

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Alicia Roth Weigel

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious, I'm Jonathan Van Ness, and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Alicia Weigel, where I ask her: how can we put the "I" in LGBTQIA? Welcome to Getting Curious. This is Jonathan Van Ness. I'm so excited to welcome our guests this week. Her name is Alicia Weigel. She is a Texas-based policy strategist and advocate for the rights of children born with intersex traits and is also the human rights commissioner for the City of Austin. I'm obsessed with that title. I'm obsessed with you, Alicia.

I have to give our listeners a little bit of a background. So I was lucky enough to meet Alicia at the launch of JVN Hair in Austin. We were talking. Alicia came up and introduced herself and we had an amazing time connecting and getting to know each other. And in that time, you shared with me that you are an intersex advocate, and that you are someone who is intersex. And you also use "she / they" pronouns, which we are actually just talking about right before we started this. But I, I'm just, was and am so blown away by you. I loved your transparency, your openness, your heart, your energy was so clearly just brilliant and beautiful. And I mean, just meeting you in two seconds, I was just like, "Wow, this person is incredible." And so I'm just so honored that you took your time to come on here and to talk to us and to share your story. And so welcome. How are you?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:01:39] Thank you, I'm great, I'm so excited to be here and guess who washed her hair with JVN today.

JVN [00:01:45] Your, I was going to say, but I try to, like, focus on policy first and has a sense you brought it up. Your hair looks amazing. Which one did you use? I'm sorry.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:01:55] I'm smelling that squalene. Squalane? Squalene?

JVN [00:01:58] That hemisqualane, honey, it's gorgeous, smells so good. Which one did you use?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:02:05] The deep conditioning mask?

JVN [00:02:07] Yes, you better give me the Nurture mask. OK, Alicia, we are pivoting from hair care. Our overall question for today is how can we put the I and LGBTQIA, honey? We're gonna put the "I" in it.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:02:21] I love it, exactly, because as of now, the I kind of stands for invisible, right? Because people don't really know anything about us. And I think updating the acronym was the first step, and it's amazing. But I think if you ask, even, like, ninety something percent of the queer community what that eye stands for, I think most people probably won't be able to tell you. So I want to, like, start off today with kind of level setting, which is, I think it's OK for everyone listening to, like, not know and be open to learning. And your whole podcast is about Getting Curious. So I think it's a great day to talk about what that "I" means, which is intersex.

JVN [00:03:01] So, yes, intersex and not invisible. I think one thing that blew me away is, and correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't, like, two percent of our, of the world intersex?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:03:13] That's correct. Yeah, about two percent. But the thing is, that's also severely undercounted because if you think about it, they don't give an intersex option on most birth certificates in most countries. And so they just give male and female. So I am intersex, but it says female on my birth certificate. So it all depends on, like, how they're counting the data and who even knows if I'm included in that two percent number? And so until we really, like, update so many systems like the census and political representation and everything, it's, like, that's an undercount. But even if it is just two percent, I think it's way more than that. But even if it is just two percent, that's the same percentage of the world that has red hair, or that's the same percentage of the world that has green eyes. So when people are like, "Oh, I've never met an intersex person," I'm like, "Have you met a redhead?" And they're like, "Yeah," and I'm like, "You definitely met an intersex person, then, you just probably didn't know it."

JVN [00:04:10] That's, and also just like, that's, like, so many families, so many friends, so many people, just like because even if in two percent, I'm sure it is, like, woefully undercounting. Those are such good points that you raise. But that's still just like so many friends and family and folks that are, like, affected that this, like, binary has, like, literally bullied and shamed into silence. And so, what does it mean for someone to be born with intersex traits?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:04:42] Yeah, let's start at the beginning. Basically, intersex is an umbrella term, so it encompasses a lot of different types of people. We all look very different. We all have a variety of lived experiences. But what unites us is that our bodies were born literally inter sex, between the sexes. So we have physical traits, whether it be our external genitalia or internal reproductive anatomy or hormones or chromosomes. So any sort of sex characteristics that fall between the binary of what a birth certificate or most of society would want you to think is just male and female. The thing is, it's not that simple. Just like some people with breasts have, like, really big boobs or just like some, you

know, cis men don't really grow facial hair, like, there is a binary, there's a false binary of sex characteristics even beyond intersex, right, like, any biological trait that exists, exists on a spectrum. And with intersex traits, it just means that our sexual and reproductive anatomy falls somewhere between the binary on that spectrum.

So for me, you're looking at me, and I think you would probably say I look pretty femme. My, I present pretty femme. Most people who, you know, exist in society would look at me and just see kind of your average cis woman. But actually, I'm not cis in that I have XY chromosomes, which most people usually equate to quote unquote "being a man." We'll get into trans and non-binary identities later, but I have XY chromosomes, and I also was born, instead of being born with a uterus and ovaries, I was born with internal testes. However, I was sterilized as an infant. They took my testes, which basically then put me into hormone withdrawal as a kid. The closest equivalent of what I can describe it to people is basically being in menopause. When, when your body stops producing certain levels of hormones, there's a lot of different symptoms, right? Mental fog or hot flashes or, you know, all these different things.

And because my natural, hormone-producing organs that I was born with were my testes, when they took them from me when I was only a few months old, that basically meant that I grew up my whole childhood in withdrawal from certain hormones that, like, my body naturally would have been producing. And then it was only in my early teens that I then went on hormone replacement therapy, which a lot of trans folks and non-binary folks can probably identify with. But for me, I didn't go on HRT just to kind of, like, realize a certain aesthetic or change my appearance. I did it because they had taken my only hormone producing organs and your body needs hormones for, like, so many reasons, like supporting your bone growth, supporting your organs, functioning properly, right?

So, and for me, my hormone replacement therapy is just estrogen, because one of the cool things about my intersex superpowers is that as someone born with what they call "complete androgen insensitivity," and I'm putting that in air quotes, that means that my body doesn't respond to androgens, which a lot of people would say are, quote unquote "male hormones." And so my testes that I was born with, the testosterone that they produced, my body would have peed some of it out. But then it would have converted a lot of it automatically to estrogen, so I would have just developed naturally on my own. So if you gave me, like, a shot of T right now, testosterone, my body would convert that to estrogen. Which so many people are like, scared of what they don't know or understand, but I'm like, that's like my superpower, like, someone give me a cape.

JVN [00:08:42] I love, wait, that's amazing. So, because anyway, I'm OK. Yes. Yes, yes. Yes. Yes. So because your internal, like, sexual organs were testes, and then they took them out and there wasn't ovaries. And then you just, it was like, no hormones were home.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:09:02] No hormones are home. And so once I hit, maybe I was, like, 11 or 12. Then I started seeing a doctor, an endocrinologist to help start balancing out my hormones and figuring out what was going to work. The problem is a lot of times with intersex kids, when we see those doctors, they are advising our parents to try to normalize us into one of two categories, right, the male or the female side of things. And that, as it turns out, was actually the whole reason that I was sterilized in the first place, because backing back up to when I was, you know, an infant. Someone like me with the intersex traits, complete androgen insensitivity. Current studies show that there's somewhere between only a one and a five percent chance that my testes could have become cancerous. But the whole reason they removed them in the first place is because they told my parents, like, "Hey, your daughter is born with this sort of body, and she could get testicular cancer one day. And so we strongly urge you to let us do what they call a gonadectomy." I'm, like, "Let's call a spade a spade." They castrated me, right?

So they urged my parents to do a quote unquote "gonadectomy" to remove my testes because I could theoretically get cancer one day. I don't want to make assumptions about your body, Jonathan, or anyone who's listening to this, but anyone who has testes here. I hate to tell you, you could also get cancer one day, but because you have some theoretical risk of cancer one day, which for me was only between one and five percent, they took away my reproductive organs without asking me. And not only did that require me to be on hormone replacement therapy, but that also means that they took away my decision of when and whether to have children when I was literally an infant.

JVN [00:10:56]] I wrote down sterilization. And, I think that's, you know, obviously when we met each other, the person that wasn't something that we talked about in, like, those, you know, four minutes. When you said it, the first time it was such a, it's such a big word that it almost, like, went over my head the first time. And as we talk about it again, it's, like, whoa. Like, that is what happened, you were a baby, like, these are... And obviously, you know, our parents love us and they're, like, trying and they're told by these like. But this is, like, I mean, I'm covered in chills. It's, like, there's so many decisions were forced, like, foisted upon you. Yes, because there was no space. Or acknowledgment or humanity given for people that are born intersex.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:11:49] Exactly, exactly. And I think when you hear the word sterilization, people who know their history know that there were a lot of, for example, Black folks that were forced sterilized when they used to do experiments on slaves. And

like, that's a horrific aspect of our U.S. history we don't talk enough about. Some people might have heard that there were forced sterilizations in ICE camps at the border within the past couple of years, which is also inhumane and not OK and against international law, by the way, to force sterilize any human being. And yet, no one is talking about how forced sterilizations are happening on intersex kids in, like, accredited hospitals by, like, trusted doctors across the United States each and every day. And again, the reason they gave my parents is that I could have cancer one day, but I'll give kind of an analogous example. Have you ever heard of the BRCA gene BRCA?

JVN [00:12:49] Yeah, yeah, breast cancer and ovarian.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:12:50] So, it's breast cancer and ovarian cancer, right. So there's this gene that certain people have, where if they have the gene, they are more likely to get breast or ovarian cancer one day. In this age of, like, 23andMe, a lot of people do genetic testing for their kids, and they have a lot of information. If someone finds that a young kid has the BRCA gene, they don't come in, force a mastectomy, force a hysterectomy on that kid when that kid is too young to consent, because there's a theoretical risk of cancer one day. And that risk of cancer is way higher, by the way, the BRCA gene, you have a pretty high risk of getting cancer. But for me, I had somewhere between a one and a five percent risk of getting cancer one day, and they still just came in and took organs without asking me, took my organs from my body without asking me because intersex bodies are not viewed as normal, and our rights are not equal to everybody else's.

And so we don't have body autonomy. We don't have any say over these basic decisions that are happening to our bodies because it's, like, "Oh, that's not normal." So of course, we would want to quote unquote "fix them," is how a lot of people still view it. And for queer listeners who are familiar with, like, conversion therapy, right for, for gay people where they tried to, like, shock the gay out of you, right? And they still do in some states, and there's so much work being done to ban conversion therapy. Intersex kids also undergo conversion therapy, but using surgeons instead of psychologists and using scalpels instead of electric shocks. Because what they're doing is, we're born in a way that a lot of people think is "abnormal." And so they want to just convert you to what they think is normal. But just like we know you can't shock the gay out of someone, like, that is a fundamental part of who they are, it's the same thing with intersex

And, like, with me, removing my testes to try to push me into the normal female box that most people are comfortable with, that doesn't erase that aspect of my humanity and who I am. And there's so much that has accompanied my identity as being an intersex person from, you know, stigma and shame and growing up feeling completely alone, to having to, like, lie to my partners and undergoing medical abuse. And there's so much stuff so, like, I

think I'm living proof that just because they took my testes to try to make me normal or like, save me and their mind from being a freak, like it didn't work, I'm here to tell you, like it didn't work, and I really wish that I could have been at the table when these decisions were being made about my own body.

JVN [00:15:42] It's the baby part, because when you're a baby, and I think that really also leads to the underreported nature of people who are born intersex. So when a lot of these issues are happening within families that are made behind closed doors, there would be no way to advocate, to make record of, to make note of. So how would, how would an adult explain, like, puberty to an intersex child? How is that? I mean, everyone's going to have a different experience. With any one experience, everyone's going to have a unique one. So I'm sure, I know, two intersex people just, like, to, like, no two people have the exact same thing. But how does that happen? I mean, I'm sure there's a lot of, like, anger or is there, like, fear or shame all of it?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:16:28] Totally. And backing up to something you said which is, like, part of the reason there is such underreporting of intersex people is a lot of us, a lot of these abuses of our human rights that happen happened when we're too young to even speak, right, let alone advocate for ourselves. And a lot of people don't even find out they're intersex until they're much older because maybe their parents made this decision and never told them about it. And so sometimes someone will be in their 40s, I saw one story that someone went into a hospital for a completely unrelated medical issue, and their doctors were reviewing their records and were like, "Hey, what was this surgery in your childhood, you know, like, on your genitals?" Or maybe it was a sterilization, I can't remember. And the person was like, "What surgery?" Like, a lot of intersex people don't find out until they're older and someone catches something in their medical records. And maybe it was their parents that lied for them. Or sometimes it's, like, the doctors make these decisions and kind of, like, dupe the parents, or the parents don't even feel fully informed about what's happening to their child.

The only reason my parents knew I was intersex when I was born is because my parents got in a car crash when my mom was pregnant with me. And if that hadn't happened, they just would not have known that I was intersex until I just never got a period of one when it was around the time of puberty. And the whole reason they found out is because my mom was pregnant. My parents got in a car crash. They did what's called an amniocentesis test on my mom. It's a test that uses a needle to check on certain characteristics about the baby. And they used this to check on my mom's pregnancy to make sure that the car crash had not terminated the pregnancy. That test told my parents that I had XY chromosomes. So they were expecting a little boy. And so they painted the nursery blue, and they were going to name me Charles, after my father and both my grandfathers. And then, lo and

behold, in the delivery room, I'm born with a vagina, and everyone's, like, a little bit confused, right?

If my mom had not gotten in that car crash, I would have just grown up with my testes intact. I would have been, like, developing naturally, whatever, and they wouldn't have known something was up until I didn't get a period in my teen years or at whatever point they started to realize that, that something was different. Because they knew with me from when I was born and these interventions on my body started happening so much earlier, I had a childhood where I knew from when I was really young, my parents told me that I was infertile, that I was not going to be able to bear children. They told me that I was different. I had to see these special doctors. There were times, there was one time I remember specifically where, like, I went under anesthesia, and it was so that they could, like, observe me and, like, you learn that a lot of intersex kids are kind of like guinea pigs for, like, research, doctors and stuff.

And if anyone has seen, like, *Stranger Things*, you know, 11, like, I felt like that a lot. Like, I felt like I would be going into hospitals and doctor's offices and, like, not fully understanding why I was there or not wanting to understand why I was there. Because the whole message I was getting from these doctors is, "You have a problem. If you tell people you'll be made fun of, and you'll never find a good husband one day because you want to lie and you want to tell them that you're just a regular girl so that you can get a good husband one day." And so when you're hearing that message your whole childhood from when you're very young, then you grow up feeling like, "Wow, I'm inherently unlovable for who I am," like, "Just for existing. I don't deserve love."

And I think a lot of the queer community can relate to: if you grow up feeling like your inherent existence is a problem, then oftentimes you kind of hyper-correct. And so I went into trying to be like, perfect because I was, like, "I have this big old blemish that I'm intersex and I can't help it, but I'm going to do everything I can do in my power to just be OK and, like, make my parents happy and make the world accept me and love me," you know? So I was, like, the captain of all the sports teams and got perfect grades and did all this and did all that like to try to accommodate for this thing that wasn't even a problem in the first place. Like, I was just born different.

JVN [00:20:55] So some of what I hear, it's, like, these are a lot of, like, misguided rationales why doctors and families will make these decisions. And ultimately what it comes down to, at least the way I see it is, is this, like, false narrative of the gender binary that we are, like, living with, living under. And, you know, obviously non-binary and trans isn't the same thing as intersex, but I think the thing that non-binary, trans, and intersex people have in common is that they all live somewhere outside of what, like, has been taught as,

like, the gender binary. But they all have different, you know, amounts of, like, shame and public perception and, like, all have different experiences. And even within those communities, there's, like, all sorts of different experiences. But when it comes to intersex people, and because there is so many different variations, like, medical variations of being intersex, I'm sure, like, you had those, like, really big words about, like, androgen something...

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:21:55] Insensitivity.

JVN [00:21:56] Yeah, there's probably, like, oh yeah, that's not that big of a word, androgen insensitivity. I can do it. I got it. I've heard before this idea that, like, you can put 10 people through the same traumatizing experience and they're all going to have, like, different reactions, like, different experiences within that. Like, so in some people who have survived sexual abuse, 10 people who have been through Iraq, I mean. And I think that literally being born intersex in this world as we live is trauma.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:22:21] A hundred percent. From the minute you leave the womb, the first decision made in a hospital is, "Which do we put on the birth certificate?" So from the very first second, we leave the birth canal, our existence is erased.

JVN [00:22:37] Mmm. Is there anywhere in the world who does intersex?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:22:39] Yes! Germany.

JVN [00:22:40] OK. What's that deal? Do they do? What's their deal? And-

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:22:44] And Colorado now offers a third option on birth certificates. So there are some places. but what, going back to your question about? Kind of, like, what is the lived experience like as an adult going through these things and how there's so many different experiences, I'm going to drop a pin on this and say for a second that the whole reason we use the term intersex rather than hermaphrodite. Besides the fact that hermaphrodite is such a loaded word and has been used derogatorily throughout times and, like, is now pretty much like a slur, it also just gives a false depiction about intersex bodies because it gives it, I think, at least the impression I get when I hear that word is that someone's walking around with like two fully loaded sets of genitalia, like, of both genders. That doesn't actually exist.

JVN [00:23:33] You explain to me what it was like sex when I was, like, little.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:23:35] Yeah, it doesn't. It actually doesn't exist. It does not exist in humanity. It's basically like you either have, like, one set, another set, or something somewhere in between, right? But what the doctors do. And I, I kid you not, what the doctors say is they say, they say, "It's easier to dig a hole than it is to build a pole." And what they mean by that is it's easier to create a vagina than it is to create a penis. So they default to making little intersex kids "girls," quote unquote. And so they, they, without asking these little kids, they operate on their genitalia to force it to fit better into one category. And their rationale is they say, "We want to avoid this kid having trauma of being made fun of or being persecuted." That being said, like, undergoing these surgeries when you don't really know what's going on and oftentimes they're botched and they affect your sexual sensation for the rest of your life and all this stuff, like, that's a lot of trauma in and of itself. There's no real health or happiness justification for doing what these doctors are doing. It's all to try to normalize people into categories that white, western, patriarchal, cis heteronormative society is familiar and comfortable with.

JVN [00:24:56] We know what your connection to this topic is, which is beautiful. So what inspired you to tell your story in the first place?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:25:04] Yeah, yeah. It's kind of a funny story. So you know, my old boss, Wendy Davis.

JVN [00:25:10] Yes, who were obsessed with, who I actually talked to on the phone would today, literally, again, for a completely unrelated issue because trying to put out this one fire because, like, my friend, needs some support for this one thing because hello, Texas, fucking the place for yeah, you know, every marginalized person. So anyway. Yeah, yeah. But we love Wendy Davis.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:25:30] We love Wendy Davis. She, for people who aren't aware, she used to be a Texas state senator. She has run for governor. She has run for U.S. Congress. That is when Jonathan supported her campaign, which was awesome. Yeah, hopefully she'll win next time. But Wendy had, at the time, just lost her governor's race in Texas. She wanted to take some time out of public office to found an organization that could train the next generation of young women in Texas to be able to better advocate for gender equity and, and their needs. And she moved me to Texas to help her launch that organization, which is called Deeds Not Words. It's still super active. If people want to check them out, they train high school and college-age activists how to better advocate for, for gender equity. And so that's how I ended up in Texas. And it's ironic because I told you the story before where my parents thought I was going to be a boy because of my XY chromosomes, right? They were going to name me Charles. So when I was born, they didn't have any quote unquote "girl" names picked out. And so as the story goes,

apparently my dad, like, in the corner of the room was, like, "Oh, we could name her Alicia after that hurricane that hit Houston when we were living there in the early 80s." So I'm literally named after a hurricane.

JVN [00:26:50] That's so cute.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:26:53] Yeah. And, like, Wendy, sometimes, like, "Yeah, Hurricane Alicia came back to Texas to, like, fuck shit up again."

JVN [00:26:58] But fuck it up in good way.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:27:00] Yeah, right? Being, being born, I already shattered everyone's existence by breaking that gender binary. But anyway, I'll do it again and again every day I'm here, I'm here blowing shit up. But anyway, so I moved here to Texas in 2016 to help Wendy launch this organization. For the organization, we were training a lot of young people how to advocate at the Capitol, how to raise their voice effectively to make changes to our laws in this country. And at the time, we were focused a lot on sexual assault and human trafficking because it was right in the height of, like, the #MeToo movement. It was something that, unfortunately, is far too relevant for all these young people. If they have not been sexually assaulted, they know someone who has.

So we started out on that issue as our anchor issue. And I was giving these trainings all the time to these young people and urging them to be vulnerable and share their story, to heal themselves, and to help others. And although I was a sexual assault survivor, I've also shared my story on that front. There was this big piece of me that still felt like a hypocrite because I was asking these people to be vulnerable and share who they are, even when it's not always easy, because the truth will set you free. And there was this huge piece myself that I had never shared with the world, which is that I was born intersex, and that I had gone through all, all this stuff as a kid and that I still continued it, it continues to affect my life each and every day.

And so basically. Fast forward a little bit. I'm in Wendy's office and I'm reading a copy of *Vogue* magazine; Wendy's very fashionable, as you know. And there is an article in *Vogue* magazine about this intersex supermodel named Hanne Gaby Odell. Hanne is from Belgium, and it was about Hanne came out as being intersex in the fashion world, and I had never heard the word intersex, keep in mind. Because I was always told that I have complete androgen insensitivity. I had a problem, and I was being fixed. I was never told like, "Hey, you're born as part of this great big community of people like you, you're not alone. You have people you can connect with," like, whatever. This is another reason why

intersex people don't come out because I am intersex, and I hadn't even heard that word till I was twenty seven years old.

Back to the story. I'm reading this copy of *Vogue* magazine. I'm reading Hanne's story. I've never heard the word intersex, but I'm like, "All of this story sounds exactly like mine, like these surgeries and these hormones and these whatever." So that night, I went home ,and I get on Google, and I start Googling intersex and I go down a rabbit hole for, like, five hours and I'm like, "Holy shit, I'm intersex. Like, there's people like me out there, like, I'm not alone. I'm not a freak. Like, it's OK to be intersex, like, mind blown." And so at that point, I then ended up coming out to Wendy first. She's the first person I ever came out to. And I'll tell you first before I get into how I came out publicly, how I came out to her because I think it's, like, illustrative of the shame and the stigma that we feel. I came out to Wendy after a few glasses of wine, and I immediately it was, like, "So I understand if you need to fire me, because we do a lot of abortion advocacy, and I could never get pregnant, because I don't have a uterus. And so I understand if you want to fire me and, like, hire someone that you know, can better speak to those issues."

And she's, like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Alicia, please, come on. First off, I'm not going to fire you for being intersex. Like what?" And then second off, she's, like, "Thank you for honoring me with sharing your story. Like, I am very honored, and I love you and I support you." But what that shows is, like, we experience as intersex people, our whole lives. We are taught that we are inherently a problem for who we are. And so we start to, like, sabotage ourselves sometimes. And, like, I do that in the dating world too, because it's like, I still have this, these feelings that I'm unlearning, which is that I am a problem and I'm unlovable as who I am, and that no one is going to be able to handle who I am, which is why so many intersex people don't come out in the first place. Anyway, I told Wendy, I was like, "Based on this organization we work for and the mission of our organization of sharing stories to help others and to help heal yourself. I do want to come out at some point, but I want to do it in a way that makes sense, and that's going to help other intersex people like me." Literally, like, a week later, they launched this piece of legislation in Texas called the Bathroom Bill, which I assume you've heard of.

JVN [00:31:13] Yes, yes, yes, yes.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:31:16] In case our listeners are not familiar, bathroom bills, they happen all across the country. But they're basically these these pieces of legislation where they tried to legislate and say that people need to use the bathroom that aligns with the sex on their birth certificate, which, by the way, side note it says female on my birth certificate, and I was still born with balls. So there are still people born with balls using the restroom, even non-trans people. There's there's so many reasons why this legislation

doesn't make sense in the first place. Plus, who carries around a birth certificate with them? How are they going to enforce this? Like, whip about your birth certificate in the bathroom? Like, I don't carry my birth certificate in my back pocket.

But anyway, so this bathroom bill comes to Texas says they had already tried to pass it earlier that year. It had failed, but there were these certain legislators that were super butthurt and they were, like, "We want to try again because we really, really hate trans people." And so they're trying to pass this bathroom bill again. And I'm at the Capitol with Wendy, giving a training to all these advocates about how to use your voice to kill this legislation. And so I get home and, like, I don't know what it was like, but something just clicked on my mind where I was, like, "Wait, I keep hearing these legislators talking about how biological sex is cut and dry, and that's why we need this bill, because then these trans perverts will go back to where they came from, or whatever." And I was, like, and I was, like, "Biological sex is not cut and dry, like my existence is proof of that." And so I was like, "If they want to pass discriminatory legislation, they should at least open a biology textbook first." Was my thought.

And then you learn later that they don't care about science or biology or any of that. Otherwise, none of these bills would exist in the first place. But so at that point, I went to the Capitol the next morning. Wendy gave me the idea, actually, of trying to look as femme as possible when I went to the Capitol, so I, like, blew my hair out, I had lipstick on, I was wearing a cute little dress and I walked into the Texas Senate chamber, and I told them that I was born with balls. And so I bet I killed all their little boners because they're real confused about what that means, or what those feelings that they're feeling are. And it's so funny, too, because online, when you see, like, I get in conversations with these conservative pundits sometimes and you'll see these comments on YouTube and people are like, "I think Alicia's hot, does that make me gay?" And I'm, like, "Oh, this is starting. They're starting to question their thoughts and their beliefs about what gender means and what sexuality means." It's like. So if I can be the starting place for people, then, then that's that. But on that day, it was trying to be the ending point for this bill, which ended up failing again. Thank God. But yeah, so I basically came out in front of the Texas Senate before I even told my own brother or, like, any of my friends or anyone else.

JVN [00:34:10] And what was the response like? Were you? What did you feel liberated? Were you, like, did you have a vulnerability hangover? Was it both?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:34:18] Yeah, I think it's funny because at first, I, like, came out of the world because the Texas Senate is televised, and people were watching it on their TVs and there was news coverage and people were texting me or whatever. But I say that I came out to the world before I actually came out to myself, before I actually, fully

internalized what it would mean to be out in society, specifically in a state like Texas where that is so hostile to trans and intersex rights. But even what it just meant for me, like, how do I feel about my identity? How do I feel about dating? How do I feel like? Am I able to love myself? You know? And so it's weird, I almost like to say that I came out in reverse, because I came out, like, so publicly without even necessarily thinking through the implications of, like, how that would affect my life. And then ever since then, which is in 2017, so for the past, like, four years, I've been doing the work of actually, like, unpacking what this identity means to me, and how I feel about myself and my own journey of self-love and self-compassion.

JVN [00:35:28] Can you help us do, like, a breakdown of why these trans discriminatory bills are also really fucked up against, like, sports on an intersex basis because biological sex isn't cut and dry? And wouldn't that, they're not?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:35:44] The bill that is happening in Texas right now is House Bill 25. House Bill 25 is trying to say that for a kid to play sports in the state of Texas, they need a statement of a student's biological sex on the student's birth certificate for them to be able to enter a sports team in Texas. So first off, the whole thing is, like, where do I play? Where do intersex kids play like? And just like one it was, the bathroom bill was like, Where do I pee? I would ask that I would literally ask them this in the Capitol, I was like, "Where am I supposed to be? Do you want me to pee outside? Because then you will arrest me for public urination? And that sounds messy and unsanitary."

They don't have answers to any of these questions, but this one, this time, it's about for a kid to play on a sports team, they need proof from their birth certificate what their biological sex is to play on a sports team. But again, what I like to remind people is, it says female on my birth certificate, I played on girls sports teams my whole life, and yet I was born with balls. It's not that simple, like, the world doesn't exist in these neat little boxes that people like to talk about. It's just like a lot of people don't know. Intersex people are not allowed to serve in the military because our bodies are considered "so scary" or so, they disrupt people's nice little notion of boxes just shove human beings into. And that's one of the, one of the laws that I'm, like, maybe I don't hate that one because then I can't get drafted. And you know, we. But, like, it's still.

JVN [00:37:11] So how does that feel for you? Like, for intersex people, it's like when people say, like, you know, trans women are women are women, you know, or trans men are men, it's like, what does it feel like to be an intersex person is just like, "Why, like, can we have like, is there? Is there a feeling within the intersex community? Like, can we have our own thing or like, do we have to be one," or like, is I totally off base there? I just was like, thinking, like?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:37:38] I think that, like, intersex people can have any rights, they can have any gender identity, they can have any whatever. We all have kind of different thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Just because of the anatomy I'm born with doesn't affect, like, you know, it shouldn't affect the rest of my life, the trajectory of my life and who I'm, like, forced to be. These bills, it's not just the sports bills. When you look at these, there are bills across the U.S. that try to block trans-affirming health care for kids, right? And those bills, they try to block surgeries, which, by the way, don't even happen on trans kids. They don't do those surgeries till later in life. They try to block hormones. They try to block, like, puberty blockers.

But what most people don't know about, and aren't talking about, these same bills that are blocking life-saving health care for trans kids include loopholes written into the bill that say, "Don't allow these procedures for trans kids, but make sure you can still force them on intersex kids." It's literally written into the bills, and so it's just, like, proof that they know, the people writing and filing these bills, they know that it's not based on science, is not based in biology, it's not based in fact. It's based on them trying to assert what they view as normal. They don't think little intersex kids are normal, so they say, "Force surgeries, force hormones on them." But if a trans kid's asking for those same surgeries, those same hormones, "Don't give it to them, because trans is unnatural, trans isn't normal." It makes no logical sense. There's no rhyme or reason to it.

JVN [00:39:19] Which is also so smart because it's, like, ultimately, I think that that was some of the stuff that I'm unlearning, when I was, like, well, "What is, like, the intersex community think about..." It's, like, "Jonathan, there's sexual orientation, and there's gender identity, and neither of those have to deal with..." [CROSSTALK] But then, and neither of those have to do with sex. Like, your sex can be any old thing, and you can have any old gender identity, and you can have any other sexual orientation, because that's yeah. Hello! Major! We're obsessed! [CROSSTALK]

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:39:47] And these are the conversations that we need to be happening within the queer community, right? Because, like, even within the queer community, intersex people are ignored at best. But oftentimes, like, we hear these weird claims that, like, queer folks are, like, "We heard intersex people, like, didn't want to be included," or, like, what? I don't know where those claims come from. We're fighting so hard just to be included. But let's set society at large aside. We're trying to just be included within the queer community. And, like, when the Pride flag was updated this year to include the intersex flag, there was so much hatred that intersex people were getting, like, from gay men from, like, cis gay men or from whatever. And people forget that, like, the trans community experienced so much of that, too. Like trans people had to throw bricks

to be here. I'm like, "If I haven't thrown a brick at you yet, then we're doing OK." You know, like, we need the queer community to hop on board and support us.

Because not only is it that we often face exclusion from the queer community, but we also need the queer community to take our rights into what, you know, your collective mantle of what you're advocating for, just like the trans community did. Because I'm one of three out intersex activists that I know of in the state of Texas, and Texas is huge. It's larger than most countries. There's only three of us out in the state. And so when all of these bills are happening, when all these things are happening, like, I, as an intersex person, I'm expected to be everywhere, because I need to kill that bill. I need to show up at this hearing. I need to do that. And it's like, I also need to have, like, a job and just pay my bills. And like, I should be able to like, go get some ice cream if I want or, like, what other things people do in their free time. And it's, like, if we could get the queer community, like, non-binary folks like yourself, queer folks, everyone, to start showing up for our rights and speaking on our behalf, just like y'all do for any other letter of the LGBTQIA+ acronym, that would just be like so magical and gorgeous, in your words.

JVN [00:41:47] Got it. Got our marching orders. So when you were saying earlier that, like, Germany and Colorado, so they're fierce. What's Germany doing with intersex rights?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:41:59] Yeah. So a lot of entire countries have banned these non-consensual surgeries on intersex kids like Germany, Malta, which is a country. Portugal tried. It got passed out of their parliament, but they got vetoed by the president. But it made it really far. And here in the U.S., we don't have anywhere that has banned surgeries, but we did have some major strides this past year. New York state passed a law that officially condemns these surgeries. California has officially condemned these surgeries as a state, and then certain cities have gone even farther than that. So after New York state condemned these surgeries, then New York City, their public health and hospital system made a blanket decision to no longer perform these surgeries in any public, public hospitals in New York City. Here in Austin, we do not have publicly funded hospitals, so unfortunately, I can't just, like, talk to one, like, hospital god, hospital czar, and be, like, "Stop doing these surgeries." It's, like, really decentralized here. So it's a, it's a different scenario.

But we do have a an ordinance that is coming to our city council on October 21st that basically is condemning these surgeries, just like what California and New York did, and trying to fund a public information campaign for doctors and parents of intersex kids, so that they have more information at their disposal, so that doctors get the most recent research and they get all the marching orders from the U.N. and the World Health Organization that all literally define these forced surgeries as torture. They're going to get

all that information so that they can make better decisions, and parents are going to get that information so that even if they have a doctor that comes with implicit biases or with their own religious-informed opinions or whatever, at least the parent, then, will have more knowledge at their disposal so they're not duped like my parents were into making decisions that might ultimately harm their child. So I'm really hoping that that passes, if it does, would be the first city in the south to do, pass any legislation for protection of intersex kids.

JVN [00:44:14] OK, I love that, so who? I mean, it might be obvious, but, like, who's really fallen short? Who's fucking up? Who do we? Who do we need to like, really pay attention to? You know, I would imagine there's lots of people.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:44:29] Totally. Well, I would say just the U.S. in general, like, Europe, is so much farther ahead than we are on these issues. So in Europe, the acronym that people use, everyone uses the acronym LGBTI. Everyone. Like, they don't use LGBTQ, they use LGBTI. The intersex community, just, everyone there, like, knows about intersex folks. They're advocating for intersex folks. They have countries shutting down these surgeries. And then here in the states, it's like we're still very much. You know, underrepresented and frankly invisible in a lot of a lot of cases. Within the U.S., who's messing up? Texas is messing up real bad. Texas, whether it be trans kids, intersex kids, non-binary kids, like, we have the most assaults on our rights and freedoms here in Texas. It's kind of ground zero, and what happens here gets replicated elsewhere throughout the rest of the country, just like what we're seeing with anti-abortion legislation. So yeah, if we, if we can as a city of Austin, do a little bit better and, like, show an example to the rest of the south of how things could be, then that would be really big.

JVN [00:45:36] So what do you think the future looks like for intersex visibility and rights?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:45:43] I think, honestly, we've made huge strides this past year alone. For years, it's felt like we're just screaming into a void, and it gets really frustrating and sad sometimes. And being intersex can be really lonely. So I do want to take a second to, like, shout out if there's anyone listening to this podcast, we'll make sure that, like, you know how you can connect with other people that share lived experience with you. But this past year alone, we've seen these huge strides. Samantha Bee had an episode about intersex people. We updated the Pride flag to include intersex, the intersex flag, the, we've been talking with the White House. They're going to do something for Intersex Awareness Day, like, we're making these huge strides. And so I'm feeling very heartened, and I just hope that we can keep that momentum rolling and moving forward and that people start hopping on the train. And I hope everyone listening to this podcast that this isn't your only time that you're looking into these issues, that this isn't your only story that you're hearing,

there are so many intersex stories that need to be heard. So I just hope that, you know, more people will start giving us platforms, and that it just becomes, like, a household issue, like, where people know we need to fight for trans rights. They know we need to fight for non-binary rights, and now they know that we need to fight for intersex rights, too.

JVN [00:47:07] Yeah, and I mean, intersex is, it's really interesting because intersectional, is coming up for me. I mean these because people who are intersex are also Black, brown, Hispanic, Asian, they come from all walks of life. They, like, the, like, intersex people's issues are everyone's issues, and ultimately we need folks to, like you said, this cannot be the only thing that folks are listening to. If this is your introduction, that's great. But what's next? Which rolls us into our perfect final question: how can everyone get involved in this effort? Where can people follow you? Where can people support intersex organizations? How can LGBTQA, you know, all the other ones except for Is, get involved in intersex stuff? And how can we really put the I and LGBTQIA?

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:47:54] Thank you. This is the best question. And so the first part of your question to follow me, my handle is XOXY, get it, instead of, like, XOXO, XOXY, because I have XY chromosomes. It's @xoxy_alicia, a-l-i-c-i-a, on Twitter, on Instagram, on TikTok. I think I have, like, one TikTok follower, haven't really done much there.

JVN [00:48:20] Getting there, gotta start somewhere. You'll get there. You got a lot of stuff going on.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:48:23] We'll get there, we'll get there. But yeah, so I'm @xoxy_alicia on every platform. There are two amazing organizations that people should follow on social media. One of them is called InterACT, which is short for intersex activism. So search for Interact Advocates on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. And then there's also Intersex Justice Project, which, as you mentioned, Jonathan, there are brown intersex people, there are Black intersex people, there are a ton of them, and their voices are disproportionately underrepresented, just like Black and brown voices are everywhere. So Intersex Justice Project was founded by two friends of mine, Pidgeon and Saifa, who are also great for people to follow. And they founded Intersex Justice Project for intersex people of color to have a home. So if anyone is listening to this and wants to be a better ally, or if anyone's listening to this and is, like, "Hey, am I intersex, like, this is all sounding a little bit too familiar." I highly, highly, highly recommend checking out InterACT and Intersex Justice Project, and we will find a home for you. We will find a way for you to get involved.

JVN [00:49:31] We're going to add all the links to the description of the episode that people are listening to this on. So if you're on this part of the podcast, honey, that is there

for you to get into the description and get involved. Check out my Instagram. Obviously I'm going to be linking all of Alicia's stuff. Alicia, thank you so much for your time and your activism and your energy and your heart and your love. You're just amazing. It was just such an honor to meet you, and this will be the last time I think we have more episodes and more Instagram Lives and things in our future. Thank you so much again.

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL [00:49:55] Thank you, too, like, you're amazing and thank you for just giving us a platform.

JVN [00:50:03] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was Alicia Weigel. You'll find links to her work and the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on our theme music as Freak by Quin. Thanks so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend and please show them how to subscribe. You can follow us on Instagram and Twitter @CuriouswithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Middle Seat Digital. Our editor is Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me and Erica Getto.