

## Women at Warp Episode 151: Body Diversity and Inclusivity

ANDI:

Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: a Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity in infinite combinations. My name's Andi, and thanks for tuning in. With me today are Sue.

SUE:

Hi, everybody.

ANDI:

And Kennedy.

KENNEDY:

Hello!

ANDI:

And our special guest Callie.

CALLIE:

Hello, my name is Callie Wright! I host a podcast called QueerSplaining. My pronouns are they/them. Been a Star Trek fan since I was like 10 or so. I happened to catch this like marathon that led up to the season premiere of season four of TNG. So I got, yeah, I got a super intense entro when I was a kid. \*all laugh\*

ANDI:

It sounds like it! All right. So before we get into our main topic, we have a little bit of housekeeping. Our show is made possible 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, up to silly watch along commentaries. And we're actively working on some new additional patron exclusive content. Visit [www.patreon.com/womenatwarp](http://www.patreon.com/womenatwarp) for more information. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. We also now have a Teepublic store with new designs based on our new banner art, and Sue threw some new designs in there as well. So we got some new stuff, plus logos and other non podcast specific Trek stuff. You can check it out at [Teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp](http://Teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp). So, cool. Our main topic today is body diversity and inclusivity. So it's a *really* dense topic. So we decided to break it down into like three main parts. We are going to tackle it through the lens of transness, disability, and size diversity. So because we're probably not going to have as much time as we'd like to talk about every nuance on these topics, you should definitely feel free to check out some of our other episodes where we have specifically tackled transness and disability and other episodes. So feel free to check it out. I just really wanted to kind of explore how Star Trek views bodies in general, which is in general such a huge thing. And something that's super, I guess, personal to me. Because I've always spent a lot of time thinking about my body, and what my body means to others, and like the space my

body inhabits. And I have always kind of come from it as a fat woman, but that's not the only way that bodies or considered to be, you know, nontraditional or just different.

SUE:

For sure.

ANDI:

Or "othered." So it became a bigger topic, and I'm excited to hit some of this stuff.

SUE:

And I think one of the unifying ideas between like, the three umbrellas we pulled out, right? Is that in sixties thought, when the creators were conceiving of Star Trek to begin with, they wanted all of our human problems of our time to be solved in the Star Trek future. So from a very basic understanding, I think that- well, I don't think they considered a trans-ness because it wouldn't have been in their lexicon at the time. Right? But disability, and obesity, or fatness, or size would have been considered by these creators to be quote "problems" that were to be solved by the future. And over the last 50 plus years our thinking has changed about these things. These aren't problems that need to be solved. These are people \*laughs uncomfortably\* that might need an accommodation of some kind, or just to be thought of as people. So it's interesting that our thinking in real life has evolved, but not necessarily as much in Star Trek.

ANDI:

Yeah. And that whole idea of a problem being *solved* is definitely one that I think a lot of people can relate to as super hurtful. Like this idea that some intrinsic part of your being, whether that's your gender, or your size, or the color of your skin, but the idea that in a perfect world, you wouldn't exist there? I mean, it's hard to overstate how hurtful that is.

CALLIE:

And especially in something like Star Trek, where the marketing is so much about how progressive and how inclusive it is and how, you know, forward thinking it is, and it gets so much praise for all of that. And in some ways that certainly is and has been all of those things. But then you think about how like, "Oh, so your view of diversity and inclusion, your view of that is complete without having me included in it." And that sends a really damaging message, I think.

ANDI:

Yeah, definitely. And I kind of wanted to start with transness a bit. I bring it up because one of the most fascinating episodes that we haven't talked about in the past, when we've discussed this topic, is the Offspring. And the reason that I think it fits so well in this particular topic is it's one of the few episodes where we see a being choosing their body.

KENNEDY:

That's true. The Offspring- it never occurred to me, I'll be honest, to think about it in these terms. It was just really just so staggering for me to see Data take on the role of being a parent. And watching the Lal adjust to, you know, what they considered civilization or at least civilized social

traits, right? How to behave, accusing someone of biting someone else's face. So I find it interesting that we're including Lal into this conversation. Because I want to know more. \*laughs\* Like, it didn't even occur to me to think about it like that! So, here for it.

ANDI:

Yeah. I think that this one's a good episode to like, view with a couple of different lenses. And we put this topic on our socials, like we do for a lot of our episodes to get listener comments. And we actually got a really good one on The Offspring. And specifically- and it relates to transness. And this was from Helena, who said "For transness, the way they handle Lals gender expression in The Offspring is literally my favorite. Lals going back and forth between masculine and feminine presentation and the lack of swaying from either side. Deanna States that both human appearances are attractive, offering advice in regards to socialization for the non-human ones. They don't use any pronouns when referring to Lal before she decides. Just her name. And Deannas "It's a girl!" means a lot because Lal chose that. Lal chose a female aligned presentation, and the crew are perfectly accepting of that." So I thought that was a really well thought out comment and very interesting.

CALLIE:

Yeah, you know? And I actually, you know, as a trans person who has done that thing that I feel like most Star Trek fans have done where we just like dive as deep as we can into all of the little nooks and crannies to try to find things? That was- it had never actually occurred to me until I heard someone else say it too, to think about Lal in the context of transness. And you know, it's just- it's just one of those things that like in the world of that time, it definitely was progressive. But of course, you know, Lal is only given binary gender options for one. And so that's, you know, from the start it's an incomplete picture. But I mean, it is interesting in that like, she gets a choice. And those options are presented as different, but not in a way that makes one or the other bad.

ANDI:

Yeah. Like, neither is presented as an inherently better option, which is kind of cool.

CALLIE:

Yeah. It's just- I remember Troi at one point just mentions that like "People will relate to you differently", which is fair.

ANDI:

Yeah. And true.

CALLIE:

Yes. \*laughs\* Even in the 24th century.

ANDI:

\*laughs\* Yes.

SUE:

So, one of the things that I've seen come up a lot in discussions of like trans people in the Star Trek universe is, especially when fans say "We want this representation", is "But if this is the future, how will you know this character is trans?" Or put another way "How can you get that representation without tokenizing the character?"

CALLIE:

Yeah. And that's something that I have thought a lot about. Because, you know, there's that push and pull between, you know, the universe that the show exists in ostensibly, it's not a big deal to be trans. And so there wouldn't be that massive social pressure in kids for them to pick a binary gender for one, or the gender that they, you know, have assigned to them at birth. And so I think there would be a lot of trans folks who would, you know, figure themselves out and come out and transition as children. But, you know, there's a couple of problematic assumptions, I think, built into that question. In that one, like we we *assume* that social pressure is the only reason people don't come out until later in life. And that may not be the case. And so I think it's still- would make sense to have a storyline about someone realizing they're trans and how that would work in that universe. I also think it would be very easy. And I don't think we actually know how this is going to be handled in Discovery yet. But like, how easy would it be to just have a character that uses they/them pronouns, and there doesn't really have to be commentary on it other than that. Or it would also be very easy to just hire a trans actor to play a character and, you know, have it be like a footnote that's just kind of mentioned somewhere. And in the context of Star Trek, *especially* in that universe, I think I would accept- you know, you have a trans woman actor playing a character and the producer is saying like, "Yeah, yeah, canonically that character is trans. We just don't wanna make a big deal out of it in the show because nobody cares." But like, that's like- I don't normally accept that because I feel like that's refusing- that's like trying to get credit for being progressive without making it explicit. But in the world of Star Trek, I think that specific handling of it would make sense to me. And so- so yeah. I don't really accept that it would be difficult to do.

SUE:

I think there's also a little bit of an underlying assumption that every trans person will want to medically transition. Which is not the case.

CALLIE:

Absolutely.

ANDI:

That's what I was- where I was going too. Cause I was like, "There's this emphasis on a physical transformation. And sometimes there isn't one", you know? But there are a lot of trans people who do want a physical transformation. And how would that work in the future where things like, they can do surgeries to make you look like a human when you're a Klingon. Apparently? \*all laugh\* It feels like if that was the route you'd want to go to, it would be pretty seamless. But I start to get a little bit nervous about that because I feel like there's so much pressure on trans people as it is to like pass, you know? They're so policed in their gender presentations. And so I just- I find that interesting in that, like on the one hand, how much easier would that be?

CALLIE:

\*laughs\* Right?

ANDI:

And on the other, like, is it even necessary? I don't know.

KENNEDY:

I feel like the best way to resolve that would be to find some amalgamation of, you know, Callie's response and Andi's response in that, and this is just me speculating, but recently, nowadays at least, with current medical technology folks who may not be able to transition are because they can't afford the procedures. Or because they live in a state that sucks, or you know whatever the case may be. It would stand to reason that in the future this type of procedure will be way more accessible to anybody that wants it. So the best way to not tokenize a character like that, to Andi's point, would be to cast somebody who's trans, to Callie's point, so that whatever the character's gender is, if they even mentioned it, it just is what it is. Like, without calling too much attention to it there's a way for that representation to be implemented. I felt like if you're going to hold space for- for folks who are in transition or who are NB, like just cast the actors and leave it at that. Right? Use they/them pronouns and keep it pushing. This way you don't- it's the same way in Balance of Terror when Uhura just got up from the comm and sat at the navigation, and nobody made a big deal. There wasn't Vaseline on the lens, \*all laugh\* romantic music as she walked up. Right? Just put the person in the role and let them do the job.

SUE:

Well and right now, as this episode is being recorded, we have seen the season premier of Discovery season three. When it \*pause\* airs? Drops, episode three will have aired of season three. We haven't seen it yet. Kennedy has, \*Kennedy giggles in a way thats halfway between smug and sinister\* but the rest of us \*all laugh\* haven't. But Discovery has cast two trans actors for this season. So, I mean, we're- I think it's safe to say that the whole group has fingers crossed that they're going to do it right.

CALLIE:

I have a pretty positive association I think with Nick Adams, the trans guy at GLAAD who does the consultation on media stuff for trans folks. And my understanding is that he was like very heavily involved in all of it. And so like, again, yeah. Fingers crossed. Praying \*all laugh\* all of the- sending all of the good energy in that way. Because I also like, I understand from some of what I've read it seems like that there's going to be a coming out moment. That like, it's not known to folks that one of these characters is trans or non-binary at the beginning. And then there's some kind of coming out moment. And that also like, makes me extra hopeful but also extra nervous. \*laughs\*

ANDI:

Yeah. I mean, I think the bottom line is these kinds of portrayals are complicated and people are going to have extremely strong feelings about them. So it'll be interesting to see how it's portrayed. And I have a feeling it can't be worse than how some of this stuff has been portrayed in the past. So- Moving forward, always is kind of the goal. Right?

CALLIE:

The thing that I always try to keep in mind is that there is justified frustration on my part and the part of many folks about how long we have waited to get these things. And so it is really easy to set all of our hopes and expectations on one character or two characters on this one incarnation of this one show. And inevitably that's being set up for disappointment, right? Because one queer relationship is never going to represent all of queerness. One trans person is never going to represent all of transness. And so like, there's almost a level of dissatisfaction that is inevitable if, you know, that character is not the specific brand of queer and trans you are. Like, you're not going to entirely see yourself. And that's like- I was having a conversation the other day. We were talking about how in fandom sometimes it's like, "Well, we gave you the queers. We gave you the trans folks. Like, why can't you just be happy?" And it's like, "Oh, so we're the only ones who aren't allowed to have complicated feelings? Got it." \*Sue laughs\*

ANDI:

It reminds me of- if y'all have not seen it there's a Netflix documentary called Disclosure.

CALLIE:

So good.

ANDI:

All about trans representation in media. And it- the interviews are a hundred percent trans people. So it's a really cool way to get a really diverse group of people together to talk about like the various ways these people have been represented throughout the years. And one of the things that always struck me was Jen Richards talked about that. She was like, "Until we have enough, like there's so much pressure on these few characters to be perfect. Because that's all there is, and you're not going to be able to move forward and tell there's lots and lots of different portrayals. And then you don't have to put all of your hopes on one or two characters."

CALLIE:

Right!

SUE:

It's a bed of nails, right? Because if you spread out the weight, you don't get impaled. \*Andi laughs\* There's probably a more elegant way to say that, but-

KENNEDY:

Nope! \*Andi laughs\* That's pretty concise, I would say. \*Sue laughs\*

ANDI:

Well, and the other kind of facet that we wanted to talk about with this was disability. And I think that's another example of TOS handled this very poorly. In fact, one of my favorite comments from our Facebook comments was about Captain Pike and it was "TOS Pike. Yikes!" \*Sue laughs\* So, thanks Pablo for summing it up so nicely. So yeah, TOS Pike. Yikes.

SUE:

TOS also has that little bit with Miranda Jones who says "A blind person can't drive a Starship" and-

CALLIE:

*Womp womp.*

SUE:

At least, you know, TNG tried to put that right by letting the blind men pilot the starship for a while. \*laughs\* But I know we- that jumps me right to TNG. So I'm going to stick on it before I lose the thought. But I think we often forget, for Geordi specifically that he's also in constant pain. It's sort of a throwaway, and I think it's in Encounter at Farpoint where he's in sickbay and telling Crusher that it's just- it gives him headaches. It causes him pain, but treating that pain is going to disrupt the function of his visor. So he just lives with it every day all day.

KENNEDY:

Dang! I forgot all about that.

CALLIE:

Yeah. Like now that you say that I remember that line, but I had not thought about it.

SUE:

And they never bring it up again. \*silence\* I hear brains exploding.

CALLIE:

Yeah. \*laughs\*

ANDI:

Well, not exploding so much as I just have mixed feelings about it.

KENNEDY:

It's medical racism. "He's black. He can deal with it." \*Sue laughs\* Fine. "It's the 24th century. Black people don't feel pain. He's good." Oh! Mad now! \*all laugh\*

SUE:

For the longest time he's the only visibly disabled character that we have as a regular in Star Trek. And of course, not all disabilities are visible.

ANDI:

Apparently, he was also someone with chronic pain. We got an interesting comment from Blair on Facebook that also was about Geordi, and her pet peeve was about the TNG episode Ethics in which Worf gets paralyzed. And she said “The biggest failure I remember is Worf becomes paralyzed and gets all ‘I won't live as an invalid. I'd rather die’ and they don't ever once show Geordi and Worf on screen together in the episode even. *Amazing* missed opportunity to have Geordi talk to Worf about disabilities since we know Geordi is very pro-accommodation/aid/inclusion. It just felt like a really squandered episode in my humble opinion.” I have thought- like that episode has always rubbed me the wrong way anyway. \*Callie laughs\* Well, I think that there's some good there, and that they actually tackled it. And there's some interesting stuff about like cultural attitudes towards disability and how they can impact like, these sorts of decisions. Because the framing of the episode is very much like “Worf's a Klingon, and he can't be disabled because then he's a useless Klingon.” Like, that seems to be the underlying fear of his. So in that way, I find it interesting. I just wished that it was handled more sensitively, I guess.

CALLIE:

What I am reminded of, and I'm struggling to stay in my lane on this one, because I don't have physical disabilities. But it is something that I have spent a lot of time reading and learning about, because I know it's a particular ignorance of mine. But something that it kind of speaks to me of this push and pull about how a lot of disabled folks are told how they *should feel* about their disability. And so there's a bit of that that makes it feel like “Why *isn't* Worf allowed to have the feelings that he has about his disability?” Right? But also, you know according to our standards, like if he was having that attitude pushed on him that would also be very very bad. And I don't know. I'm trying to like, kind of formulate my thoughts on that. Particularly, I have a really really close friend of mine who has dealt a lot with having feelings about their own disability and like, being told by people who have no idea what they've gone through that they should feel differently about them. And that just- it feels in some way like- I feel echoes of that in there, even though it's not really exactly the same context, if that makes sense?

ANDI:

Yeah, it does. And I think my response to that would be that Michael Dorn is not disabled. The writers were not disabled. So when it comes to showing representations, if we're talking like Worf as a real person? He would absolutely have the right to have those feelings. But in this case, he's a fictional character that writers *wrote* those feelings for. Do you know what I mean?

CALLIE:

Yeah. That makes total sense.

ANDI:

Yeah. So that's where I start to get iffy on it, because if it was an actual disabled person saying this, then I would feel like at the very least they're certainly allowed their feelings about it. But it's



abled people like putting the words in his mouth, and they're saying something with those words that then we have to interpret. And that, I think, is the difference there.

CALLIE:

No, that makes total sense. And, I do this thing where I get caught up in the mythos and I really start thinking about like, "No! This is real world stuff!" \*all laugh\*

ANDI:

Wait a minute! You're telling me that Worf's not real?! \*all laugh\* That doesn't seem right.

SUE:

The takeaway, the message, that we get from The Menagerie, with TOS Pike right? Is "Better dead than disabled."

ANDI:

Right. And that's my least favorite part of that whole storyline. It's like they put him away so they don't have to deal with him anymore.

SUE:

Right. So that's the message that they send in that episode. In this episode, in TNG's Ethics, those words essentially come out of Worf's mouth. And he wants his friends to literally kill him so that he won't be "dishonored" by living with a disability.

ANDI:

Yeah. I just feel like it's pretty harmful.

KENNEDY:

Yeah. But it's also part of the trappings of Klingon culture. Right? And how does one uphold one's culture in the confines of a workplace environment? This isn't the first time it's happened. Well, really it happened several times to Worf.

SUE:

It happens with Klingons a lot.

KENNEDY:

Yes. So when he had to make the decision whether or not Kurn lives or dies, like these are things that straddle the line between, you know, keeping your personal life separate from your work life. And is it possible for a person to separate themselves in that? Is compartmentalization feasible in this case? The heavier part of Ethics, to me, is the other doctor deciding whether or not she's going to use this experimental technology on Worf. That was the part that effed me up, more then, you know, him trying to adhere to a Klingon social construct when one is injured that way.

ANDI:

Yeah. I think that the one thing that Ethics does do successfully is that it sets up a conundrum that does not have easy answers. And that's what you want from an ethical quandary. I'm just not entirely sure that they executed it as well as I might like. It's certainly a, I feel like a very- I feel like good and bad is not useful terminology for the episodes like this. It's certainly thought provoking, and we're talking about it you know and unpacking it. So in that way it was successful. Moving into DS9, the episode that most people talk about when we talk about disability on Star Trek is Melora. And we *have* discussed this episode in our disability episode. So if you're interested in us doing a deeper dive on it with more time than we have here to do it justice, we do have that. But that one had the difference from Ethics in that Disabled people were actually involved in the making of that episode, which I think is important.

SUE:

The story was written by Evan Carlos Summers, who uses a wheelchair, and wrote this basically in response to how disability had been treated formerly on Star Trek.

ANDI:

Yeah. And I think that that's important, to have that kind of voice involved in the process. But it's interesting to me that disability advocates and disabled people still have issues with that episode.

CALLIE:

Apparently there were changes made to the script after Evan wrote it. And he was apparently not happy with those changes. \*laughs uncomfortably\*

ANDI:

Yeah. I'm not surprised because the biggest flaw, for me, is that essentially you have Melora telling everybody what she needs and then you have Bashir being like, “\*scoffs\* But actually.. you know what you *do* need? But you don't need this other stuff. But what you *do* need is *my* expertise.” Right?

CALLIE:

“And also you should stop being mean to me because I'm just trying to help you”, which is something I'm sure every disabled person has heard at some point in their life.

ANDI:

Well that, and the definition of mean or like aggressive changes based on who is being so-called “mean and aggressive” and who it's directed towards.

SUE:

I do think this episode is at least somewhat successful in pointing out the aspects of the world around us that, you know as able-bodied people, we might not realize create a barrier to accessibility. Right? So Melora points out about the lip at the bottom of the door, in every corridor. And I think there's even a character who says, “Oh, I never even really thought about

it.” Right? So, and those are things all the time that when you start thinking from outside your own experience, you see how many barriers to accessibility there really are in the world.

KENNEDY:

Weird-ass Cardassian station. \*all laugh\* Rusted-ass, crusted-ass, backwards-ass, funky-old, stank-old Terok Nor. Ever since the first season of that show, when they released the bloopers from the pilot where it's Riker- it's Frakes and Brooks repeatedly tripping \*laughs\* over that lip as they enter cause *no one* had gotten used to it yet. And they- every time they tripped, both of them fell out laughing, like cackling, \*Andi laughs\* because you can see they had been trying to keep it together that whole time. Ever since I saw that, I was like “Oh, these- oh, they're going to get to change these lips now right?” And ever since I was just like, “Someone's going to fall. \*Callie laughs\* This is not smart. Someone's going to trip. What if someone has a wheelchair?” and then people were like “It's the future! That doesn't happen.” And I'm like “I don't know.” And then *sure enough!* \*Callie laughs\* Here comes Melora letting them know what day it is. \*Andi laughs\*

CALLIE:

And I think maybe it sort of unintentionally stumbles on like, you know, the way that Outcast wasn't meant to be about trans stuff, but it kind of like awkwardly stumbled into trans commentary? \*Andi laughs\* You know, there's a commentary to be had on the fact that on her planet she is average, right? She's quote unquote, normal. Like, that's a terrible word, but you know, she's ostensibly no different than anyone else. And it is the environment that she is in that disables her. So it's, I think they call it the social model of disability. It's the environment that disables me, not my body. And like, they don't explicitly point that out. But when you see it through that lens, it's- I don't know if that was done on purpose, maybe given who the original writer was, maybe that backstory was meant to sort of illustrate that? But I also think it is- there is something to be said for the fact that it was not the stereotypical like “Oh, she had a horrible accident.” Like that kind of stuff. It was very much like, “No. The problem is that you have not made the environment with me in mind. It's not me that's the problem.”

SUE:

Right.

ANDI:

Yeah. And I think that's how we should be looking at disability in general anyway. And I think that's kind of what you're getting at, is that the problem is not the disabled person. The problem is our environment is hostile to them. And how can we make it so they can live their life without having to deal with trying to get their wheelchair over a lip in the door, you know?

KENNEDY:

Why is it on a space station anyway, like there's artificial gravity? Why would- you already have enough of an issue being in space my guy! \*Andi laughs\* You got to make it that much more complicated? If I was O'Brien I would've ripped all that shit out. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

From a design like, space perspective I think they're supposed to all be airlocks where like doors could close

KENNEDY:

Shit. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

Fix your design.

KENNEDY:

Yeah!

CALLIE:

But I mean, in the 24th century you could make airlocks without lips, right? There could be a small lip floor that would be easy enough to get a wheelchair over, that it would not cause problems for wheelchair users. And then you could still, you know, set up a thing through it to seal it. You could do that, if you wanted to.

ANDI:

Yeah. I mean, that brings us right into Discovery. Because one thing that you see on Discovery is they do a lot of what we think of as background diversity. At a party scene they have two ladies gettin flirty with each other. You know, they do try and make the background actors be more diverse than we are used to seeing. And one of those includes a wheelchair user. But the problem with background diversity is like, he doesn't get any lines. He doesn't get a name.

CALLIE:

I know, it was about say "I don't even think we have a name." Do we?

ANDI:

Yeah. So like, as cool as that is, because it's like this moment that acknowledges that- cause we were talking about this earlier. *He's there*, you know? The future includes him. You know, like he is not a problem to be fixed. He's a dude that's awesome, yhat's on Discovery. That's awesome. But also, could we have some more please?

SUE:

Yeah. And we also have Detmer and Airiam who have augmentations, right? And we actually can bring in Rutherford with this as well, from Lower Decks. It can be- or it seems implied that, uh, Rutherford's was a choice, right? He's like, "I just got my upgrade or whatever", but it's also implied that for Detmer this was a result of the battle of the binary stars and for Airiam it was a result of a shuttle accident. So *their* augmentations aren't necessarily by choice? And it just makes me wonder about like, we don't know these characters well enough, but what are their feelings about that?

KENNEDY:

See, I never thought that Rutherford- I feel like he had an injury as well, and his implant is just *new to him*. I feel like Rutherford's in the same boat as Detmer and Airiam, in this case.

SUE:

It's possible. They definitely don't tell us.

KENNEDY:

Yeah. Only because of the fact that when Shaxs ripped it off at the ends, spoiler alert *\*chuckles\**, the side of his face like, he was missing his ear and his eyes. So I wonder if he had like survived some type of accident and then-

ANDI:

That would make sense.

KENNEDY:

The Vulcan *implant* is new. Like it's probably new technology, that's *also* new to him. And because Rutherford's such a champion nerd he's just glad to be, you know, a portion- he's glad to be 15% machine. You know what I mean? *\*Andi laughs\** Whereas Detmer, I'm sure and at- and *Airiam*. I keep wanting to call her atrium. *\*laughs\** I'm sure both of them had to learn how to, you know, work around their new *\*pause\** I don't want to say augments. Their new prosthetics? Is that proper? I don't know if that's proper either. Whatever the appropriate term is for someone who's got, you know, technology implanted. I think those two in particular had to adjust probably more than Rutherford did.

SUE:

Their "cybernetics" maybe?

KENNEDY:

Yeah.

ANDI:

Yeah.

SUE:

Since we didn't have Lower Decks the last time we talked about disability and Star Trek for that episode, I just want to bring up Much Ado about Boimler, and that episode, and that storyline of like all of the Starfleet accidents are going off to the farm. Right? *\*group cringes\** And just the playing it for comedy in that, that whole story made me very uncomfortable. The use of the word *freak* made me very uncomfortable. And I- like there was definitely relief in that story that the farm was actually a medical facility. And not like- well they're also still supposed to be healing them.

KENNEDY:

It's a medical spa. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

Point is, you know, spa slash medical facility and not a ship of death. But they're still, even though it is a medical spa, they're still sending people off and not worrying about them again. They're "out of sight, out of mind"-ing these people.

CALLIE:

Well, so what it reminded me of are those Facebook posts that, generally speaking, you only see cis-het people post, where it's like four paragraphs of a thing that you think is going to be *wildly* transphobic. And then it turns out the joke is it wasn't transphobic. And it's like, that's not funny guys. That's not cool. I don't actually enjoy that as a trans person reading that. This is not fun for me.

SUE:

Upping my anxiety level-

CALLIE:

Exactly!

SUE:

-so you'll get a chuckle.

ANDI:

It's like seeing a red hat now with a joke on it.

CALLIE:

Yes! Exactly. That's exactly what it is. And like, I don't want to speak on behalf of disabled folks, but it definitely had- it had that vibe for me. And that's kinda what I was thinking about while it was happening. Well, at the end I was just like, "Oh yeah, that is a relief. But wait, no, that doesn't feel good."

KENNEDY:

Yeah. I feel like the only reason why that episode didn't hit me as hard as it should have is that because it's made by Titmouse and everything looks so Rick and Morty- everything is like two and a half steps away from being an episode of Rick and Morty anyhow. So when they peppered in those extra difficult \*laughs\* to watch portions like that one- I think there was another section of Lower Decks that we might've discussed too where they do this. To where the humor is a little crass and a little cruel? I guess I'm just able to be like, "Well, this is one of those moments. Okay, cool. Okay. And we're back." Right. Overall, you know, the fact that those people \*sighs\* while it was cool to see that they *do* have a solution for folks who have been victimized by transporter accidents, or you know, in the field in some way. Did they really

have to take the ship of doom to this place? Like, all the rest of the fleet is tricked out, \*Andi laughs\* smooth edges, you got the 80's bus pattern carpets, like holographic drapes.

SUE:

Supposedly they just need to turn on the lights. Right? \*Callie laughs\*

KENNEDY:

This is- I don't even know why it's like this. Yeah, I would say that it did get a little cringy at times. Though I felt cringy-est when they had the three people in Pikes, it's not a wheelchair. Mobility device, I'll say.

ANDI:

Yeah. Moving on to our last kind of topic, I guess you could call it? Of being size diversity. One of the reasons when I first pitched this episode and wanted to do it is I definitely wanted to talk about this. And then one of the hang-ups I had is that the biggest story when it comes to size diversity in Trek, is that there isn't any. So it's harder, I think, to talk about the *absence* of something. But I want to talk about the absence \*laughs\* of something, \*Sue laughs\* and the absence of fat characters, and how rare they are. And when we do see them that we almost always see them as either a stereotype, or we almost never see women. They're usually men, if we do see fat characters. And just how disappointing that is and how harmful it is.

KENNEDY:

Yeah. I would say for myself growing up a Starfleet fan, like growing up with- just Trekker from the womb, right? Trekker from the cradle. And always wanting to dress in the uniforms, and we didn't call it cosplay back then, but like getting into uniform and all that stuff and just never being able to find anything my size. And initially, you know, I was a tall kid, so I had a hard time finding clothes anyway. But as an adult, I've just had *the* hardest time finding a uniform that I can wear anywhere that doesn't make it look like I either got it from a bag, like it came out of a bag or \*Sue laughs\*, you know, I have to wear all the shapewear to get into it, because heaven forbid there's curves. And then the alterations that I have to do, if I find one that actually covers my butt. Like I was like, "Okay, well I guess just people like me don't get into Starfleet. Like, I'm not *fit* enough. I'm not *healthy* enough." And all those other misconceptions that we're told when it comes to the difference in sizes. And it wasn't until I saw Tilly that I was like, "Oh snap! Thick bitches make it to the future!" \*all laugh\* "We out here!" I said, "Okay Tilly! You're serving these curves up here in the 22nd century! Bitch, what? I eat! \*all laugh\* You see this jumpsuit? You see how they poured me into this uniform? You see I look just as good as any of these other skinny bitches out here? Come on son!" I got so hyped for Tilly. *So hyped!* And it made me think, like, "Why is this the first time I have ever seen somebody who looks like me or even close to me in Trek? This is 50 plus years old at this point, and I'm just now seeing Tilly. *Unacceptable.*"

ANDI:

There's two things there that struck me. And one is what you're talking about with the whole like, merchandise and costumes. And that I feel like this is an example of the off-show fatphobia translating into on-show fatphobia that then translates back to off-show fatphobia. \*Sue laughs\* Do you know what I mean?

CALLIE:

Yeah. When I got into TNG it was still, you know, on its run. And so you could find cheap Star Trek costumes, like at the Halloween store around Halloween time. And I totally went and got one and like, it wasn't in my size, but I wore it anyways and it looked ridiculous because it was like three sizes too small for me. Cause I was a *fat* kid.

SUE:

I- in the fourth grade I wanted to be Dr. Crusher, surprise \*laughs\*, for halloween *so badly* that my mom took me to party city. And we found like, the closest to my size uniform that we could find. And in fourth grade, I was wearing an adult large by the way, cause it was also the largest size that they made. And I wore it to school. And I was made fun of mercilessly, and I did not put on another Starfleet uniform until I had the ability to *commission* one to actually fit me. And that is not something that everybody has the ability, or the funds, or the privilege to be able to do.

ANDI:

Yeah. And we got a comment from Lori on Facebook that said "I do think all of the general Star Trek uniforms are unflattering to bigger bodies. I've heard a few people say that they don't want to cosplay because they don't think they'll look good in the uniform. I would quite like a uniform that's not a jumpsuit." And it's not even *just* the cosplay. It's t-shirts, you know? It's basic like, trying to find clothes that fit.

SUE:

Well, there's another layer to this as well, which you brought up a little bit before Andi, in that t-shirts if they're \*groans\* I hate the words, but if they're unisex cut or straight cut or men's cut or whichever you want to call them, they go up to like five or six X. Right? If it's a quote women's cut shirt, it's typically *really* a Junior's cut shirt, which means it's for like teenagers. And it *maybe* goes up to an XL.

ANDI:

Yeah.

CALLIE:

And even the men's sizes, when you go up above XL, usually there's like A \$5 surcharge. Like you got to pay more, because you're fat. Yeah.

SUE:

Yeah. A *fat tax*.

KENNEDY



Don't forget the height issues. God forbid you want something that actually, you know, hits past the midriff. I almost never- so for me being broad shouldered, none of the quote unquote women's size shirts ever fit. Right? Because the larger they go they figure "Oh, you've got

huge breasts. So we're going to give you all this space in the shirt" and it's like "No, no. Thanks for reminding me \*all laugh\* how much space I don't take up there. Appreciate you."

CALLIE:

Which I'm sure you haven't forgotten, by the way.

KENNEDY

Oh, right right! And the mens shirts always fit me better in the sleeves. Right? At least in the shoulder part, but on the arms that fits weird. And then of course, because I'm curvy, like it sits weird on the hip too. So this whole- the whole merchandising arena, Trek and outside of Trek altogether \*sighs\* like merch is abhorrent.

CALLIE:

As a person who had testosterone puberty at like 10 and then had estrogen puberty at like 28 I am so there with you. \*all laugh\* I had a like quote unquote weirdly shaped body. \*laughs\*

SUE:

But when it comes to t-shirts and clothing, I think number one is we need to stop gendering it. And number two is we need more options. We need different cuts, we need different proportions, and sizing for a whole bodies.

ANDI:

And I did want to throw out there too, that societal fatphobia doesn't *just* show itself in fandom through merchandising. It also shows itself through access. I'm specifically thinking of convention access. Convention access is a whole nother thing when it comes to disability as well. Like having space for people in wheelchairs. These sorts of things.

CALLIE:

Ramps to get onstage for panelists and speakers.

SUE:

Yeah.

ANDI:

Yes! There's just a lot of things that we need to do more of when it comes to both merchandising and just conventions in general, to make it more inclusive of people who do not have the same body that you might be thinking of.

SUE:

Well and another thing, I mean Kennedy, you're talking about how much you were thrilled to see Mary Wiseman in Starfleet. Unfortunately, there was a group of fans who were incredibly cruel to her and calling her fat, making fun of her weight. Which is just- it's ludicrous.

KENNEDY:

It's always somebody.

SUE:

Yeah. And more than one, \*laughs\* unfortunately. And you know, back when in, I guess the nineties Trek back when Robert Blackman was costume designer, he said in interviews that like "This is a military organization, everybody in it needs to be *fit*." So I think we need to take a step back and remember that weight is not an indicator of health. And neither weight nor health are an indicator of value.

CALLIE:

Absolutely.

SUE:

There are very thin people who might have a chronic illness who will never be healthy, that does not affect their worth as a person. There are fat people who might be very healthy *and* they're fat, and that does not affect their worth as a person. So we need to break down these false equivalencies that society has built in our head. Right? Just like fat does not equal ugly, and fat does not equal unintelligent.

CALLIE:

I mean, let's look at the premise of fit characters, right? And when we say fit, what we should be talking about is fit for the job, right? Like they signed up to do *this* job in Starfleet and what are their capabilities of doing *this* job? Right? And so like, there are fat people who are incredibly physically strong. There are skinny people who are incredibly physically strong. And all myriad of diversity therein right? I, you know, as someone who plays Roller Derby and gets regularly demolished by people half my size and regularly demolishes people twice my size, \*laughs\* like I can- I have personal experience with the fact that those things are not congrues in the way that we have been taught to think of.

SUE:

There is an image from a couple of years ago, Grace brings us up every now and then, from the US Olympic team. And it was an image of women who were competing in different sports. And I believe it was the summer Olympics. And it's just a reminder of like different bodies can do different things the best. And not that there is one body type that is the pinnacle or the goal.

ANDI:

And I want to bring it back to Tilly too, because one thing that has always \*pause\* not *bothered* me, but like, I always think about this when people bring up Tilly under this. Yeah, she is curvier

than your average Star Trek gal, but your average Star Trek gal looks like Jeri Ryan. I find Tilly to be extremely average in weight. She's *much* thinner than me. First of all, I don't even think we can really categorize what is fat or not fat really precisely. But to me she's not fat. Thicker, yes?

KENNEDY:

Yes. That's what I said, "She's a thick joint." They also have her and every other actor like, cinched into body contour shapewear for those uniforms in particular. Jason Isaacs was talking about how much weight he had to lose to get into that uniform and how, you know, the jacket is attached to the pants, otherwise it'll ride. And so the uniforms are slenderizing *and* they have everybody like cinched into a stupor to get in them. It's just the fact that I see a waistline on Trek, that isn't in the twenties.

ANDI:

Yeah. And I'm not like, I'm not saying that she's not inspiring in that way. It just- I feel like there's more we could see, and the fatter people we could put on Star Trek. \*Sue laughs\* I try to think of a different way to say that, but that's what I mean. I mean, let's have fatter people somewhere.

CALLIE:

Well, and again, it comes back to the fact that like, we are allowed to have complicated feelings about things, right? Like, you know, the Outcast was mega-important to me as a kid, but as an adult, I'm like "Well, let's think a little deeper about that." \*laughs\* You know what I mean? Like, and both of those feelings are valid and both of those feelings are important. I think.

ANDI:

Yeah. And what you brought up Kennedy, too about the actors is something I really want to touch on. Because Star Trek has not been kind to their actors, and this is not a problem that's inherent to Star Trek. This is a problem across entertainment industry. But all the way from back to William Shatner, they treated William Shatner like crap over his weight. It fluctuated a lot, like I found in *These Are The Voyages*- I found notes from Roddenberry that were like "You need to tell Shatner to lose weight. He's too fat" over and over again. They designed special costumes. Like you were talking about how the costumes are slenderizing? That whole green uniform that he wears that's the wraparound shirt, that's different from his regular one? That was like his "fat uniform", like when he was chubbier, they put him in that instead of the regular uniform.

KENNEDY:

Which is kind of interesting because that's like the sexy time uniforms. So it's like \*all laugh\* "Ayyy! Way to sexualize a little chubb. I'm here for that. Let's get it." \*Callie laughs\*

SUE:

That was another one of their tactics though. That's what they did to Marina Sirtis right? She has said that the only reason that she was not wearing the uniform for the first six seasons of the show was that they thought she was too fat. So they gave her all of this cleavage to draw

attention away from her middle and up to her chest. And then when she lost enough weight, they put her in the uniform.

ANDI:

Probably the most egregious from the beginning was Grace Lee Whitney, who got addicted to diet pills and amphetamines so she could play Rand. Because they gave her a costume that was this tiny costume with the miniskirt and said "Fit in this or get fired." And like, she battled like years of addiction over that. The pressure that we put on actors to have a very specific body type and the way we punish them if they deviate from that body type, is really harmful and frustrating.

KENNEDY:

Yeah, I'd say so. But what- I can't recall who of us said it, but you know, "these people are fit for the job." Right? Tilly, Tilly's a scientist. Who's to say what scientists are supposed to be shit like? Just saying.

SUE:

Researching for this episode, it took me to a lot of places on the internet I didn't want to be.

CALLIE:

Oh god.

SUE:

Like \*laughs\* lots of places that were supposed to be about T'Pol, but really about her boobs. Or places that were fat shaming star Trek fans. And a lot of quote, *fan theories* as to why there aren't fat people in Star Trek. You know, there's the military organization excuse, there is the "Well, they have replicated food and the replicator is going to adjust the nutrients to what you need. So you might be ordering junk food, but you're getting a balanced diet, like based on how the replicator puts it together" and all of that. Like, it's not always diet. It's not always how much you exercise. Right? It's like the idea that like, "Everyone can be skinny if they try" is a bad one, is the point that I'm trying to make come out of my brain.

ANDI:

\*Sue laughs\* Yes. It's very, very wrong. And it's frustrating to me because one of the things that happens when you're fat is people make a snap decision about what your lifestyle is like. They think they know how you eat. They think they know how much you exercise. And in my case, they're incredibly wrong on both counts. I can tell you that. But the thing that I want to make clear is like, even if they weren't, even if I never exercised and ate cheeseburgers every day, that doesn't mean you get to treat me with anything less than respect. I just- it frustrates me because like, it's a shorthand for health. But like, they don't *really* mean health.

SUE:

\*condescending voice\* "I'm just concerned for your health."

ANDI:

Yeah.

CALLIE:

And I can tell you- I'll get a little extra vulnerable here. I had bariatric surgery a few years ago. And where I am now in life, I have *extraordinarily* complicated feelings about having made that decision. And I experienced that in both directions, right? Like everybody making positive assumptions as I was losing weight. And I was like "I could have a serious illness causing me to lose weight and you're just jumping right to praising me."

SUE:

So I want- this isn't directly Star Trek related, but in case it helps anyone? I don't know. That seems like a weird thing to say. But a couple of years ago I started referring to myself as fat at any opportunity, just blatantly, like "Yeah, I'm a fat lady. It's fine." And without fail the first time anybody heard me do it, *including my mother*, I'd get "Oh, you're not fat. You're beautiful."

CALLIE:

Ooh. That's not a binary! \*laughs\*

SUE:

Right? And that's what I said. That's what I used it for. I said "I didn't say I was *ugly*. I said I was *fat*. Like I wear a size 20 in women's. I have to shop at Lane Bryant. I'm fat. Like, that is a fact. I dress myself everyday. I know how big I am." and every time, I didn't give all of that each time, but it was always "I didn't say I was ugly. I said I was *fat*." And without fail, they would also stop and go "Oh, you're right." And I never heard it again from any one of them.

ANDI:

They'll try and make you feel *better* about something you *don't feel bad* about. Which is really condescending. And it- it says more about them and their thoughts about fat people than it says anything about what you said, which is just a bare fact. The other thing I like is people who tell you as if you *did not know*. \*Kennedy laughs\* This is when you get insulted for being fat.

SUE:

Yes!

ANDI:

And it's like, I always think of that gif of Phoebe from Friends "That is *brand new* information!"  
\*Sue laughs\*

CALLIE:

Well, and you get that as a trans person, too. People try to- people try to inform you the way that you are born as if I wasn't painfully aware and have spent lots and lots of time dealing with the consequences of that. \*laughs\* Like "I wasn't aware, I didn't know. Sorry."

ANDI:

Well, we tackled lots. I think we have more to say-

CALLIE:

Oh yeah. Always \*laughs\*

SUE:

Barely scratched the surface on all of these.

ANDI:

And sadly, we don't have very much more time. But is there anything on any of these three areas that somebody really want- like, missed a thought and wants to add to their thoughts?

CALLIE:

I would like to, like I feel like we can't leave without at least giving a couple of seconds to the Pakleds. \*Andi makes angry noise\* Because not only are they playing fatness for comedy, they're also playing perceived cognitive impairment as comedy.

SUE:

Yep.

CALLIE:

And that's just like a special combination of- "I don't like any of that." \*laughs\*

ANDI:

\*laughs\* Yes. And one thing about the Pakleds that particularly bothers me is that this stereotype of fat people not being smart or being slow, not just in body, but in mind somehow? Is really damaging and directly results in especially discrimination at work. \*sounds of agreement\* Work discrimination, specifically for women, more than men, but still impacting men as well in that they have found that fat people are less likely to be hired and less likely to be promoted simply because they're fat. Because people perceive them to be not as smart. So this particular portrayal is especially annoying to me. And they come back in Lower Decks!

SUE:

Yeah. So how do we feel about that?

ANDI:

I mean, it's better.

KENNEDY:

Seeing them again makes me want to launch the Darmok and Jalad argument, in that they are, as far as their civilization is concerned, they're average. They're quote unquote normal. It's just that in them communicating with anybody else that it puts it on a point of reference in terms of whether or not they are, you know, cognitively inferior, or on par, or superior. I think the Pakleds know exactly what they're doing. They just don't know- they just don't communicate that in a way that Picard or anybody else in Starfleet has really been able to understand. Because we don't know how long the Pakleds have been out here hacking up people's ships.

SUE:

A while, apparently.

CALLIE:

And I think that goes back to the in-universe explanation, versus the fact that we have to think about the lens the writers were writing it through. Because I think you're, I mean, you're right about that. And even *in* Samaritan Snare, like the Pakleds turned out to be a lot smarter than they were perceived to be. Right? And that was kind of part of the whole thing. But I just like, I had forgotten. Cause when I watched that episode of Lower Decks with my wife, my wife is a far more casual Star Trek fan than I, and I *died* when I saw the Pakleds. And I like, after we watched that episode, we went back and we watched Samaritan Snare because I wanted her to like, get the reference. And I was just like, "Oh my God, this is worse than I thought!" \*laughs\* But I mean, they were very very different in Lower Decks. And I don't feel like they were played the same way at all, which was good I thought.

ANDI:

They were actually much more competent and scary.

SUE:

And based on interviews, they're going to be a major threat in season two?

CALLIE:

Oooh! Interesting.

ANDI:

There's something I like about that. They were like, "Well, you thought this race of people that's all the worst stereotypes about fat people, thought they were not a threat. And now they're going to come back and f\*\*k you up."

SUE:

"They're not a joke anymore." \*Andi laughs\*

CALLIE:

Right.

SUE:

Andi, I want to talk about- we have it sort of as a general thing at the end that doesn't really fall under any of these three umbrellas. But what about energy beings who don't really have a body at all? Where do they fit?

ANDI:

Yeah. So we've come full circle \*Callie laughs\* and we've discussed many types of bodies that you can have. And now the question is, "What do you do when you don't have a body at all?"

CALLIE:

Celebrate! \*all laugh\*

SUE:

Celebrate?

ANDI:

Yes! I am- so like, there is a part of me that's like "Bring me to the energy being planet." And like "Let me be the energy."

CALLIE:

\*laughs\* "I want to ascend!"

ANDI:

"I want to ascend." Essentially, yes. But I've always found this interesting, this idea of not having a physical self. And the portrayals of that and like the positives and negatives in that.

CALLIE:

I'm trying to think through, and it feels like it's *mostly* presented as a positive. Because like the beings that we meet, largely, that don't have physical forms are portrayed as being more advanced or like higher life forms. You know, that they have achieved some higher state of being. And honestly, like I don't know. That sounds cool to me. \*laughs\*

SUE:

The closest I can think of Star Trek actually dealing with that question is the DS9 episode, I think it's called Meridian?

CALLIE:

Yes!

SUE:

Where they go to the Brigadoon planet. \*all laugh\* I remember the characters who like spend most of their time as energy beings. And then like for whatever amount of time their planet finishes its orbit or something are corporeal. Describe it as like, "You can't imagine what it's like



to not hold hands with somebody or to not hug somebody or to not just be in a physical space with somebody.”

ANDI:

I *can now*. \*all laugh\*

SUE:

I think that's a perspective that we hadn't *had* for energy beings previously. Of like “What do you lose when you lose that ability?”

CALLIE:

Yeah. And I feel like there's maybe an entirely new form of intimacy that's possible, right? Like the intimacy that we are used to, and enjoy, and crave, and need. You know I mean, there's a possibility that we would get something in theory that would be even more like close and intimate and cool than like holding hands, or hugging, or kissing, or whatever form of like intimacy that we enjoy. It's definitely interesting to think about. Would we count the great link in that?

SUE:

Yeah. That's what I was thinking about. Yeah.

CALLIE:

Yeah. Cause I mean, I've definitely- I mean I have complicated feelings about that whole thing. With like meeting a bunch of shitty trans people who were Republicans, and then like watching the episode where Odo figures out that his people are terrible. \*all laugh\* I deeply identify with Odo in that. But I've definitely thought about like “God, how rad would it be?” And there's that scene where where Odo and the Female Changeling have sex. And she's like, “Wow, that was- that was ridiculous. That's not cool at all.” \*all laugh\*

SUE:

I'm telling you, changelings are asexual!

CALLIE:

\*laughs\* But yeah, I've thought about that too. Like having something like the great link like, that'd be rad. I mean, I like hugs, but if I could link with my wife, I'd be into that.

ANDI:

Yeah. Well, cool. I feel like we've covered a lot. So, if people have thoughts feel free to send them into us. Cause I think that there's still a lot to unpack on all of these topics and we really only scratched the surface, but I had a really fun time doing it.

CALLIE:

Yeah! This was great.

ANDI:

I'm glad. So that's all the time we have today. Callie, where can people find you on the internet?

CALLIE:

I'm @Calliegetsit on Twitter and my podcast is called Queersplaining. And you can find that anywhere you listen to podcasts.

ANDI:

Awesome. And Sue?

SUE:

You can find me on Twitter @Spaltor and that's S P A L T O R.

ANDI:

And Kennedy?

KENNEDY:

Can find me on both Instagram and Twitter @thatMikeychick that's that- M I K E Y C H I C K. Don't act up in the comments though, because I'll drag you and block you.

ANDI:

And I'm Andi. You can find me on Twitter @firsttimeTrek. To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit [women@warp.com](mailto:women@warp.com) or find us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram @womenatwarp. You can also email us at [crew@womenatwarp.com](mailto:crew@womenatwarp.com). And for more Roddenberry podcasts, visit [podcasts.rodnenberry.com](http://podcasts.rodnenberry.com). Thanks so much for listening.