

## Women at Warp 112: Cogenitor

\*Intro music\*

JARRAH:

Hi and welcome to women at warp. Before we get into this episode I wanted to give you a content note that our discussion will include mention of transphobic violence and suicide, subjects which we recognize may be particularly difficult for some of our listeners.

\*intro music\*

SUE:

Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: a Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans boldly go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Sue, and thanks for tuning in. With me today I have crew member Jarrah.

JARRAH:

Heeey.

SUE:

And two awesome guests, Callie

CALLIE:

Hello!

SUE:

And Jonathan.

JOHNATHAN:

Hi!

SUE:

And our main topic today we're going to be talking about the Enterprise episode Cogenitor. \*enthusiastic\* But first before we get into our main topic we have a tiny bit of housekeeping to do. Our show is entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as a dollar a month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media to silly watch-along commentaries and some new special non-Trek content exclusive for certain Patreon level donors. So you can visit us at [Patreon.com/womenatwarp](https://Patreon.com/womenatwarp). You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. So let's turn to our guests, Callie and Jonathan I'm going to ask you each to tell us a little bit about yourselves, your history with Star Trek, and because we're going to get deep into some gender stuff today if you would like to share your pronouns or any other information in that realm that you see fit. So why don't we start with Callie?

CALLIE:

Cool. Hi! I'm Callie, I use she/her pronouns and I host a podcast called Queersplaining. I am both queer and trans. And so I have lots of I guess baggage is the polite word? \*laughs\* around gender and sexuality. Growing up, as a kid, like I knew I was different but I hadn't exactly been handed the vocabulary to be able to accurately describe the ways *in which* I was different. And not too long after like I found Star Trek just like on a Star Trek marathon before the premiere of season 4 of Next Gen and then it wasn't long after that that I saw the Outcast and that was like "Oh! I think I see a person who's maybe different in a way that I'm different. And like, it seems like the people that I love on the ship are cool with that." And so that sort of endeared me to the Star Trek world, just like seeing a world where it's like "Yeah maybe we'll get to a place where like I don't have to be afraid of the ways in which I'm different." Also, I grew up without a father in my life and Captain Picard very much filled that role for me. And so I learned a lot about like respecting people and morality and dealing with complicated questions of right and wrong from Star Trek. And so it's really been sort of a lifelong love affair for me. I think I got into Star Trek when I was probably eight or nine. I think? So yes so that's like a brief history of Callie and Star Trek.

SUE:

Jonathan?

JOHNATHAN:

Hi. Yeah so, Jonathan Alexandratos. I use they/them pronouns. So I'm a non binary playwright, and essay writer, and action figure junkie and Star Trek is \*laughs\*-my earliest sort of living memories are of watching Star Trek. And that's because where I grew up, in Knoxville Tennessee, they would do marathons of the original series and then the next generation. And my parents would just sit me down and I'd watch it just obsessively and I absolutely loved it. Even before I could really understand what was going on. I also grew up in a very kind of conservative town for sure, and then on top of that a conservative kind of household more or less. And so when it comes to sort of understanding some of the gender stuff that Trek was trying to do and also kind of the gender stuff that was going on in my life I was very sort of-I felt very not allowed to explore that as a kid. But *later* in life when I went to grad school I started studying transgender literature and reading tons of transgender autobiographies and works like that. And what struck me as I read was I was having this emotional connection to the work on a much deeper level than I ever had before. And so after that I had to start asking myself questions about like "Well who am I?" You know? Like "What does this mean about me? The fact that I'm feeling this so importantly?" And what I kind of realized was that I am non-binary and that's sort of been running through my life for quite some time. But there in my childhood I couldn't really express that or even really know what that is. So after that I started thinking about "Well if that's if that's where I am you know Trek has always been such a wonderful home and there's always felt very accepting. How can I sort of fall into that with my identity?" And what I found was honestly like cosplaying any sort of gender bending or gender questioning or

whatever kind of costumes made me feel really really good and that I could do that in a safe space of a con, or at least it was safe in my experience. I know that's not necessarily everybody's experience with them, but it was safe in my experience and it made me feel really great to kind of do the Trek cosplay in a sort of gender questioning kind of way. And I still kind of maintain that.

SUE:

Yay! So, Cogenitor.

CALLIE:

Coooooo-genitor.

SUE:

That's what we're going to talk about today.\*She and Callie laugh uncomfortably\* This topic came to us from one of our Patreon patrons, YB.

JOHNATHAN:

Thanks for that.

SUE:

Yeah \*laughs again\* well. Who wrote "Cogenitor is my favorite Enterprise episode from the light and fluffy early scenes, to how absolutely shattering the conclusion is. And it's the first episode to really call attention to the fact that Archer might not be a great captain. But I also know that it's an extremely polarizing and controversial episode in regards to Tripp's actions, Archer's actions, and what the episode means in the bigger picture of Star Trek." There is *a lot* to unpack with this episode. Jarrah, would you be able to give us a quick plot summary?

JARRAH:

Sure. So in this episode they make first contact with a species called the Vissians and they seem super chill and relatable, especially to Archer. They just want to go out and explore shit and eat cheese and be nice. And when Archer invites them all over for a meal they discover that the Vissians have a third gender called the Cogenitor, the people are called Cogenitors, and in order to reproduce a heterosexual cis gender couple of a man and a woman needs a Cogenitor. And this Cogenitor class is oppressed and denied education, only really useful for their reproductive ability, passed from couple to couple to help them reproduce. And Trip up meets a Cogenitor and becomes really fascinated with liberating them. And meanwhile Archer's off having science-y pilot-y adventures with the Vissian Captain leader guy. And Trip ends up teaching the Cogenitor to read and not long after that the Cogenitor, who has now named themselves Charles, wants to have asylum on the ship and doesn't want to return to its former life, for which Trip gets in heck of a lot of trouble and they are forced to send the Cogenitor back. Yeah it is quite sad and complicated.

CALLIE:

I think those are accurate adjectives that describe roughly the whole of the episode. \*crew laughs\* Complicated.

JOHNATHAN:

Definitely.

SUE:

So this episode aired in 2003. Let's start off with how do we think this depiction of a quote "third gender" holds up today?

JOHNATHAN:

Well can I just say also that the word or the term "third gender" is always kind of a-it kind of makes my skin crawl a little bit because like well, so you've got you've got male and female. Right? Those are the normal ones. And then there's like maybe that third one that you kind of like put last on the list and like \*anguished noise\* you know? Like so that in and of itself is like \*uncomfortable voice\* "Ooooh that's..oh." All right? So we're already starting off there, but in the episode that is so I think it to answer your question I think it holds up really poorly. Honestly.

CALLIE:

I would say the same, because the whole thing is like "Look how *exotic* these people are because they've got *three!*" \*crew laughs\* You know? And like...except for Phlox. God bless Phlox because literally he's like the only person on the crew that's like "Yeah that's like, this is a normal thing. It's really not that big of a deal. Like you guys should get out more." You know? \*Johnathan laughs\* And so like he's like the one saving grace that I'm just like "You and I are somewhat on the same page my friend, I appreciate you."

JARRAH:

This episode needed more Phlox.

JOHNATHAN:

It did. And you *know* though, you *know* on that ship that it was like there had to be some like two-spirit person, or like a Burnesha person from Albania you know, or one of these people that *is* of an earthbound like quote unquote "third gender" or whatever and they must just be there like "Seriously!?! You're sending Trip? Like, I'm kind of equipped here to have this conversation in a pretty in-depth way and yet you just...aargh!"

JARRAH:

Except apparently there's *not*, cause T'Pol makes this comment at one point that's basically like "Oooh the species is so unique that they're not just men and women. Oh my gosh!"

SUE:

They couldn't seem to decide whether it was rare or common. Because every other description is this "No, this happens a lot of places, that there aren't quote just two genders" but then the next sentence is "Well *most* species are just two genders."

CALLIE:

Yeah. Like ,while we're speaking of seriously cringe-y phrases can we talk about Trip saying "Well she looks more like a her than a him." \*entire crew groans uncomfortably\*

SUE:

Yeah.I think there's a whole discussion to have about pronouns here.

CALLIE:

Oh my god really!

SUE:

I *do* want to point out the good, and the good is that Trip immediately accepts the Cogenitor as a whole person. Whereas none of their own species does. So I guess good for that.

JOHNATHAN:

That's exactly the thing though. Like, I think that the episode is pretty...um.. well smart-*ish* when it comes to talking about slavery. Like I think that that's, as a topic in the episode, I felt *that* on a much deeper level than I felt anything about gender. And to me I mean that kind of makes sense. I mean it's an episode directed by LeVar Burton, I mean of Roots! I mean this is someone who like as a critical reader, and LeVar Burton is incredibly smart and incredibly powerful as a reader, I'm sure he would see you know sort of the levels of slavery in this text in the script but the the gender stuff is sort of secondary to that. And I think that shows the problem when we try to lump all of this into one kind of issue episode. It's like well you want to do the slavery thing and you're kind of getting at that end and a pretty interesting way. But then you also want to do the gender thing and it's like you're gonna end up doing neither very well.

CALLIE:

Yeah I had literally the exact same thought. Because it's actually been a long time since I watched Enterprise through and so I re-watched the episode *twice* yesterday and today as sort of like a re-prepping for it and I didn't remember much aside from the vague plot points and that was literally a thought that I had as I was. Like "Wow, this is a far smarter commentary on slavery I think than about gender."

SUE:

Yeah, I've also seen some comments about this episode where the commenter said they thought that this was supposed to be more about the subjugation of women than about the subjugation of trans or non-binary people.

JARRAH:

Which, I can see that as well. I think though that this goes back to the point: Yes, Trip does respect the Cogenitor as a *person*. *Except* that he makes the assumption that, I'm going to call

them they because I don't think that they ever determined a gender identity, he makes the assumption that they're oppressed before asking them anything really.

CALLIE:

Yeah. That was another dimension to this that I picked up on. There was a lot of echoes of like a white savior complex. Like, you're not really getting to know this person or this culture before you're making these judgments. And part of me is like "Well you don't necessarily have to do that to recognize when someone's oppressed" but I mean especially if we're talking about like, literally a society that developed completely outside of the social context that we did. Like, there is a lot you need to learn before you run in and start telling people how to do things.

JOHNATHAN:

And that could have been the issue we were supposed to have with it, because Archer kind of has that issue. With the way Trip handles this, right? Sort of at the end of the episode. So I think the fact that we feel *that* is good. Like that's coming through.

CALLIE:

Yeah I agree.

SUE:

So when the episode starts the Cogenitor does not have a name and its family uses "it" pronouns to describe the Cogenitor. It really hurts me to do that *\*laughs uncomfortably\** which is why I keep pausing. Um. Why don't the Vissians, first of all, have their own pronoun for the Cogenitors? Is it just not translating correctly? But you know, Trip insists on calling the Cogenitor "she" because of that *horrible* line Callie mentioned. But I think this is really twisty and like difficult to wrap my brain around. But is it better to use *\*disdainfully\** "it" because it's what the rest of the society uses? Or is it better for a Trip to try and use "she" or "he" because it's at least not dehumanizing? Or I mean ideally he would have asked. Right. But he did not ask. Sooo..

CALLIE:

Yeah, that's what I was going to say. Cause I've run into folks who use the pronoun "it" to refer to themselves. And like, I've got hang ups on that because of my own societal programming but that doesn't mean that I get to paint what my expectations are onto this person. And so, I mean if we're talking about in-world context, like I would hope that by the time you know Star Trek is happening that at least they/them would be a normal thing. And so you know, whatever universal translator is an action would recognize that like "Oh this is this is a gender neutral pronoun" and translate it as they/them. Of course this was 2003 and maybe it's not too much to expect but maybe it was too much to expect, if you know what I mean?

JOHNATHAN:

Yeah exactly. I mean I definitely agree with Callie there and I think that it's once we start kind of questioning pronouns that a culture assigns or a culture has, I mean that's that's kind of a slippery slope and we don't necessarily want to go down that road. So yeeeah I mean, I think

that we kind of do have to go with the culture on that one and just, you know, it might feel odd or maybe not necessarily odd because like Callie said plenty of folks do use “it” pronouns but we got to run with it.

JARRAH:

But IRL definitely ask people.

CALLIE:

Yes. Oh yeah totally.

JOHNATHAN:

Oh yeah.

SUE:

Well I think it's pretty clear with the slavery allegory that there are that the writers were trying to make the point that this person is seen as an object or a possession rather than a person.

CALLIE:

Yeah. And not to radically change the subject, but the other thing that I was thinking about throughout this episode is that whenever there are discussions about the actual I guess squishy-ness of gender whenever we are doing something even adjacent to acknowledging that gender isn't a binary and that sometimes it's fluid, why is it always feminine coded folks that those questions are foisted upon? Right? Like we saw in the Outcast. We see it in this episode. So like, anytime we are playing with gender expectations it's almost entirely around people who are coded to read as feminine or who end up identifying that way or being identified that way. That's something else that kind of felt gross to me throughout this whole thing.

JOHNATHAN:

Well it felt gross to me too and I think that the answer to that is, I mean if we go with sort of the David Gerald and Andy Mangels kind of some stuff that they've said, Rick Berman kind of kept any sort of gayness out of Star Trek for as long as he could. And I mean I think that there's some of that that runs through this here as well. Like this idea of well you know, if the Cogenitor is male coded then has this relationship with Trip, even though you know the gender is you know outside of the gender binary, then some will still read that as gay and we can't have that. And of course Rick Berman co-wrote the script for this episode and it's like that that kind of makes my skin crawl even worse.

CALLIE:

Well right. And by the time, we're at 2003 I think we're probably past the excuse that the suits won't let us do it? Like I can *begrudgingly* maybe accept that in the 80s and 90s but by 2003 like you are not setting the world on fire to *hint* at a gay relationship like there is there. There was not really an excuse then and there is *definitely* not one by 2003 and my humble opinion.

JOHNATHAN:

Oh yeah definitely. Never an excuse. Absolutely right.

JARRAH:

I think you can also point to at least Julia Serano calls trans-misogyny this idea that like it's more questionable for a person who is born male to want to change to a pure female-to be female because of the devaluation of femininity. And I mean I'm not-I definitely don't think anyone explicitly thought that creating this episode but like it plays in this insidious way throughout a lot of our cultural narratives.

CALLIE:

Yeah it's the gentle whispering of all of the expectations and boundaries that our society has set around gender that like even when you have someone who is trying to play with that in some way like they still end up repeating a lot of those boundaries and maybe only moving them slightly or only starting to hint at really questioning them.

JOHNATHAN:

Yeah exactly. Jacob Tobia does a really good job of explaining this in their recent book Sissy kind of the idea that the worst thing that a masculine person could do is anything feminine you know in certain circles. And of course Tobia is you know, quite feminine in their performance but also you know non-binary and talks about that. That exact thing quite deeply.

SUE:

We see that even today with clothing lines. You know lines that promote that they are making gender neutral clothing and are inclusive of everyone. Most of that clothing is still pants and masculine coded clothing. Not always but often. And like larger bigger picture stuff is that you know, societally we're socialized such that it's OK-"OK" Quote unquote for girls to be tomboys or wear pants or run around and get dirty and have these like masculine qualities. But it is definitely not OK for boys to like girl things.

CALLIE:

And it's a damn shame too because I have seen so many men that look *amazing* in dresses by the way.

JOHNATHAN:

I love dresses. They're so.. they just feel nice.

SUE:

And I just hope everybody can hear all my air quotes \*crew laughs\*

JARRAH:



Well, and in Cogenitor I would say like the wardrobe felt pretty androgynous to me which I thought was like, I mean, the Outcast kind of was *too* but it was reinforced by like casting all of the actors from that planet as being like, reading female and female cis-women actors. But the other thing I think is good, wasn't all the way there, but they did even though they were giving Charles feminine pronouns they're also like "Yeah it's cool that you call yourself Charles" which before Discovery hadn't really happened in Star Trek that you were like "oh you can be a woman but also have this name that's very masculine." So they were allowing *some* flexibility.

CALLIE:

Right! Yeah. There was no questioning of it. It was just like "Oh cool! OK we can do that."

JOHNATHAN:

Exactly. I mean I think that, yeah I agree that that's that that's a very good thing, I think that *probably* you know one of the more-one of the less good things for me is is this idea that gender in this case is so tied up in sexual function and like the Cogenitor is a quote unquote "third gender" because they perform this sexual function and that is I think incredibly offensive. This idea that you are just defined by what you do in a sex act. And that is what makes your gender what it is. I mean that is awful.

CALLIE:

Yeah well it's the idea that sex and gender are interchangeable and that they mean the same thing when they very much do not.

JOHNATHAN:

Right.

SUE:

Well and Phlox and Trip, Phlox being the doctor repeatedly conflate sex and gender in this episode.

JOHNATHAN:

Yeah exactly. Sex-sexuality and gender. Yeah, all of this you know, it ignores things like the case of Leticia King who was a young middle school transgender girl was and was killed and then the news reports kept reporting that this was the death of a gay boy. And it's like that's not it. Her classmates said it's not that she's gay it's that she's transgender and there's a difference. And just the reporting of that kept sort of killing her again and again and again in that sense. And it was so sad and it's so heartbreaking. And then to see it sort of all over again via Star Trek, in a much different context of course, it's just like *\*frustrated\** ugh.

CALLIE:

And that's something that happens to me all the time when I'm talking about trans stuff. People, who are who are very well-meaning you know, I'll talk about my experience as a trans person and is like "Well I wouldn't really understand that because I'm straight" and I'm like *\*frustrated\**

noise\* "There's more conversation that needs to happen here." But like remember the audience right where there's not time to do a 301 here. But like these two things are not the same.

JOHNATHAN:

Yeah exactly.

JARRAH:

Yeah, like the scene here that Sue is referring to I think is the one where they're in sickbay and he switches the words sex and gender interchangeably saying like "Not all species are limited to two sexes..." and continues and then later Tucker goes "I'm pretty familiar with how it works with two sexes" *it* being reproduction and Phlox goes "Multi-gendered techniques aren't always the same." It's like OK-that's-yeah. No. So I mean, yeah. If anyone's not super familiar when you're talking about like reproductive capacity the word *sex* is much more appropriate. And when you're talking about *gender* you're talking about identity. And so to say like a multi-gendered reproduction technique is basically meaningless.

CALLIE:

Yeah, and the other one is the dinner scene right when he's explaining like "Well oh he's very very interested in our reproductive process." And like it just reminds me of all of those scenes of like a family sitting around a dinner in the 50s like "Well *those* people" he's like "humans are bi-gendered" like, that's weird guys. \*Johnathan laughs\* But the whole thing is just like \*uncomfortable voice\* oh God please no.

JOHNATHAN:

Could just ask a random question about this episode? Whatever happened with Reed and the uh-

JARRAH:

OK. I was totally going to raise that. I was like "We should talk about it. \*all laugh\* Just get that part out of the way."

JOHNATHAN:

Cause like, wait a second. Halfway through this episode-three fourths of the way we just drop this whole thing like Reed is totally like trying to sleep with the like I guess female of the species that has come on the ship. I'm like "Uuuuh why is that in there?"

JARRAH:

I think it was supposed to be comic relief and defense against Dominic Keating worrying that people would think Reed was gay. Like, "Oh look at him! Hahaha! He's such a manly man horn dog!"

JOHNATHAN:

It just made me think he was gayer. Which I would love. I mean I don't have any-

JARRAH:

Oh there's a whole thing on this in Star Trek: The Human Frontier, and it talks about how there had been some discussion about Reed being gay and he might have been theoretically the first openly gay character on Star Trek but Dominic Keating apparently reacted really poorly to this and was told like "Oh no we weren't seriously considering it!" and was very relieved.

SUE:

Supposedly if you ask *him* about it he now tells a different story.

JARRAH:

Yeah, but there are some quotes and interviews that indicate otherwise at the time.

CALLIE:

Yeah. That whole scene also read to me as sort of a ham-handed way-like *another* way to point out like *these* people are *different* because she does that whole like "Well we have to go to bed *before* we have dinner" and like that just seemed very like, I'm not sure that served a narrative purpose. Like they're literally just trying to beat you over the head with like *\*intense voice\** "look how different these people are! That's weird!"

SUE:

But they they seem to like be shoving in as much hetero-normativity as possible. Because I mean Reed even says like "Normally you ask a *woman* to dinner first." And the Vissian captain says when discussing warp drive with Archer about like "Your father did this? That's amazing." He says "The men who developed warp drive on our planet" it's just like, that so easily could have been more inclusive with just the "people" or the "scientists". And it struck me about how much they did that in this episode in particular.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And the woman that Reed is cheese sniffing *\*Sue laughs\** with says-

SUE:

New favorite euphemism!

JARRAH:

- "It's only when a woman enjoys her intimate time with a man that she'll join him for dinner." And I think you're just supposed to assume they slept together. I don't think it had any purpose in this.

CALLIE:

Or there was more to it that got cut for time or something and they just kind of left it.

SUE:

So I have an in-universe question that might not even make sense to anybody but me. \*laughs\* Buuut they tell us that over and over again that the Cogenitors make up about 3 percent of the population, the Vissian population. As we saw in DS9 joined Trill make up about 3 percent of the Trill population but they're treated like an exalted class and the Cogenitorss are like a subjugated class. Furthermore presumably 3 percent of all children born would be Cogenitors. So what happens to *them*? Are they just taken away?

CALLIE:

Man, that's a great question.

JOHNATHAN:

It is. I mean, I guess to the point about like whether we treat rarity as you know, something to be honored or something that we can just kind of basically abuse, or rape, as it seems. \*sighs\* Yeah I mean that's-\*sighs again\* as to why that decision is made.. it's a tough one.

CALLIE:

I think it might come down to a perception of who has the power. Because joined Trill are, you know, in terms of society they're like the cream of the crop. Right? Like they are the smartest, the most athletic, the most physically fit, the most like everything that you would expect a society to exalt as like good traits to have they sort of exemplify the peak of all of those things. Whereas you know the Cogenitors being necessary for reproduction. I mean you know in our society it is generally like, stepping into a societal point of view right? We know that women are necessary for reproduction but we don't value them as a society at least not as much as we should. And so like I could see a society exalting those folks as the like "Oh we couldn't exist as a species without these people so we need-like they're gods! like we need to worship them." But I also think that if there was some sort of cultural event in their history that let power be exercised over them to where they were subjugated like, that things working out that way I think make sense to me. I mean obviously I don't like it but I'd like it's not tough for me to see how it would happen.

JOHNATHAN:

Well and to that point, because you mentioned something really really important there, and I think it's that it's getting at this idea of like what is this socio-religious mythos that surrounds this minority? So in Trill culture there's enough of a text there, enough of this religion there, to sort of say "This is what you do. So you don't question it. That's just what you do." And I get the sense that for the Vissians there is also a time honored sort of cultural tradition and this is what you *do*. You act in *this* way so to do anything else would go against that and that would be, you know, a capital offense. And I think that today in our society we see that in the treatment of people who

are homosexual, you know in a sense, because you know *yes* that is a group people that of course we *should be* respecting we should be honoring, we should be. But there are some in our society who try to make this argument that "Well you know my God says that's wrong. So therefore I'm going to treat it as wrong." And you know of course we push back and we push back and we push back against that. But you know at the end of the day it is so hard to change anyone's sense of like "Well my God says this is what I should do. So I'm going to do it." And I wonder if there's something similar operating here.

JARRAH:

Well I mean yeah, I think if you look back at human history we can see examples of cultures, like two-spirit people in Native American and Indigenous cultures who were really, and are in living culture still, really respected and honored but that was pretty much stamped out of existence by Christian missionaries and for you know white capitalist purposes as well. So certainly I think religion is a factor as well as economics. I think if you look at gender oppression throughout the world, that a lot of times when people devalue-, often women, if you look at some preference in different cultures and in our own history the idea in a lot of places it's like it becomes self-perpetuating. So a woman's not about as valuable because there's an assumption that she's weaker and won't be able to work as hard for you. So you send your daughters off to go marry and live in another family often paying the other family for that. So then you want daughters less because the daughter is like a liability on your family and the son is the person who brings women into your family and gets more people working for you. And so it's complicated but there are a lot of factors at play and you can definitely see parallels in our own society for how people could either become valued or devalued as a minority.

JOHNATHAN:

Well you definitely can. A lot of a lot of the work that I do is sort of creatively and academically deals with people who are Burnesha, which in an Albanian culture is I said this earlier a quote unquote third gender, but they are traditionally people who were very very much honored in the society. Essentially Burnesha people were assigned female at birth and later transitioned to this gender in order to take on male roles socially. And once the communists took power in Albania that was completely, just you know, not an option. I mean to the point where people were killed exiled et cetera. And so once a government shifts then, you know, everything changes and nobody is allowed to question that any more. To the point where today there are like a hundred and two Burnesha people existing in the world that we know of when once upon a time I mean we were talking about hundreds of thousands if not millions. So it's awful, what can happen. I wish this episode delved into that a little more. Maybe the mythology of what creates this society. But what we have is all we have.

CALLIE:

Well the other dynamic that I could see emerging is there's this thing that we often see in the Christian right where they think that the way they are oppressing women is valuing women. Right. So like you know "This is what a woman is supposed to do because being a mother and being the caretaker of the family is the most exalted thing. Therefore this is what you have to do

and you have no other choice.” And that’s oppression that’s at least sold as valuation and sometimes even worship. Right. And so I could see it very easily emerging as something like that too. Like it you know, maybe started one way and sort of evolved into this other thing where they, you know, at least sell it like this is how we assign these folks value because they have this most important place in our society when the problem is they don’t have any other choice but to be that thing and some might choose it on their own and that’s great. But lots of them wouldn’t and those folks shouldn’t be forced into it.

JOHNATHAN:

And that’s how you create the hegemony. Like, you don’t need an army to enforce this because that system has been internalized so much that you know even if you were to come across a Cogenitor who maybe is asexual that just wouldn’t matter. In this case it would- it should matter, but it wouldn’t matter because this person has internalized this horrific system to the point of just saying “Well this is my duty. I guess I’ve got to do it.” You know, and it’s like “No!” at least I don’t think so.

JARRAH:

I’m interested because, I didn’t raise this in the summary and you know it’s a hard topic, at the end of this episode when Archer informs Trip that Charles committed suicide. Basically, was forced to return and ended up ending their own life. And Archer reacts basically like Trip says “This is my fault” and Archer’s like “Yeah, you’re damn right it’s your fault.” I don’t know. Thoughts on that ending? I mean on the one hand I like that it wasn’t clean and that it showed, I don’t know if I like it, but it showed that you know that depression can have tragic consequences. But did it end up arguing that like knowledge of one’s own oppression was what caused the tragic consequences?

CALLIE:

Well that was going to be my thought because I think it makes a very powerful statement. But I don’t think the statement that I got from it was the one that they were trying to give. And so, for me, it’s sort of about this idea of the, you know, the white savior, in this case the human savior, mentality. Because even if they were trying to do the right thing, like obviously you can’t just drop a bomb in the middle of society and walk away. Right? Like if you’re going to do this at the very least there’s got to be a way that you go about it and like you can’t just do that knowing that like “I’m going to have this one interaction with this one person that could radically transform the entire society in ways that I have no idea about” and I don’t I don’t know that *that’s* why Archer was actually mad. If he was mad for that specific reason then I’d be like “cool. I think we’re on the same page.” but I don’t really think that’s what it was supposed to be.

JOHNATHAN:

I agree with what Callie said there. I think that it just for me it fed into a really uncomfortable trope of trans and non binary death. And I see that in media so much and it’s to the point where you know I am sort of asking like “Do we really only care about trans lives when they’re dying?” I think that’s horrific thing to think about. So in a way this episode wrote itself into a corner

because if I had gotten the ending I wanted, which was an ending where this person does flourish and this Cogenitor does make some sort of a vast cultural shift happen then I mean it would have basically been because of the cis-savior and that kind of what have been a little bit of a letdown too. But through the death I also sort of am really just triggered to think about all the other stuff I've seen and all the other stories that have been created where this is the inevitable end. And that makes me incredibly sad.

CALLIE:

Yeah. I just think a really talented writers room could have done better. And you know, I'm not a fiction writer and so like I couldn't tell you that, like you know, narratively you know this set of three other things would work better. But I completely agree with what you're saying about the trope of the trans or non-binary or gender nonconforming person their death being used as the cudgel to make this thing significant. Like I'm just all the way over that being a thing. And it also, the end, it also just in general the idea of using suicide as the narrative cudgel even if we're removing it from the context of gender and sexuality like just the idea of like "Oh you did this and this person committed suicide" like I don't know if *lazy* is the right word but like I just I feel like they could have done something a lot better and maybe even set themselves up for future interactions with people like you know it could have ended up like "Well there's a revolution started hope you thought that one through before you did that." Because at least that it opens the door for more discussion about you know, because you don't have the prime directive yet. Right? And so we're thinking through the ways that we engage with other cultures and I feel like it could have been left open for a lot more discussion and a lot more commentary on these issues. But they were like "Nope. Suicide. We're gonna make people feel feels because that's how you do that."

SUE:

It definitely feels like Archer is upset because his new friend is mad at him.

JARRAH:

Totally. He was like "You ruin my fun adventures!"

SUE:

Yeah that's why he's upset. But to Callie's point I feel like we can compare this pretty-almost directly to TNGs I Borg right? Because when they send Hugh back with his individuality they're considering that like, I don't want to say an act of war but like as a strategic shot right? Against the Borg. But he's gonna go back and this is going to destroy them. And Trip certainly doesn't consider that like this will blow up in their culture or it may be he only thinks that can be a good thing. But there's a lot of consequences for this. And especially when he was not asked or instructed to do any of what he did.

CALLIE:

Yeah, If the Cogenitor had been asking for all of these things I think that would change the tenor of it a lot. Because if I'm Tripp in this episode I have to think like "Gosh, I know what I think the

right thing is. But I also am not going to be around to see the consequences of this happening.” and so like at the very least it's a lot more of a complicated question than he considers throughout the episode regardless of what he actually ends up doing.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And I mean as much as I, you know, appreciate some arguments around the Prime Directive in the world today, you know, I have friends who sponsor LGBTQ refugees and I wouldn't be like “Hey Canada! Y'all should have a prime directive. It means you just ignore these people!” Like it's-I don't know that that's where the Prime Directive is meant to go when people are actually you know sentient beings who are asking for asylum.

SUE:

But the Prime Directive is about pre-warp societies. *Both* of these cultures have developed warp drive. They meet out in space studying the same star. I'm not sure the Prime Directive applies here.

JOHNATHAN:

It seems like the foundational kind of human texts that they're sort of writing off of, it feels more like the Dred Scott decision. Like to me like sort of the Dred Scott case of like, slave escapes and then finds a life that is better but then you know the high court says “Well you got to go back.” And of course that's a horrific decision. And it feels like the micro version of that. I mean the trouble is when you inject gender into this, the gender story I think wants to be much smaller, and the Dred Scott case is this epic thing and it's really tough. So I think make those two tones level. And I don't know that that would ever really be successful nor that it should.

CALLIE:

Yeah I feel like the story could be like a four or five episode arc as opposed to like a single contained episode because there's just way too much to unpack to be able to do it effectively. Like, even people who are really culturally competent in these issues would have trouble fitting all of this into 40 minutes.

JARRAH:

Maybe a lot of it could've just been solved if they were like “Hey, instead of telling an allegory about gay people or trans people let's just have characters that are trans and gay and do all sorts of things.”

JOHNATHAN:

I really just want a non-binary person on one of these ships. Like that can't be *that* rare actually. Like in the future, assuming like you know, now that you know we we have plenty of non-binary people working at various workplaces. Like I feel like by then surely there's somebody and surely you know what would be great is if these crews actually started to make an effort to say like “Well, you know OK. Who actually is the best person to deal with these situations?” and then we could about a really great moment of maybe a non-binary Earth human talking to a



non-binary alien in a completely different situation. And wow! Like imagine all the levels that could happen there.

CALLIE:

Right? Imagine a non-binary Starfleet officer talking to the society who are like “Yeah we have three genders” and the human is like “Yeah you know actually for us it's way more complicated than that.” And like imagine the discussions you could have around *that*.

SUE:

So that leads to the problem of Star Trek. Of why people and humans in the future are so confused by individuals who don't conform to a gender binary. I guess for a long time Star Trek tried to play this off as humor. I think this might be one of the first times they sort of deal with it *not* in that way. I mean even with the Outcast we know that the ship appears at- well not appears but arrives at this planet full of non gendered, if you will, individuals and that's just.. they use that as an allegory because the writers could not imagine such a thing being true. Like you can imagine in the writers room them saying “Well this would never happen. So we can use it.” Right? because that's how science fiction gets away, with allegory.

JOHNATHAN:

Well with the Outcast it feels like they're very much speaking more towards gay conversion therapy than anything else. And yet again gender takes a backseat to that. And like, I *like* that Star Trek wants to address something like gay conversion therapy. I like the overall message of like you know gay conversion therapy, and I'm putting major air quotes around that term, obviously. Because it's not therapy at all. It is terrifying and the results can only be bad. But yeah I mean, again you see them drop the ball on the gender element to it. So like gender is not just a tool that you can use to help along your allegory about something else like gender is a very very complex thing that needs its own narrative.

CALLIE:

Hard agree.

SUE:

Right. I think what I'm trying to say *\*laughs\** is when sci fi does this kind of allegory the writers are trying to come up with a situation that could never possibly occur in our world. Right? And there could never possibly be a group of people without a gender. There could never possibly be a third gender, right? And they just are getting that *wrong*. And in all of these cases you know it's 10, 15, 20 years later that the conversations become more prevalent in society. People are talking way more about you know, gender issues and trans issues than we were in 2003. And like is that...*\*struggling\** oh what are my words? How do we fix that? Just-I think the obvious answer is we get more people who are not straight and cis into writers rooms.

CALLIE:

That was what I was going to say \*laughs\*.

JOHNATHAN:

Well, it is that and I think from that what we can expect to see is-I mean the shift also has to happen with producers and directors and you know any level of that owner-of that sort of administration where the thinking is way old school we need to change that. And I think that what we can expect to see is less and less of these jokes that are just built on “Hey women are like *this* and men are like *that*” and you know “Can you imagine if someone, you know, goes against any of that” like, there are few shows that I hate more than the Big Bang Theory which makes these jokes so often. And I’m just like this is so tired, and *yet*. I mean they’re one of the most popular comedies, you know, that is going out right now. And it’s just like, you are absolutely missing the mark. Every single time.

CALLIE:

Well a journey that I've been on lately is recognizing that these folks actually already exist in these spaces. The problem is that we're not giving them power and we're not empowering them to speak up, right? So like, I was doing a piece for my podcast and I was thinking like “How many transgender journalists are there?” And my initial thought was like, not many but like now I'm part of a community where there's over 100 of them, right? So it's not that they weren't there. I didn't have the *awareness* that they were there. And hearing these folks talk, it's more that like they have to pick and choose their battles right, because their editors are not always friendly. The people in power are not always friendly. And like, I feel like show business almost has to be the same way right? There are non-binary people in these environments. There are trans people in these environments. There are queer people in these environments and I am guessing part of the problem is that they don't feel empowered to ask for space for themselves. And that's really sad to me, because if I thought the problem was that they just didn't exist at the very least that's a more simple solution. Like not easier, but a little bit more simple because it's like “Well those folks aren't in the room. Let's get em in the room!” My fear is that I think they are in the room but they don't feel comfortable speaking up and that's a problem that I really just don't know how to solve.

JOHNATHAN:

Well I mean to me, right now as of today 2019 we almost need look no farther than Caster Semenya. Like, the reporting that is going on around Caster Semenya right now is largely heartbreaking. The number of outlets that are calling her transgender, which I mean if she was great but she's not exactly, the number of outlets that are reporting on the fact that she has “too much of a male hormone” like that is absolutely not how science works. Like this shows that socially we are still fundamentally flawed in our overall view of gender. And until we can change that, I mean, I want those people that Callie is talking about to feel empowered. I hate that they dealt and I think every time we see another news report that classifies gender in this way or another sitcom that classifies gender in this very old school binary way we are oppressing them.

CALLIE:

Yeah I agree.

JARRAH:

I think that there is an onus on the people who *do* have space, who have you know got in the door, some of them have fought their way in the door, to hold the door open for other people. And not just be like "OK I got in here. I'm probably a cis white woman or a cis gay man and white gay man. And OK good!" I know that sometimes if you fight your way and you can feel like "OK cool! Now lets celebrate!" great, but your work isn't done and you have to turn around and be like "Who's missing?" And I think that you can interject in these conversations in these creative rooms and be like "I don't know that we're actually considering all the perspectives here. I can't actually speak for all the marginalized people in the world."

SUE:

I think there's also a perception that the entertainment industry is more open than others, and that's just simply absolutely untrue. \*noises of agreement from crew\* Maybe a little bit in theater but, not as much as you think and *definitely* not in TV and movie production. I have a friend who is a P.A. on a show and is asexual, but it's not out because she is afraid of her workplace finding out. And if you think about it, like as an Ace person myself like I think it's pretty easy to be straight passing as much as I hate having to feel that way. But like she is honestly afraid that if her production company, if her employer finds out that she's Ace and instead of straight she'll be fired.

JOHNATHAN:

Gosh. I hear that on the theater side. You know one positive thing that I can sort of add to that is we just were talking about this very thing in a in a meetup that I went to, at TCG Theatre Communications Group, that Corinna Schulenberg who is a transgender playwright and theater maker of all kinds and we had this group of non-binary and transgender theater makers and actors and we talked about all these issues of you know, mainly casting. Like you know, that sort of discrimination that goes into casting transgender people. You know, so many people wanted to cast *these* people in *those* roles. And like, plenty of transgender actors you know who are looking for the work get looked over for them. And just thinking about ways to change that to the point about holding the door open for other people. I have seen that happen in theater from transgender playwrights and producers and theater makers. There is, in my experience, a very strong stream of activism that runs through situations like that. So I have seen that happen. Of course I can't speak for everywhere nor everyone.

SUE:

Generally, the more commercial you get the more difficult it is. But, yeah.

JARRAH:

I feel like Disco is *starting* to make some strides. Like when we interviewed Gersha Phillips talking about how the deliberate choice to name a woman Michael and Gersha Phillips view that in the future clothing shouldn't be so gender specific and that all clothing should be empowering. Which I thought was kind of cool but they still haven't actually made the leap of having an actual non binary character.

JOHNATHAN:

Yeah, well that's what I love about wearing my Starfleet uniform is that it looks pretty much the same across all genders and I like that. Like, it lets me really feel like, you know, who I want to feel like. And even though when I wear it I realize that I present as cis male, you know, to me it doesn't mean that although I certainly acknowledge the privilege.

CALLIE:

Yeah I just always-like the cynic in me is that I remember being at Star Trek Las Vegas and there are lots of folks who are ostensibly men wearing the skant and like people are cheering that and I'm like "But if this person was wearing just like a regular dress would you be as excited?" I hope so. \*laughs\* That's just the cynic in me but you know, I always have those thoughts in the back of my head because it's like, I feel like some people have like "There's this space called Star Trek where all of these things are cool and anything goes. But like let's get real and talk about how there are really only two genders." Like, I feel like there's so much of that sort of compartmentalization going on and it drives me-

SUE:

And is the skant as popular as it is in cosplay right now because it's funny?

CALLIE:

Right. Exactly.

JOHNATHAN:

I hope not. I wear the skant because I, to me, it's an environment where I can wear a dress and not get my ass kicked. And I really like that. And to me it's a very serious thing. Although I do wear dresses and all sorts things publicly, I always have felt you know in a sort of Star Trek convention if I'm dressed like that then you know I sort of have this out if a situation becomes unsafe.

CALLIE:

Yeah. And it's so like you know, on the one hand it's great and empowering that there's a space where that can happen but you know on the other hand it's like this shouldn't have to be a thing. I sort of made a deliberate choice like, if I'm not in a place where like my paycheck is at stake like T-shirt and jeans is what I wear. That's my style. And like backwards Starfleet flat-bill hat and like you know I am seeing at a convention where like most of the speakers were like

business casual suit and tie and I'm like "No damn it!" like "I'm a woman and I am wearing a t shirt and jeans. Traditionally masculine style clothes because like this is what makes sense to me." And it felt like such a statement. I don't know if anybody else like picked up on that. But like, I know what you're saying when you say like it's nice to have a space where you can do that and it feels like such a- at one you know at one point it's just like cool I get to express the way that I feel and I get to like the way that I look. And then it also feels like, maybe radical is the wrong word. It feels like a very subversive kind of activism as well which is like cool but it shouldn't have to be that way.

JOHNATHAN:

Yeah absolutely. I mean that's why when I teach, I teach and in clothing that is much more feminine because I feel like I want my students to see someone that you know maybe doesn't look the way they might expect. You know, and if you just looked at my face you know you might expect me to be wearing like a suit and tie or something. But if you looked at everything I have on then you see someone who all of a sudden you know, doesn't conform to your gender norms. I think it's important for young people to see that and to just be like "OK now I have this frame of reference and if I feel this way then I have permission to do the same" which of course everyone in my class does. And if I don't feel that way then at least it's normal. You know I mean, that stuff is old old old stuff queerness. Its old! Like we are talking like centuries old. People who are non-binary, people who are you know gender queer what we would call it. You know this stuff is old old old in many many cultures. And the fact that people try to pass it off as some fad or some recent trend or just what the kids are doing is absolutely offensive. We need texts to talk about this stuff as the historical thing that it is.

CALLIE:

Yeah. And it even bothers me when people who are otherwise affirming talk about these things as if they are new. And it's like and it's that cultural solipsism right? Like "I just heard about it. So it's obviously a new thing" as opposed to like "maybe this just means I'm a little behind the curve". And you know there's that interplay between you know, you grew up in a society where this isn't a thing that's talked about and we do have to talk about that societal aspect. But there is also a bit of personal responsibility involved and like if I claim to be a person who wants to understand human culture these are definitely things I should at least have a passing familiarity with and non-binary people are *not* new.

SUE:

So we talked about it a little bit, but I want to go to the end of this episode real quick. And taken in conjunction with the Outcast, our two episodes that deal mainly with gender one commits suicide, the other is essentially "reprogrammed" quote unquote. So why, how rather than why, how can we react to Star Trek's treatment of its gender nonconforming characters and what do you think we can do to make sure that they're treated better in the future?

JOHNATHAN:

I mean to me the most intriguing episode of TNG is Lower Decks where we actually get to see some of the non bridge crew you know? Kind of what they're what they're up to, and the reason that I bring that up is because if you've assembled a show where you're you're dealing with the fact that like "OK well the bridge crew has to deal with this and the bridge crew doesn't contain anybody that is of this particular community" will then do something small. Do something like a Lower Decks episode. Do something where like you actually get to see you know, maybe people who are of the community but maybe aren't you know on the bridge gate and maybe actually get them questioning like "why don't we see ourselves on the bridge of this ship? like why? Why, you know, even though we might encounter an alien race that doesn't treat all of its genders with the fullest respect. Why doesn't ours do that too? Like maybe our you know, sort of Starfleet gender culture isn't killing anyone but why aren't we getting promoted?" You know these are kinds of conversations that I think we need to be willing to have in Star Trek from time to time and I think that could be one way to maybe approach that.

CALLIE:

Yeah I I tend to to be someone who wants a little more than that. I mean I think that would definitely be good, but for me I'm just like you know, I love Star Trek. It's been a lifelong obsession for me and probably will be for the rest of my life. But we are *so far* past time, like we are so far past time for this kind of thing to be normalized in this universe that we love. And at the very least I would like to see, you know, if not like one of the main bridge crew but like a recurring secondary or tertiary character that has gender variance of some kind. That is just like something that's brought up in a very casual way. Something as simple as this person uses they/them pronouns and there doesn't even necessarily have to be any more commentary on it than that. Because that's one of the conversations that I had with someone is that like you know obviously this far into the future being trans is something that's totally normal. And if somebody chooses medical transition and probably that happened very early on in adulthood and so like, how would the conversation even happen? Because nobody would think it was a big deal and I think that's a valid question to ask. But I think a very easy way to do it is to have a non-binary or a non-binary character that uses they/them pronouns. And I don't know that there has to be more commentary than that. Like there can be, but if we're talking about just including and normalizing this in the Star Trek universe having a character that uses they/them pronouns or having a trans actor play a secondary or tertiary character even if their gender is never exactly commented on, like I think those things would be fantastic steps forward.

JOHNATHAN:

You know what's interesting about that it's almost as if Discovery, in a like a blink and you missed it scene, sort of did that with disability. There's one scene in where it's just a general sort of scene on the Discovery and we see somebody in a wheelchair. You get the sense that in the future they could probably have the technology such that that person perhaps doesn't need the wheelchair but then that brings up the idea of like well maybe maybe there's a better sense of like choice involved there and you know. So that to me opened up my mind to a whole different view on disability, and I'm certainly not trying to equate the two, but I think that there are those moments where we can look at a character even briefly and go "Oh that really makes me think,

that really makes me see things.” It just takes such a little thing. But the flipside to that is, yes I am totally in favor of going even bigger and saying you know yes let’s put put people on the bridge. You know if the goal really is to have a Star Trek series or two like running continuously throughout the year in a couple of years, which seems like their goal, you are programming lots and lots of shows right now. So think about who you’re putting on.

CALLIE:

Absolutely. This is such a crucially good time for them to write this gigantic misstep.

SUE:

But we are near the end of our time. Is there anything we didn’t touch on that anybody wants to talk about about Cogenitor?

CALLIE:

The only other thing that really sort of caught my ear is when Trip talks about human rights and the response is “they’re not human.” And I’m just thinking like “Wow what a missed opportunity for a deeper conversation on humans thinking we’re the center of everything.” Surely we would have thought up something better than the phrase human rights by then.

JOHNATHAN:

My only point would be I’ll be happy to not watch this episode again for a while.\*all laugh\*

CALLIE:

Well yeah I kinda had the same thought.

SUE:

Well thank you everybody for coming on the show. I think this was a great discussion about a somewhat difficult episode. As we sign off, Callie where can people find you on the Internet?

CALLIE:

I am @calliegetsit on Twitter and my podcast is called Queersplaining any place you find podcasts do you can find it. And Queersplaining.com is the website.

SUE:

Jonathan?

JOHNATHAN:

I am @JAlexan on Twitter. You can also look me up on Facebook by name Jonathan Alexandratos.

SUE:

And Jarrah?

JARRAH:

You can find me on Twitter @J-A-R-R-A-H-Penguin and also at Trekkiefeminist.com.

SUE:

Awesome. And I'm Sue. You can find me on Twitter @spaltor That's S-P-A-L-T-O-R. If you'd like to reach the show you can find us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook at Womenatwarp. You can find our website at Womenatwarp.com or shoot us an email at crew@womenatwarp.com and for more from the Roddenberry podcast network visit podcasts.Roddenberry.com. Thanks so much for joining us!

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