

Good morning, everyone.

I'm going to get this out of the way now because it's simply unavoidable. The political landscape at this moment for trans people is bleak. Things don't seem to be getting better. And it's been this way for a while. I bet you could name at least three horrible things happening to the trans community right now.

Bathroom bills, homelessness, military ban, legal protections being taken away, healthcare issues, suicides, high unemployment. And of course, why we're here, the rampant, targeted murders of many trans people, particularly those of Black and brown trans women of color. When we're in the news, it's always about our rights being stripped away one by one by one, or for our brutal murders.

My friends ask me how I'm doing, how I'm holding up whenever one of these stories breaks into the news cycle. They're worried for me and I greatly appreciate that. Now, I'm one of the last people they need to worry about because, hey, look at me. But it sparks a conversation in which they get to learn a very hard aspect of my life that they take for granted.

I talk about trans issues a lot. I've been invited on several podcasts, a TV show, panels, et cetera, to teach Trans 101 because despite being around for hundreds of years, y'all are just now finding out about trans folks like it's 2013 and kale is suddenly more than buffet decor at Pizza Hut.

One of the hardest parts of teaching Trans 101 is deciding what narrative would be best to use in a succinct manner for cisgender folks - and that's 'cis' spelled c-i-s, meaning identifying with the gender you were assigned at birth. And you've probably already heard my story in one way or another, even if you've never met me before.

Honestly, we could probably write a generic trans narrative together. "Well, they were born a girl, but then growing up at some point they realized they weren't happy in their body. They wanted to do more boy stuff than girl stuff, etc etc etc."

Then there's when did I come out, how did my parents feel, when did I start hormones, etc etc. I get called 'brave' and I swear to God, there's a look that comes over your face - I'm not joking - when you're trying to imagine me pre-transition. It's a head-tilt combined with this slightly glassy look in your eyes as you stop listening to me. Some of you are doing it right now. So because I need you to really listen to me, I'll save you the trouble of imagining. [SLIDE] Yes, it is unfair that I'm attractive in two genders.

So for me, my name is Jack Kelly, I use the pronouns they them theirs. I identify as non-binary, and more specifically agender - meaning I have removed myself from the binary of masculine and feminine and straight-up do my own thing. I don't know when I first realized because it was a slow process over several years, from around age 17 to age 23. I came out publicly in July 2015.

My parents struggled at first with my transition, but have ultimately come around even though they still consistently use the wrong pronouns - he instead of they. It's a miracle I've gotten them this far and I'm not gonna push my luck. Medically, my transition resembles closest to that of a trans man, which I'm often misidentified as.

I started testosterone on August 20th, 2015, had top surgery on February 6th, 2017. I won't answer any questions regarding my genitals because unless you are my doctor or my partner, it's none of your business. Yes, I like being part of the trans community. No, I don't like Caitlyn Jenner but you won't catch me misgendering her. Wear what you want, do what you want. Gender is a construct.

But I gotta be honest with all of you: I'm so tired of telling that story.

It's not really my story. It's a story that's been hijacked by cisgender media outlets and boiled down to its simplest and most rudimentary concepts, using the same words and phrases that allow you to zone out because you've heard it before. Take the basic outline and just plug in my information like it's transgender madlibs.

And cis folks don't hesitate to have this conversation with me. Like, I understand that I may be the first trans person they've ever met - that they know of - but I've had it within minutes of meeting someone more times than I can count on my hands and feet. I never have a chance to be a regular person.

And I'm on the luckier side. Because of how I'm read, I can sometimes get away with never disclosing. But trans folks whose transness is louder than mine often never get to leave the sideshow. And some trans folks have to endure even more scrutiny through racism, sexism, ableism, classism, etc that is equally as impossible to ignore.

The wild thing is, I'm practically an open book about my transition once you get to know me. That's not the case with the vast majority of trans people. I'll answer all your nosy and invasive questions. But there's a couple caveats. I'll tell you what my old name was as well as the struggle of deciding to ultimately change it despite liking my perfectly unisex birth name. I'll show you pictures of me pre-transition, but talk about how I learned to dissociate myself from my body and how I still struggle with body acceptance and physical intimacy today. I'll talk about my hormones and surgery, but adding how sometimes I think I made a mistake in coming out, that I should've stayed permanently depressed and suicidal because then at least I could've avoided dehumanization and maintained some iota of dignity.

But you don't actually want to hear those stories. You like the sanitized story, stripped of its emotional complexities and challenges, removed from my humanity and individuality, so that it is easier to divorce yourself from your complicity in the problem.

Ask me about my emotional journeys. Ask me about the hard decision to come out. Ask me about the anger I have, not just over this administration and the news you saw on TV, but over the transphobic things done and said to me on a daily basis by the people I love - who are well-meaning, mind you, but have never considered what their words and actions actually say.

I assure you, you've never heard those stories before. Most people haven't. See, for many trans people, our body is the last thing we want to talk about! I've spent more time hating my body than all of Dick Wolf's shows combined. Law & Order ain't got nothin on me.

Because if I were able to tell my story, my trans identity would not be the subject. It'd be a fun, neat tidbit in the trivia section of my IMDB page, but not in the summary. In the list of identities I feel the strongest about, my transness is pretty far down. It's fallen in the charts recently and I'm really okay with it because there's so much more of me to offer.

I'm a comedian. I'm a writer. I'm passionate about television. I'm Jewish. I'm a sister. I'm a loyal friend. I'm a hopeless romantic. I'm compassionate and considerate and driven and alarmingly honest. I live by the phrase "everybody in" because I believe that everyone deserves to be included, regardless of who they are or what they look like. There is so much love packed inside this 5 foot 2, eyes of blue shell that I'm bursting at the seams.

Yet cis people only see me for my body.

We all know that when you boil someone down to just their identity - whether that be trans, gay, Black, brown, disabled, immigrant - you strip them of their humanity. And when you only look at us for our transness - even just out of curiosity - you can start to understand how easy it is for hateful people to dehumanize us.

By identifying someone as just 'a transgender', something that is disgusting and grotesque and ultimately not human, they're able to ignore and extinguish the whole person, someone who had a life and people who loved them for exactly who they were.

That's what happened to the people we're remembering today. They were only looked at for their body and how that body mystified and offended and angered those around them. Angered them so much that they were brutally murdered and became another statistic.

I am more than my transness. All of these beautiful people were more than just their transness. It's why we do the Trans Day of Remembrance, so we can honor who they were. We know that we can tell their story the best because we see each other as fellow humans who are seeking the same things in life: love, acceptance, joy.

The trans community is very small and insular, and we joke that Trans Pride is really a family reunion. And for some, we are their only family. We support each other in ways you wouldn't think of. We're tasked with taking care of each other because if we don't, who will?

So this year for Transgender Day of Remembrance, I invite you to see trans folks for our complete and total selves, all of the pain, all of the joy, the full unabridged version, and honor those we've lost with the utmost dignity they deserve.