

## **Women at Warp Episode 21: Two About T'Pol**

MELINDA:

Hi, this is Melinda Snodgrass. You're listening to Women At Warp.

VO:

T'Pol has a big secret. She's contracted a disease that if revealed could jeopardize her future.

T'POL:

There is a great risk I'd be taken off Enterprise.

PHLOX:

I think I can question them without revealing you're infected.

T'POL:

It's too great a risk.

PHLOX:

Without further treatment, you could very possibly die.

VO:

T'Pol was previously forced to engage in the intimate act of a Vulcan mind-meld.

SUE:

Hi and welcome to Women At Warp. 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 are Jarrah.

JARRAH:

Hey

SUE:

And Grace.

GRACE:

Hey guys.

SUE:

Before we get into our main topic we'll do some housekeeping, as usual. We would like to remind you about our Patreon over at [Patreon.com/womenatwarp](https://Patreon.com/womenatwarp). That's P A T R E O N.com/womenatwarp. And that is basically how we pay for things like hosting, and convention travel, and a lot of stuff we're able to do to help promote the show. Also, we want to remind you if you are not subscribed on iTunes, please go over and subscribe on iTunes. And if you have a

couple minutes while you're there, leave us a rating and a review. Subscription numbers, and ratings, and reviews are what help other people find the show.

GRACE:

Your love keeps us going.

SUE:

Totally. That is really what we're trying to do, is spread the feminist Star Trek love. And I think Jarrah wanted to talk a little bit about a new book?

JARRAH:

Yeah. I just wanted to put in a quick plug for a book that I just finished reading called "The Star Trek Universe: franchising the final frontier." It is a collection of academic essays. It- you know, I read actually a lot of academic books on Star Trek and sci-fi and almost all of them promise to be accessible to non-academic readers, and very few actually deliver. But I think this one does. I think that it has a lot that's really exciting for a broader Trek audience. I sort of liken it to I guess like a tapas meal or like a sampler plate, because it's full of essays on really every aspect of the franchise you can imagine. From like the gender representations of the TNG action figures, to how the Borg Collective is similar and different from modern social networks, and things like that. So I thought it was really cool and I just wanted to put a shout-out there for anyone who's interested in just, you know, maybe thinking some new thoughts about Star Trek. There is quite a bit of stuff on gender and race in there. I think a lot of it could go deeper. But part of the strength of the book is it just kind of introduces you to a bunch of new ideas and I think it works. So that's "The Star Trek universe: franchising the final frontier" which is edited by Douglas and Shea T. Brode, or Brode, but B R O D E and it's good.

GRACE:

Most excellent. Don't you love that we're at a point where we can plug things? \*Sue laughs\* Isn't it great?

SUE:

I think I saw your review of this on Tumblr, maybe? And it immediately shot to the top of my wish list.

JARRAH:

Yeah. If you do want to read more about my thoughts on it and some of the specific highlights there's a fuller review at [Trekkiefeminist.Tumblr.com](http://Trekkiefeminist.Tumblr.com).

SUE:

So shall we jump in?

JARRAH:

Yes.

GRACE:

Let's do it.

SUE:

All right. Today we are talking about the two T'Pol centric episodes that are kind of tied together by storyline, and deal with some pretty big themes. Before I go any farther I do want to put a trigger warning on this episode. We are going to be talking about things like assault, and violence, and issues of consent, and probably even as we get later in the episode discrimination and homophobia. So if those things are triggering for you don't listen until you feel safe and comfortable doing so. So those episodes are Fusion and Stigma. Fusion is an episode from season one in which T'Pol meets a group of Vulcans who embrace their emotions and practice mind-melds, and ends up being assaulted by one of them. And then in season two in the episode Stigma we find out that T'Pol contracted Pa'nar syndrome from her attacker, and that disease is a clear stand-in for HIV and AIDS and is highly stigmatized on Vulcan. So there are some really big issues in these two episodes.

JARRAH:

Yeah, and we haven't talked a ton about Enterprise yet on the show. And we thought this would be kind of a good place to start because it has those big issues and they are focused on one of the two main women characters.

GRACE:

It's a little telling already that we can say "The one of two characters who are women on this show." \*Jarrah laughs\*

SUE:

Yeah. That's another podcast, I think. \*laughs\*

JARRAH:

We're definitely going to do one on women of Enterprise and-

GRACE:

I don't think we see either of them talk to each other in either of these episodes, either.

JARRAH:

I believe you are correct on that. One thing I found when Bechdel testing Enterprise is that Hoshi and T'Pol rarely talk to each other. When they do, they do have some cool scenes, but we can probably say that for the women of Enterprise episode. And we're also going to do another episode looking at the roles of women in Enterprise and TOS, and how there's that sort of potential contradiction between a show that's produced several decades after the original series, but set *before* the original series. So if you're looking for more on those things, we're going to have more episodes on that later.

SUE:

So does anyone want to give a perhaps more detailed summary of Fusion?

JARRAH:

Well- yeah I mean, so that's pretty much the summary. But you know, when I started watching Enterprise the first season is not great. Even fans of Enterprise acknowledge it gets better later. But I had been watching a lot of Next Generation before this, and when I got to this episode I was actually really pleasantly surprised with how I felt the issue of assault was treated. Basically like we said, there's the encounter with the ship of Vulcans and T'Pol is really quite suspicious of them and disapproves of the fact that they embrace emotions and they also practice mind-melding, which she doesn't really seem to know a lot about. And all of her human crewmates, and I think Phlox as well, they're all basically urging her to hang out with these Vulcans and she's really uncomfortable. She really doesn't want to do it, and they're all basically saying like "Oh, you could totally loosen up and be like them."

GRACE:

Which is very uncomfortable both on a cultural level, because they're all saying "She should be around her own kind", and on a social level of all these guys are telling the one woman she needs to relax, when she from the beginning is like "I am not crazy about this, you guys" like "Nah, you should! You should try and learn something." Which is especially great because that one guy is just giving her the eye business.

JARRAH:

Like, this guy's name is Tolaris, and I mean I wouldn't say we know that he's a bad guy right off the bat, but we know that he's interested in-

GRACE:

He's making bad guy eyes at her. I mean, I know Vulcans already have bad guy eyebrows, but still!

JARRAH:

And definitely not good guy hair. That's not the hair of good guys. \*Sue laughs\*

GRACE:

They go to the barber of evil. \*Sue laughs\* He's a very specific clientele.

SUE:

Those bangs are *quite* short.

GRACE:

Yeah.

JARRAH:

Yeah. So you know, this happens a lot in Enterprise where T'Pol is really expected to be the one who changes to fit in with the humans, and none of the humans are really expected to try and explore her stuff. Until she hooks up with Tripp later. Sorry, spoilers. But at this point, this is a pretty expected reaction, is all the guys being like "Oh you should totally hang out with this guy. He seems so nice." And I don't think it's as much about like, "Be with your own kind" as it is about "These guys are more human. Like, they're less driven by logic, and they're more driven by emotion, which is more like us. And we want you to be more like us. So you should hang out with them, because they're doing it right." So that was kind of what I got from that.

GRACE:

They *do* specifically use the phrase "Be with your own kind" a few times in the episode though.

SUE:

*Several* times in the episode.

JARRAH:

I forgot that. Ugh. \*Sue laughs\* And so, there's also like this kind of charming little engineer guy who hangs out with Tripp. And he's kind of the comic relief and he really likes being on Enterprise, so that's kind of going on at the same time.

GRACE:

And he's super curious, and has all these questions about "Is it really true that humans do this and this?" and it's very endearing.

JARRAH:

Yeah. So T'Pol does end up sort of exploring mind-melding with Tolaris. So the mind-meld takes her back to a San Francisco night when she was at the- I guess hanging out around Starfleet, and she wandered by this jazz club.

GRACE:

A jazz *fusion* club. \*group "oh"s\* Yeah. \*smug voice\* You get it? It's a title that ties back around into the show. Yeah.

JARRAH:

Yeah yeah. Clever, clever wordplay.

GRACE:

Yeah. Yeah.

JARRAH:

So basically Tolaris pushes her too far, to the point where she withdraws consent, and she says "No" she doesn't want to do this anymore. And he is like invading her mind, and it does definitely have sexual overtones. And she breaks it off, but she seems like she's injured and, you know, the next time we see her we see she's in Sick Bay. And so she explains to Archer what

happened, and Archer to his credit totally believes her. You know, no one says “Oh, I guess we were wrong about this guy.” But he does say “I’m going to hold this guy accountable.” Tolaris kind of tries to like victim-blame her saying that “T’Pol simply panicked because she couldn’t handle the quote-unquote emotional turbulence of the meld” and Archer is basically like “No. I believe my crew member. No one treats my crew like that. Get off my ship.” and so basically he kicks the guy off, and fun guy in engineering also leaves. And Archer basically goes to check on T’Pol, and T’Pol’s basically like “That is awful, but I’ll recover.” Is that a fairly accurate description? \*laughs\*

GRACE:

Pretty much. And honestly I really did like the fact that we do not see this conversation between Archer and T’Pol. That we just see him being like \*upbeat voice\* “Hey! Come on in, sit down. So. You *attacked* one of my crew members.” And we kind of as an audience give T’Pol that level of privacy. And the fact that he just instantly is on her side and is in full force like “No, you did a bad thing and I’m here to tell you that you did a bad thing.”

SUE:

Yeah, that’s true. I mean that is definitely one of the good things they did, was to not show the victim being forced to relive an assault while reporting it.

GRACE:

Which I really appreciated.

JARRAH:

Unlike The Enemy Within, right? Yeah.

GRACE:

Yeah. Also, the fact that we get to hear him saying to her attacker “Really? She’s in the sickbay. Do you think that sounds like she wanted that? and that she’s OK with all this?” \*sounds of agreement\*

SUE:

But that scene is just so bothersome upsetting. You know? Especially- she says “Let me go.” She says “No.” She says “Stop” twice. And then she has to try and kick him out twice. Like it’s a good several *minutes* of her trying to get him to stop and leave.

GRACE:

Complete with a lot of gasping and heavy breathing. Yeah, it is *very* uncomfortable to watch.

JARRAH:

Yeah, I agree. But I think that the way that the narrative was treated, it did a good job of taking the issue seriously, and the fact that like we clearly saw that she withdrew her consent. And Tolaris used really common victim-blaming narratives that we will hear in media or from accusers today, and Archer just shuts that down. So I thought that was important, that it got

beyond like I think the level of a lot of the Troi assaults, of really just being about like putting a damsel in distress. And it really more addressed the idea of, you know, this is rape culture and like this how we shut it down, is we refuse to accept those narratives that like “Well, because she mind-melded she consented to all of it.”

SUE:

Well, the other thing that- I don't know if anybody else sees this, but there is one line that Tolaris has towards the end of this. He says to her “You've made progress. Don't give up now.” And to me, that takes it into shades of what is referred to as *corrective rape*. \*all make noises of discomfort\* Right? Which is *horrendous*. That is, you know, when somebody is bisexual or pan or gay or asexual that somebody decides “Well, if you just had sex with the quote ‘right person’ you would be quote ‘fixed.’” And it's horrifying. But it is a huge issue.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Or even just the less sinister version of that, like “All she needs is a good lay” which you hear a lot to refer to women who are not very emotional or like who are logic-driven and ok taking charge. Like “Oh, well she wouldn't be such a B-word if she just had a man to sleep with.”

GRACE:

Either way, he's kind of grooming her into this position where he can take advantage of her beyond her comfort level.

SUE:

And plus there's- I don't think anybody ever actually says the exact phrase, but the discussions of emotion leading up to this are laced with the idea of “Well how do you know if you've never tried?” And it's just- it's so incredibly terrible. \*laughs uncomfortably\*

GRACE:

Lets just let out a communal \*uncomfortable groan\*.

JARRAH:

Yeah for sure. I think it's really uncomfortable, but I think- so I pulled a quote from Jaclyn Friedman, who is a feminist author and commentator, who wrote a really great essay at the American Prospect about the use of sexual assault in TV. Because since this episode of Enterprise it feels like rape on TV has become really ubiquitous with like Game of Thrones and even shows like Downton Abbey having rape plotlines.

GRACE:

House of Cards. It's all over the place.

JARRAH:

Yeah. It's like you almost can't even have a show without having a main character get assaulted. And I mean Star Trek Renegades also references assault and has like rape threats. So you know, it's certainly something we're dealing with even more now. So Friedman says “TV is national and international audiences certainly need a better understanding of all of the issues

surrounding sexual violence. But for all the dramatic and social good rape as a theme can bring to television, rape as a plot device is manipulative and damaging. It's a difference of intention. Why are we doing a rape plotline now? And it comes down to the execution." So how do you guys feel like it stacks up? Looking at it in that sense. Do you feel it felt like it was a plot device? Do you think it felt like they explored some interesting themes with it, or what do you think?

GRACE:

I think it could fall on either side of the line really. On one hand, we haven't actually talked about a lot of sexual assault and rape in Star Trek. It's alluded to, it's implied, especially with characters like Tasha Yar. This is one of the first times where it's straightforward said "No, a woman was assaulted." So it's one of those things that's very interesting to examine from the perspective of "We're talking about this idealized future universe that is not yet an ideal setting." And even in the building up towards this ideal setting, we get later on there's gonna be some bumps in the road. But at the same time the fact that we have, again *two* female characters on this show, one of whom is sexually assaulted within the first season, I think it does kind of speak to the show's lack of ability to plan a good story. Or at least a more creative, more attentive story for one of its female characters. And they really just needed to have a better idea of what they were doing with them, and the scope of what kind of stories you can tell with a female character, especially one like T'pol. She definitely had so much potential that was unexplored and to just go to take the rape story as just go-to, again in the *first season*, it just feels a little it feels a little tacky.

SUE:

Well not only in the first season, but this is really the first episode about T'Pol. In the very first episode-

GRACE:

To say that this is their go-to for a character episode for her speaks *enormous* volumes about how rape is seen as one of the go-tos that you have for a story her female character.

SUE:

She's assaulted in the very first episode that focuses on her character. It's just kind of gross.

JARRAH:

Well, certainly I would agree that I don't think that the creator's intent was to like "Hey, let's dismantle rape culture with like a sensitive look at this issue" because there's a Brannon Braga quote. He was quoted as promoting the episode by saying, oh I have to make my gross Brannon Braga voice \*Sue laughs/Jarrah switches to a sleazy voice\* "We have a show coming up where T'Pol gets nasty with a Vulcan, and that's a real sexy show."

SUE:

\*aghast\* To call- to call that scene sexy... like, I'll be back. I just have to go take a shower.  
\*laughs\*



GRACE:

That's another problem that we have with the depiction of sexual assault in media and culture, is it's very sexualized. It's very much like "Oh yeah. She's being attacked but she looks so cute and pretty the whole time." It's like *ew god*.

JARRAH:

Well, he also said that this episode would be quote \*sleazy voice\* "The Vulcan version of Nine And a Half Weeks" which-

GRACE:

*Disagree.*

JARRAH:

for those not familiar with the movie that's basically like a 1980s- sort of considered a precursor to Fifty Shades of Grey. It's about- it has Kim Basinger and.. the guy whose name that's slipping my mind. And it's sort of like this guy, he convinces her to sort of try-

GRACE:

Mickey Rourke! That's the one.

JARRAH:

Yeah, Mickey Rourke. And it's disturbing in similar ways, in that a lot of people have said it was *supposedly* supposed to explore the boundaries of consent, but it actually isn't reflective of what consensual BDSM relationships would be like. And it really is more about coercion, and glorification of violence against women, and like submissiveness of women. So \*sarcastic\* yay. But you know, I will still defend this episode, not like- I won't say that it's not problematic in context. Like, I think it's a really fair point that it's problematic that that's the first episode that focuses on her.

GRACE:

If it had not been her first central episode I probably would've said "Wow, that was- that was interesting. We don't talk about that a lot, and we don't talk a lot about the implication of the mind meld Vulcan culture." So the fact that it comes with all these shades of gray here, I probably in a different context would have found it interesting and appropriate. But in this one I kind of don't.

JARRAH:

Yeah, I think that's fair.

SUE:

How they deal with it after, I would put in the positive side of the scale. You know, they're not making T'Pol relive it. Archer is 100 percent on her side. There's no like "Well, are you sure you weren't wearing sexy mind-meld clothes?" \*laughs\*

GRACE:

Which is tricky because she's *always* wearing that catsuit. \*all laugh\*

JARRAH:

And Archer doesn't talk about her like he's mad because she's his property. Like, it's not like Riker in *The Child* with like \*accusingly\* "Who's the father of your alien rape baby?" Archer is just clearly mad because like "You hurt my friend. And that's just the wrong thing to do." So it didn't feel like, you know, a man had to step in to defend her, but that was an appropriate role for him to play as her captain.

SUE:

Yeah.

GRACE:

As a leader, taking accountability for taking care of the problem.

JARRAH:

And it doesn't show that like, she immediately recovers. Like she doesn't just magically- you aren't supposed to think that like "OK well, the guy sent away so she's gonna be totally fine now." Which is another problem.

GRACE:

\*chipper voice\* "Problem *all gone!*"

JARRAH:

Yeah. That's another problem we tend to see in a lot of media. This idea that like, you get revenge on your attacker, or your attacker goes to jail, and suddenly you're fine.

GRACE:

Closure is not that easy. The problem is if you're showing it in a television format you need to have closure within the end of your hour. Or else it doesn't work as a story.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I mean, obviously that's changed quite a bit over the past several years with the way that TV has changed. But I think when *Enterprise* was on, they still- in the first season was still very episodic. So they do imply that, you know, this is something that she's going to have to recover from. And they're- and Archer is going to give her the space and the time she needs to do that.

SUE:

Yeah. I just kind of wish, to say it again, that this wasn't the first episode that focuses on T'Pol. But also that maybe there was a little more time spent afterward, rather than leading up to it. Because in my opinion that's where the important stuff really happens, is how it's dealt with. And how it's not acceptable.

JARRAH:

Yeah, I agree. You know like, I first saw this when I was watching my way through. And it's close to the end of the first season, and I think part of the reason I appreciated it was that I was just so incredibly frustrated of how often T'Pol's male crewmates were telling her to loosen up, and be different, and have a sense of humor, and not listening to her. And then even when she was right not acknowledging "Hey, you were right" and this seemed like it was- like again it started off that way. And then at the end there was really a shift that was "We should have listened to you." And I think that I was kind of relieved by that. But I agree, and I mean I think that we would all agree that T'Pol just generally should have had more like episodes centered around her, and more variety, better episodes centered around her.

SUE:

The men of Enterprise really are kind of street harass-y aren't they?

JARRAH:

Oh yeah. They're definitely-

SUE:

"Hey baby, smile!" \*all laugh\*

JARRAH:

Yeah. I mean, the number of times they're like "Hey, go see this old-timey movie. You'll really really like it." And then she's like "I fail to see why I would like this." And I do too, because like why would you want to go to the movie theater where all they show are movies that were released before 1950 so that Enterprise didn't have to pay royalties to those later movies, and then have people talk through the whole movie? \*Grace laughs\*

GRACE:

It's going to be just like a bigger equivalent of going over to a friend's house for movie night and everyone just talks over the movie about how great it is while you're trying to watch the movie.

JARRAH:

\*laughs\* Totally, yeah. So I mean, I think T'Pol deserved better in the show as a whole. I think if this wasn't really one of the few T'Pol centric episodes that I could I think appreciate it more. But overall, I definitely appreciate it in the context of all the other depictions of assault we got, which we will also do another episode just on sexual assault and Star Trek. But in that context, I definitely appreciated it as just doing a better job than I think Trek has ever done on the issue.

SUE:

I'd agree with that.

GRACE:

Low bar, but they jumped it. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

So a year later in Season 2, lest we forget about this horrifying assault on T'Pol, we get the episode Stigma. Part of a Viacom awareness campaign for HIV and AIDS in 2003, a mandate came down that every show on the network had to do an episode that would essentially act as a PSA about the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

GRACE:

That's oddly proactive of them.

JARRAH:

I don't object to the idea on principle, but definitely when you look at this episode I think it's questionable whether the execution actually accomplished their goals. Part of their stated goals was to appeal to- or to raise awareness and education. And I think we'll probably talk about how much it actually teaches us and- yeah. I mean, maybe the other-

GRACE:

*Teaches* might be a loose term here.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And then, you know, Brannon Braga again, your friend and mine, he commented on the creation of this episode to sort of defend like "Oh don't worry, it's not going to- this isn't going to be like too preachy." \*laughs\* At least that's how I read it. He says \*sleazy voice\* "We're not here to provide answers to questions. We're here to provoke thought about an issue. This episode stands on its own. Even if you don't draw the analogy it's still an interesting episode because it deals in general with prejudice. The metaphor will be clear to a lot of people." So I'm like "You're not here to provide answers to questions?" Like this- you're talking about HIV AIDS awareness like it's pretty cut and dried. \*laughs\* I don't think there's really like a lot of legit room for debate.

SUE:

And *who* was *not* going to draw the analogy? \*all laugh\*

JARRAH:

No kidding! Maybe I'm jumping ahead because we haven't given a synopsis yet.

GRACE:

\*laughs\* Let's get to that, shall we?

JARRAH:

Someone else want to do this one?

GRACE:

OK. So the gist of this episode is, you know, it's been a while since T'Pol was assaulted but she is having some problems with this mysterious disease that she's contracted, apparently from her assault. And Dr. Phlox really wants to see if he can do some investigating into it, find out more information. But to do that he has to talk to the Vulcan science council during some kind of medical conference and that could put T'pol's position in jeopardy. And surprise. They put one and one together and they are asking "So, you've got a Vulcan on your crew and you want to know about this really specific disease. I'm thinking there's some stuff you're not telling us." And then T'pol essentially risks losing her job because of the stigma attached to this disease, because the Vulcan Council isn't big on people who mind-meld for some reason.

JARRAH:

You did not need to be Sherlock Holmes to figure out why Phlox needed to know about Pa'nar syndrome.

GRACE:

*Noo.*

SUE:

It's so- \*ugh\*.

GRACE:

He tried. He tried.

SUE:

I just- like, I would say *thinly veiled* but there is no veil. Like, \*laughs\* it was a flashing neon sign.

GRACE:

Maybe if it was a veil made of like cheesecloth or something.

SUE:

I mean, he says "There's a subculture of people and we don't condone of their behavior." Like-

JARRAH:

Yeah, I believe they referred to it as "their lifestyle" at some point. And they call them deviants.

SUE:

"We don't condone the intimate actions these people participate in." That's a direct quote.

GRACE:

Guys, it's not *subtext* if it's *right there!*

SUE:

\*laughs\* It's not subtext if it's *text*. \*laughs\*

JARRAH:

\*groans\* Yeah. So then the Vulcans find out, they get annoyed. Then Archer finds out, and he is like even- he's more angry at first that T'Pol and Phlox didn't tell him then concerned about her well-being.

GRACE:

"How dare you have personal secrets. *How dare.*"

JARRAH:

\*laughs\* Jeeze. Yeah. I think that Fusion is actually a better Archer episode than Stigma. But in this one he's like- he's really like personally offended. And actually to their credit T'Pol and Phlox are basically like "I thought they, you know, your people believed in medical or doctor-patient confidentiality." So they basically call him on "Your values don't line up with your anger here."

SUE:

Yeah. Phlox shut that down. And that was great.

JARRAH:

Go Phlox. So Archer becomes suddenly less angry when he realizes it's because she was assaulted, because I guess if she had just contracted it through normal consensual mind-meld it would've been OK? Or like he would have had a right to be angry with her? Which is- that's kind of problematic. And then everyone is like "Tell them you were assaulted because then they won't kick you off Enterprise" and she refuses to do so because she says it's not fair to the minority. That if she says "Well I'm innocent here. I'm not one of them" that it implies that what they're doing is wrong and it condones the prejudice. And still everyone is like "Tell them tell them tell them."

GRACE:

But there's also that very unspoken level of "If I tell them this, I have to admit to the fact that I was assaulted. And I have to tell all these strangers I was assaulted."

SUE:

Yeah, that is definitely a huge privacy point that is not even addressed. And the reasoning that T'Pol gives, I *do* kind of like. Like "I refuse to use this as a defense because there is nothing to defend about participating in this."

GRACE:

And it's good, and it's logical, and it does sound like something to defend with. But at the same time this whole thing is unspoken.

SUE:

She should not have to tell anybody about her history. Like, there's no reason for that.

JARRAH:

There is no- the only benefit to her in reporting, which involves confessing this experience that she shouldn't have to tell anyone, but it's not going to bring her attacker to justice. All it is going to do is make people see her as a victim in this situation. Or- and end up condoning the prejudice against the people in the minority. And yet people- like she says "I have Pa'nar Syndrome. It doesn't make a difference how I contracted it." And Archer goes "It makes *a lot of* difference. You're *not* a member of this minority. He forced himself on you. You said it yourself." So Archer's just like "If you *were* a member of the minority...I don't know."

GRACE:

Archer isn't thinking this through very well.

JARRAH:

No, he's very much just like "How can we get you out of it? I don't care that the Vulcans are oppressing this entire group of people."

GRACE:

\*Whiney voice\* "But T'Pol, you're not making it about meeee."

SUE:

It's just that whole idea. You know, "Tell them you were assaulted. Tell them it's not your fault. Tell them you didn't consent." It's just because of the *not at all veiled* \*laughs\* analogy here, it's just reinforcing the stereotype that HIV AIDS is a gay man's disease.

GRACE:

And a minorities disease.

SUE:

Yeah. "It only affects this small group. It's only if you participate in what they do that you would contract this" and that's simply not true.

JARRAH:

No. Absolutely. And so, there's a doctor in this group of Vulcans who is a member of the minority, the mind-melding minority, and he is- I would say it's fair to say he's a bit more effeminate than the other Vulcans. Like it feels like they were deliberately trying to cast a man who was- would like be a bit more stereotypical of what you would think of a gay man as. And he-

GRACE:

\*sarcastic\* 'Cuz it's veiled, see. It's veiled.

JARRAH:

And he slips information on the syndrome to T'Pol, and he urges her also to tell about her assault. And again she says "No, I'm not going to throw you guys under the bus." And then he ends up outing her assault, at the hearing. And I think that's pretty awful. So at the end, she gets to stay on Enterprise *purely* because the Vulcan council can rationalize that she's not a member of this minority. And Archer is basically like "Oh, I feel bad for those dudes. But selfishly speaking, I'm glad you're still on the ship."

GRACE:

But at the same time, *this dude* in a position of power who could have really somehow affected the power sway now doesn't have a job, for the sake of T'Pol.

SUE:

And by the way, they also make it *very clear* that the Vulcans who mind-meld, they're born with this special ability-

JARRAH:

Yeah it's genetic.

SUE:

that not all Vulcans have. There's this genetic ability to participate in this behavior. It's so gross. Like just the way that they do this.

JARRAH:

Like Sue said, it really reinforces the idea that HIV AIDS is a gay man's disease, which actually is not true. And it also functions to perpetuate stigma, and homophobia, and also to enable people who are not men having sex with men to let their guard down and assume like "Oh, well I'm not going to get HIV because I'm having straight sex." Which is part of the reason that like one of the highest groups of people contracting HIV AIDS in North America has been young straight women. And it's- so it's like not true. It perpetuates the stigma, and it's irresponsible.

SUE:

But- I know there's more about this, but I really quickly just want to talk about the B story of this episode. That is the one where one of Phlox's' wives is there, and she's interested in Tripp, and Phlox is kind of like encouraging this relationship. And it's supposed to be the comic relief, because Tripp's uncomfortable with it and he was raised to believe \*southern accent\* that you don't mess around with another man's wife. "And I just don't think I could ever get over that."

GRACE:

\*southern accent\* Polyamory is just *too* weird."



SUE:

Right? And like *in theory* the idea that the Denobulans are polyamorous is kind of cool. And when Phlox just talks about this different kind of relationship? Great! But when it's actually *in the episode* it's just used as a joke. Like, it's the butt of jokes. It's used for comic relief and that just makes me really sad.

GRACE:

Also, can we point out that for the second time in a very few amount of episodes we have an Enterprise episode where big exposition thing between the dudes is in the gym. \*Jarrah laughs\* That's just mysteriously only full of men. Just dudes, working out. Being dudes together. Because, you know, in a military operation women don't need to exercise apparently. And the whole ship is a locker room.

SUE:

\*laughs\* and Tripp isn't so much concerned that- the way he phrases it, that she is married or in a relationship but that she is "another man's wife." It's not "She has her own commitments." It's "She is the property of this other person" which is also bothersome.

JARRAH:

Yeah. Totally. So like, so this is the episode where- I think we previously knew he had multiple wives, that Phlox did. But we didn't know that the wives also had multiple husbands. So that's kind of cool. Like you said, it's a cool concept that they could have done a bit more justice to. And I think they could have even possibly balanced some humor in there. Like we see in a lot of Next Generation episodes that- like Riker gets into entanglements from not understanding what's going on with another species sexual mores, and there's usually like a laughing point about that, but everyone else is really respecting that cultural difference. And Riker basically will go like "Oh yeah, messed that one up. Ha ha ha. I totally respect you guys though." And it didn't really have that concurrent message of "this is just something different and we're delighted by difference." Where, you know, "This was a mistake but we really are accepting of the fact that you just do things differently than we do." It's like everyone on the Enterprise is like "We can't even *understand* how this is even possible."

GRACE:

\*confused voice\* "What is this? What *is* this?"

SUE:

The *shock* that "Sure, OK. I guess we can accept that this man has three wives" But then that each wife also has three husbands? "That's not right!"

GRACE:

That tipping point. Tipping point, right there. \*Sue laughs\* Heavens forfend, clutch your pearls.

JARRAH:

And I totally agree with what you're saying Sue. This is something that really annoys me in society as well as in media. This idea that- and we see this a bit too with Paris and Neelix on Voyager. This like "You can't mess with another man's girl." And it becomes so that the woman's wishes are totally irrelevant. And I'm not saying that like, Tripp should have just gone and slept with her because *she* wanted to. Like if he's not comfortable that's totally fine. But like you said, he's basically talking to Reed and he's like "She's hitting on me" and Reeds like "Oh you can't even tell Phlox about that. Like, he'll be really angry." And so they're just making assumptions that like Phlox believes this woman is his property, *she* can't possibly control what she is doing, and I have to go talk with him man to man. He goes to talk to Phlox and Phlox goes "Don't you find her attractive?" and Tucker goes "Sure. I mean no! She's your wife." Like he's really like "I can't find her attractive because she's your wife."

GRACE:

"Women don't have sexuality after they've committed their sexuality to a single male. Don't you know?"

JARRAH:

Yeah. And Phlox goes "Well, what does that have to do with it?" And he goes "She's your wife?" And Phlox goes "Oh nonsense. Nonsense. You're too concerned with human morality. I thought you wanted to learn about new cultures. Isn't that why you joined Starfleet?" and he goes \*southern accent\* "Wha? Of course it is, but I was brought up believing you don't play around with another man's wife. I don't think I'm ever gonna change my mind about that." And like, what he could've done instead was just say "Hey Feazel-" That's her name, Feazel. "Look, I know that Denobulans have different ways of doing things but I don't feel comfortable being involved with someone who's in a relationship with someone else. So maybe just like stop hitting on me."

GRACE:

\*laughs\* It isn't possible to quote Tripp without doing the accent.

JARRAH:

Yes. \*Sue laughs\* Or he can be like "Hey, this is a work situation. And so maybe stop trying to have sex with me, because we're at work."\*Sue laughs\*

GRACE:

\*southern accent\* "This is a professional environment, ma'am." \*Sue laughs\*

JARRAH:

Both of those would have been more respectful of the fact that she also has a stake in the situation.

SUE:

"Rather than speak to her, I'll just go talk to her husband." That's how it goes.

JARRAH:

“He can shut this down.”

GRACE:  
Evidently. Oy.

SUE:  
Really, that's what's happening. He is going to Phlox to make it stop. Instead of asking *her* to stop if he is uncomfortable. He is going to the man that controls her. \*laughs\*

GRACE:  
At the very end they have this point where the two of them, Phlox and Feazel, get together and are like \*loving exasperation\* “Humans.” And that is the point where I wanted to go \*loving exasperation\* “Star Trek writers.”

JARRAH:  
\*laughs\* Yeah. Like I admit I laughed at some of the parts, but overall I think it really lacked any kind of- like Archer or some other figure to like play the Picard, or the role of. Or Troi, or anyone who could remind them like “This *is* why we're out in space: to learn about new ways of life, new forms of life” and- which is not even acknowledging the fact that polyamory exists on Earth today. And I'm sure did at the time of Enterprise as well. But-

GRACE:  
It's always fun when a different character has to be their own advocate.

JARRAH:  
I think that's like the minimum they could have done though.

SUE:  
But back to the Vulcans.\*laughs\*

JARRAH:  
Yes.

GRACE:  
I Vul-*can* get behind that.

SUE:  
\*laughs\* Well one of my other notes right, is that this whole idea that the Vulcans are rejecting a subculture is just- it doesn't jive for me. Right? The idea that Vulcans, a peaceful logical I don't know vegetarian people \*laughs\*, would be bigots.

GRACE:

That doesn't sound like infinite diversity.

SUE:

Yeah, it does not make sense. It does not compute.

JARRAH:

I agree. I mean, I know that Vulcans in Enterprise are supposed to be a bit different. And we do see them being bigoted towards humans in a way that's more significant than the original series, and later series.

GRACE:

I think that by *different* you mean just generally douche.

JARRAH:

Yeah. They are definitely generally douche. But I still didn't buy that they would go this far. Particularly to the point of rejecting knowledge about a disease. Like I could believe that they would stigmatize a certain group of people for mind-melding because it was a threat to their culture, because we do see that change in the Vulcan culture later in Enterprise. But to the point that they would hide knowledge about a disease and let it kill people? That, I don't see how that is remotely justifiable and- or in keeping with Vulcan morals and ethics.

SUE:

They're basically, if not advocating for, acting like they're totally fine with the deaths of all of these people.

GRACE:

Well again, they've- tie that into the AIDS analogy being like "Tell me you're just okay with letting this group of the population that you don't like die out." Which adds to the analogy but at the same time does not make sense for Vulcan culture. It really does not.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And it's kind of unfortunate that, you know \*sighs\*, to this point we- like we only see that there's this group of people who are genetically predisposed or genetically able to mind-meld and have this disease, and we see one person who was assaulted, and there's no one that is saying "It goes beyond these groups." So it does really reinforce the idea that like this is something- like there's a reason to hide this thing in the shadows, which is not fair at all.

SUE:

It's sort of *again* the "Well, if you just behaved this wouldn't happen to you. If you were a better person. If you did what we wanted you to do this wouldn't be an issue."

GRACE:

Government mandated "karma" sure is a bitch.

JARRAH:

I think it's worth mentioning to you that this was 2003. So like, when this episode came out I was graduating from high school. I started learning about HIV AIDS, and I know like my experience was not universal, but I started learning about HIV AIDS in my sex ed curriculum and like community programs in nineteen ninety five. When I was 10. And I think like the mid 90s were really like a turning point in- not to say that there was not still stigma, and that stigma does not still exist today.

GRACE:

But there was more of a conversation happening. Yeah.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I mean we had had Act Up. We had had a lot of- there was a *lot* of media. It was started to be realized that this was something that went beyond gay men, sex workers, and drug users. And there was Angels in America. There was all kind of art being produced. And this is like less, I would say, less incisive than like *anything* that I saw being produced in the mid 90s. And this was in 2003. It was like they were very afraid to actually teach us anything about HIV AIDS.

GRACE:

You tried. But just barely.

JARRAH:

Yeah.

SUE:

In fact, they're basically doing the opposite of what they claimed to have wanted to do. You know? They're promoting this stigma and kind of indirectly giving out false information.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I think it's similar to The Outcast, in that it was well-intentioned but some of the choices that they made in the execution ended up just reinforcing some of the problems. Like in Outcast, just briefly, we talk about how the fact that they cast all women as these androgynous race made the fact that there was like a kiss between this woman and Riker less of a potent analogy for homophobia. And the fact that she can get cured at the end is also a problem. Or quote unquote cured, implies that it is actually something that you could and would want to possibly cure. So there's this- and like similar problems. Like, this was an issue that they were actually kind of behind the eight ball in creating art on, and they chose to go with representations that were just kind of conservative.

SUE:

Conservative and stereotypical.

GRACE:

And all white people. \*Sue laughs\*

JARRAH:

Yep. I thought- yeah, that was frustrating. I was trying to think like, how would I have felt if this had been an episode of TNG?

GRACE:

Would have been a little more timelier for one thing.

JARRAH:

Well if it had- \*laughs\* Yeah.

SUE:

If it were TNG it would have been pushing the boundaries. Because that would have been the 80s, early 90s and before we knew as much as we knew in 2003.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I mean, even if it had been like first season Voyager I think that you could give them more credit for trying. But by 2003 there was so much more information, and voices, and knowledge about this that this story is- yeah it's counterproductive from where things were. Plus the whole stuff about like "Let's force this woman to talk about her sexual assault because we want her-

SUE:

"Because it's for her own good."

JARRAH:

to stay on the ship with us."

GRACE:

\*singing\* "Men know what is best for you."

JARRAH:

Yeah.

SUE:

Yeah. He *outs* her "for her own good." \*scoffs\*

JARRAH:

Yeah. And if there's one thing we've learned, like the Vulcans are gossips. So they like \*Sue laughs\* I mean in Enterprise they are. Like when later on, you know, there's an episode where T'Pol and Tripp go visit her mom, and her mom like knows everything that's happened on Enterprise. So when Yuris, this like Vulcan Doctor outs her at the hearing, which is what Archer *wanted* to do, and thankfully- like minor credit to Archer in this episode. He said "OK I'm not going to out this about you, but I want to have a hearing. But I won't tell this story if you don't want it told." But when Yuris outs her, he's not just outing her to the people in that room. Like you can assume that is getting back to her mom, her like entire military command structure.

GRACE:

He is outing her to the world essentially.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And like, it's going to affect how she's seen and so it's really like not fair to do that without her consent.

GRACE:

No, not at all.

SUE:

It is none of their beeswax.

GRACE:

Give this episode three out of five resigned groans.

JARRAH:

\*laughs\* Well, I think when we did our first episode review on Wolf In The Fold we thought about doing a thing like "Set phasers on blank" to write the episode, so we could do that with these episodes.

GRACE:

Good call. Just just keep that groan going for like seven and a half minutes and we're good.

\*Jarrah laughs\*

SUE:

So ratings for Fusion. Grace, why don't you start?

GRACE:

On a scale of 1 to being good and 5 to being bad, I give it two and a half groans. And with Stigma I give it three out of five groans, again.

JARRAH:

For Fusion I will set phasers to "E is for effort" \*Sue laughs/Grace cheers\* and for Stigma I will set phasers to \*yelling\* "What do you think you're doing? Who do you think you're actually helping here? Maybe just don't even bother." That's a new setting.

GRACE:

Yeah. That's a good setting. \*Sue laughs\* It's frequently used.

SUE:

I like it. Oh man. I will say for Fusion I want to be positive about it, so I'm gonna say set phasers to "Ally-ship is important."

GRACE:  
OK.

JARRAH:  
Yeah.

GRACE:  
Yeah, that's fair.

SUE:  
For Stigma I'm going to say "Just watch The Normal Heart instead."

GRACE:  
Yeah, you can do better.

SUE:  
And you'll be a much happier person too.

GRACE:  
Set phasers to "You can do better."

SUE:  
Except that you'll be crying *a lot*. \*laughs\*

JARRAH:  
There's lots of- you could also watch Rent. You could watch-

GRACE:  
Philadelphia.

JARRAH:  
Angels in America.

GRACE:  
There's a lot to work with. There is media to consume here. More accurate and aware media to consume here.

JARRAH:  
Yeah.

SUE:  
Absolutely.



GRACE:

See that frickin episode of Walker Texas Ranger, seriously guys. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

And written by people who lived the experience.

GRACE:

Who live the stigma.

JARRAH:

Yeah. I feel like with Stigma there was zero effort to get- delve down into what it's actually like to live with HIV and AIDS and experience that stigma firsthand. It was like you could have written that by reading three news articles.

GRACE:

"There's stigma because we're telling you there is" essentially.

JARRAH:

Yeah. "There's stigma because I read about it somewhere." \*Sue laughs\* "I imagine it's pretty bad."

GRACE:

"It must be. Moving on."

JARRAH:

"Damn you Viacom! I wanted to write a-" OK crap, I'm getting my \*Sue laughs\* Trip Tucker and my Brannon Braga voices mixed up. "Damn you Viacom! I wanted-" Damn, that was like drawl-y Brannon Braga. \*all laugh\* OK.

GRACE:

They fused together, you see.

JARRAH:

\*Brannon Braga voice\* "Why couldn't you let me write another sexy Vulcan story? Jeeeeeze Viacom." \*all laugh\*

SUE:

Oh man.

JARRAH:

"This wasn't sexy at all."

SUE:

\*laughs\* So thank you for joining us to talk about some “sexy” Vulcan Enterprise episodes-

GRACE:

Apparently.

JARRAH:

Hopefully we'll get to like some more- I don't know. Are there any actual sexy Vulcan Enterprise- Oh well.

GRACE:

In theory the whole show is supposed to be sexy. *In theory.*

JARRAH:

Yeah. I'm sure later we will cover decon chamber, and Vulcan neuro massage, or whatever. But that is for another day. \*Sue laughs\*

GRACE:

Another far *far* away day. God-willing.

SUE:

But that is it for us today. If you would like to send us an email, let us know your thoughts, you can e-mail us at [crew@womenatwarp.com](mailto:crew@womenatwarp.com). Find us on Twitter [@womenatwarp](https://twitter.com/womenatwarp). We're on Facebook at [facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/womenatwarp), surprisingly, [womenatwarp](https://facebook.com/womenatwarp). Grace, where can people find you on the interweb?

GRACE:

People can find me on Twitter [@BoneCrusherjenk](https://twitter.com/BoneCrusherjenk), and they can read my writing on the [Mythcreants](https://mythcreants.com) blog.

SUE:

What about you Jarrah?

JARRAH:

You can find me at [Trekiefeminist.Tumblr.com](https://trekkiefeminist.tumblr.com) or on Twitter [@JarrahPenguin](https://twitter.com/JarrahPenguin).

SUE:

I'm Sue, and you can find more from me at [anomalypodcast.com](https://anomalypodcast.com) or on Twitter [@Spaltor](https://twitter.com/Spaltor). That's. S P A L T O R. Thanks for joining us.