

07.11.2020 PRESENTING: Transcripts

Sarah McConnell [00:00:04] From Virginia Humanities, this is with good reason. I'm Sarah McConnell. Earlier this year, our former producer, Cass Adair, left with good reason to work on an exciting new project. Today, we're thrilled to share part of the pilot from his groundbreaking new podcast Transcripts.

LaSaia Wade [00:00:29] It pops in my head. It was a clip of Raven Symone. Sitting at a table. She said "I had never felt liberation, but in this moment I'm around other black people. I felt liberated."

Andrea Jenkins [00:00:49] That's LaSaia Wade. She's talking to oral historian Myrl Beam in fall 2019. And she's talking about freedom.

LaSaia Wade [00:01:01] It's always gonna be a bill things to be paying. It's always going to be a water bill that's being turned off. It's always gonna be a car note that you missed. It's always to be that particular stress. But I feel liberated when I'm around other black people. I feel liberated when I'm around other trans people.

Andrea Jenkins [00:01:22] From the Treader Transgender Oral History Project. This is Transcripts, a new podcast series about how trans activists are changing the world.

SFX [00:01:39] What do we want? Trans rights? When do we want it? Now.

SFX [00:01:39] We want to talk about trans issues, trans rights and gay rights. It's like it's OK if you're Queer.

SFX [00:01:47] There are some incredible trans women of color activists up here with me. Yes. Let's her it for them.

SFX [00:02:00] The state of transness in America. The state of blackness in America. The state of sexuality in America. Everything that I care about: housing, discrimination, education.

SFX [00:02:11] And that that is the work. That is the work that I'm so honored to stand here and lift up for you today.

Andrea Jenkins [00:02:19] My name is Andrea Jenkins.

Myrl Beam [00:02:21] And I'm Myrl Beam. I'm the one who spoke with LaSaia and all the other voices you'll hear in this episode. I work on an oral history project where I collect stories of trans activists from all over the U.S..

Andrea Jenkins [00:02:32] I actually started that oral history project back in 2015. I wanted to hear the stories of trans people in their own words and preserved those stories for other people to learn from.

Myrl Beam [00:02:46] And I'm so glad you did, because the stories are amazing and those stories are especially important right now because so many trans people are dreaming of a new world, one without gender discrimination or racism or economic injustice.

Andrea Jenkins [00:03:01] We've been asking folks, what are the tools you're using to make change? Who's leading the struggle? And how in the world are people getting enough money to live and do all this work?

Myrl Beam [00:03:16] So in this pilot episode, we're going to tackle a question that sounds simple but is actually really big. Is life actually getting better for trans people? So when I interviewed LaSaia, I asked her, what about the fact that things seem to be getting better for some people?

Myrl Beam [00:03:31] At the same time, we have this visibility. There's also been more black trans woman killed last year than I think ever in my lifetime. How do you explain that? What do you think is going on?

LaSaia Wade [00:03:41] We allowed our enemies to know where we're at. We had allowed our enemies to know where we're at.

Myrl Beam [00:03:51] This answer was so compelling that I wanted to back up and learn more. How did we arrive at a place where some trans people, especially white trans folks, people like me, think of things as getting better? But life is actually getting a lot more dangerous for black trans women like LaSaia.

Andrea Jenkins [00:04:08] To answer that question, we talk to so many different people and we want you to hear their stories directly from them. You'll hear folks describing the barriers that they face, but you'll also hear what they are doing to change things.

Myrl Beam [00:04:25] That decision to try to change things, to devote your life to a larger struggle. It isn't always an easy choice. Activism wasn't exactly LaSaia's Plan A..

LaSaia Wade [00:04:34] I was director of communications in Tennessee. Nashville, Tennessee. At BellSouth when it was slowly switching over to AT&T.

SFX [00:04:41] "For the price plus digital satellite TV with more HD channels than cable. All four under ninety nine dollars a month. BellSouth call today."

LaSaia Wade [00:04:49] Good job. After I graduated college, I nailed one.

Myrl Beam [00:04:52] She wasn't out as trans at work.

LaSaia Wade [00:04:54] As a trans feminine person is easier to live as a stealth person and especially trying to live a healthy life or also live a wealthy life. What I mean about wealthy is going to school. Getting a thriving job, not just surviving, but thriving a job, a good career.

Andrea Jenkins [00:05:12] But about a year into the job, she rode into work after she had been out out the night before at the club.

LaSaia Wade [00:05:20] You know I was still young. I was still vivacious. I wanted to have fun.

SFX [00:05:26] Music Playing

LaSaia Wade [00:05:30] So I came back to work that following Monday with my stuff on my desk packed up.

Myrl Beam [00:05:36] One of LaSaia's cis gay coworkers had seen her at the club. And from there he figured out she was trans. Then he outted her to the rest of the office.

LaSaia Wade [00:05:44] The coworker that wanted my job told my boss at that time that I was a trans person and it was multiple layers to that, right? I was a black person in the high position at a company that that is not really known for a black person to be the high in a position that I was in. And also I was a trans person. And then they fired me for non-disclosure of my transness.

Andrea Jenkins [00:06:10] She was in Tennessee where there aren't many protections for workers.

LaSaia Wade [00:06:16] They fired you because your hair is purple and they don't like the color of your hair. So in the moments I was depressed. I was like what am I going to do. How dare they treat me this way? Then I was just like, how can I take my language and my education and take it to the next level for communities, my community? That is not seen. So I joined Black lives matter. And ever since then, I took off.

Andrea Jenkins [00:06:51] And that transformation from being fired to becoming an activist. That's a familiar story for the trans folks we spoke with.

Diamond Stylz [00:07:01] I'm just literally coming to work doing my job, and I don't know if I'm going to be fired or not.

Myrl Beam [00:07:09] That's Diamond Stylz. By the time she was fired from her job, her life was already shaped by racism and discrimination.

Diamond Stylz [00:07:16] My mother had been caught up in the prison industrial complex as a black woman. She was one of those super predators.

Andrea Jenkins [00:07:24] Super Predator refers to a now discredited theory from the 1990s. The idea that some people were just naturally violent and lack empathy. Most of those so-called super predators were black.

Myrl Beam [00:07:40] The concept was made popular to the nation by the Clinton administration. They used that terminology in campaigns, ultimately passing a racist Tough On Crime bill in 1994.

SFX [00:07:50] They are not just gangs of kids anymore. They are often the kinds of kids that are called super predators. No conscience, no empathy. We can talk about why they ended up that way. But first, we have to bring them to heel. And the president has asked that faith.

Andrea Jenkins [00:08:04] That fake science was part of a trend of mass incarceration of black and brown people. People like Diamond's mom.

Diamond Stylz [00:08:12] And so she got caught up in that. And I got custody of my brother. And so I'm at home, a single trans woman with an eleven year old.

Myrl Beam [00:08:21] As a black transwoman, Diamond knew she had even more stacked against her.

Diamond Stylz [00:08:25] I worked for Hewlett Packard. And when my transience came out, one of my family members worked there like a distant cousin. And she told people that I was trans.

Andrea Jenkins [00:08:35] Her coworkers started harassing her.

Diamond Stylz [00:08:38] One of the supervisors lost their keys and they gave me the keys to give it to the supervisor so they can take pictures of us interacting with each other and make fun of him. I don't have any political recourse. I don't have any legal recourse because of the state that I lived in. We did have a protection for trans people. And so I was forced into survival sex work at the time. And, you know, it just changed the trajectory of my life.

Andrea Jenkins [00:09:09] Sex work is something that some trans women do to make money. But it wasn't that Diamond wanted to. She felt isolated. But then she found something that changed her life. YouTube.

SFX from Diamond Stylz YouTube [00:09:25] Chaos that should go down and die also with that, this is a go time. How are you?

Diamond Stylz [00:09:32] I wasn't trying to activist, but because of those situations and because of technology, I started to be YouTuber.

SFX from Diamond Stylz YouTube [00:09:40] They see your personality, your smile. All that good stuff. They see all the bad. That's what they are.

Diamond Stylz [00:09:47] And because I was a little bit older in my transition. I was 26 at the time, but I had been living my truth since 13, 14. And so because I had already physically transitioned years ago, my narratives were about just relationships and stories.

SFX from Diamond Stylz YouTube [00:10:06] You have to create your own ideals of beauty. You. And stick to it. Because if you have your own ideals of beauty and you're all ideas of where you should be and what you should look like, no, I can come around and smack it out of your head.

Diamond Stylz [00:10:21] I had like 4.5 million views and it just it just grew from that.

SFX from Diamond Stylz YouTube [00:10:30] I feel like every time they talk to trans people, all they have to talk about was the bathroom issue. I care about things more than the bathroom.

Diamond Stylz [00:10:40] People started to say I was activist and I really wasn't for sure if they head sick. Because at the time I was still doing sex work I was doing all the non respectable stuff and I was like, no activist. That's for the goody two shoes. That's not me.

Myrl Beam [00:10:58] But the more time and worked in activism, the more she realized it actually was her.

Diamond Stylz [00:11:03] And so what this last five years has taught me in being in this work is that you have the power to build a community to keep you safe. You have the power to build community, to give you the support that you need so you can do the things you want to do, give you the power to change your own trajectory, your life. You want to be that structure for somebody else. And you want the people in your life to be that structure for you.

Myrl Beam [00:11:28] But what does that change look like? When I asked her how things had changed in the last few decades, LeZion had a pretty frank answer.

LaSaia Wade [00:11:35] It's a lot of assimilating politics. And what I mean by assimilating politics is as a black revolutionary, as a black person, that deals with black politics and black power and black liberation. We think that if we want to be a part of society, we're still using our master's tools to be a part of society that deem us not normal.

Myrl Beam [00:12:01] A lot of trans people have this idea that if we get more visibility, we'll do better. And some of that has worked for people like me.

Andrea Jenkins [00:12:09] But we heard very different stories from the folks working on the front lines of black and trans people of color lead movement.

Diamond Stylz [00:12:19] You have to understand that visibility does not change the heart and minds of the people. If I'm still in Texas or Indiana and I'm getting fired and I don't have the legal recourse to protect myself against workforce discrimination, it doesn't matter if everybody's seen this on the TV. When I was homeless, I couldn't go to the cis gender women's shelter because they're uncomfortable and whatever rules that they have. I couldn't go to the male shelter because that's a liability for them. Like they literally asked me on the phone. Can you take your breast off? On the phone. Well, if you can't take them off, then you can't come here, went to the LGBT -- LGBT. Went to them and they said, well, our funding only covers people with HIV. Now because of the work that we've done. The LGBT one, now is open for all. But in the time that I needed it, the normal social safety nets that a cis person could go to. I didn't have access to them and they weren't safe places for me.

Dean Spade [00:13:23] I've heard countless stories about like a trans training happening in a police department and then the police in that department more easily identifying trans people to harass.

Myrl Beam [00:13:32] That's Dean Spade, founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project in New York, an organization that offers legal support to trans and gender nonconforming people. He argues that queer intransmissibility can cover up the fact that inequality is still growing.

Dean Spade [00:13:45] Civil rights legislation doesn't doesn't really work to resolve systemic harm against hated groups. It hasn't for any of the hated groups that are supposedly covered. Conditions continue to worsen for all of those groups.

Andrea Jenkins [00:13:55] In other words, marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws may make it seem like things are better for LGBT people, but they don't make poor people less poor or get prisoners out of prison.

Myrl Beam [00:14:10] So for Dean, that means that just changing laws isn't the answer. If resources are still being hoarded by some people, then the rest of us are less free. No matter what the law says,.

Andrea Jenkins [00:14:21] Even though the connection and community that Diamond has created through her media presence is incredibly valuable. Diamond pretty much agrees.

Diamond Stylz [00:14:33] Those key bottom line factors to be able to eat, sleep and chase your dreams. Those Are the changes that can keep trans women off the streets in housing, in good health care, not just visibility.

Andrea Jenkins [00:14:48] Still Diamond Stylz has hope that legal protections and anti-discrimination laws can improve the lives of people like her.

Diamond Stylz [00:14:59] You get people who are in the trenches and in those back rooms who are putting policies to work that protect us and are not creating this perpetual cycle where we don't have the care.

Myrl Beam [00:15:10] But LaSaia Wade, the former BellSouth employee, she says trans people need to work outside the system.

LaSaia Wade [00:15:16] I want to see more of us building our own will power. Instead of trying to be a part of their power. Assimilation ain't going to do nothing but try to disempower the trans community in a way of, "oh, now we're part of society. We need to forget about the movement." And also, that's a white lens. We need to realize assimilation is not healthy or good for the black body, period. It's never was. It means death.

LaSaia Wade [00:15:53] So what does it look like for us to build our own system? What does it look like for us to build our power? What does it look like for us to build our own methods of funds that we tunnel back into our own community?

Andrea Jenkins [00:16:09] What does it look like to build that power ourselves? To find out, we spoke with Gabriel Foster.

Gabriel Foster [00:16:18] After I dropped out of high school. I know what I'm doing, but I just dove in and I said yes to everything.

Andrea Jenkins [00:16:26] That say yes to everything attitude meant that Gabriel was already a pretty seasoned activist by the time he grew up and moved to New York City. But one day he was out in the middle of a protest when he literally ran into someone who would change his whole world view.

SFX [00:16:44] We march today to show the depth of the trans community solidarity and commitment to end discrimination against trans and gender nonconforming people now.

Gabriel Foster [00:16:58] We were at the Trans Day of Action March and rally, which happens every year where like trans and non binary folks and allies and queer folks and lots of different people fill the streets of New York.

SFX [00:17:17] What do we want? Trans Justice. When do we want it? Now.

Gabriel Foster [00:17:18] Like this woman named Karen Pittelman, she was trying to talk to me while we were like marching really angry carrying these signs around and like there's a lot of feelings. And she's like asking me she's like, "I have an idea." And I was like, "what?" She's like really trying to have this conversation with me they are really trying to have this conversation with me. And I'm like, what? I can't you know, I couldn't give her my full attention, you know? And she's like, I just want I just want to, like, put money into a paper bag. And drive around the country in a van and give it to trans communities money so they get the money more directly. And I was like, I don't have any idea what you're talking about. I had never heard of anyone in my life talk about, like, just giving trans people money.

Myrl Beam [00:18:11] So that was Gabriel's first meeting with Karen Pittelman. Karen Pittelman is a writer and poet and the lead singer of Queer Country Band - Karen and the Sorrows. She's also part of a movement of people working to give away their inherited wealth. And although Karen isn't trans herself, she recognized that trans people were on the frontlines of social justice struggles, struggles that she wanted to support. So eventually, Gabriel and Karen did have another conversation, this time not in the middle of the march.

Gabriel Foster [00:18:47] You know, I had no background philanthropy, I think. I didn't even know what that meant for a long time. But she was like, you worked with a lot of communities and, you know, folks kind of like around the country. And then she brought her checkbook. But she also brought a lot of time and dedication and worked for, I don't know, 60 to 80 hours a week for at least three years.

Myrl Beam [00:19:12] And that's how the Trans Justice Funding Project was born.

Andrea Jenkins [00:19:15] And, man, I am so proud that I was able to work with Gabriel and Karen because that idea sparks something that would end up supporting hundreds and thousands of trans people and organizations.

Gabriel Foster [00:19:32] And now we are moving into our eighth year. The first year we made grants. We were able to raise a little over fifty five thousand.

Myrl Beam [00:19:41] Fifty five thousand dollars wouldn't be a lot of money for big LGBT rights organizations. It's a tiny fraction of the budget for a big mainstream organization like the Human Rights Campaign. You know, the organization that gave out all those little yellow and blue equal sign stickers.

Andrea Jenkins [00:19:55] But for trans organizations, that's a lot of money. And today, the Trans Justice Funding Project has funded hundreds of small budget trans lead community groups. The kind of groups that provide care and support for trans migrants', trans youth, indigenous trans people, undocumented trans people, trans veterans, trans people of color, just really all sorts of trans gender identified people.

Myrl Beam [00:20:25] Transcripts in Alabama and Texas and Montana and South Carolina have all gotten funding, too. It's a big coordinated mutual aid project where money goes to those most in need outside of the big non-profits.

Andrea Jenkins [00:20:39] And what's so beautiful is that it is trans people who choose who to give that money away to.

Gabriel Foster [00:20:47] We use community-like folks who are actually doing this work every day. As experts who know what's best and allow them give them the power to make decisions around where money should go. A staff I have no say about where - where the money goes, which is not easy. But like, that's our that's our politic. That's us practicing that politic about it being fully community lead.

Myrl Beam [00:21:10] But and unlike most grant making organizations, the Trans Justice Funding Project doesn't just give money to organizations with official nonprofit status.

Gabriel Foster [00:21:18] We know some of the most radical and critical and amazing work doesn't happen in offices and doesn't happen because the government says that should happen. Like people do a lot of work at kitchen tables and community centers and parks or whatever they can meet. And it doesn't have to be validated by the government to matter.

Andrea Jenkins [00:21:37] In the absence of social services and support from the mainstream movement, trans people of color are keeping each other safe and are doing the work.

Andrea Jenkins [00:21:51] Today, Diamond Stiles is the executive director of Black Trans Women Inc, and she builds her work around foundational black feminist principles.

Diamond Stylz [00:22:03] Black feminists have already laid off foundations like this. Black women have never had a vision of liberation that didn't include everybody. If you built your policy around caring for me, regardless of what I've got going on, out of all the things, out of all the labels: trans, black women, if I was disabled, if I was positive, if you revolved around caring about my humanity, regardless of the label, it just pulls everybody up.

Myrl Beam [00:22:35] Pulling everybody up. It's a big task and we don't know if we'll live to see the end of things like incarceration or policing.

Andrea Jenkins [00:22:44] But we can see glimpses of liberation already in the work that trans people are doing right now.

Myrl Beam [00:22:52] Like in LaSaia Wade's new job. After she was fired from BellSouth, LaSaia began organizing a direct action protest group in Chicago called the Transgender Liberation Collective, TLC.

LaSaia Wade [00:23:04] It was a complete blackout. No one wanted to say anything. Everyone refused to say anything. And I was angry. I was angry. I was livid. Like you say, you want liberation, but you exclude trans people from that liberation because you're not talking about everyone's liberation. You're talking about your liberation and what your liberation looks like. That's not what liberation is.

Andrea Jenkins [00:23:29] LaSaia was angry because black trans women in Chicago were being murdered. She was angry because no one was doing anything about it. Not the city and not the big white gay and lesbian organizations either.

LaSaia Wade [00:23:46] So TLC said F*** this. We need to step out and do something.

Myrl Beam [00:23:52] They put together a march to call attention to the murders of black trans women in the city.

LaSaia Wade [00:23:57] I'm getting chills right now because the Midwest showed up and showed out in Chicago. We had over 2000 people in downtown Chicago, below zero degree weather marching for trans people. And that's where BSA was created. That's when we knew that BSA needed to be in Chicago.

Andrea Jenkins [00:24:36] The BSA, the Brave Space Alliance, that's LaSaia's job now. Running her own activism organization in Chicago.

LaSaia Wade [00:24:51] And then we started building.

Andrea Jenkins [00:24:59] Today, the Brave Space Alliance is that black-lead trans-lead LGBTQ center located on Chicago's South Side. It holds events and support groups, helps people find jobs and get training and even runs a free produce program.

Myrl Beam [00:25:21] During the first few weeks of the COVID-19 crisis, the Brave Space Alliance delivered bags of food to over a thousand households and gave out over 40,000 dollars in direct mutual aid through the transfer relief fund.

Andrea Jenkins [00:25:33] And through all of this work. LaSaia brings a clear vision of the future.

LaSaia Wade [00:25:39] To center trans people through the leadership of black and brown trans people. And then everyone else can come and join the liberation.

Myrl Beam [00:25:50] It's worth saying, again, that's a really different strategy than the mainstream LGBT movements have used. Those movements, mostly led by white, wealthier people, are built on the idea of finding LGBT people who are most like other people in power. Except for this one difference.

Andrea Jenkins [00:26:07] But what Black Trans Women Inc and Brave Space Alliance are doing, centering the most marginalized in your activism? It isn't just theory. It's happening now.

Myrl Beam [00:26:22] And it's already changing the world around us.

Andrea Jenkins [00:26:26] So these days, LaSaia it isn't angry anymore.

LaSaia Wade [00:26:31] A lot of people look at me like, "why are you smiling. Ain't you supposed to be angry?" But I'm next to you. Why? I need to be angry. Why I need to be sad about it. I need to figure out this particular type of joy that I'm feeling in this particular moment because I'm standing beside someone that probably wouldn't have even been able to stand beside. Because in this particular madness, I'm connected to you.

Sarah McConnell [00:27:07] This has been part of the pilot from the groundbreaking new podcast Transcripts. The Lead Producer of Transcripts is Cassius Adair. Myrl Beam is the senior project scholar and producer. Rachel Mattson is the managing producer. Myra Billund-Phibbs is the production assistant. Sound design is by Ariana Martinez, Musical Direction by Casper. You heard music by Juniper Gray and Carlx. For more about Transcripts. Go to bit.LY/transcriptpod. The Transcripts Podcast is a project of the Tretter Transgender Oral History Project based at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Funding

came from the TAWANI Foundation and the Minnesota Humanities Innovation Lab. This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back.

Sarah McConnell [00:28:05] Welcome back to With Good Reason from Virginia Humanities. Hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people in America are on the rise and victims often don't feel safe getting help afterward. Eli Costin is a sociologist at Virginia Commonwealth University who studies anti LGBTQ+ hate crimes. They got interested in the subject while doing research in New York City.

Eli Costin [00:28:33] There had been a series of hate crimes that occurred in the West Village in New York City. And the last one culminated in the murder of Mark Carson, who was a gay man. And the West Village is the gay spot in New York City. It has the gay bars, all the restaurants. There are gay flags everywhere. How does this happen in a place like New York City, in the gay district, in what's supposed to be one of the most gay friendly places in the country? And I had to know more about why.

Sarah McConnell [00:29:06] How old were you when this happened?

Eli Costin [00:29:08] I think I was about 27 when this happened.

Sarah McConnell [00:29:11] Was it the first time you were actually afraid to be out in public? Was it the first time you realized it could happen to me?

Eli Costin [00:29:21] No, actually, the first time I realized it could happen to me was when I was in a shopping mall. When I was 16 years old. Somebody looked across the escalator. They were going down. I was going up and they yelled a homophobic slur at me and ran down the escalator. And I ran up and I hid. I was terrified. I didn't know what that person would do to me if they found me. And it was just my physical presence. I wasn't holding hands with anyone, wasn't kissing anyone. I just looked a particular way that this person inferred that I was gay.

Sarah McConnell [00:30:00] Do you think it changed your behavior after that?

Eli Costin [00:30:03] No, not mine. I think it changes many people's behavior, though. A lot of people go back into the closet. A lot of people decide that when they're out in public, they won't hold hands, that they won't kiss their partner. You know, they live their public lives as friends and their private lives as partners. Having to hide that is horrible. People shouldn't have to hide their relationships.

Sarah McConnell [00:30:27] It wasn't long after this murder and the string of hate crimes in New York City that you became involved with an anti-hate crime task force in New York.

Eli Costin [00:30:39] Yes. So the New York City Anti Violence Project, one of the things that we were trying to do was get curriculum instituted in the New York City public schools, anti-bullying curriculum, because most defenders of hate crimes are younger. They're thrill seeking. They happen to see somebody kissing or holding hands and tell one of their friends, oh, hey, let's go mess with those people. It's not that people are going out intending "I'm going to go commit a hate crime today," which kind of makes it even scarier.

Sarah McConnell [00:31:11] Did you all have much success trying to get this sort of curriculum, anti-bullying in the New York schools?

Eli Costin [00:31:17] We weren't actually successful while I was there, but subsequently that actually has been implemented. So I'm very happy for that. I know that I've talked to state legislators here about trying to get similar legislation passed in Virginia so that it would be a requirement in schools. That requires also teaching about LGBT people to school aged children. And there's some resistance to that, unfortunately.

Sarah McConnell [00:31:40] Still in Virginia,.

Eli Costin [00:31:41] Still in Virginia.

Sarah McConnell [00:31:43] It must have been so interesting to come from a state that had been more progressive on this issue to come to a state without.

Eli Costin [00:31:50] Yeah, it has been interesting. For example, there is not hate crimes legislation that covers sexual orientation in Virginia.

Sarah McConnell [00:31:58] And there is in New York?

Eli Costin [00:31:59] There is in New York.

Sarah McConnell [00:32:00] Does that make a difference whether a state has anti hate crime legislation?

Eli Costin [00:32:05] It doesn't actually make a difference in the rates of victimization, but it does send an important message to people that this is where our values lie, that LGBT people are worthy of dignity, that they're worthy of respect, that they're worthy of the same rights as everyone else. Types of legislation like same sex marriage passing actually decreased rates of hate crime victimization because LGBT people were seen as equals.

Sarah McConnell [00:32:31] That's interesting. So now nationally, with same sex marriage legislation across the board, are we seeing a reduction in hate crimes?

Eli Costin [00:32:39] Well, that's a complicated question, actually. There's been a slight increase in hate crimes since about 2012. And so that's disturbing. But when we look at the implementation of same sex marriage, when same sex marriage was implemented in various states at different times, it reduced the rates of anti LGBT hate crimes in those states. Again, this idea that saying LGBT people are equal, they have rights, they are valuable. It humanizes people. And it means that people are less likely to target and victimize them.

Sarah McConnell [00:33:16] What are you working on now with anti violence in this regard?

Eli Costin [00:33:20] Well, I think one of the biggest problems is actually that people aren't seeking help after they're victimized. Less than half of people go to the police after a hate crime because they're afraid of being re-victimized. They're afraid of being outed. They're afraid the police will treat them poorly. There's also a real problem with lack of follow up care. Hate crimes take a toll physically. They're often more violent than nonbiased crimes and only about 15 percent of victims seek medical care post victimization. Because, again, they're afraid of experiencing homophobia or transphobia from medical providers.

Sarah McConnell [00:34:02] Are there a lot of people who are out and out to their friends and out in their lifestyle, but not out to, let's say, talking to a police officer or talking to a medical health professional, et cetera?

Eli Costin [00:34:15] Absolutely. And there are large numbers of LGBT people who are not out to even their primary care physicians. Many people don't tell their doctors. Many doctors also aren't asking. That's also a problem because this is critical information needed to treat a person. Trans people often, if they go to the doctor for something else, will not tell the doctor that they're trans because then everything comes back to the fact that they're trans.

Sarah McConnell [00:34:44] What do you mean everything comes back, that they're trans?

Eli Costin [00:34:46] So there's this phrase called trans broken arm syndrome. And essentially, if you are trans and you go to the doctor with a broken arm, they're going to somehow relate it to the fact that you're transgender, not the fact that you had an accident and broke your arm. It comes from lack of knowledge. Quite frankly, it's the same type of, you know, stigma that overweight people face when they go to the doctor, right? Every health concern is linked back to their weight.

Sarah McConnell [00:35:14] Is there training for medical professionals that is going on in medical schools and other areas?

Eli Costin [00:35:19] There are trainings that go on in medical schools and in nursing schools. But the number of hours is relatively limited. Nationally, the average hours of cultural competency training for medical school students is eight hours. And that's covering all types of diversity. So race, gender, LGBT issues. And that's simply not enough.

Sarah McConnell [00:35:44] What about police encounters? Are police trained in this regard?

Eli Costin [00:35:49] There are often trainings for officers in LGBT competencies. For example, in Richmond, there is an LGBT police liaison. Police cadets also meet with a panel of LGBT people. But I think that's only about an hour. And so, again, how deep are you really going? How much are you really understanding?

Sarah McConnell [00:36:16] What is the danger of police not really being educated in this field?

Eli Costin [00:36:21] Well, one of the big things people face is that in New York City, for example, I often heard trans people being stopped by police and then if their I.D. wasn't updated. The police officers wouldn't use their preferred name. They would use their legal name, which can be very damaging to a person and the way that people are searched. Trans women should not be frisked in the same way by a male police officer that a man would be. Nobody calls the female officer for a trans woman to be frisked. A male officer just does it himself. These were important areas where we could be treating people with more dignity.

Sarah McConnell [00:37:03] What also about dealing with crimes against trans people and the relationship they have with police in that regard?

Eli Costin [00:37:11] Well, this is one of the reasons people primarily don't report is because especially trans people have so many negative interactions with the police already. Going to the police is probably not going to help you. Almost a quarter of reports in New York City when people said they went to try to file a police report about a hate crime. We're told we can't do anything. We can't help you. The police didn't even take the report.

Sarah McConnell [00:37:37] Why would they not?

Eli Costin [00:37:39] You know, I really can tell you, I think it's probably homophobia. I think it's probably transphobia. I think it's that there are some people that the police don't want to help.

Sarah McConnell [00:37:49] Do you think there's more homophobia and transphobia among police officers than the general public?

Eli Costin [00:37:56] I think that police officers, just like the military, like things to be nice and neat and orderly. Things should fit into neat little boxes and LGBT people don't always conform to those boxes. You see this happening in schools, too. LGBT youth are much more likely to be referred to police for bad behavior in school. Disruption, disobedience or talking back to a teacher or things that we wouldn't normally think of as crime. But youth are actually referred to the police for these things. And what we find is that LGBT youth, especially LGBT youth of color, are most often reported for these things.

Sarah McConnell [00:38:42] Thank you for sharing your insights and With Good Reason.

Eli Costin [00:38:46] Thank you.

Sarah McConnell [00:38:51] Eli Costin is a professor of gender, sexuality and women's studies at Virginia Commonwealth University. Coming up next, coming out or coming in as queer in the Middle East? Last year saw the publication of the new Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer History. The University of Virginia's Hanadi Al-Samman coordinated the Middle East entries from pinkwashing to masculinity in Iranian cinema.

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:39:27] I think it's important for us to know that the LGBT groups is not a new experience to the Middle East. They have existed from time immemorial.

Sarah McConnell [00:39:42] What is the range of experiences in the Middle East?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:39:45] So the range of experiences that we have, laws that would dictate death penalty in countries such as Saudi Arabia or Iran for LGBT members to short imprisonment or harassment in places like Egypt, Jordan. And then there are places that are accepted, kind of, such as Turkey or Lebanon.

Sarah McConnell [00:40:06] Is the gay culture relatively hidden in most Middle Eastern countries?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:40:11] Yes, they often operate under the table. They are known to a select few. Most of the times their families are aware of it. Their intimate friends are aware of it, but not necessarily they are out in the open. Nor do they want to be out in the open.

Sarah McConnell [00:40:31] Well the penalty is so huge.

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:40:34] Yes, Sarah, the penalty is huge, but not just the legal penalty. I think the cost of loss of family connection is important as something that LGBT people cherish. There is a range of experiences where you may find families that are accepting and loving, but then there are families who are totally unaccepting. And then you would see, for example, a teen maybe coming out to his mom, but not to his dad. And so in that sense, they are having a little bit of a support group by coming out to a select few in an intimate circle, but not to the whole world, because coming out to the whole world really carries a lot of risk, not just legally, but also, as I said, in the loss of the familial ties. That is so important not just to LGBT people, but to every Middle Eastern or Arab citizen.

Sarah McConnell [00:41:28] There is in the Queer Encyclopedia, an entry called Coming Out, Coming in in the Middle East. What is addressed there?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:41:37] So I'm calling it "Coming In" because this coming in basically highlights the fact that they want to be embraced by their family. They want to still reside within the context of their family. So if you think of the closet as an image, it's not an oppressive closet, as we understand it in the Western sense. Rather, it's a loving or a sanctuary closet because it still has the family members that understand you and care for you as a loving entity who can again, you can come into their embrace. And I think it's really important for us to listen to what they want to tell us. Listen to how they want to define their experience as opposed to, you know, LGBT groups and NGOs from from the West telling them what they need to do.

Sarah McConnell [00:42:30] Do LGBTQ leaders in the West and NGO's lecture Middle Eastern gay people on coming out of the closet?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:42:38] That's a great question, Sarah. I think they do, because they they have an understanding that you can only define your LGBT status in the coming out process. So often times these NGOs have the financial support to have the logistic and like the Know-How of how to gain visibility and they condition this on, "you have to follow the path of what we are telling you." Sometimes this is to the detriment and at a great risk to Middle Eastern LGBT.

Sarah McConnell [00:43:08] You could be jailed or killed.

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:43:10] You could be jailed. You could be killed, for example, in ICE during ISIS times. Some LGBT members who were outed forcefully by their family or friends were punished greatly, were killed, thrown away from rooftops. In this sense, the coming out process carries a great risk - death.

Sarah McConnell [00:43:30] You also refer to something called double refugees, that people who flee ISIS or flee repressive regimes to have more freedom in their LGBTQ lifestyle in other countries are further discriminated against in spite of what they believed would be a safe haven.

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:43:49] Yes. So the LGBT is who became refugees in Turkey. They have to to leave because they were threatened by being killed and sometimes by members of their own family, an older brother, a cousin or even a father. And in that status, they are double refugees because, A, they share the same refugee concerns and

challenges just as any other refugee. But because of their sexual orientation, they are also being doubly targeted. Turkey has more lenient laws towards LGBTs. However, some right wing groups might actually harass them or kill them. So there is an interesting documentary called Mr. Gay Syria, where one LGBT Syrian man was asked to really participate in this Mr. Gay World competition. And in the process of making the documentary, he was outed to his family. He was married. He lost his wife. He lost his child who had to go back to Syria, to a region now that's under the bombing called Idlib. There is an interesting section in the movie where he said, I only did it because I thought this would highlight my chance of being moved to Europe, me and my family. But now I'm just out and I don't have a visa. So you see the pressure sometimes that that's international LGBT groups and NGOs exercised over these people where they forced them to come out, often to their detriment. So this also happens at a much smaller level where it doesn't carry that much of a risk, you know, of killing. So there is this Lebanese LGBT woman who have come to New York. She's trying to find support from the American LGBT groups, a support group. And she's telling them, you know, I cannot come out to my family. And this American LGBT guy telling her. Well, so what? You know, the heck with your family. Who cares? It doesn't matter what they think. And she said no. But that's so important to me. I cannot really risk abandoning my family because without them, I am cut off and I'm torn and I need them in my life. So they have to maneuver and find a way, Sarah, of basically making their own life and then keeping their family at the same time. Because keeping both is such an important thing for them. And I think we need to listen to them. We need to hear their stories and listen to their experiences and what they need, rather than us telling them what they should do.

Sarah McConnell [00:46:24] When LGBTQ people do leave the Middle East and land on a Western country or in a less oppressive Middle Eastern country like Lebanon or Turkey or Israel, are they sometimes disappointed with the trade offs in their new lives?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:46:43] They are disappointed because oftentimes they are not finding out that they are being embraced fully by the counterparts, Western counterparts from the basic dating apps where the people says no Middle Easterners apply. No Arabs apply. And often times we see in countries such as Israel that they are being used also in a pinkwashing practice.

Sarah McConnell [00:47:10] What is Pinkwashing?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:47:12] So Pinkwashing is where Israel claims itself as a gay mecca of the Middle East. And by contrast, calls Palestinian or Arab attitude towards LGBT as backward in such a way that would make us forget the colonial practices towards the Palestinians by the Israeli IDF groups.

Sarah McConnell [00:47:34] What about the entry in the encyclopedia called "Maculinity in Iranian Cinema." What's that?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:47:40] That's the fascinating entry, Sarah. And it goes, you know, has the gamut range from the macho to the hyper masculine, but also some feminine examples, some cross dressing.

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:47:53] How could Iranian cinema illustrate cross-dressing in a country that has the death penalty for homosexuality?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:48:02] Well, and in most of the Middle East, especially in the earlier times, women were not allowed. So oftentimes male actors dressed as women and they performed female roles. And in this sense, they got away with it. But, you know, the interesting part is that those people, they found an avenue and an outlet for expressing those double identities that they want to live in. Right. So we have cross dressers early on in the nineteen hundred. But later on, even to this very day, we have performers, famous performers today in the Arab world, Lebanese and Egyptian and others who are actually men. And everybody knows their men, but they are very well known. Their experiences as women and women performers.

Sarah McConnell [00:48:48] And are they part of the trans community?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:48:49] They are part of the trans and they are actually making headway to the public culture as performers. One is a very well known performer. People come and they watch their shows and they listen to them

Sarah McConnell [00:49:05] And people know they're trans, and it's starting to sort of change public attitudes?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:49:12] Yes, as long it does not move away from this performative theater, then it is accepted as maybe some people may take it as a comic relief. But, you know, at the very least, I see it as a glimmer of hope, silver lining, where there is a bit of an acceptance.

Sarah McConnell [00:49:28] What about the entry called "Internet Queer Sites in the Middle East?" What will we find there?

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:49:33] So this is such a fascinating entry. You'll see a range of sites set Middle Eastern LGBTs are using to connect with each other. They connect with other queers within the Middle East, not just the outside world. The Internet is a great place for that. People hide behind again the safety of the lack of visibility and behind the Internet sites, connecting also with other causes. The more successful examples that Middle Eastern LGBT groups found is tagging their issues with other bigger issues of the national women's liberation, LGBT rights and human rights. So this group called Tellem were successful in changing Lebanese law that criminalizes homosexual activities by working with lawyers under the umbrella of human rights.

Sarah McConnell [00:50:28] Thank you so much.

Hanadi Al-Samman [00:50:30] Absolutely, Sarah. I think it's really important for us to heed Middle Eastern LGBT stories, to listen to them and to let them define their experience, not us dictating our own experience on them. They will have to find that path.

Sarah McConnell [00:50:51] Hanadi Al-Samman is a professor of Middle Eastern and South Asian languages and cultures at the University of Virginia. She coordinated the Middle East entries in the Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer History. Major support for With Good Reason is provided by the University of Virginia health system using advanced cardiac imaging to better diagnose conditions before they become serious health issues. UVAhealth.com. With Good Reason is produced in Charlottesville by Virginia Humanities, which acknowledges the Monacan nation. The original people of the land and waters of her home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Our production team as Allison Quantz, Matt Darroch, Lauren Francis and Jamal Milner.

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