

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Chase Strangio and Adri Pèrez of the ACLU

**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 (or two!) to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by Chase Strangio and Adri Pèrez of the ACLU, where I ask them: What does trans joy look like? Adri Pèrez is the policy & advocacy strategist for the ACLU of Texas, where they lead LGBTQIA+ advocacy on the Sexuality & Gender Equality team. Chase Strangio is Deputy Director for Transgender Justice with the ACLU's LGBT & HIV Project and a nationally recognized expert on transgender rights. Without further ado: this week's Getting Curious!

Welcome to Getting Curious, we're diving straight in. So ew, I can't believe I just said that! Straight in?! We are diving in is what we're doing. First of all, welcome chase. Welcome, Adri. I'm so excited. You two are here. This is a really big episode. It's a big week. We have Trans Day visibility this week, which we love. I think everyone knows what our community is going through in terms of the challenges that we're facing. But what I would love to focus on to kind of get started is some stories of trans joy and trans resilience. And so, Adri, can you start us off with just a gorgeous story of trans resilience?

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:01:21] Well, it's been a really hard month in Texas, and I think folks have been feeling a lot of fear. And these stories of joy and beautiful moments that we have shared have been interspersed between all of that because we have been forced, in some ways, to come together to resist against these attacks in the state of Texas. And it has resulted in a lot of protesting that has brought together trans people from Austin and from all across Texas. People have driven in to, to come to the Capitol and to protest against what is happening in Texas. And those moments are, I think, always really beautiful and really hard to feel any sense of despair or hopelessness in the midst of it because you are standing among hundreds of beautiful trans people and beautiful allies that are all there in community alongside you to resist these attacks that are happening. We have been able to bring trans people from all across the state of Texas to share together in a meal, where we are just able to sit and be ourselves and think about something other than the attacks on our humanity. And those moments are full of such laughter and love. And kids just being kids for the first time in a couple of weeks, kids have just been able to be in community with trans advocates and their parents, their families, and just be themselves without having to be afraid of what is happening in the state.

**JVN** [00:02:50] Yes, a story of human duality. Chase, can you just serve us up with a plate of what trans resilience and what trans joy means for you at the moment?

**CHASE STRANGIO** [00:03:01] Yes, I love plates of resilience and joy, I feast upon them. That is what keeps us going. I think there is, right, as Adri said, this duality of, you know, the entire

framework of our opposition is that it's harmful to be trans and we are going to take the full power of the state to try to stop people from being trans. And for me, as demoralizing and depressing as that can be, it's also a just constant reminder to myself as a counterpoint, which is I love being trans, and I think it is a path towards so much capaciousness and magic and beauty. And every time I'm fighting back against, that, that very narrow, restrictive notion of who we are, it brings me in community with my people and we get to show that we are so incredible and so magical. And yes, that is threatening to people because we have this unique self-awareness. And yes, we had the audacity to say, "You may think you know who we are, but we know who we are better."

And that sort of sense of possibility that comes with transness is part of the joy that's around me all the time and why I feel so blessed to be surrounding myself with trans people all the time and just being in community and celebration and having been an advocate for trans justice in trans spaces for almost 20 years, I have so many beautiful memories of just laughing and coming together. And even in the face of so much violence, having these moments where we look at each other and we embrace our bodies and we embrace our histories. And I just feel that there is so much joy and resistance and resilience that's animating our ability to survive, and we have been in places like this before in worse places like this, and we have the tools and the blueprint. And so when we come together and share meals, when we come together and tell our stories, whether they're the stories of our trancesors, our stories that we are carrying directly from our experiences, that is such a sight of beautiful building. So they will try to crush us and we will keep being beautiful and being brilliant and being incredible. And and yeah, this coming together that we are always able to do and in different ways. For me is this sort of sight of joy and resistance and resilience that keeps me going every day.

**JVN** [00:05:28] I love that story, and I also, you know, don't want to, like, boil us down to, like, how we look. But at the same time, I also have to say an example of trans joy and resilience is Adri, this hair! OK?! I mean, the last time I saw you was I feel like you did not have these, like, turquoise wavy moments. I feel like this lightness that is. I just had to say it has been welling up within me for the time that we've been on. Your hair is serving, OK? It's a serve. The waves are beautiful, and I just, you know, I felt the need to share. OK. So one thing that really struck me, Adri, is when you said that, you know, for the first time in a few weeks in these moments of having community that some of these kids are able to just, you know, be kids. And I think so often because the humanity of trans people is being so questioned and then the ways that the growing attacks have started to really zero in on families, on health workers, on, on these, like, pillars of foundational support for people.

And then, you know, Chase, you were saying, like, for, for us to just be able to embrace our bodies. These are things that cisnet people so often take for granted because, like, so often it can be about kids being kids and when when kids are faced up against, you know, a lot of different issues is this commonality of, like, "Oh my God," like, "let kids be kids." But when it comes to these trans issues, there's this, like, villainizing and there is this like pathologizing and these barriers that get these, you know, very real barriers for us, but they're imagined

barriers for cisgender people that they're putting on these families and on trans youth, which makes it so hard for trans people, gender nonconforming people, kids and adults to thrive across the board. So what, what can living authentically look like for a trans child or a trans adult in their day-to-day lives? Can you give us an example of that, Chase?

**CHASE STRANGIO** [00:07:24] Yeah, I mean, I think this is such an important thing to sort of ground us for a moment because one of the things that's so insidious and frustrating about this time is you have opposition saying, "Look, trans young people or trans people generally have these sort of poor mental health outcomes. And that's a sign that being trans is bad." And that is not accurate. We have examples of poor mental health outcomes because we face rejection, discrimination, structural violence, we're pushed out of schools. We have, you know, faced discrimination in employment. Those are causing trauma and poor mental health outcomes. And what makes it better is when we take away those things and we support and affirm people, particularly young people. And so it's so important that when we talk about these things, we recognize that we have power to change these conditions that trans people are living under, particularly trans adolescents who right now are facing these very, very serious assaults on their survival opportunities. Because the data shows that when you are affirmed in who you are, when you have that, the freedom to self determine your identity that you thrive. And that what causes the negative harm, what causes those poor mental health outcomes is precisely what the states are trying to do, which is restrict our access to being affirmed in schools or participating in activities with our peers, family rejection.

So these are all things that hurt trans people and harm adolescents who are developing. And it's not easy to grow up, period. And so when we think about, well, how can we nurture our young people and I, as a parent, think about this all the time because raising young people is not easy. But we are at our best when we support them in their exploration of who they fundamentally are and give them the tools to feel good about their journeys, whoever they are. And that, you know, when you look at young people who are thriving, who are trans and who are thriving, it's because they have support. They have structural support, they have individual support, and that's what we, we want to see. And how incredible to see a young person who is six or eight or ten and who, in the face of so much rejection and so much structural discrimination, says, "No I know who I am, and I am going to tell you." I mean, that is so beautiful and growing up is so hard and so complicated. And that type of sort of beautiful sense of self is an incredible thing to nurture and nourish. And so I think that's what we want to see, and that's part of the organizing in this moment is building power for our community so that we don't crush these really incredible, resilient spirits.

**JVN** [00:10:09] And so, Adri, you work in a lot of different spaces, but it's also very focused in Texas. But what are some of the things that you know, a trans or gender non-conforming young person may have been doing living their day to day life that, you know, it was fine, it was working? And then Governor Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton issued this letter. Can you just tell us a little bit about what happened most recently?

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:10:38] So most recently, Attorney General Ken Paxton released a non-binding legal opinion that classified gender-affirming care as child abuse. And the following day, Governor Greg Abbott escalated the attack on transgender kids by directing the Department of Family Protective Services, which oversees Child Protective Services, to investigate families with transgender kids for child abuse. This, of course, is false but these false accusations have led to a lot of false accusations and unmerited attacks on the families of transgender kids who are simply loving and supporting their kids in the best way possible to ensure that they're able to survive and thrive in the state. So that's what happened most recently, right. But these attacks on transgender youth have been happening since 2020, since before then, even. There are so many kids in the state of Texas that who, trans kids specifically, who have grown up having to go to the Capitol to share their stories with legislators and ask them to see who they are and believe them in their, in their truths as transgender youth. So I mean, these, these attacks are certainly not new. They have been going on for a long time. This most recent attack, I think, has led to an increase in, even more in the visibility of trans youth and, and their families in the state of Texas. And so we have seen, I think, a lot more profiles of these families' happening in the news to try to humanize this issue and let other people into these families' lives so they know what it's like to, to support and love these kids.

**JVN** [00:12:27] You know, obviously I'm a non-binary person. I have a lot of people that listen to this podcast who, you know, are cishet people. They are people who, you know, feel themselves very removed from this conversation. A lot of cishet people who don't feel that they have power to change any of these things that are going on. When I think about some of the questions that I was going to ask you all and one of them was is, like, you know, "What does living authentically look like for trans kids and adults?" And what's so frustrating about that is, like, why do we have to explain and this is me asking, you know, people in our own community, why do we have to explain about living authentically looks like? Well, what does living authentically mean for a cishet child counterpart or adult? It can mean access to education. It can mean getting to do the job you want to do. It can mean getting to, to prosper and have access to whatever you need, like, be that doctor, health care, you know, supportive family, supportive friends, extracurricular activities, honey, whatever that means. You know, it's, it's just really, we just want access to what everybody else has access to without having to scrutinize the way that you come into the door, which is something that you know so many cishet people just don't have. What I really want is a silver lining. But sometimes, you know, people want things that they can't have because there's not a ton of silver linings right now. But what do you all see as a promising moment for trans visibility as we celebrate Trans Day of Visibility and what this week means to us?

**CHASE STRANGIO** [00:13:59] So I think two things I want to say one, just sort of in response to this notion of sort of who you know, "How do we sort of cultivate authentic trans experiences in the world when there's so many constraints?" I think one thing that happens a lot and that we see all the time is that, you know, we live in this strange narrative paradigm where people think only trans people have a gender, or only trans people are journeying to self determination when it's, like, we are all on this journey and people experience different

types of constraints and different types of violence, depending on who they are and what their experiences are. But part of what feels important in this moment and all of these moments is that to remind people that we're all implicated in this, and I don't know that this is a silver lining, exactly. But we are facing right now a lot of overlapping attacks on many communities. And if you look at a place like Texas or a place like Alabama, where we have these very, very severe and quite frankly, catastrophic attacks on the trans community. These are inextricable from the attacks we're seeing on access to abortion, from the attacks we're seeing on access to voting, and that our opponents are coordinating and effectively so in hurting us and constraining people's life opportunities.

And so what we need in this moment, and perhaps it is a silver lining if we get it together, is a coordinated resistance. The more that people understand that they're implicated in these struggles, all of them, which are inextricable, by the way, I think the more we can see how our power can grow. And that does not mean, unfortunately, that we're going to see immediate changes in these very entrenched forms of violence, particularly because these structures of violence over the last 10 years in particular have gotten a lot worse. When we think about things like the courts and we think about things like state legislatures, it is getting harder. That said, our power can still build and grow. And I think the more that we push back on these very aggressive forms of attacks, the more we're going to see our possibility grow as groups of people who are building power together. And so I am really looking to this moment as a moment of reckoning for those of us who are pushing back on these overlapping and intersecting forms of state violence and saying, "No, we are not going to let you divide us anymore. We don't believe that so-called women's rights are in opposition to trans rights. We do not believe that the regulation of bodies through restrictions on abortion is different from the imperative to take away trans health care. And we know that when you suppress the vote, it's all part of building out those structures to regulate and control us." And so I think the moment of this so-called "visibility" is only powerful if it comes with coordination, power building and action.

**JVN** [00:16:42] Mm. I love a legislative coordinated moment because we really need actionable change, which I think is also inextricably linked to legislative change, and this is obviously a really big year for that. I'm so happy that you bring up the attack on voting rights and reproductive rights, which has also been, you know, all coordinated through legislative attacks, but also for years we've had a reduction and access to health care. And so it's these ways that trans people are targeted through reduction in access to health care. There's reduction of access to health care for everyone. We also have all of these other issues that are making people sick. It's making people suffer, cis and trans people alike. And what I'm seeing is these ideas to, like, scapegoat trans people and queer people for some of these larger ills that have nothing to do with us. And there are these other issues that are really killing us. When trans people being able to, like, play sports or, you know, go to school is not killing us.

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:17:47] Yeah, I mean, that's what I refer to all the time, right? The smoke and mirrors attack on our community. It's distracting from the real problems that all Texans are facing or all people in this country are facing because they're trying to divide us along the very same lines that Chase mentioned and trying to paint these causes and these fights as different and separate from each other. But they're all one because they know that if we were to see beyond those divisions, and that's what we have to do, right, is see beyond those divisions so that we can come together and stand for the things that we all need as people to thrive and survive, not just trans people, not just Black and brown and Indigenous people of color, and not just the people who exist within those margins and those, that Venn diagram of marginalization. And if Chase wants to add anything?

**CHASE STRANGIO** [00:18:39] We have to understand that the, you know, our opponents are very good at acting as though they're having this debate over sort of things they're concerned about, concerned over health care for trans young people, concerned over women's sports. Nobody is concerned about those things, to be clear. And actually, what's happening and if you look at sort of the rise in anti-trans rhetoric globally, it aligns completely with the rise of far right fascist governments. And you can see it in Eastern Europe, you can see it in Latin America, you can see it in the U.K. and in the U.S. that this is a structural, power-building tool of the far right and that trans people in many ways are the canary in the coal mine. It doesn't start or end with us. But if you look at us as an easy target, you can have a pretty clear sense of it going in a very bad direction. And you can even see sort of the rhetoric around, you know, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where you have this idea that it was this quote-unquote "liberal inclusion" of LGBTQ people or trans people that then prompted this militarism from this aggressor and that the reclamation of this certain societal but also family structure is part of how far right movements mobilize globally. And so if we sit here and think we're having a conversation about trans people in sports and not recognize that we're having a conversation about state power, we are going to be too late. And you know, we have an obligation to step in and intervene, because when communities are scapegoated in the service of political, structural ideologies, that, it leads to very serious consequences for everyone. And so I think people should care about trans people because you should care about trans people. But I also think you should care about what's going on because it's going to implicate you, too.

**JVN** [00:20:25] Yes. So I also notice this other thing about how when you look at the percentage of trans and gender non-conforming people, like, in the U.S., like, how many of us are there? Like, there's a lot of us, because there's, like, you know, 330 plus million people in the U.S. and if you think about, like, two to four percent, that's still, like, millions of people. But you couldn't have it all be us, like, that are causing all these issues. And then I also look at, like, this idea of, like, voter fraud and this, like, big issue of like, you know, "We're not doing anything suss," or "We're concerned about voting integrity." But in reality, like, the voting has integrity, and all of these audits that have been done. So I'm just saying that there are these attacks on issues that don't really seem to exist, but there's a very effective way that they take these issues and blow them wildly into a place that isn't really in reality and just really want to, like, repress every person that comes in their path. So I'm kind of stressed about that. I know

that we're all really stressed about that. Adri, you've both been on the front lines of this. What can people do to me to effectively mobilize themselves and their resources to get in this fight and to start early to, to help get in front of these issues?

**CHASE STRANGIO** [00:21:40] I tend to think of it as sort of, like, three basic interventions that I really want people to feel empowered to engage in. And we can think of them on sort of, like, the microlevel and increasingly to the structural level. So first and foremost, this is a fight that is playing out in the public discourse. This is about, as you know, misinformation, weaponized misinformation. And the only way that we disrupt that is if we change the conversations we're having, including the conversations we're having in our homes, in our communities, that we all have a responsibility to engage. That, you know, so people may feel that they don't have a role if they don't live in Texas and they don't have a role, if they don't know how to engage in the political process. But you do have a role because you are part of creating a cultural context in public discourse that you can, you can change by changing the way you talk about things, talking to your kids differently, you know, stepping in when things are happening at a school that you are affiliated with. So that is an incredibly important way. That change is going to happen. Disrupt the misinformation. Say, "No, I believe that trans young people should be able to participate in activities with their peers, and I am not worried about people having access to medically necessary care," like, we have our role to play. So that's one, that's one way everyone can engage. Talk to your parents, talk to your kids, talk to your communities. Two: engage in your political struggles at every level.

So that doesn't mean just, you know, think about what's happening during presidential elections and in midterm elections for Congress. That means paying attention to your school board, your local school board, paying attention to county government, paying attention to your state politics because so much is happening at that level and we lose sight of it. And that's how we end up in situations with highly gerrymandered. But I mean, there's lots of reasons where if I were there, there's the long history of racism that's entrenched in the Constitution. That's also why we're there. But we also have a responsibility to push back in our state and local elections. So that's a political way that people can engage. And then there's the resource way, if you have money, you can donate it. And I think that is incredibly important that we continue to funnel resources into trans led work. But money isn't the only type of resource. If you are someone who knows how to cook, you can bring food to people who are organizing. If you are someone who has an emotional intelligence skillset, you can help people process their trauma. So we can share resources from the financial to the special to the food. So, so there's a lot of things that we can do. And so those would be my sort of three genres of intervention that I would call upon everyone to engage in that everyone has the power to.

**JVN** [00:24:13] So this was a non-binding letter that the attorney general and then Governor Abbott, you know, kind of one-upped each other. But there there's been a lot of challenging moments for trans rights in Texas and across the US. So Chase, can you kind of catch us up if people have been under a rock or if people have been, like, depressed or anxious or whatever,

for whatever reason, they're kind of tapping out. Can you help us tap back into what some of these anti-trans bills are saying across the U.S. at the moment?

**CHASE STRANGIO** [00:24:41] Yeah, and I want to I want to help people understand, and quickly, how we got here because I think what they're saying isn't really about what they're saying because the goal is what they want, which is to expel trans people from public life, to stop people from being trans. And so I think when we think about them, we have to understand that it's not about the thing that they say it's about. And we can do that by looking at, "Well, how did we get here?" We got here largely because of a backlash to marriage equality and after the Supreme Court ruled in 2015 and Obergefell that states can no longer ban same-sex couples for married. You have a sort of revitalization of anti-trans backlash that really picks up and takes off in 2016 with the proliferation of anti-trans bathroom bills. And just like in 2016, when you have this, you know, "solution in search of a problem," the fake problem of trans people using the bathroom, which we know is simply not a real problem.

We've had different versions of that escalate and adapt over the last six years. And so the bathroom bills were largely unsuccessful, in part because we were able to organize and push back. But unfortunately, we didn't sustain our momentum and our opponents adapted their strategies to where we are today in the last three years, 2020, 2021, and 2022, we've seen hundreds of bills targeting trans people, focusing primarily on banning trans women and girls from sports in the scholastic context. Mind you, we're talking about mostly children and sometimes collegiate athletes, but again, all in the scholastic context, weaponizing the notion that a trans body is somehow a threat to others, which it is not. And then these bills that would restrict or criminalize even health care for transgender adolescents. And again, these are also fueled by misinformation. This idea that kids are having surgeries at young ages and that there's not protocols in place when really what we're talking about are adolescents in puberty, getting access to largely reversible hormone therapies that are available to cis kids for other reasons.

But there is this reflexive fear of transness and trans bodies, again, that people are playing or tapping into quite effectively leading to hundreds of bills across the country and the types of restrictions and criminalization that we're seeing in Texas and Alabama, in Arkansas that are that would cut off care for people who rely on it and criminalize doctors who are following their ethical obligations to treat their patients with medical care that is supported by every major medical association in the United States. And so those are the two main things that we're fighting back against in state legislatures. I will say that there are new things coming up: restrictions on use of the proper pronouns for students in schools, for example, curricular restrictions that is part of the whole anti so-called CRT push. And I think we're going to continue to see sort of efforts to restrict that autonomy and survival opportunities and trans people in a multitude of ways. What I am most concerned about, however, is this continued escalation in criminalizing trans bodies through these restrictions on sports and restrictions on health care that are just getting more and more dangerous every year.



**JVN** [00:27:53] And a lot of times you hear about, like, this idea of, like, “protecting tradition” because trans and queer people are, like, “changing the fabric of society.” We've always been here. We've always been a part of society. But there's been different levels of interrogation and villainization and vilification of queer and trans people all throughout history. And, and that part isn't different, but as you say, it just continues to morph into these, into these, into these things. Now how close are some of these bills to becoming laws?

**CHASE STRANGIO** [00:28:24] Yes. So, you know, we have this situation where Texas, the governor and the attorney general acted completely outside their legal authority. The legislature did not pass a law that would presumptively consider treatment for transgender adolescents to be a form of child abuse. We are in court, blocking that, I had hoped to be able to continue to have that enjoined because it was simply completely outside the authority of those governmental officials. When it comes to legislative action in 2021, Arkansas passed a bill banning health care for transgender adolescents. And that bill we were able to block in court a week before it went into effect. So no such bill has ever actually gone into effect, although we are continuing to defend that win appeal. In 2022, unfortunately, we continue to have several of these bills very much in play. I think right now the greatest threat is Alabama's bill. They have a felony ban on health care, which would make it a felony to treat anyone with medically necessary standard of care medicine for adolescents who have gender dysphoria. That bill is one vote away from going to the governor. It would make it a felony, both doctors and parents could face prison time, and obviously adolescents can lose the health care that they rely on. There are probably five other states still considering such bills. I would consider Alabama to be the greatest threat. And what I will say is each year it gets worse. Next year, Texas will be in session. They will also, I am certain, propose bills like this legislatively. So we have to keep staying vigilant and fighting back and fighting the legislative fights is crucial for many reasons. But one of them is that it is difficult to win in court in a post-Trump era when that federal courts are stacked with anti-trans anti-, you know, equality judges and justices that the Trump administration very, very effectively moved through the court nomination and confirmation process that we are litigating in a hostile climate, which means stopping things before they become law is that much more important.

**JVN** [00:30:25] I think another really insidious correction I see here that is, you know, so frustrating is that when you talk about the inclusion of trans women in sports, so often what the TERF people or, like, people who are protecting women's sports will say is like, “Well, you know, trans women who have experienced puberty or have experienced, like, a puberty that of being assigned male, they have an unfair competitive advantage.” But then they're also banning hormone blockers and things for children that are assigned male at birth, but then know that they're trans and want to take hormone blockers to not then go through that puberty so that when they are older, they can transition or whatever when they can make those choices for themselves. But now these legislators are, like, felonizing that so that even if a young person does want access to completely reversible puberty blockers, they can't even get them. So that's a way that you can see that this was never about protecting women's

sports. It was always about restricting trans people. Because even the ways that you could theoretically be more included or, like, you know, "do everything right" so that you could still go play sport through all of these, like, you know, red hoops, you have to jump through the trans person, a trans woman, you can't even do that. They're, they're making it so that you can't even do that in so many states. So, Adri, do we see that the rises in these bills seem to track with public opinion?

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:31:42] You know, this is a fabricated crisis, non-crisis, non-issue that our opposition is using to hold on to their political power in states. And so before this fight started, we saw that across the country there was overwhelming support for nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people, including transgender people. There is generally an overwhelming amount of support in this country for an increase in civil rights protections for all people, including those that have been kept on the margins throughout history. What we see now when we do some polling on this issue and try to gain some insight on how people are feeling about this, it mostly is that there's a lot of confusion out there about the transgender community. As Chase was mentioning, we live in an era of misinformation that is taking hold of our communities in an unprecedented way. And it is that very same misinformation that is impacting how people feel about transgender people broadly.

**JVN** [00:32:56] And one thing that we've learned on Getting Curious is, is about how when people take on information the first time, even if it's misinformation, that's the way they remember, it as truth. And it's really hard to disentangle like propaganda and misinformation once people have consumed it, because once you have it that first time, your brain's always going to want to go back to that. Have you seen any stories of transformation from people who were like, really transphobic and nightmares and then being, like, "Oh my God, I don't want to be a part of this, like, dehumanization of people and I actually want to be part of the solution."

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:33:29] Absolutely. Some of the stories of the parents that I have the honor and privilege of knowing and working with, and they themselves are people who did not understand the transgender issues, had not really paid attention to it in the past, did not see or recognize trans people. Who then they themselves were presented with a transgender child who was standing there in front of them. The kid that they raised, the kid that they loved sitting there in front of them, asserting to them that they are somebody other than the person that that that parent thought that they were. And they have chosen to, in those moments, I think, undergo a transformation of their own to learn about transgender people, transgender history, and learn about what acceptance can mean for their child and to help guide them through this process of becoming who they are, who they truly are.

I like sharing personal stories. I'm maybe, like, more feelings-oriented. But I came out when I was 17 years old and went to an all girls school. It was very Catholic, and I saw the people in my life for the very first time grapple with what it meant for them to love me, knowing that I was now transgender. And my best friend was the most Catholic person I knew at that time.

And she and her family have been the biggest supports in my life, and in order to do that, they had to rewrite their entire understanding of their faith that they had held for their entire lives. And they did that to ensure that transgender people and love and support for transgender people fit within that framework. And that, I mean, that is what keeps me motivated and doing this work that you have to believe that the people that are in this world that may not understand transgender people, that may have never met a trans person, that they themselves are capable of this transformative process in order to keep doing this work. And I believe it because I've seen it time and time again in my own life, and it is why I exist so openly and so publicly as a trans person.

**JVN** [00:35:46] So one thing that we have learned also on Getting Curious, we have an upcoming episode about trans history with Professor Jen Manion, and we got to learn all about "female husbands" and how this group of people was brought into the press. We see a lot of the ways in these, like, historical writings that, like, in so many ways, it's not a totally new conversation, it just, it continues to evolve and change shape. So what is the power for us as gender non-conforming, well, for me, it's gender nonconforming people, for trans people. What's the power of trans role models and trans representation?

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:36:24] Oh my gosh. I mean, what I keep saying is that trans kids grow up to be trans adults, and trans adults need to be able to see people like them around them in order to believe that they have the ability to create the future that they want. Something that is so painful for me personally is, is not knowing a lot of trans elders in my life who could be role models or mentors or set an example for what I could achieve. It's very lonely to move through life without seeing people who look like you. And for me, that is people who are a who are trans, who are queer, who are non-binary, who are first-generation immigrant, who are brown. I think that that's a lot of intersections. That's a lot of identities that I carry within myself every day, but I have yet to really meet—, I can think of one, I can think of one person who is trans elder that is older than me in a position of power. Doing this work, who I can look up to as a role model. And so I think there is so much power and existing openly as who you are and sharing your story as widely as you are able to at the time that you are able to. Because I know that when I was first going through my transition, I wasn't able to share my story very widely without it causing me a great deal of pain. And the emotional work and sacrifice of that was not worth it to me at that time. And so everybody, at their own time, at their own level, at their own capacity sharing their story, whether it be with a close friend, whether it be with a group of friends or their families. I think that there is a lot of power and just existing physically as a trans person.

**JVN** [00:38:20] And what resources would you recommend for people who are, like, say, like, considering coming out, for people that are navigating their own experience with transness, or maybe their, their relationships to, to their gender?

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:38:41] What is so great about the last twelve years since I came out is that there, there have been some incredible networks of resources that have developed and

become available online. Anybody who is trans and queer and scrolls through TikTok, for example, for five minutes will end up on "Trans Tik Tok" and then just be exposed to a lot of other trans people talking about their own journeys and their own stories and the resources that are available out in the world. I mean, I think everything starts with a Google search. If you are able to safely Google something, please do. If you're listening to this podcast, you probably are. And so just doing a quick Google search, trying to connect to the LGBTQ resource centers that may exist in your community, or some that exist in other communities that have online communities available for you to plug into and access those networks of support that are so crucial to our survival. There are advocacy organizations in every state that are working to stop this legislation. And so if you feel motivated to take action in that way, plugging into those is an excellent way to facilitate that process and not be overwhelmed yourself and trying to track all of these bills. There is somebody out there who is already doing that work for you. All you need to do is make a phone call or send a letter or plug in a parent or a friend to do the same.

**JVN** [00:40:13] What about for someone who's, like, supporting a loved one who is coming out or who is trans? I think that's, like, I'm loving that feedback, I felt like tapping into the legal networks that are fighting the fight for, like fighting these anti-trans bills and making trans equity become a legislated codified thing, seeking to support those networks for, like, people who just like love trans people or have like trans friends and family members. Or maybe they don't even have trans friends and family members. They just want to, like, help.

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:40:42] Yeah, so there's been a really excellent Facebook group that I just found out about last week called Mama Bears that there's a documentary for it and that the founder of the Facebook group spoke at this press conference about how the group has grown from being 20 people to 2,000 people to now 32,000 people in this Facebook group who are all able to connect with each other as parents, as aunts and uncles, people generally, and family networks trying to support trans people. You're able to connect to this group and go in there, tell your story, may ask your question and ask for the support that you've made and hopefully receive it from this group of people who share the same proximity to this issue as you do and are able to share their perspectives and stories with you so that you feel supported in that process and also seen in that process. I know that I, as a trans person, the experience was different for me than it was for my family members who they themselves had to undergo a process, I think, of grieving who the person that they thought I was going to be, the person that I had been to them up until that point. And it is hard to hold those feelings as a trans person when you yourself are still reckoning with the strength and courage that it takes to be your full self in a society that is determined to erase you. And so those parents and family networks need these alternative systems of support, and they are available now pretty widely. And instead of relying on the trans people in your life who they themselves are undergoing their journey you are supporting in that journey, you are able to turn to people who look like you and who share your same positionality in in this journey that we are all on together to feel supported to then be able to support the trans person in their lives.

**JVN** [00:42:40] Yes. OK, so now what's next for you? What's happening for you coming up? Where can we find you? How can we support you? What's happening? What's around the corner?

**ADRI PÈREZ** [00:42:49] I don't know that I am ever able to fully predict what's around the corner. I know that doing this work has been especially the last month has been especially emotionally draining, but there's really nothing else that I can imagine myself doing that when I first came out, I was determined to be very public about being trans and about my journey to becoming my full, authentic self and being brave enough to do that in public, which for right now includes having blue hair. And I am now in a position where I have trans youth and the parents of trans youth who message me on Twitter, on Instagram, by email every day, asking me questions about how to support their kid, asking me questions about how to get involved. Just reaching out so that we can share space and listen to each other's stories. And that is really what I always wanted to be able to do in this work is fight for trans visibility and fight for trans liberation. And so while these past three weeks have been more exhausting and terrifying than I ever imagined, they have also been so incredibly beautiful and showing me and I think the rest of the people in Texas, just how strong networks of support and love are and just how authentic and beautiful our people are when they are coming together simply to support and love their children. I am going to keep doing this work until the very bitter end because Texas is my home and I refuse to leave. I refuse to give up this state to the people who are trying to erase me and erase our trans kiddos, erase the families, doctors and teachers that love and support them. This is my home and I'm going to keep fighting for Texas because it's worth fighting for.

**JVN** [00:44:51] Oh, I can't think of a better way to end up this episode. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate you so much. I know so many people who love you and are rooting for you and look up to you and you're such a shining example and we love you so much and thank you so much for coming on Getting Curious.

You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. Our guests this week were Chase Strangio and Adri Pèrez of the ACLU. You'll find links to their work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Middle Seat Digital. Our editor is Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Zahra Crim.