

Women at Warp Episode 233: Neurotransmitters of Doom (“Man of the People”)

[Women at Warp theme]

Jarrah: Hi, and welcome to Women at Warp, a Star Trek Podcast. Join us on our continuing mission to explore intersectional diversity in infinite combinations. My name is Jarrah. Thanks for tuning in. And with me today are Sue.

Sue: Hello.

Jarrah: And Andi.

Andi: Hello.

Jarrah: Before we get into our main topic, we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. 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. Like, if you join in the past, you can join our watchalong that we're recording right after we record this episode.

Andi: [laughs] Get a time machine and you can be a part of it too.

Jarrah: [laughs] And if you're still working on your time machine, you can be around for the next watchalong. And as well as, getting thanks on social media, we do spore jump episodes on non-Trek topics and all sorts of other things. Visit patreon.com/womenatwarp. And if you're looking to support our show through podcast merch, check out our TeePublic Store. We have tons of designs, and they're on T-shirts, notebooks, stickers, tote bags, all sorts of great stuff. Find that store at teepublic.com. That's teepublic.com/stores/womenatwarp. All right, so today's topic comes to us from Eliza Trek on Twitter, back when it was Twitter, and we've been saving this one for a while, for the right moment.

Sue: Legitimately, five years. [laughs]

Jarrah: Yes. So, hopefully you're still out there listening. Eliza, sorry it took us so long to get to this. Eliza says, “Rewatching *TNG's Man of the People*, and it's awful, but also genius. It might be an examination of how women are expected to carry the emotional labor of men, but it's also got an overlay of ‘ew, old women.’ I need Women at Warp to analyze this episode.”

Andi: Ask and you shall receive, five years later.

Sue: Tweeted on March 16, 2019.

Jarrah: To be fair, it was one of those, like, does anyone want to rewatch *Man of the People*?

[laughter]

Jarrah: And it took us a while to psych ourselves up for it, so. But it was a great suggestion. So, I'm glad we're getting around to it, and I'm also glad that now I've rewatched it, and I can wait at least another five years before I have to watch it again.

Okay, so just a couple quick random background points I wanted to highlight. And then actually, you know what, does someone want to give just an overview quickly of what this episode's about?

Andi: So, this is a classic Troi episode in that a creepy man creeps on her, which I'm sure we will talk about, why does Troi always get the creepy man creep on you episodes. But in this case, there is a brilliant negotiator, like diplomat guy who shows up on the Enterprise with his scary mom, and suddenly Troi is getting old, horny, and wreaking havoc on the Enterprise while he is remaining calm and ready to negotiate this random diplomatic snafu of the week. And it turns out that he has been pouring all of his negative emotions into Troi, which apparently makes her horny. And, yeah, the crew is like, "No, that's bad." And he was like, "No, it's actually really good."

And then he gets what he deserves at the end of the episode and dies, and Troi is fine, and she magically de-ages. And that's this episode. And also, I would like to point out, *Man of the People* I like vaguely could remember it was a creep Troi episode, but I could not remember which one. You just had to say cougar Troi, Jarrah.

Jarrah: Yes.

Andi: And I would have remembered from the beginning that this is the cougar Troi episode.

Jarrah: Yeah, I got it mixed up with *The Price* with the guy who's also a negotiator, but in that case, he's hiding his empathic abilities and he's way more overtly skeezy and she's way more into it. [Andi laughs] And, yeah, I dislike both these episodes, but *The Price* at least has a halfway decent people out, this one, like, who even cares about what this dude's negotiating.

Andi: Yeah, he's like, "People are dying." And I was like, "What? News to me," that came out of nowhere. He was like, "Do you know how many people died yesterday?" And I was like, "No, I did not know that." That was not something the episodes decided to tell me so.

Jarrah: Well, also, how him and the mom get on the ship is very not explained and not significant. And so, the dude and his-- spoiler alert, not really his mom are on this other ship, and the other ship's just like, "Hey, here's some people for you." And then they're on the Enterprise. [Andi laughs]

Sue: Well, everything in this episode seems to move very quickly and come out of nowhere because right after the opening credits, this guy is taking Klingon martial arts class.

Andi: Why wouldn't you take Klingon martial arts class with Worf if you could, Sue?

Sue: But he seems to know exactly what he's doing [laughs] when did he learn all of this?

[laughter]

Jarrah: I mean, okay, so as much as Troi says, it's very demanding. I see seniors doing it in the park all the time. [Sue laughs]

Andi: Yeah, it's very clearly Tai Chi, or a space Tai Chi, Klingon Tai Chi.

Jarrah: Yes. And of course, Tai Chi is very legitimate. It's just funny that they make it out to seem like it is a very, very strenuous activity. So, the premise to the episode is based on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, that's a thing.

Andi: I would not have gotten that. Yeah, that's another thing that I would never have thought that. And also, I don't think it was fully explained. Although at the end, I was thinking, "Wait, so was he artificially young because he was aging these women?" And I think the answer is yes, because the backlash aged him so quickly and then he died. So, was he always that age and he'd just been staving it off, and now knowing that the premise was Dorian Gray, then I think even more, yes.

Sue: But there's never a discussion when he's explaining this to Picard that he's stealing their youth. It's all about emotion. And I guess it's like there's this understanding that stress and negative emotions age you.

Jarrah: Mm-mm.

Andi: Yeah. Maybe he just didn't want to say anything because Picard was an inch from murdering him.

Sue: Potentially.

Jarrah: He was like, "I don't think the vibes are going very well on this because I am very good at my job at negotiating. I should probably get away from this man who's about to strangle me with his bare hands." Maybe that was it. And he just didn't have time to tell all of the details to, of his nefarious plot to the one dude in the area that could make him pay for it.

Andi: Yeah.

Jarrah: Which is a choice, for sure. It's a choice. [laughs]

Sue: That whole conversation, that confrontation scene, just had me so angry.

Andi: Oh, yeah. When he says, "receptacles," bless Patrick Stewart, the way Picard, like, you can feel this switch flip where he's like, "Oh, you're done. I am about to burn your whole world down." Because it's very much like a, "Oh, oh." And then I still do not understand that confrontation at all because Picard goes into it thinking maybe there's a disease that Deanna caught. He is probably suspicious, but he doesn't go into it going like, "You did this to Deanna. What the fuck?" But he goes up to him and he's like, "This is happening." And the guy's like, "Yeah, that's because I am doing this."

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: What are you doing, man? [laughs] I don't understand that at all. He was like, "What you need to understand is she's not important and I'm very important, and she's just a receptacle." And he's like, "This is a senior staff member of Starfleet." The logic is not logic-ing. "Dude, what are you doing?" And I don't think we get enough of a sense of him to understand-- I think we understand that he's super arrogant.

Jarrah: Yes.

Andi: But that's pretty much it. Like, we do not get-- how long has he been doing this? How has no one noticed this before? The way he openly takes the next gal in front of Picard and we know she's going to die. He's like, "Here's my next murder plot." It's just so inexplicable. [laughs] I just don't get it.

Sue: He very clearly doesn't think he's doing anything wrong.

Andi: Right.

Sue: He thinks--

Jarrah: Yes. So, it's obviously not something that's just accepted on his planet. And it's unclear to me if he hadn't died and if they had apprehended him somehow, would he have faced a trial on his planet? Would they be like, "Oh, yeah, turns out, we found 30 bodies connected to this guy."

Andi: Yeah. Oh, man, there's so much to unpack here.

Sue: Even before he just refers to Troi as a receptacle, which, gross, he has this line that sets me off where he's just, once I was able to channel my unwanted emotions and my darker thoughts, it left me unencumbered.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: And that's what pinged in my brain because you still see people making that argument for today of why women should be doing all the housework is to leave it so, because the men work hard all day at their jobs and they should be able to relax when they get home.

Andi: Yeah, exactly.

Sue: That is like an active thing that happens. Now still, it's not as archaic as we want to believe.

Andi: Yeah. And also, the other thing that, that whole confrontation scene and his whole justification for it just made me think of the genius men and how everyone is supposed to allow them all of their terrible behavior because of their genius. So, like, yeah you can see that in, especially the Hollywood reckoning of the me-too movement, where they're like, "Right, right, that guy's abusive. But also, look at the art he makes. It's so good." It's totally worth grinding up all of these countless people in the Hollywood machine. So, that somehow makes it so he's a genius, the one informs the other. No, this is just an asshole that you're allowing to be an asshole. And no piece of art is worth the mental well-being and physical well-being of another human person. This very much made me think of that.

I mean, we see this archetype in shows all the time. Think, all the *Sherlock* ones, *House*, where it's like, "Yeah, he's horrible to everyone around him and treats them like shit, but he's also so smart, guys. He's so smart. And therefore, that's justified." And in this case, it's very much like he is sacrificing unknowing people and murdering them. And he's still, in his mind, is like, "I'm important enough and my work is important enough that these people don't matter." And the fact that he thinks that's going to go fly in a court of law is wild to me. And just goes to show how arrogant and delusional this man is, like, truly delusional.

Jarrah: Yeah. So, I mean, you definitely hit on the emotional labor theme that was suggested and it also, yeah, made me think as well of the, you know, like you said, Sue, it's still happening today in dynamics around narratives about the role of a wife. But obviously, that was even more inflated in the 1950s, early 1960s. And the idea that women would take valium to numb themselves, basically, so that they could and had to be dressed up and clean the house all day and then make dinner and look nice while doing it and all this kind of stuff. But there's also, I mean, in general, a lot more expectations on women in the workplace, even though it's largely unstated to manage emotions of our colleagues and that-- this is actually a little bit of a reverse of what we see in this episode, where men are allowed to have outbursts. And if women in leadership have outbursts, it's like they're unstable.

Sue: Oh, my God. I literally had a boss tell me that I was not allowed to get angry.

Jarrah: Oof, yeah.

Sue: Which just made me angrier. [laughs]

Jarrah: In this episode, it's fully expected. Like, people don't react to Troi doing this stuff until she's considered not attractive, essentially. The reaction is very just like, "Huh, she's acting a bit funny." Like, no, she's being full on inappropriate. And it isn't until she's haggard at the end and apparently has surmounted the horny middle-aged phase and now just become, like--

Andi: Crone.

Jarrah: A crone, yeah. And, like no longer sexualized, because that would be icky, I guess. Like, that's when they suddenly start to care.

Andi: Well, it's very clear that Riker is very taken aback by what's happening, but he doesn't make any real steps to figure out what was going on. Although I will say that-- okay, so let's talk about some of the good things in this episode. One is that it is very clearly the underlying theme of women being forced to carry emotional labor for men, because he very clearly chooses women for this. And I think that's probably just garden grade misogyny on his point. But when you do it in the episode and this is shown as terrible behavior, it's actually fairly feminist reading of it, and the way everyone reacts to it, Picard's reaction to it is very much like, "Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no." So, there is that. So, there's some good stuff there, but it's all undercut by the rest of the weird issues around women's sexuality and aging and stuff.

Sue: So, we talked about emotional labor a while ago. Is that something we think we need to define?

Jarrah: I mean, emotional labor is basically the idea that women in particular, although anyone can do emotional labor, do a lot of work to support other people's emotional wellbeing, and to manage their own emotions to make others comfortable. In the workplace, for example, it's often women who find themselves either being directly asked or jumping in because men are not volunteering to do the get-well cards and the birthday parties and the going away parties and other recognition for their coworkers and just checking in after, like, they know someone's gone through a tough time. And then find yourself also doing that in family situations.

And also, like I said, maintaining this reigning in anger and sadness out of a sense of, it's not okay to make other people uncomfortable with my emotions, even when a man in the same position might get away with it.

Sue: Mm-hmm.

Andi: But the other thing that I like about this episode is we get Detective Crusher again. I love Detective Crusher. She's like, the way she's immediately, like, "What the hell? This gal, I can't find why she died." Old is not a reason to die. There is usually a reason. And you're more susceptible, obviously, but, like, she couldn't find a reason, and she was very much like, "Let me in the ring, captain. I'm ready. I'm about to do my science detective stuff." And then when she's able to immediately diagnoses the problem, puts together a plan. She's the real savior of Deanna in this episode. And it's very much Riker and Picard deferring to Crusher as she saves the day. So, there's some good stuff in here. And the Detective Crusher pieces I enjoyed.

And I do think it's so funny that she's always like, let me do an autopsy. And they're always like, "No, you can't." And she's like, "Hmm, but I'm going to." [laughs]

Sue: Well, she got permission this time.

Andi: Yes. But--

Sue: Not always. [laughs]

Jarrah: It is weird to me that she couldn't have figured out the real age of the person without doing an autopsy. And also, the fact that she wasn't related to Alkar.

Andi: Yeah, that's a simple DNA test. But I will say the thing that was fun about rewatching this episode was, first of all, it's creepy as hell, and sometimes in an uncomfortable way and sometimes in a funny way and an enjoyable way. But the beginning, I thought, was actually really cool because I'm afraid I don't know her character's name.

Sue: Sev Maylor.

Andi: Maylor. Okay. She seems like she's completely lost it. And I do want to talk about this too, everyone's initial reaction is this woman's bonkers. She's just delusional. She probably has dementia. That's specifically stated. And so, the silencing of old women or elderly women. And the way that she's ignored and dismissed, like, she's literally screaming at the top of her lungs and distressed. And Troi is weird and walks away. And I get why she does that, because the way it's framed is this isn't a disturbed person. But I thought it was interesting that when you rewatch it and you know that what is happening in this. So, it seems like she's threatening Deanna, but she actually seems like she might be warning Deanna too, because she says, "If you get close to him, you're going to regret it for the rest of your life."

And that, to me, was very much a horror story kind of way, where you have, the dude at the beginning of the horror story says something really creepy, and everyone blows him off, and then it turns out he was prophesizing their terrible time in the cabin in the woods or whatever. It felt like that kind of thing, where it's like, the first time you see it through this lens. The second time you see it, you go, "Oh, wait." She's obviously, clearly irrational because she's still doing the, like, "You want him, he's mine," thing. But she's also going, "Don't get close to him, you will regret it." And that, to me, is a warning more than anything.

Sue: Well, because they're framing it as the overprotective mother who thinks that no one is good enough for their son.

Andi: Pretty brilliant for him to make her a relative because if it's just some random lady, then it's very much like, "Let's get this lady to sickbay." But if it's his relative, well, then he is in charge of her, and he is in charge of her care, and we should defer to him on what he wants to do about his mother.

Sue: But what's weird to me, if we're assuming that she has the same or went through the same behaviors as Troi does, which, since we see Troi echo her, I think is relatively safe to assume. At no point, when she's in his presence and he refers to her as mother, does she say, "I'm not your mother?"

Jarrah: Yeah. Well, it's very unclear why, like, also Troi because she feels very unsettled when he forms the link with the psychic devices that are in a box shaped like a coffin.

Sue: Yeah. Mm-mm.

Jarrah: And she looks very unsettled, and then she has the scene where the-- I will say the music does a lot of heavy lifting in this episode on the creepiness side of things. And the scene where you're supposed to realize something's wrong is when she's just touching her throat and upper chest in the mirror in her Tai Chi outfit. And it's like, "[gasps] No."

Andi: It's really weird how sexualized she is in this episode. I still don't understand why they made that choice, like, thematic. I understand from a TV perspective why they made that choice, because she looks hot as hell in it. But thematically, I don't understand why all these negative emotions is turning into this lustful. Some of these scenes I'm surprised they were able to put on network television. The scene where she's touching herself is very sexual. And later when she's in her quarters with Riker, she's wearing something is basically translucent and is very clearly not wearing anything underneath it. And it's super inappropriate to be having Riker for work purposes in her quarters wearing something like that. But it's also wild to put that on TV. So, it's just odd to me, like, why did it manifest this way? It doesn't make sense story wise to me. It just seems like an excuse to put Marina Sirtis in incredibly sexy clothes.

Jarrah: The problem is that they said it's negative emotions. Like, they repeatedly stress that it's about him sharing his negative emotions. In fact, it actually seems like he's sharing basically all his emotions. It's more that he's not allowing anything that could interfere with his calm. And I feel that would have been a better way to frame it, because as it is, the implication is women's sexual desire is a negative emotion.

Andi: I think you're right, Jarrah, because when you frame it like that, it's okay. And that's the other thing, is, considering how sexualized she is, he does not seem to be sexually attracted to her at all.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: Like, he pushes her away. She goes to other people because he won't sleep with her, and she is trying to sleep with him so ferociously. And that, to me, says, when you frame it that way, Jarrah that makes it click in my head that, like, "Okay, he's sending all of his lustful feelings to her because he doesn't want to feel them, because they're distracting." But that's not super clear in the episode, I don't feel like.

Sue: Well, he does at one point say, "Oh, that's not what this is."

Andi: Yeah.

Jarrah: But that's after he's already formed the connection. I feel it's implying that he feels all of those feelings normally, but because he has this connection, he can't pursue a relationship with her sexually. Yeah, to me it's just about-- so, yeah, it's very sexualized when she's touching herself in the workout studio. But it's also the music that's saying, this is a scary thing we should be afraid of, and that is unfortunate. Although, I mean, that's the foundation of the entire episode, so. [laughs]

Sue: But you brought up when Riker stops by and she's in that flowy thing. There's also that lower decker in her quarters. And I want to shout out to how far Riker has come since the child, [laughs] when he demanded to know who the father was.

Andi: Yeah.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: But legitimately, he is surprised because they had a work meeting scheduled. He thinks it's out of character, but he doesn't get weird and jealous.

Andi: Yeah. And she says to him, like, "It's not your business," kind of thing. And he says, "I know that."

Sue: Yeah.

Andi: He specifically says that he knows that. But it's very clear that-- and I am glad you brought that up, Sue, because I really did think that was well done on Riker's part, is that it was super clear that it's not that she was having a sexual relationship with someone. It's how inappropriate the sexual relationship was and how inappropriate she was acting in there. Because when he leaves, he says, "Let me know when you're ready to work."

Jarrah: Yeah. Because also they're supposed to be working on performance evaluations. And even though it's very strongly implied that sex was consensual with lower decker, the way that he leaves and then she's basically like, "I know where to find you, ensign. And he's like, "Yes, ma'am." Reinforces that she has incredible power over his career, and she also threatens her counseling patient, basically don't-- like, "If you can't hack it here, then I'm going to put you up for a transfer." So, it's not necessarily able to be said like that was really consensual with no power issues or potential coercion there.

Andi: Mm-hmm. And I'm glad you brought up the counseling scene because I thought that was both frustrating and well done. It's frustrating because we don't get to see Deanna counsel very often, and I love seeing Deanna counseling, and it's kind of stuck to see it, like, the toxic version of it rather than a healthy version of it because we get to see that so rarely. But I did think that Marina Sirtis did a really good job, and actually, the script did a really good job of making it seem like it was normal right up until it wasn't. The first couple of things she says is very much like, "Why do you feel that way? Please tell me more."

And it feels normal right up until she's like, "Actually, this is your problem, and you're just sensitive," and it's very clearly not appropriate at that time. But the switch is so well done that I actually thought it really was a cool way to show she's not okay. But as I said, it is still frustrating because, like-- did she remember that happened and, like, went to that gal and was like, "No, no I'm sorry, that was mistake." This is one of those things where the episode ends and then we fly off into space and we never hear about it again. But there's some wreckage here that Troi needs to address. But this lower decker needs to be like, "I'm sorry that happened. That wasn't okay. My bad." And then also, this counseling patient gal needs to be talked to.

Jarrah: Yeah, I mean, Marina does a pretty good job making this episode entertaining. Yeah, it's fun to see her both go-- she said that basically, when she saw the outfit that she wears in Ten Forward and the hair and makeup. She saw Anne Bancroft misses Robinson and basically played it based on that look. And then it's also just fun when she's just totally losing it near the end. Although-- Yeah, I mean, the broader messages about the character are not super fun, [laughs] but the individual instances and the acting is entertaining.

Andi: Yeah. And the scene in Ten Forward is the hottest she's ever looked. That dress is unbelievable, and the hair and everything about it is [unintelligible [00:29:00] [laughs] and she really is, like, she's chewing the scenery in an extremely entertaining way. It's like the episodes of *TOS* where the script is doing some things, but Kirk and Shatner's performance in it are just fun to watch. Like, *Turnabout Intruder*. Jarrah and I talked a lot about *Turnabout Intruder* and our episode on that, and that was part of the reason why I am kind of turned the corner on that episode is like, he makes it fun to watch is similar in this where I like watching her in this. I just wish that she had more to do.

And I think it goes to show that if this was the one episode where Troi had a creepy dude, like, hit on her, take over, manipulate her, whatever, that would probably be okay. But this is the millionth episode, or at least it feels like the millionth episode. And it's like, Troi can have another story, guys. And look what she did with *Face of the Enemy*. It's not that the talent isn't there, and that the character isn't interesting in other situations. It's that you are falling into these very tired tropes repeatedly.

Jarrah: I guess it's this one and I think it's *Violations* where she doesn't dig herself out, like in *The Price*, she digs herself out in *Masterpiece Society*, a little bit of a different situation, but she basically recognizes, "Hey, I slept with this dude was a bad idea. Ultimately, this can't be a thing," but in this episode, she's in a coma, basically.

Andi: She's the damsel.

Jarrah: Yeah. And it's nice, like you said, to see Crusher play a role there. But a little bit of a tangent, this episode made me think of, I just finished a book by Carey Millsap-Spears about *Star Trek Discovery and the Female Gothic* and gothic literature influences in the history of *Star Trek*. And I really noticed in this episode the gothic influences around the mum being *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, whose eeriness is a warning to his next woman target, and his grooming and manipulating her is similar to a gothic villain, but where it doesn't do what the female gothic novels do, like Brontë novels and Ann Radcliffe and Frankenstein is the protagonist being Troi in this case, is usually supposed to be a woman who is both ingenious and victimized or ingenious and vulnerable. And then through her ingenuity and exceptional talent and determination, basically is able to secure her escape and mold her own future. And I think this episode is written by a whole bunch of dudes, and that was not their concern.

Sue: Yes, but also, I think we need to talk about that as well, that it's written by a whole bunch of dudes. Like, it's literally, they were on a time crunch and split up the axe and gave one to five different people.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: [laughs] Then stitched them all together.

Jarrah: And they literally said behind the stage, they gang-banged the script, which is real classy.

Sue: I mean, you can get the sense that they were struggling for a resolution here.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: Because it doesn't quite make a ton of sense. Like, supposedly the connection with Troi is broken when she dies, so he has to form a new connection. But her waking back up, even though the connection is broken interrupts that forming of a new one. Even when they're doing that end cap scene with Riker and Troi, she's just like, so it just happened and they don't know why. Yeah, basically just happened. [laughs]

Andi: I do think it's funny to think of Picard being like, "Oh, no." [laughs] Because it was very clear that he was ready to kill that guy, like, if he had to. And I'm just picturing them and going, "Captain, we're really sorry, but this dude died." He'd be like, "Aw. Anyway." [laughs]

Jarrah: Well, they also fully set the other woman, Liva, up as bait, and that's a risky situation, and they don't even know if they can bring Troi out of it.

Andi: Yeah, I do get that they didn't really have a whole lot of time to make a plan, and Picard definitely is very clearly worried about her safety and wants to get her out of there as soon as possible but you still are using someone and possibly risking their life. So, not ideal.

Sue: Especially, this time through rewatching the end, it was just that moment of, "Somehow Palpatine returned."

[laughter]

Sue: "We don't know how. It just worked."

Andi: Sometimes I prefer that than them trying to make it make sense. Like, we don't know. Because I feel like that's almost more realistic. Stuff does happen that is not explainable in medical terms, but I just think it's funny. [laughs] its very much.

Sue: Well, we really lucked out. [laughs]

Andi: Wow, that worked out perfectly. [laughs]

Jarrah: I was interested, Sue, in your science corner take on neurotransmitters as a source of psychic assault, and also the fact that Crusher found elevated neurotransmitter residue in the corpse.

Sue: Look.

[laughter]

Andi: Who says so much with one word?

[laughter]

Sue: I mean, neurotransmitters are great. Wish I had more of them.

[laughter]

Sue: Yeah. I don't know.

Jarrah: More what I thought was weird was the term neurotransmitter residue, because it's like, well, okay, so if you have a corpse, you're not, like, "I found blood residue. [Andi laughs] Like, your blood's still in it for a while. Like, neurotransmitters are also just in you. So what is the residue? It's like the breakdown of neurotransmitters.

Sue: Okay, but this is, what, like, 1993?

Jarrah: So, I looked up when were neurotransmitters discovered and went on a rabbit hole of the history of neurotransmitters. And, okay, so, obviously, when they were first discovered, which was in the late 19th century, it was acetylcholine, and it wasn't really proven. There was a big debate about whether chemicals could deliver messages in the brain, but we had the first SSRI by the time this episode was made, and we had identified many separate neurotransmitters by this point. So, I mean, I get, though I did think it just felt like an episode that was created at a time when, in the public consciousness we were just becoming more aware of neurotransmitters because of SSRI's, probably, but I just thought it was funny.

Sue: It definitely is. The made-up science language, I can't defend, [laughs] but it is, I think, worth pointing out that even though we now have identified way more neurotransmitters and we have SSRI's, the brain is still a huge mystery.

Andi: Yes.

Sue: We don't really know why a lot of the medicines that we have actually work, and sometimes we don't know how they work.

Andi: As someone who suffers from migraines.

Sue: Yeah.

Andi: Let me tell you, people still don't know why migraines happen. And there's more coming out on it, and there's more research being done. But I know when I was really having trouble with my migraines like 10 years ago, my doctors were like, "Shrug. Don't know. Here's some pills that might help."

Jarrah: Mm-hmm. I would personally love if having less neurotransmitters made you look young and youthful.

[laughter]

Andi: Would they also give you dresses like that? Because, wow.

Jarrah: I mean, what are the odds that Troi has just had this in her closet with that outfit that Tasha wore from *The Naked Now* this entire time?

Andi: That's the other thing is, like, so we have not talked about this a lot on the show, I don't think but someday we're going to have to talk about this, because I am fascinated by this. Do we think that Troi bought that dress, or do we think she went to the replicator and was like, "Make me something amazing. Here's the specifications." Do people design their clothes through the replicator?

Sue: Well, we do have that scene in *Data's Day* where, like, Worf is in a bigger replicator room, not just the one in his quarters, like, looking through essentially a catalog.

Andi: Yeah, that's what I mean. Did she have that in her closet, or did she go to the replicator catalog and go, "Give me something that has 20 pounds of applique on it and amazing cutouts and here's the color?"

Jarrah: Who programs the replicator catalog, if that's in it, on just, like, standard on Starfleet ships?

Andi: Oh, my God. This is why I say we have to unpack this more in another episode because I just am fascinated by this idea. And also, we talk about the replicator mostly in terms of food I feel like. But, oh, my God the way that I would not wear a single thing the same ever. I would wear something different every day. I would be like, "Bring me this." It would be so much fun. Imagine just being able to dress up in any clothes you wanted. Like, your cosplay options would be amazing. So, I know this is a weird episode to go down that rabbit hole on, but that's what I was thinking that, Jarrah, when, she shows up in Ten Forward in that, I'm like, "Where did that dress come from?"

Sue: It is reminiscent of something that Lwaxana wears on *DS9*.

Jarrah: I was thinking the same thing. Yeah. Okay, so they don't really mention it in this episode, but we do know from canon that Betazoid women get real horny when they hit Betazoid menopause.

Andi: Mm.

Sue: Oh, yeah.

Jarrah: And so, because they don't mention it, I think that it's more about the implication that we talked about earlier, that, sexuality was a distraction for Ves, but the way that it's framed as a negative emotion, particularly in an older woman, is real problematic. I don't think they were doing it because it was like, "Oh, well, now Deanna's aging, and so she's entering Betazoid menopause."

Sue: Right. Because she's not aging.

Andi: Yeah.

Sue: Right. Because when they finally did the autopsy, Crusher was like, "This woman is 30."

Jarrah: Yeah.

Sue: Not 93. She just looks 93.

Andi: Which, by the way, can we get Crusher's technology to just turn back the clock on that because-- [Sue laughs] Yep.

Jarrah: Oh, yeah. So, I was thinking maybe this is a dress that Lwaxana sent Deanna for when she's in Betazoid menopause. [laughs]

Andi: Wow. I do think it's funny that you bring that out because I did not think about that. But that actually makes it more enjoyable for me, because also, he says at one point that it happened to Troi faster than he was expecting.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: So, maybe her being Betazoid did have something to do with it. But we're going to have to put this in all of this Sue's science corner stuff, where it's just, "Look, look, I don't know." They don't explain it and they don't-- it's just somehow this happened to Troi. But I think it's fun to think like, one, if she was eating naturally, would she start picking up Lwaxana's like, fashion sense? [laughs] Because I can see Lwaxana's wearing that dress a 100%. I also want to say that she looked amazing with the white hair streak.

Sue: Yes.

Andi: Like the updo. Ah.

Jarrah: Now I'm just imagining an alternate version of this episode where she basically just becomes Lwaxana and she's just walking around naked and taking Alexander to the mud baths.

Andi: [Laughs] And it's funny because Troi is always mother.

Jarrah: Yeah. [laughs]

Andi: Man, this episode is wild.

Jarrah: So, Brannon Braga wanted try to be scarier in this episode and thought they made the wrong call focusing on the prime directive piece as the issue and apparently wanted that counseling scene to be way darker and for it to feel more like Hannibal Lecter.

Andi: Honestly, I think he's right. The parts of the episode that work for me are the horror aspects. So, the beginning with the older woman giving her warning or whatever, that I was like, "Okay, I'm invested in this." And as I said, that counseling scene, I thought was really well done. But if they had brought it up to not just like, her being unprofessional, but actually her being scary, I feel it would have added a lot to the stakes. I like the idea he has around a slow descent, like a psychological thriller thing. I think that would have been more effective than her just being irrational.

Jarrah: Yeah, and I agree. I feel like we said, they didn't invest enough in the B plot for the prime directive to be an interesting issue. Not that it would justify his treatment anyway. But it's we've seen that in other episodes, like *Code of Honor* and things like that, where it's like, "Well, but if we don't do this, we're not going to get these vaccine for this population," and that kind of thing. And in this case, it's so unmemorable and we don't really care about what's happening with this planet he's working for at all. But it just is like, "Why did you even bother to put that in there?" Like, it's just a MacGuffin.

Sue: I didn't even realize that the prime directive was supposed to be an issue.

Jarrah: Yeah. Well, because they are all very validly a dude that doesn't excuse what you're doing and you can't just kill someone to be a better negotiator.

Andi: Also, I'd like to point out that it caught my eye at the beginning. Picard's like, "We're going to this place because this war is impacting our shipping lanes," which I feel like we could have put on our PowerPoint, Jarrah, for our western empire-

Jarrah: Yep.

Andi: -episode *Anglo American Empire* episode. No, I think he's right. And I think it's part of the problem of having too many writers is I don't think they all quite had a cohesive vision of what they thought was the important pieces of this episode. So, in the end, they were just like, "What if Troi was hot and slutty?"

Jarrah: It would also maybe have been interesting to see-- Not that I want this to be more like *The Price*, but to see other people be charmed by Ves Alkar, because we really don't get any sense of why he's good at what he does. The only person that supports him is Liva.

Andi: Yeah. And she's very clearly being groomed by him to take over, and that's exactly what happens.

Jarrah: Yeah.

Andi: Which actually, her character made me really sad because she with her own eyes, is seeing what's happening to Deanna, and she's still like, "But he's a great man." There's a part of me that wonders-- and again, they do not do the work to show us this, but would have been cool, or at least interesting to have her be a willing participant because she believes in his mission, because that is the kind of stuff that men convince women to do all the time. They're like, "I'm a great man, and you're my great support, and I can't do my great work without your support." And they're like, "Oh, yes." And she had that vibe to her, but they just

didn't take it to 100 and the way that the end is, it's very much like, she's there when Picard's like, you're murdering Deanna. And she's like, "meh." And then later she's like, "Okay, I'll come with you to your room and do this thing." And it's super not clear if she knows what's going to happen, but I can't imagine she doesn't.

So, it would have been a very much made her much more interesting character and her motivations be much more interesting if she knew and she went anyway.

Andi: But everything else, it's underbaked.

Jarrah: Word.

Andi: Is that the word of the episode, underbaked?

Jarrah: Yeah, you don't want to bite into that cellular peptide cake.

Sue: Oh, no.

Jarrah: Okay. Well, any final thoughts before we rate this episode?

Andi: Just that I'm going to say that my rating, the positive ratings are going to be for Detective Crusher. That gets a star.

Jarrah: Yes.

Andi: The outfits, which are just unbelievable, will get it a star. Marina Sirtis performance will get it a star. There are good things in this episode. It just never comes together into a cohesive thematic story, and they didn't know what they wanted to say.

Jarrah: I pretty much agree with all that. I'll also maybe give some points for the music soundtrack, which is, as I said, doing some heavy lifting here, and, yeah--

Sue: Oh, you know what? I did have one more note.

Jarrah: Oh, yeah, go for it.

Sue: We were just talking about Liva, at the end, they're having this discussion about saving Deanna and that-- well, Alkar will clearly turn his attention to somebody else, but they need to save Deanna. But it will put someone else in danger. But they need to save Deanna. And it gave me the feeling of, I don't know, all of those lists of things that women need to do when they go out. Like, make sure that your hair is not in a ponytail because it's easy to grab and make sure that this is covered and you're carrying your keys this way, which it all boils down to make sure that someone else is the target, and that's just so off putting. Because it's make sure that someone else gets attacked, not, let's prevent the attack, but make sure it's not you.

Jarrah: Yeah. And if someone doesn't do these things, then they're indirectly responsible for what happens to them.

Sue: Right.

Jarrah: Yeah. Don't go to a stranger's quarters and perform a funeral meditation for his mother.

Sue: Add it to the list.

Jarrah: Google that person before you do that. [Andi laughs]

Sue: Oh, my goodness. But, yeah, it felt kind of gross. I know they needed to do it in a certain way for a story, but in addition to setting her up as bait, there was the undercurrent of our person is more important than this person.

Jarrah: Yeah, that's what I mean about. Because they didn't 100% know what was going to happen. They knew that he was going to go after someone else, but they didn't know if it was going to save Troi for sure, and they didn't know if they would be able to save the other person after he had made a connection.

Sue: Yeah. I didn't really understand why they were waiting to transport her out of his quarters if the connection was supposed to be broken when Troi died.

Jarrah: The neurotransmitters were too high.

Sue: [laughs] Again, I'd love to get some of those.

Andi: They were leaving residue, Sue.

Sue: Okay.

Andi: Residue on the transmitters is bad.

[laughter]

Sue: Oh, boy.

Jarrah: Yeah. The fun fact is that 75% of the dust in your home is actually neurotransmitter.

[laughter]

Andi: Science.

[laughter]

Andi: We can have Jarrah's fake science corner.

[laughter]

Jarrah: Sue, did you have a rating for this episode?

Sue: Oh, gosh. Anything about ratings?

Jarrah: I know. I'm also trying to think of mine. Okay, I'm going to go for two and a half out of five coffin boxes.

Andi: Well, I'm going to go for 4 out of 10 white streaks and an elegant updo.

Jarrah: Nice.

Sue: The thing is, it's not like a good episode.

Jarrah: No.

Andi: No. Very much. No.

Sue: But it's an interesting one to discuss.

Jarrah: Yes.

Sue: And Troi looks hot.

Andi: Yes, that is very true.

Sue: Argh.

Jarrah: And the points that Andi raised are valid. The plus sides.

Andi: I'm always looking for the plus sides

Sue: And Detective Crusher. So, it's got to be, I don't know, 16 out of 30 neurotransmitters.

[laughter]

Jarrah: Awesome. Okay. Well, that's about all the time we have for today. Sue, where can people find you on internet.

Sue: Right now, just to follow the show.

Jarrah: And Andi?

Andi: Yeah. Best place to find me is pretty much anywhere under [@FirstTimeTrek](#).

Jarrah: And I'm Jarrah, and you can find me at [trekkiefeminist.com](#). To learn more about our show or to contact us, visit [womenatwarp.com](#). Email us at crew@womenatwarp.com or find us on Facebook or Instagram [@womenatwarp](#). Thanks so much for listening.

[Women at Warp theme music]

Andi: Jerry. He's yelling. Come here. Why are you yelling?

Jarrah: Because he hasn't subsumed his negative emotions into Mary cat today.

Andi: He could try. Mary cat is a clear, shallow pond. She doesn't know what a negative emotion is.

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