

Transgender ideology and free speech - Stella O'Malley, Arty Morty

Panelists: Stella O'Malley, Arty Morty

Moderator: Sasha White

Description:

Stella and Arty discuss the difficulties of speaking up and being heard on the topic of transgender ideology.

Stella O'Malley is an Irish psychotherapist and author, with three books on parenting and mental health. She is a regular contributor to Irish national newspapers, podcasts, and TV. Her latest book is [What Your Teen is Trying to Tell You](#).

Stella O'Malley's BBC documentary 'Trans Kids - it's time to talk': <https://vimeo.com/304866757>

Arty Morty is a commentator, writer and YouTuber who reports on gender ideology and its effects on children, women and the gay rights movement. Arty co-hosts an online show called The Mess We're In with Graham Linahan and Helen Staniland.

He's known for his clarity and breaking down complex and contentious issues, and for his strong advocacy for gender non conforming individuals. He's written for Plebity, Lesbian and Gay News and on his substack artymorty.substack.com.

Sasha White became a free speech advocate in 2020 after being fired for her personal comments on transgender ideology. She has written for Spiked online, Tablet Magazine, and 4W. She co-founded the Plebity Free Speech Fund and hosts interviews on the Plebity Youtube channel.

*Note: Participation by any panelist does not indicate their agreement with or endorsement of the opinions of any other conference participant. The presence of any panelist does not mean Plebity endorses or shares their opinions.

Transcript

Sasha: Hi everybody and welcome to the gender ideology and free speech panel as part of Plebity's Free Speech on the Left conference. First of all, I want to welcome my two panelists today Arty Morty and Stella O'Malley so thank you both so much for being here.

Stella: Thank you.

Arty: Thank you so much. Lovely to see you both.

Sasha: Great to see you. So Arty Morty is a commentator, writer and YouTuber who reports on gender ideology and its effects on children, women and the gay rights movement. Arty co-hosts an online show called The Mess We're In with Graham Linahan and Helen Staniland.

He's known for his clarity and breaking down complex and contentious issues, and for his strong advocacy for gender non conforming individuals. He's written for Plebity, Lesbian and Gay News and on his substack artymorty.substack.com.

Stella O'Malley is an Irish psychotherapist and author, her new book, *What Your Teen is Trying to Tell You* just came out this spring is already a best seller in Ireland. She is the co-founder of Genspect, which is an international alliance of professionals, trans people detransitioners, parent groups and others who seek high quality care for gender related distress.

Stella is also clinical advisor for the Society for Evidence Based Gender Medicine, and a founding member of the International Association of Therapists for Desisters and Detransitioners.

Stella co-hosts a podcast with another therapist Sasha Ayad where they discuss gender from a psychological perspective.

So, Arty has actually been a guest on Stella's podcast before and both Stella and Arty have previously sat down with me individually for interviews with Plebity, and I'm very excited to have them both here now and to have a conversation together about both of their experiences facing consequences for speaking out against gender ideology.

So to get right into it today we are discussing the topic that more than any other topic will get you canceled for going against the liberal or leftist or woke crowd however you want to label them.

For example, Matt Taibbi, who has built a career covering controversial issues and going after powerful figures admitted in an article he wrote that this issue, gender ideology was the first time he was ever scared away from a topic.

That's how toxic, this issue is. Both of my panelists have raised questions about transgender ideology and have faced backlash. And I want to be very clear here. Those who speak against trans ideology are constantly maligned and smeared as hateful bigots. And today is not about litigating the issues themselves, it's more about the narrative around the issue and the climate of censorship and repression.

So if you want to hear the panelists fully flesh out their points of view on all things gender, you can find their work linked below and be sure to check out my previous interviews with them on this channel.

So first of all, Stella and Arty, I'd like to ask you both about the ways your speech on this topic has been received. So I think it's fair to say there's been quite a bit of misunderstanding, and that both of you have, I think, been accused of transphobia, in quotes 'transphobia.'

So can you tell us a little about your thoughts on the disconnect between what you've actually said on the topic, and what people on the left or people who call themselves the left have been reacting to. And Stella will go to you first.

Stella: Thank you. Um, yeah, it always, it always shocks me to see how much the left have been positioned into this position of, I don't know, very, very kind of pro the medicalization of people's gender identities.

But what happened to myself was when I was a kid, I had a very strong experience for many, many years. And I, you know, I very much was born a girl, wanted to be a boy and wanted to be a boy for years. And it was a horrible experience and it lasted a long time and it took a lot a lot of effort and reckoning with myself to kind of become comfortable in my own body and become comfortable with myself.

And I did get through. Now I wasn't given options that children will be given today, there was certainly no such concept as puberty blockers for children with with gender issues when I was a kid.

And many, many years later I became a psychotherapist, and I was invited to do a film. And the premise of the film was that there's been a 4000% increase of girls seeking medical transition. In the last decade, and could any of those girls be like me, somebody who grew out of gender issues.

So that was the premise of the film and I thought that was a gentle enough premise. Now I knew it was a very toxic environment. I knew that the you know the would be pushed back. But I had no idea that actually asking that question would immediately write me off and all I was saying

was, could any of the 4000% could any of them be like me, somebody who had extreme gender issues and came through them.

And I was told that's a transphobic question to ask. And then I realized, realized any question in that area because we spent a year making the documentary and it was highly acclaimed, was very good I think.

And it was 2018, and we were asking just generally just inquiring. The idea was I wasn't involved. I wasn't on Twitter. I didn't know any I didn't know any of the people involved and it's funny because now they're very well known people.

But at the time I remember meeting Posie Parker who was called Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull and I remember thinking she looked very mumsy and very sweet. I had no idea who she was. I'd never heard of her.

And I met Miranda Yardley and I was like it's too fascinating. And I met, who else did I meet, Magdalen Berns and all these, what I now know Debbie Hayton obviously, all these massive names that I had no preconception around.

And I didn't know that merely by being introduced to any of these people. I was being immediately siloed into a position, which I was from Ireland, these were all people in England. It was so random for me because I was like oh pleased to meet you, literally have never heard of you never been on Twitter so I don't know anything you're talking about.

Yeah, so I had very much a baptism of fire of being silenced because there was a huge amount of efforts from all the trans groups in England to get the film shut down. And later on the director of the film, his name is Ollie Lambert and he's made 30 films all based on the wars, you know, Iraq, Iran and he did a lovely film on Ukraine, very sad film on Ukraine there a few months ago.

And he said, of all the films he's ever done and you know he's won Grammys and Emmys on these films, he's very highly acclaimed. Of all the films he's ever done, the hardest to get both sides to speak was this film about trans issues, and he left our film, which is called Trans Kids It's Time to Talk, and he moved on and he did a film between Israel and Palestine and it was called 24 Hours in Palestine. And the idea was he was meeting both sides, and he found it easier to have both sides meet on that film than our film, where basically we were absolutely blackballed because we spoke to certain people, the people I mentioned because we spoke to certain people.

That was it, the end of the film, nobody who was pro trans would speak to us and we were willing to speak to anybody. And I remember I was at an event, I'll hand it over to Arty now in a minute, but I remember I was at an event and it was the first time where I realised something very strange is happening.

And I might sound very naive, but I wasn't. I was really quite educated, but I just wasn't in this online culture war that many people are in, including myself these days. And somebody was saying, what's the hashtag for the event? It was just this women's event that we're talking about women's kind of issues.

And somebody said free speech and everybody went, oh no, oh no, oh no, that's a right wing trope. And I was like, sorry, what? Right, what? Have I heard that right? And I turned and I said, sorry, free speech is a kind of, you know, forbidden. And they were like, oh yeah, you know, like free speech is way off.

And I was like, oh, there's a whole world here. There's a whole world here of rules that turn everything we learned about civilized society on its head. And it's very Alice in Wonderland like what's up is down, down is up, blue is red. It's an extraordinary world. So, yeah, since then, and it's because, by the way, the only reason I'm still here talking about the same issue, you know, five years later is because I hated being silenced.

I realized that the truth wasn't coming out because the silencing of, we got the film out, but so much got removed. So many things got in the way. So many kind of additions got put in that shouldn't have been put in.

And I realised the truth is being warped and mangled because of political manoeuvrings. And it's only for that reason that I'm still talking about it. Had I just made the film, it would have been an interesting film.

And had we been free to say it, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be, I wouldn't have made Jen's back. It just wouldn't have, it wouldn't have continued. It's just this feeling of people are hiding information that will really help people. And it's essential that anybody who knows speaks out.

Sasha: Interesting. So by opposing you so strongly, they kind of encouraged you to keep speaking out about it, which is interesting.

Stella: I just, just to finish, I just released a book on bullying called Bullyproof Kids in 2017. And, you know, it all started in 2017. The film was made in 2018. And I just, it was bullying. You know what I mean? There was definite bullying happening. It was targeted harassment. I could see it happening. And I was really, really up on how group dynamics work. And so there was just, I couldn't but keep talking

Sasha: Interesting. All right. So Arty, your thoughts on kind of the disconnect between your speech around this and what people have received or heard?

Arty: Yeah, I come at this, yeah, I come at this as a gay man who has some history of distress around my sex, and who has had a little bit of exposure and experience in the transgender community a long time ago. In the late 90s, I worked for a little while at a transgender bar. So I was very familiar with some of the, this issue long before many other people were. And then I moved on. I got over my distress around my sex and gender.

I stopped working at the transgender bar and I moved to another city and I forgot all about that experience. And then many, many years later, I had been in a long term relationship with someone that ended. And so I found myself back on the dating scene on the singles market. And I was spending a lot of time at gay bars and reacquainting myself with the gay community that I hadn't spent that much time in because I was in a long term relationship.

And what I found was that in that time that I had been away, everything had changed in gay culture. Suddenly everything had to do with gender identity and not with sexual orientation. So many people were not just crossdressing and playing with their gender identities, but experiencing tremendous distress around sex.

And I was trying to figure out, I wanted to understand what was going on, but I never came at this with a criticism of gender identity ideology. It was always my intention to just understand what gender is, what transgender is, what this issue is, to come to an understanding.

I also have always been curious about science. I'm a scientific minded person. I'm a big advocate for freedom of speech and I'm a big advocate for scientific literacy. So I wanted to understand the science of what sex and gender identity is. And what I realized is that there are a lot of people who simply don't want the answers.

There are a lot of people who have extreme distress around sex and around gender identity. And there's a lot of fear that if they actually understand what these things are, if we put a microscope up to them, that their distress will maybe be delegitimized or that somehow they'll be harmed. And I don't think that's right. I think everybody needs to understand what gender is, what transgender is, what gender dysphoria is for their own sake.

And what we're seeing in all of society right now is that there's a sense that if we talk about this, we're doing harm to the gay and lesbian and bisexual community, which is now expanded to include transgender and words like queer and unrelated things like intersex conditions. And it's just growing all the time.

There's a sense in society that there's a historic guilt and shame about the past homophobia and misdeeds against same sex attracted people. And I feel like people want to relitigate that through this new issue of gender and gender identity. And I don't think that's right. I think that we have to be able to talk about this openly and we have to understand what it is. What's

interesting is that no two people have the same idea even of what transgender means because nobody's allowed to talk about it.

And because there's so much anxiety about even asking questions about what these things are and what it means. No, but no two people have the same understanding of what it is. Some people believe that this has to do with a deep inner sense of being. Some people believe that it's a kind of intersex condition or a biological thing.

Some people believe that it has to do with biological sex not existing at all. These are valid questions to ask and these are valid things for people to come together and to talk about openly. Yeah. So when I started asking questions, I started realizing that nobody wanted to hear the answers to these questions.

Nobody even wanted to hear possible solutions to some of the problems that a lot of these people were experiencing. And it got me in a lot of trouble really fast. People very quickly decided that I was unworthy of their friendship. I was unworthy of the gay community and it was very upsetting. I've lost many, many friends. I worked in the gay community and I no longer do. I don't feel welcome or comfortable in gay environments because there's this tremendous sense that anybody who speaks scientifically and rationally about sex and gender is somehow a traitor to the cause. And is trying to harm.

Sasha: Yeah. So why is this such a third rail issue? I mean, Arty, you just raised the word homophobia. And that's something that gets thrown in there a lot with people who raise questions or critique the trans movement. So that's maybe one thing and one piece that we want to start to tease out. But Stella, I want to ask you, what do you think? What are your thoughts on why is this such a third rail issue that even for you as a professional asking questions and looking to understand, right? Like Arty was talking about as well, making this documentary. Why do you think people reacted in that way?

Stella: I think the majority of people who would find what myself and Arty are saying as objectionable or difficult, I think the majority of them have equated being trans with being gay. And I think that is the fundamental cornerstone of a misunderstanding of my position, Arty's position and thousands of other people's position. And why people think trans is just kind of gay 2.0? I think it's a lot of reasons. And when you start studying them, you can kind of see how it happened. You know, the T got added to the LGB, for example, in the 1990s.

And I've studied this and it got added without much thought. It was very much like most people who were trans in the 1990s. The numbers were small and it was a natural community to be part of because it was edgy. It was often, it's kind of close to sexual orientation in so far as it feels like you're talking about sex and you're talking about gender identity.

I can see how it happened. There could have been more purposeful decisions beside that, adding the LGB to the T.

But it certainly enmeshed these two experiences in people's minds. And as now we're 30 odd years later, I think most people think some people are born gay. And some people are born trans and some aren't. And those that aren't are cis. And they've just kind of assimilated that thought process without really thinking it very true. And I would argue some people certainly seem to be born gay. I would argue some people become very engaged or absorbed or fixated upon their gender identity for want of a better phrase. You could use various different phrases for that. And they become fixated and they stick onto it and they want to become somebody else.

And it is very, very satisfying to say that's their authentic self. And they're very, very determined to seek out as many medical interventions as they can to become a different person, to become the person in their mind. And I think it's a starkly different experience to being gay. Being gay is about your relationship with other people. It's about sexual attraction. It's about falling in love. It's about intimacy with somebody else.

Gender identity is completely within your own head. It's unfalsifiable. It's unverifiable. Nobody can put their finger on it. You can't test it. You can actually test somebody else's attraction to somebody else. And it's a relationship with yourself. And so it's nothing to do with anybody else in the world. And so it should never have been put together. But as a result, I think people think that we are basically talking the equivalent of saying people shouldn't be gay, which is not what we're saying. But I think people are misunderstanding that. And they actually don't get further than block two. That is where both sides just divide. You know what I mean?

And I think if we can just do nothing else, but over the next 10 years, we establish within society that gender identity is a very different experience and has very different expectations from society than sexual orientation. If we do nothing else but that, I think a huge amount of misinformation will be corrected. I don't think we'd have to do a hell of a lot more, actually.

Sasha: Okay. So Arty, thoughts on why this is such a third rail topic. And also, I'm curious, do you agree that the LGB should not be grouped with the T?

Arty: I don't know if I have an opinion one way or the other on whether the LGB should or should not be grouped with the T, because I think it depends on the context. But generally, same sex attraction is a very different thing than having a gender identity. It's a very different experience.

But I can understand that many same sex attracted people do have gender identities and do believe that they are transgender and are transsexual and transgender. So in some cases, I can understand why these letters are together. But in others, I think it's very important that they shouldn't be.

I've co-founded an organization called LGB Alliance Canada. So I'm very interested in specifically the rights of same sex attracted people, just the LGB as a separate political entity from the other letters. But I think that's to each their own if they want to include whatever groups to identify with.

As to why this is such a third rail, I think it has to do with a little bit with some of the political shifts we've seen across society. Most civil rights struggles came from the left and they came from people who were marginalized and didn't have any political power. And the left has always been kind of the anti-establishment side of society. But over the last probably around 20 years, so many of our battles have been won on the left that we really are the authority now.

We're not, we're the establishment of progressive politics, civil rights, gay rights especially. These things are entirely, these are all in the institutions now. Every human, every HR department, banks are flying rainbow flags, all the governments. We are the institutional power now. We're the establishment and not the anti-establishment. And that means we can control what can and can't be said in ways that it used to be the right wing that was able to do that. And we used to fight to have our voices heard. Now we have the power to silence other people's voices. And unfortunately, a lot of people are doing that.

This is why the word freedom of speech is being considered a right wing dog whistle, because we have the power to silence views that dissent from us. And we're using that. Free speech is being used by people who disagree with a lot of views on the left. And this is one of them. I consider myself to be on the left.

I consider myself to be a progressive. I consider myself to be an ally of transgender people and definitely gay people. I'm a gay rights activist and advocate. But I have a view that is just more nuanced and more complex than what we're allowed to have on the left right now. And because of that, people want to completely silence me. People who are my own political and ideological allies otherwise just don't want my voice to be heard at all.

And I think this has to do with this shift in power, this sort of zeitgeist shift in society where progressive views are now totally mainstream.

Gay rights is absolutely considered to be, has been adopted by everybody pretty much at this point. Yeah, that's a big part of it.

Sasha: So I want to hear a little bit more from both of you about your experience facing backlash. So, Stella, we'll go back to you first. What has it been like in these five years since you kind of set foot into this debate? What are some things you've dealt with in terms of backlash?

Stella: You know, I think of, you know, Christy Moore is a singer in Ireland. There's a famous song, This is Heaven, This is Hell. Who knows who can tell? And it really has been like that because there's been some hellish, terrible moments where people have badly misunderstood me and badly misrepresented me, my thoughts, my speech, misquoted me, deliberately misquoted me or taken quotes out of context.

So I've seen the kind of the underbelly of humanity in a way I'd never seen it before. Now, I'd seen some awful things, but I hadn't seen such systematic, colluding, lying and bad faith, cynical determination to pull me down, even though they could hear what I was saying. They knew enough to kind of mangle what I was saying and change it. So when you see that, you can't unsee it. And it's a kind of a horrifying realization of what people will do to other people.

So that has been horrific. On the other hand, I've met some extraordinary people in these last few years as well. So it hasn't all been bad, but it's certainly been the most intense of my life where I did need to kind of every so often rally my deepest reserves of courage.

Because, you know, when you're a psychotherapist, I was working for myself and I did the film. And like, you know, honestly, when you watch it now, it was so gentle, like it was so gentle. Just kind of perhaps could we maybe speak about this was probably as deep as I went into it. And when I got vilified afterwards, you know, like literally like, you know, they often you know that line, first they laugh at you like they laugh at you and they undermine you and they really, really, really denigrate everything you say.

Now, I'd already got books published. I'd already a lot out in Ireland, you know, in the national media. So my position was very clear about mental health, about the fact that I was an atheist, about the fact that I was very liberal and very leftist on all policies. And so all of that was absolutely dismissed. And I was called a right wing Christian zealot. And it was like, but how can you call me that? I had books. It's obvious. Like it's all there. It's very, very, very verifiable. And it just gets and the ability for people to just roll over the facts and imprint.

So they kind of in Ireland, like they have this kind of, you know, fear of the Catholic Church because we had such a bad history of it. They kept trying to make out I was some sort of crazy Bible basher. And I was like, I've been an atheist forever. Like, what are you talking about? Like, this is crazy land. And it's so easily checked. It's so easily checked.

So that was a horrible experience. And I, because I worked in private practice, I was very vulnerable to being cancelled and I knew it. I knew it was very scary. And there were attacks on my accreditation. Funnily enough, when they did it, basically my licensing, when they did attack it, the attacks were so outlandish. You know what I mean? There were things like who I was speaking to online and I said bad things. I was, you know, there were really, really bad accusations that were very easily proven.

But it was interesting, my accreditation board was so frozen in the face of it, just like the person you described at the beginning. They were frozen in the face of the tax. So what they did was when they got accusations leveled about me, they kind of went into panic mode and did nothing and just kind of just tried to bury the whole thing.

Just like they did not know what to say or do because they found it so frightening. And I was like, just check it. Like you can just press play. It's easily checked. Do you know what I mean? There's nothing, I wasn't hiding anything. You know, it was quite easily checked.

So, yeah, I've always wondered how did different historic moments happen? How did it happen? I see it now. I see that the strength of group, the dynamic is so important. And I have to say, and I'll leave it at that, but like I realize now that public shaming is how we have controlled society for millennia. You know, laws. Yeah, whatever. Public shaming is how everybody is kept in check from the age of five onwards. It's why they boys stop peeing in the street. Do you follow me? Like it's really a really strong way of creating a civilized life. And the use of shame in this context is the most powerful way to shut everybody up. They're shaming people.

And when people are shamed are so many of us immediately go into a reflexive kind of curled up hedgehog position. We're scared when we're shamed. And this is this is a silencing. And people will say, well, how can you say we're silenced? We're speaking here. But we're speaking here because the mainstream media are frightened of us and they're frightened of us because if they speak to us, they will be shamed. They will be shamed by people who use shame as a weapon.

And it's a horrible, horrible tactic that I grew up with because I did grow up with the Catholic Church and it was all about shame. So I'm very, very, very experienced in pushing back on. Don't don't use shame to try and control me.

Sasha: Well, Arty, how about you? Have you experienced that shame?

Arty: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. And I'm very sensitive to it as well. When I started talking about this publicly, I wanted always to have a tone that was very almost pleading for people to understand that I'm not all the things that I'm inevitably accused of. Right wing Christian conservative. I'm a left wing atheist, science advocate and gay rights advocate, for goodness sake. Yeah, it's it's very upsetting the things that people knee jerk accuse you of.

But people because there's no discussion about this, because this topic isn't being openly talked about at all. People don't understand that to even talk about it isn't to hate transgender people. People suggest that I hate gender nonconformity and I want everyone to be gender conforming. That couldn't be further from the truth. My idols in all my life have been gender bending people. David Bowie and Prince and the lead singer of a band named Suede. I love gender nonconformity. I love I love gender bending in general. I think it's a wonderful thing.

What's important is that people who are expressing their gender in any way that they want are not experiencing medical distress, are not being given bad treatment or not. You know, we have to make sure that these people get the the services and the rights that they need and deserve.

So speaking about this issue is not actually about criticizing or being hostile to gender nonconforming people at all. It's very much about making sure they get every all the support that they need and the proper support that they need. And that's just completely not understood by so many people, because like Stella was saying, they're not even going to that one step.

There's such a climate of fear, the climate of fear of being shamed, a climate of losing one's tribe. People are very tribalistic. People have in groups and out groups. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. That's just a part of the human condition. People are so scared of falling out with their tribes.

And I think it's particularly prominent in North America. The United States has become a massive battleground of blue and red, of red, of sort of maga country. And the left, left and right are a total ideological war, it seems right now. It seems like we're living in two Americas. Now, I live in Canada, which is different, but we tend to fall in line with whatever political sort of whatever political trends are happening in the US are inevitably going to happen in Canada, too. So we're seeing the same thing here.

So the one thing I hear over and over again when I bring up this topic is that it's somehow right wing. All you hear all the time is mention that you're falling in with the right. Are you sure you haven't become right wing? Gosh, you're not as left wing as you used to be. I just stand here thinking it has nothing to do with right wing anything. This just has to do with basic facts, basic conversation, basic freedom to ask questions. And in fact, it's very, very progressive as far as I see it. This really isn't a left or right issue at all.

But I could at least frame it somehow, somewhat on the left, in that it has to do with making sure people have their rights and freedoms and are taken care of and that marginalised people get the support they need to live their best lives in society. So, yeah, it's very strange.

Stella: Could I add to that? Because I think that's a very good point that, like, arguably if aliens landed on Earth and if they learned about what is left wing and what is right wing, arguably they would say, well, people like Archie and Stella are fundamentally left wing on this issue because they're very pro a kind of a live and let live, non medicalised, low interventionist approach. While the medical transition side of things is a big pharma, very intensive medicalisation that costs billions of dollars to the world. And it's medicalising an identity to conform with stereotypes.

So it's a really strange scenario where the left have chosen this as a left wing idea. It sits much more, frankly, it's much stronger on the right. It's stereotypes. You don't want a gay little feminine

boy. Yeah. Turn him into a girl and then your head can go round. That is a fundamentally more conservative view of it. He's not really a boy. He's a girl. Put him in a dress and medicalise him quick because we can't deal with the fact that he's he's feminine.

Arty: You know, and I want to add to that, I think there's an element of a sense of freedom of choice. So maybe that's how it turns into somehow a progressive view. I think there are a lot of parents when they see that their child is distressed about their gender expression and their child might be discovering that they're gay, but don't want to be gay. Therefore, they're helping their child to not be gay. There's a lack of understanding that the process of discovering that you're gay isn't a process of liking it necessarily.

Most people who discover that they're gay or many people aren't going to want to be gay. And many people who just have a natural affinity for things that are coded as the opposite sex, that are sort of feminine gender or masculine gender, most people who are atypical for their sex are going to be distressed about it.

So I think a lot of people think that medicalising that is a way of helping people. When I would argue that another way of dealing with that is helping people to understand that they don't need to medicalise these things. And the more holistic approach would be to help people just understand that there's nothing wrong with being atypical.

But yeah, you can almost look at it as progressive to do one or as progressive to do the other. And these two sides both feel like they're more properly seen as the progressive way of dealing with this issue. But depending on which way you stand, the other side looks extremely conservative. But I think it's I think a lot of people are just mistaken and haven't been thinking things through.

And the only way to get to these to answer these questions is to talk about it openly. So that's why freedom of speech and the freedom to discuss it is so important.

Sasha: Yeah, so so some people have just not thought it through all the way or, you know, have a knee jerk reaction. Have other self-censored, do you think? I'm curious, let's start with Stella. Do you think, have you noticed people, especially people who call themselves on the left, you know, to continue this discussion about the left being the side that's really, really going after people like the two of you for asking these questions? Have you noticed self-censorship? Have you noticed, have you noticed a lot of that? People, you know, biting their own tongues?

Stella: Well, it's not even noticed. I have been told by countless people that they are self-censoring. And it is it is the biggest problem that all these people who are self-censoring are telling themselves that they are probably right to self-censor and in itself that has become a problem.

And George Orwell called it. He said self-censorship is the biggest threat. And he was right, because it is the biggest threat and it is exactly what's going on right now. People are self-censoring. And then the people who aren't self-censoring, like myself and Arty and yourself, such as we are their, you know, we are their bulletproof vests. We're their kind of cannon fodder, you know what I mean?

And it makes us much more vulnerable as a result, and it makes us much easier to criticize, because when you're self-censored, you look for reasons why it's better to stay quiet. And so it's easier to criticize people like us three for maybe seeking to speak out, because then it feels less uncomfortable psychologically, because otherwise you feel a bit guilty for self-censoring because you know your voice is needed and it is needed.

But yeah, to answer, I used to like getting DMs saying, you're so brave, thanks so much, I'm too scared to speak out myself. It used to be kind of heartwarming a little bit, maybe the first year. But now it's not at all. I don't really want to hear about it anymore. Yeah, okay, you do you, but I'm not interested in being other people's cannon fodder.

I just think people need to have integrity. And yeah, I have a job that is very vulnerable. We all have a job that's very vulnerable. So I don't, you know, I know that I have to say before that I do know that parents in particular who have a child who's in a deep trauma. Sometimes there's certain specific situations with without a doubt, you need to keep your anonymity 100%. But there's an awful lot of other people who are self-censoring for much more mild benign kind of, I don't want to be unpopular in work and I don't want to be shamed by the community is the main reason most people are self-censoring.

Sasha: Yeah. Arty, I find that self-censorship, talk about your experience with that.

Arty: Oh, yeah, it's everywhere. People are, what I find shocking is that people who will whisper to me that they agree with me will still distance themselves from me in public. I've had that a lot of times.

But there's another thing that worries me, which is that Stella made, you made such a great point there about people feeling guilty for not speaking up and being afraid that they might be ashamed.

What I feel is happening now is that a lot of people are hyper scrutinizing everything that I say, because they realize that they do want to speak up, and they realize that they should have been on my side and they should have defended me.

And because they didn't, they now need an excuse to have not. So they have to find something that I said or did wrong and say, aha, see, he's still bad. That's why I didn't stand up for him because he did that one thing that I disagree with, you know, and they're scanning and they're looking and they're hyper hyper scrutinizing.

My friend, all of our friend, Graham Linehan gets that a lot. Even some prominent journalists who have started talking about this issue are still looking for other people who have been talking about it louder and sooner. And trying to sort of throw them under the bus. And it's really, really quite upsetting.

And I fear that as this issue breaks into the mainstream, it already has done so in parts of Europe, certainly in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It's starting to, it's starting to become a topic in the zeitgeist in North America, but the mainstream press still won't touch it. I fear that when that happens, there's going to be an attempt to to excuse their own behavior by throwing some of us early cannon fodder folks under the bus, you know.

Sasha: Yeah, not a nice thought but definitely a good point. And I'll just throw in there, you know, we both brought up people are afraid of the consequences and the shame in particular. That's a very hard thing to deal with other than just to continue to speak about it for those of us who do. But then also the fear of losing losing one's job losing one's livelihood. I want to ask you both as well.

What do you think it does to the larger society, when you have this sort of chilling effect when you have all these people self censoring when you have, you know, huge organizations and even the government, different governments, taking a side on this and, you know, perpetuating one narrative that does shame and silence and censor its critics. So what does that do to not just the left but just to society in general?

Arty: I think it's the beginning of a very, very dangerous trend. If you look at history, if you look at when progressive views descended into authoritarian views, like in many times this has happened in the 20th century but my favorite example is East Germany, it's starting to look and feel a little bit like that.

And I know that might sound off-putting and jarring to somebody who thinks that we're just talking about a sort of niche issue that has to do with a few people having distress around gender. But the way that it's being censored, the way that it's created such a climate of fear and total control over the narrative and total excommunication of anybody who says anything at all about it. This can easily transfer to other areas.

So I think it's really, really scary. It's a really, really dangerous precedent that we've set, and we really, really have to address it. It'll be very interesting to see how this plays out over the next few years. Hopefully, we will correct this mistake in our censorship, but who knows?

Stella: Yeah, I also think it'll take a few years, at least. I think there's a very worrying belief system that young people are growing up into, which is your dark side is shameful and needs to be given no room.

So it's the entire concept of psychotherapy is frankly, you know, thrown out with this because everybody up until maybe a decade ago accepted that we have a yin and a yang. We have a dark side and a shadow side and a bright side, positive and negative. And that if you don't give some kind of acknowledgement to those darker impulses in you, you will end up being driven by them, you'll be shaped by them and you will behave in really quite toxic and warped ways. And so it's very important that you acknowledge that sometimes we're greedy, sometimes we're lustful, sometimes we're selfish, sometimes we have horrible, mean thoughts about other people.

And that's the lot of the human, that is the human condition. And make a peace with that and, you know, have some self-acceptance, have acceptance of other people being like that and we'll all roll along better. But these young people have been taught that by society, by the general filing of you can't say that, you can't think that. Don't you dare say or think that and what's wrong with you that you're thinking that?

So they're being taught in a way that's so reminiscent of myself when I was growing up in the 80s of the Catholic Church. They were impure thoughts. You shouldn't be having them. There's something wrong with you for having them and you need to suppress them.

And so young people are basically, I can see it with my kids, like there's a vibe of you're not allowed to think things, let alone say them. You're not allowed to think. And so they're basically suppressing everything about Freud onwards. It's all gone out. Forget about it all. Because that was the fundamentals of our understanding of human kind of psyche. That's all been wiped away and you should be thinking good things.

And if you're not, there's something wrong with you and hide it. And I think it's really going to cause, and it's already causing a huge amount of really toxic, anonymous behaviour. Of course it is. Where else would it go?

Arty: Yeah. And the Internet only exacerbates that. The whole social dynamics of social media have fundamentally transformed our society. Not for the better, if you ask me. But if we're looking for a kind of like, people always compare now to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell.

But I think it's more apt to compare it to *The Crucible*. You know, if we're looking for...

Stella: I thought you were going to say *Brave New World*.

Arty: No, actually, because you were talking about people censoring themselves and their fear and this falling out with the tribe and calling someone a witch and all of that. It seems like it's so apt to what's going on these days, but it's like made a thousand times worse because of social media.

Sasha: Yeah. So we see this chilling effect and the effect that it's having on the society. It's really interesting to hear you both talk about that, especially Stella, that kind of the dark side and how that has to come out in other ways. And you know, a lot of the backlash to the questions that people such as yourselves raise is really vitriolic. I mean, it's really brutal. They do try to destroy people's lives. And I mean, I guess just to maybe not dwell on that too much more, but just one more question on that. If you could speak to, I guess, the extreme nature of the response when questions are asked, kind of the anger, the emotionality that we see coming up.

Arty: Oh, God, I'll give you an example, a funny one. I was in London in the fall and I went to a gay bar, as I want to do, and I was chatting with some random fellows at the bar and it was all lovely. And something somebody said something about something. I don't remember what, but J.K. Rowling's name came up and I simply said that I like J.K. Rowling. And somebody erupted into a fit of rage about her supposed transphobia and my transphobia for mentioning my fandom of J.K. Rowling. And it got so bad that he almost threw a chair at me and had to get out of the bar.

So that's that's like a hysteria when you can't go to a gay bar and mention J.K. Rowling's name without somebody trying to throw furniture at you. It's crazy times we're living in. Yeah.

Stella: Yeah, I remember the same, like I remember I posted something about J.K. Rowling online and an old friend of mine kind of contacted me to say, listen, she comes across as really decent and I know all this philanthropy and all this, but don't be fooled. Don't be fooled by her niceness, you know what I mean? It's all a very, very elaborate way to be evil. It's just, you know, she does it in a nice way. I don't know, like the convoluted nature. It does feel very hysterical.

I know the kind of the nasty, funny, the very, the outlandishly throw a chair kind of online nastiness. I just I'm not as bothered by that as I am by the people who are closer to me. You know, I think it may be it's the vanity of small differences, but when they're completely outlandishly, quite clearly, seriously disturbed, I just think, God, wow, and I move on. But when it's somebody who's coming across really civilized and then they just cannot open their mind to the fact that they really should read, for example, J.K. Rowling's essay before they comment on it. Those people that I am so civilised and I'm too civilised to even read something. That is what gives me the chill. So it's the veneer of the sophisticated thinker who won't think in a sophisticated way. They frighten me a lot more than the throwing chair, slaving lunatic. What can we do about that?

Arty: Yeah, well, I spent a lot of time studying Scientology, not as a Scientologist, but as a fascinated onlooker at the kind of train wreck of Scientology. It's very famously a dangerous call, but a lot of very intelligent, rational minded people somehow manage to get caught up in it.

And I spent a few years really just soaking it all up. So, so fascinating. Just as an exercise in understanding how human minds work and how people can get roped into strange beliefs that aren't rational. And there's one of the lessons I learned arguing with Scientologists on message boards online was that they, you shouldn't call it brainwashing. It's more appropriate to call it heartwashing because people how they get roped into Scientology is that slowly, slowly, bit by bit, this group, the Scientologist group convinces you that they are decent and that they're good and they're your team and they're your tribe. And you develop this tremendous affinity for these decent people and their actual beliefs don't matter.

Most Scientologists don't even know what Scientology even does or even believes. All they know is that they're a group doing good and they are good. So when you try to show them that Scientology has done something bad, it's not that they're too brainwashed to see it. It's that they're too heartwashed. It would hurt their feelings to be told that their group has done something bad. So they have to push it out. Their hearts will not allow their minds to even process any information that might tell them that their tribe that they're deeply loyal to is somehow bad.

And the gay rights movement has a tremendous amount of goodwill in the world right now, especially among the left. And the gender identity movement has taken a lot of that energy. A lot of people on the left believe that transgender is the new gay rights and that all of their passion and infinity and affinity for lesbian and gay people is attached to anybody who is transgender as well.

And that to do anything that might make you think differently about this is so frightening to them that it's akin to saying that all gays and lesbians basically deserve to die. They can't process anything, no matter how well spoken it is, no matter how reasonable it is, if it's telling them that they are somehow mistaken in their allegiance with this tribe.

Of course, I'm not telling anyone to be that they're mistaken and having allegiance for gays and lesbians. I'm a gay rights advocate and I'm not telling anyone that they're mistaken to be having allegiance with their transgender friends by no means. I'm simply arguing that people should look at this issue with a rational lens, should question some of the underlying assumptions about this and to just sort of treat it more rationally.

But people can't see that because their emotions are blocking them from listening to anything that might suggest to them that they're on the wrong tribe, if that makes any sense. So it's kind of heartwashing rather than brainwashing. People are so emotionally wedded to this group and to this identity group that anything that even suggests that they might possibly change their mind about that view must never be even allowed in in the first place.

And anybody who's trying to say anything that might threaten that sense of allegiance can never, never be trusted. And that's why someone as decent as J.K. Rowling, famously one of

the most decent people in the world, writer of books that are beloved by hundreds of millions of people, can be suddenly treated like a hostile monster who's out to trick you into being bad. That she can't be trusted, you know?

Sasha: Yeah, Stella, did you want to add anything on that before I take it?

Stella: No, I agree completely though, yeah. I remember this really stuck with me. I have a friend who's a psychologist, and when she first started probing into what me and Arty are experiencing, she said, I couldn't believe it because if it was true, it meant the entire of my civilized society was completely rotten. So therefore, it couldn't be true. So she spent a complete year studying it, reading, what Stella said couldn't be right, because actually it upturns our civilization because massive lies have got into all the institutions and schools.

And I know I sound a bit mad, but I can see where she was coming from. She was like, I just cannot believe that J.K. Rowling must be bad because that level of vitriol couldn't have happened misguidedly. And you know what I mean? She came from the premise of the populace had been so insanely full on certain that it couldn't be wrong. And so, like, God bless her like it took her a year, but she did kind of, she came from the premise of I must be wrong. Stella must be wrong. Everybody else, because there's too many people on the other side saying it with such certainty.

And I thought that gave me a real insight into how people just think. It reminds me often, I know I say this analogy a lot, but in Northern Ireland and Ireland, we had the troubles for 40 years and people were, thousands of people died. And it was very, very complicated. And everybody was scared stiff of speaking about it because it was so easy to go wrong.

And everybody would go, you're wrong. You don't understand. It's very complex. And so you'd be shot and nobody would say anything. And only the real extreme experts on both sides would speak and everybody else would go, don't ask me. It's too hard. It's too complex.

So I do think that's happening as well. You know, it's a very strange position society has got itself into.

Arty: Yeah, there's something, there's a line in Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, I think, that was pointed out to me. Somebody is calling it like the Matilda Principle, where the head teacher is being so viciously cruel to the students that their parents simply won't believe them. And Matilda says, don't do anything halfway. Go whole hog. Be so extreme because then no one will ever believe that it's true. And that seems to be what's happened. This is so shockingly big and it's such a shocking mistake that we've somehow walked into that it's just almost unbearable to face the enormity of it

And it makes me wonder a lot how this is going to play out. I don't think we've ever, as a society, had to deal with this in the age of social media, in the age of digital technology, where everything we've ever said can be held to account.

A lot of people have put themselves on the record saying some really, really shocking things, and they can't just quietly hope that everybody forgets. It's not like your racist uncle, you know, who quietly dropped his racist views when his niece married someone of a different race, and then we all just forget about it.

These, everything everybody said is documented. It's online. So that's going to be really interesting how this plays out.

Sasha: Yeah, and you both, you know, stated so eloquently how it really is scary to speak up about this and to be a little more fair than I think I was a few minutes ago to the people who stay anonymous, you know, that it comes with a real risk and they may be scared of even asking a question for fear of being shunned by everyone they know or, you know, they might be afraid of saying the wrong thing. It is hard. They might feel like they're stepping on a landmine.

For my last question, just if you could, if you guys could just say a few words, what would you say to someone like that who maybe has a question about this and they know that by asking it, they will be potentially smeared or shamed? What would you say to that person?

Stella: It's never too late to do the right thing. I think your moral integrity is probably the most important thing a person can have. And, you know, to give your power away by allowing yourself to be silenced is betraying yourself and dishonouring yourself. And I think it's incredibly important that people go back, defend the right to ask a question with good faith and that actually intention matters.

And to kind of learn to kind of stand our ground in defending that position of my intention is good and my question is decent and honourable and to kind of hold our boundaries on that point. I think it's incredibly important if somebody is silenced and has lost their integrity that they look at themselves in the mirror and think I need to do the right thing.

Arty: At the very least, don't throw other people under the bus, or at least take a step, try it, you know, try saying something like I think this person should at least have the right to have their opinion, or if you don't want to voice your own opinion and venture that, then at least defend someone else who's doing so. Take a step, you know, take a baby step and see how it feels. And just always make the effort to move in the right direction.

Because when everybody stays silent, and when nobody takes even a toe step forward, nothing moves. So, you know, try it, try speaking up, just say something nice about JK Rowling, or something, you know, just do your best to at least defend people who are speaking up.

And try to listen, if you're not sure where to begin, just open your heart to this, open your heart to trust that people who may have different views than you on this are not inhuman, that we are compassionate people, that we're not out to trick you, we're not out to hurt anybody. So open your heart.

Sasha: Fantastic. Thank you both so much. This was a wonderful conversation. It's always great to talk to both of you. And I really appreciate you coming. I think you've given our audience hopefully a lot to think about and it's been really wonderful. Thank you both so much.

Stella: Thank you.

Arty: Oh, thank you so much. It's lovely to see you both.