

HENRY: [00:00:07] Welcome to another episode of the "Talks at Google" podcast, where great minds meet. I'm Henry bringing you this episode focused on Broadway's "Head Over Heels" and the serious message inside this raucous comedy. "Talks at Google" brings the world's most influential creators, makers, and doers all to one place. Every episode of this podcast is taken from a video that can be seen at [YouTube.com/TalksatGoogle](https://www.youtube.com/TalksatGoogle). "Head Over Heels" is a musical comedy currently playing on Broadway and is set to the iconic music of the 1980s all-female rock band The Go-Go's. It's a hilarious and sexy celebration of love in all its infinite varieties told through the story of a royal family that must embark on an extravagant journey to save their beloved kingdom and to find love and acceptance. This episode also features an identity-focused panel with Peppermint, season nine finalist of "RuPaul's Drag Race," Rain Dove, nonbinary model, actor, and activist, [00:01:01] Geena Rocero, model and founder of advocacy group Gender Proud, and Chase Strangio, ACLU lawyer and transgender rights activist. Here is "Head Over Heels" on Broadway: A Trans Perspective.

["We Got the Beat" by The Go-Go's]

BELINDA CARLISLE singing: We don't know where they want to go but they're walking in time. They got the beat, they got the beat. They got the beat. Yeah, he's got the beat.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Please give a big hand for Peppermint, Bonnie Milligan, and Taylor Iman Jones! Keep it going! Yes! [00:02:02] Welcome, hello. PEPPERMINT: Hello. Hi.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yes, I think we can pretty much end after that amazing video. Thank you so much for being here. Tickets available--perfect. Welcome to Google.

PEPPERMINT: Thank you.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Thank you so much for coming. We're so excited to have you. Before we get started, just let's go down the line. We'll start with you, Bonnie. Just tell us about yourself and your character in the show. BONNIE MILLIGAN: Hello. Bonnie Milligan. I'm making my Broadway debut doing this show. I'm very excited. And I play one of the princesses in this royal family of Arcadia, Pamela.

TAYLOR IMAN JONES: My name is Taylor Jones and I play her royal handmaiden in the show who has a bit of a crush.

BONNIE MILLIGAN: Back at you.

PEPPERMINT: I'm Peppermint. Do I need that?

MICHAEL SHAYAN: No, you're good.

PEPPERMINT: I'm Peppermint and I play Pythio the Oracle in the show. And it's my Broadway debut as well!

BONNIE MILLIGAN: [00:03:01] Yes!

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Believe me, we are going to talk about this. This is amazing. And it's all of your Google debuts.

TAYLOR IMAN JONES: Yes.

BONNIE MILLIGAN: It is.

PEPPERMINT: It is. Well, yeah, yeah. In person.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yes, amazing.

BONNIE MILLIGAN: I use Google all the time, I don't know if that-- MICHAEL SHAYAN: Every time you say it, we get \$0.10, so keep saying it. TAYLOR IMAN JONES: Google, Google, Google, Google, Google, Google. MICHAEL SHAYAN: So this show just gave--I mean, it really just gave me so much life and seeing you three on stage is just, like, such a delight. Let's just start by talking about these Broadway debuts. Peppermint, obviously you are making history as the first out trans person to originate a role on Broadway, which is like—

PEPPERMINT: A mouthful.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: I practiced that before. I mean, what's that like? How did you get involved with the show? And how does it feel?

PEPPERMINT: It's a dream come true to make your Broadway debut is so--I'm on cloud 900. [00:04:03] And you're right, it is an historic moment and I don't take that lightly. It just feels so great that I had the opportunity to audition and, actually, you know, the drag gods were in the room when I auditioned, and I got the part. And initially I was just excited to be on Broadway but then I had a chance to read more into the script and obviously meet the fabulous cast. Just the entire experience has been great for me, and then I'm also really happy that there is this historic moment. And not only my casting but also in the character, and that's not lost on me at all.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah, tell me a little bit about the character and how you sort of created this character. How do you interpret the character-- PEPPERMINT: I didn't create the character, but—

MICHAEL SHAYAN: No, I mean, like, how do you create the character on stage?

PEPPERMINT: Okay, originate.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Originate.

PEPPERMINT: [00:04:59] Well, the character is Pythio, who is the Oracle of Delphi, who has--for those who come to see the show--a few different connections to each cast member in the show. And I guess it's important to say that the show is essentially about a family on the run, on a journey of self-discovery, to say it very quickly. And so the Oracle is instrumental in that and gives some key prophecies that are kind of dooming. And so the Oracle themselves identify as gender nonbinary, and so that's, I think, an historic moment as well. I've never heard of any Broadway characters self-expressing as nonbinary. And so, getting into the role, I mean, luckily the nonbinary part of it is not very daunting for me. Just obviously having dealt with my own issues of gender and kind of exploring that myself.[00:06:04] But on top of it, there's something kind of mythical and mystical about my character in a very positive way. And they're very empowered, and they're very powerful and in control every moment in the show, which is, I think, rare a lot of times for queer folk and especially gender nonconforming folk who are oftentimes the butt of the joke, killed off way too soon, or just, like, this mythical being like a unicorn, which is lovely, but we're more than that obviously. So it's great to have kind of a full circle moment.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah, beautiful. I mean we will talk about representation because I think it's--on one level just seeing the three of you here on the stage, just such fierce and talented, gor--amazing.

PEPPERMINT: You say "gorgeous," what, huh?

MICHAEL SHAYAN: I have six pages of it honey, okay.

PEPPERMINT: We get paid every time you say "gorgeous."

TAYLOR IMAN JONES: [00:07:02] Gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous. MICHAEL SHAYAN: Gorgeous, gorgeous! So representation on that level I think is just I think really beautiful. Bonnie, we've talked about sort of like, representation as a person of size.

BONNIE MILLIGAN: Yes.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Will you talk about like your song "Beautiful"?

BONNIE MILLIGAN: Well, I get to be the beautiful princess and everybody on stage, like, agrees and says "yes." Like, I'm not the butt of a joke, which is sadly revolutionary.

TAYLOR IMAN JONES: She's the most beautiful princess in the whole land. BONNIE MILLIGAN: The most beautiful. And I have a love story, spoiler alert, with Taylor. And it's something that you don't get to see plus size people, "A", be onstage without being like, I don't know, explained why you're there in some kind of way with like, "well, she's struggling through her self-worth" or some kind of fat joke or something. It's just not there. And you have like, "Hairspray" which paved the way, but then it was about her size and overcoming it. [00:07:57] And "Margaritaville," there are different things we talk about with size, and this is the first time I think, in a Broadway musical, where you have a plus size woman being the beautiful girl on stage and having a love story and falling in love. And actually the lesbian love story is just filled with joy and discovery, and we embrace it, and everyone on stage embraces us, which is also sadly revolutionary, so I love representing all that and giving more voice to lots of people.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah. I mean, what I love about the show is that it takes these sort of tropes--Elizabethan language and characters from the 14th and 15th century--and queers them in a very hilarious and smart way. It's a very queer show and there's queer love which I think is beautiful. Taylor, I'm looking at you. Just talk to me a little bit about the love stories in the show and, like, what does that mean to have a queer love story represented on Broadway and many queer love stories? [00:09:03] Like, what's that like for all of you?

TAYLOR IMAN JONES: I think one of the coolest things about our show is there are many love stories and none of them are really gender-based at all. Like, everyone's in love with someone else, and they either find out it's not what they expected or it is what they expected or they don't care whether it was what they expected or not. And I think that's--we have a character who's dressed in drag for a lot of the show. He's a male dressed as a female, but the king and queen both find themselves attracted to this person along with the young princess is attracted to this person, no matter who they are, and I think that's really important and feels so cool to be a part of. And to get to share that with everyone, and like you said, have people at the stage door see themselves on stage finally in a positive way.

BONNIE MILLIGAN: Celebrated.

TAYLOR IMAN JONES: Yeah.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: I want to ask about the reactions to the show. Peppermint, obviously, hello, season nine of "RuPaul's Drag Race," which you were--

PEPPERMINT: [00:10:01] Season nine runner-up of "RuPaul's Drag Race." TAYLOR IMAN JONES: Queen to us!

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yes! Is there crossover in the audiences of--do you see a lot of "Drag Race" fans coming to the show?

PEPPERMINT: There must--I think so.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah.

PEPPERMINT: Yeah, "Drag Race" is so mainstream now, so there's definitely people, especially at the stage door, which is really the opportunity to meet people who obviously have seen the show and hear what they have to express. And a lot of them say "I watched you on season nine and now I'm getting to see you here, which is great!" So yeah, "Drag Race" is a nice little intersection.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: When I saw the show, Sasha Velour was there.

PEPPERMINT: Oh, yes!

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Right behind us, yes. Have other "Drag Race" sisters of yours come through?

PEPPERMINT: Yeah, yeah. And a whole bunch more are coming. I think DragCon is coming up, so there's gonna be plenty. But yeah, Sasha was there, Bob the Drag Queen, Thorgy Thor was here recently.

TAYLOR IMAN JONES: Carmen.

PEPPERMINT: Yeah, they've all--Carmen. Yeah, they've all come to support--

MICHAEL SHAYAN: [00:11:02] Oh, wow.

PEPPERMINT: And hopefully enjoy.

BONNIE MILLIGAN: Which is super great for us. Super great for us.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: I think this is a good time to take a pause. Thank you, Taylor and Bonnie, for joining us. They will be back at the end of the show to treat you guys to a---

PEPPERMINT: To kill you.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: To kill you.

PEPPERMINT: With their voices. I shouldn't say that. Hi, security. MICHAEL SHAYAN: To slay you, perfect. I want to invite--thank you both. Give them a hand. I want to--it's my pleasure and honor to invite a number of leaders and activists from our community to have a discussion about exactly what we're talking about, representation, identity. So please give a big, big Google welcome to Rain Dove, to Chase Strangio, and Geena Rocero. [00:12:08] Yes, perfect. So just to quickly give bios and then I want to hear from all of you. Rain, you were just on the cover of "Vogue" Italia, amazing. We will talk about that. And you're a model--a longtime model in New York. Chase, you are at the ACLU. You are the first out trans person--first out trans attorney at the ACLU, is that right?

CHASE STRANGIO: I mean, that we know of, sure.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: That we know of, okay, great. And Geena, hey Geena. You're a model, producer, and founder of media advocacy group Gender Proud. One more big hand for all of our guests. Yes! So we've sort of been talking a little bit about identity and sort of representation and I want to sort of open by posing to the group here, like, how does your identity show up in your art? [00:13:05] Can we talk a little bit about--and you talked a little bit about this, but I would love to hear you talk more about--does your identity as a trans woman inform your identity as a performer? Let's start there.

PEPPERMINT: Yeah, for a long time my drag--I've been working in New York as a drag queen for 20-something years, and so for--most of that time was before I had really medically transition or even, like, mentally transitioned. And so for the longest time expressing myself as Peppermint the queen was the only access that I had to people affirming kind of this feminine, female--this womanly identity that I created. And so my drag character, persona, is really just my trans identity kind of heightened. [00:14:05] And for the longest time, that's all I had until, eventually, I was able to kind of wrap my head around more and able to kind of--I don't want to say separate the two, but really cement my own identity, my own self everyday as a trans woman. And all the while I kind of transitioned underneath my drag persona, so Peppermint the drag queen kind of protected me from people judging me about why am I wearing this clothing or why do you just have makeup on? And are you going to a show? And all these little questions that I would sometimes get. And also, for myself, it allowed me kind of this space to see me as--to create myself, which I had already done as a queen, and so, yeah. My art, my first art, which is my drag, and I still work as a drag queen, definitely is 100% made up of everything that's Peppermint.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: [00:15:10] Oh, wow. So do you think that--I'm just interested in this idea of you're using your drag as a protection and as a shield. Like, was that a conscious thing for you? Like, were you aware of that while it was happening?

PEPPERMINT: Oh, yeah, yeah, in many ways. I knew that I wanted to--I felt fabulous, and I wanted to wear these women's clothing and strut my stuff, and obviously I have a joy and love of performing, so drag was the perfect calling for me. And there really wasn't any--there weren't any other realms. There was no other Broadway roles that were being written that were supportive of trans identities or even gender nonconforming anything, really, in my experience. [00:16:00] Especially as a Black person auditioning, it was pretty shallow and narrow, I should say. So I created this drag persona to kind of include everything that I always wanted to be, and I knew that, for me, the kind of fantasy of Peppermint the drag queen was just everything I always just wanted to be, how I want to be seen, and if I can't access that in any other way, then I'll do it on stage, and I'll get paid for it. And people are gonna clap. And that's kind of what I started it out as, you know.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Wow, yeah.

GEENA ROCERO: I want to add something about what Peppermint was saying about protection and that persona and creating that whole identity for us, by us because it's more than protection. Its survival, right? I mean, for so long we really needed to find our way to--for us to find platforms for ourselves, for us to express ourselves, and to find those safe spaces. [00:17:00] I mean, for me personally, I was born and raised in the Philippines. We have this culture in the Philippines of transgender beauty pageants that happens during the most traditional Catholic religion tradition. Irony is not lost on me, but we did it,

so it's part of our culture. So in a way, growing up as a young person, we needed to find those ways and avenues to express ourselves. So these trans beauty pageants that happens all over the Philippines, this is how I first learned about myself at 15 years old. This is how I first learned how to really get to know about who I am and surround myself with a community that loved me and supported me, and I found my chosen family. So just to build up on that, finding ways to protect ourselves, it's also a way to survive and also building off to that as people, as communities, to thrive as a community.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah, you mentioned chosen families. I just want to talk a little bit about that. I mean, there's this idea in the queer community that we as queer people often get to choose our families and the people that we surround ourselves with. [00:18:01] Can you just talk a little bit more about what that means for you and--and, Chase, we'd love to hear from you too about how this shows up in your activism and your legal work.

CHASE STRANGIO: Yeah, I mean, just going back to the initial question and thinking about, well, what does it mean to show up as ourselves in our--to sort of be a disruption of the expectations that are often imposed on us. And so I sort of like the idea of thinking about law as art because we're narrative story tellers as lawyers. The work that we're doing is always engaging with culture, and so if you take me showing up in my body and being public about that, making it visible, you know, as assigned female at birth, I don't have a very traditionally masculine presentation in the courtroom or anywhere else, and that is very much a disruption to the gender normative structures in the courtroom and in the law. And I think the law doesn't really allow for nuance. [00:19:02] It tries to box people into binaries. It tries to tell people that they can't live intersectional, nuanced, complex lives, and so if we cede that terrain to our opponents to the legal structure, then we're never gonna make space for people to survive and step into their existence. And we have to be really careful about, especially in sort of conservative and repressive political climates, really giving up on the idea that we have the power to tell our own stories in all the different places that we show up. And naming our bodies and naming our truth is in and of itself a disruption that is dangerous for many people, particularly people of color, particularly people who don't live in binaries, people who are bisexual, people who are nonbinary, people who are people of color, whose existence is a threat to the power structures that exist. It is imperative that we name the complexities of our lives and step into spaces where we're not expected and allowed to be. And so that's how I try, as a lawyer, to walk into the courtroom and to tell stories of my clients and myself so that we aren't erased from the power structures that try very hard to erase people.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah. Yes. Yeah, I mean, I totally hear you and I think like, just on that sort of piece of naming and claiming your own identity and personhood, like, Rain, I heard you in an interview. You said you identify as gender nonbelieving?

RAIN DOVE: It's not gender nonbelieving. My identity is "I am I." So I don't have any language. I allow other people to use whatever they feel is fit. We're born into language, and that language is tailored to each person specifically. It's a unique experience. In order for language to work, you have to have an understanding of the history of the sound. [00:21:02] And if I said the color "red" right now, I guarantee everyone has a different shade in their head, so I don't police other people's language for me. When people--I always say a pronoun is just a sound, and all I'm listening for in that sound is positivity. So you can use she, he, it, one, they, whatever you want to use for me is appropriate. However, for some people--like for me, that's ultimate freedom. I just-- I'm in this little flesh-bound thing. We don't look like ants, and even ants look different under a microscope, so why are we comparing each other? Why are

we homogenizing each other? Doesn't make any sense to me. However, for some people, finding their identity and having that label and having that kind of stability and that thing, it's their freedom because they had to give up so much--their families, their careers, their lives, maybe even lives of others in order to be able to say, "this history of this word is a thing that I want to be." [00:22:00] So I don't police the way other people identify themselves either. And I don't see other people as imprisoning themselves. In my work, I talk about gender as, like, gender capitalism. The idea that we've weaponized this division in society, he and she, as something you can capitalize on and make money off of and sometimes even have advantages given to you. So a lot of my art actually goes around comparative photos. So I just did an experiment with domestic violence. I went on to the New York City subway trains and I presented as societally very masculine and then societally very feminine. And then I had two other people with me and we yelled at each other on the train. Culminating in a slap across the face. When people perceived that there was a female yelling at a male, they'd be like, "Girl, you get that guy! You get him! You get him! Oh, boy, you're in trouble." But the minute the guy raised his voice, people would literally grab me. [00:23:03] They would grab me. They'd sometimes would even hit me. We have a couple of times where somebody was like "bro, you need to chill out" and they hit me. And when I did it where it looked like the same two genders by societal perception of what is male and female, people just took out their cell phones and recorded. And it made it very clear that it is actually more advantageous to be a female in a public situation in which you are--you need help. Whereas if you're a male, people tend to sit back a little bit more and with same sex, or same gender presentation, we just don't have enough education to be able to identify when somebody's being abused at all. People just didn't know what to do. So that's the kind of experiment I do. I take the videos, I show side-by-side, just like, it's just--I was born into this body, but by identifying with one or the other, why do I deserve less? Why do I deserve less because I might have more here? [00:24:00] Or I definitely have more here? You know? It doesn't make any sense to me.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: What's your experience been in modeling and in fashion? What's that space been like for you as you've been sort of in the community for years? How did you sort of enter it and navigate it, and how does it sort of play out for you now?

RAIN DOVE: So basically in the modeling industry, it's one of the few industries in which men make less than women by far. And I model as everything. Whatever you put me in. In the industry, I find that there's a lot more protection for women for sexual harassment. So when I do male-perceived jobs, I tend to find that people want me to take off more, they want me to expose more, and for male portfolios actually there's a lot more nudity, but it's something we don't talk about because men are supposed to be more comfortable with their bodies, and men are supposed to be able to stand up for themselves. [00:25:00] However, with a lot of the women's stuff, the clothing that they want you to wear, the garments, even the heels can be absolutely crippling, and damaging, and it's so brutal. You walk into a room. People will flat out say, "You're fucking ugly. Why did you even come here? This is a women's casting! Come here when you pick a team," you know? And the women are very competitive with each other, so they tend to put you down a lot behind the scenes because it is so intense. So the women, you know, they're hungry. They're told to lose weight. I'm actually up right now for--I just probably got the Louis Vuitton runway show and campaign. But--thank you. I'm very excited. But it turns out it's the women's show, and they want me to lose 15 pounds before September 5th.

PEPPERMINT: Don't drink any more water!

RAIN DOVE: I've lost six total, and that's as far as I'm gonna go, and they can fuck off. [00:26:03] But yeah, I mean, I was gonna say, I really wanted to like, point out Geena because, Geena, you've been in this industry a lot, too. And you know like, it's intense, it's brutal.

GEENA ROCERO: I wanted to just put context to what Rain was talking about. It's important to understand also what had happened for so long. I mean, personally, I now produce documentaries, web series, and stories that center the narratives of the most marginalized in our community, specifically trans women of color. Especially created by a trans woman of color. For me that was very important, very critical, both for representation and the nuanced storytelling. For so long--I was born and raised in the Philippines, and I moved to New York in 2005 to pursue my dream to be a model, and in 2005, there is not an out trans identified fashion model, so it's important to have the context that we're having now. For so many people, when they see what's happening now in fashion, gender nonbinary, gender fluid, all that stuff, like, that was not the case three years ago, four years ago, right? [00:27:04] So when I moved in New York City in 2005, I made the decision to not share to my model agent that I'm trans, acknowledging the degree of privilege on that. Because for so long, I've had this--there's many women pioneers who came before me, women like Tracy "Africa" Norman, Caroline Cossey, Lauren Foster, and many women who paved the way for me as a transgender model that, when they got found out, their careers basically disappeared. So, in a way, there were both a sense of possibility of what could happen for me, but also a sense of fear that, oh, if I actually come out, that's what's gonna happen to me. So I was working as a model for about ten years, and I was working, doing commercials, cover of magazines, but every time I would go home, I would always feel so scared and so paranoid that, oh, "The New York Post" page six will find out I'm trans. My career would be over. So I was living in paranoia.[00:27:59] So a lot of obviously things that has changed when it comes to media representation, but after almost ten years of doing that, I've had enough. So I made the decision to take ownership of my story. I wanted to tell the world and come out to the world, so I decided to come out on a TED Talk in 2014. And even just 2014 to 2018, so much as happened. It feels so long ago because all of a sudden this conversation of gender, the "TIME" magazine, Laverne Cox, what we see on media right now, posts being written, created, starred by trans people of color, centering the narrative. So much has happened, right? So it's important to understand the context in which where we're at right now. Certainly there's so much more that needs to be done, but it's important understand that there are so many people, especially the pioneers, who suffered, basically, for paving the way for so many people.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah. I want to talk about coming out. And your TED Talk, Geena, I think is really beautiful. Everyone should go watch it [00:29:00] It was titled "Why I Must Come Out," and something about that word "must" just sort of struck me.

GEENA ROCERO: I didn't title that talk, by the way, so it's important to even have that. But certainly, I now have a different understanding of this word of "coming out" because what does that really--for me, growing up in the Philippines I knew I was--I came out to my mom when I was wearing my T-shirt on my head, telling my mom, "Mom, this is my hair," this is me coming out at five. I came out again at 15, started joining pageants. Certainly we want to have this nuanced conversation about these words, right? Because we all deserve that. To have those conversations. Especially the cultural context in which all of these things kind of plays a part. Certainly in 2014, so much is happening. I mean, Chase and I were actually, we haven't seen each other in a while but we were even just talking about, when did we meet? And we actually met around 2014 because a lot of things are happening in 2014 as we all could

remember. [00:30:02] It's "TIME" magazine says the tipping point, obviously that's something to argue about. But this word of "coming out," what does that really mean, right?

CHASE STRANGIO: And also just to build off what Geena is saying and what Rain said, we all have a responsibility to understand that gender is a system that we're all complicit in, and it leaves some people imperiled by the system and others are benefiting from it. But the very concept of coming out is predicated first on an assumption of cis-ness, and an assumption of monosexual identity, and so if we're not calling it the question of, well, what are we all deploying every day as the signifiers of gender? Of the assumptions of sort of bodily coherence? And even "Head Over Heels" plays on this because it assumes that if you hear the word "vagina," you think woman. You hear the word "penis," you think man. [00:30:58] Those are political choices that we're making that then situate very particular bodies in vulnerable ways, and we have a responsibility to unpack that because yes, a lot has happened since 2014 but I can tell you as a parent of a kid, we're not doing a very good job of dismantling gender. We're actually doing a catastrophically terrible job and we're all responsible for that. So I think we should really pay attention to how our language assumes things about other people, both in terms of their bodies and in terms of their attractions to others. And who's left out by that, because it really does have life or death consequences and I think we're all very much responsible for building up those systems.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah, I mean, I love what you said about coming out and just sort of like, taking that idea and sort of turning it on its head a little bit. I'm interested though, how that sort of plays out in the public. I mean, Peppermint, you sort of came out very publicly on "Drag Race," I just want to understand, what is your relationship to coming out? [00:32:01] And like, let's start there.

PEPPERMINT: Just as Geena said, it's an ongoing process. It's something that you do over and over again because coming out really is, for me, it's just telling people more information about myself that's always existed. And so, just as Geena said, there could have been many moments where I revealed something about myself that would have been very telling about my identity, whether I was a child or an adult or, regardless of what language I was using. And so, you know, yeah, it's funny, a lot of people read and people who are fans of "Drag Race" and hadn't known me personally, will say, "Oh, you came out in 2016 as trans." And for them, and I guess for a lot of people when you hear that, it means that's when I transitioned, realized personally for myself what I was. [00:33:01] And that's not the case. I've been living as a trans woman publicly since 2012, and I just wasn't on TV. So yeah, I needed--I felt the need to have a conversation with the people who were in the room alone--well, alone with cameras. And I didn't know these humans so I wanted to talk to them about my existence, but it was more than just me saying, "guys, I have something to confess about my shame." It wasn't that. It really was, in the context, as Geena was saying, of trans-ness and how it meets and intersects and supports drag, and always has. And there's--far too many times there's a lot of people who, just as Rain was saying, people want you to make a choice. Are you trans or are you a drag queen? Tell us which one so we'll know. And a, it's none of their business. But b, I don't see the two as incongruent. [00:34:03] It's a job. I'm a woman and I have a job. Why do I have to choose between those two things? And so that's--the coming out thing has always been an interesting kind of language because I always feel the need to qualify it and explain it. Like yeah, I came out on "RuPaul's Drag Race," but you should know that's not really--I didn't come out. I did but I didn't. So it's complicated. GEENA ROCERO: I think there's a sense of--I think the word that's the through line is a sense of ownership, right? Because when we talk about media and media that's being created, whether it's a Broadway show or a TV show series or anything. A web series, whatever that is. There's a sense of ownership that like, when trans people declare ourselves, initially the reaction

is like, you have to even validate yourself even more. You're not believed that you are this because, for so long, especially American media, it's predicated upon this thing of, you don't own that identity because people were not exposed to it. [00:35:02] Can you believe, like, I found this out, like, about two months ago, "Jerry Springer" was just canceled. So it's been on for that long. Isn't that crazy? So I was born and raised in the Philippines. When I moved to the U.S., we had transgender beauty pageants on national TV in the Philippines. It doesn't mean it makes it—you know, it's such a progressive, accepting place, but we have this very mainstream media representation where people go to church, they go home, they watch a trans beauty pageant. That's what they did. That's what we did. But then when I moved to the U.S., the first representation that I saw on mainstream media was "Jerry Springer," which is all about like, "you're this, you're horrible this, a man, woman," I was just like, "whoa." And for so long American media is predicated upon that, that we don't own about our identities. So all these things that we're always having to validate ourselves is because I think of ownership. Obviously here we're speaking about it because we are who we are. [00:36:02] We don't need to go deeper into—yes, we're educating, but we don't need to go to validate ourselves that we are these human being. Obviously we are. But I think a lot of the things in representation that's happening right now, whether it's in Hollywood, whether it's like, who gets to produce stories about trans people, documentaries about trans people, or like, who gets to play a role, trans roles in Hollywood? In any of this content that we're seeing. So obviously there's a lot more to go but the nuanced conversation is everything. It certainly—as someone who produce content and stories, you know there's a big difference. When there's a trans person or gender nonconforming people behind—not just in front of the camera, but behind the scenes. Recently Rain was part of a documentary that I did with Logo and VH1 about the history of transgender models that when I was doing a project as an executive producer, I couldn't believe that I was doing it because for so long to representation—[00:37:03] I got to invite Tracy "Africa" Norman, Lauren Foster, Crimsona Kaiser, these are the women that I mentioned before that paved the way for me. And sort of bring them to the conversation and take—give them that space of ownership about their stories that for so long they were denied because they got outed. That was the media landscape for so long. So I think the sense of ownership about who we are, our abilities, our talent, it's important to understand that. RAIN DOVE: I'd like to build on that a little bit if I might. Is that—

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yes, we should build on that. We just want to open it up to questions, so if you have questions from the audience, please line up at one of the mics on either side. Sorry to interrupt.

RAIN DOVE: No, of course. So, first of all, I was like, am I supposed to be here? Because I don't identify as trans, however a lot of times people who fall within the nonbinary spectrum are seen as people within the trans community. But I do experience a lot of transphobia. It was a really important thing I think that you did. [00:38:02] It was really amazing. And I just want to build on the idea of people behind the camera. Right now, I just want to put a big warning out to everyone. There are a lot of advertisements. It is popular to have diversity in your ads right now. But just because you see diversity in the ads doesn't mean that they're doing good things. You really have to research the products that you're buying because you might say, "What I'm buying isn't just a great product, it's also making me feel good because I see Rain or Geena or Peppermint on these ads." But they still support animal testing, they still support factory sweatshop labor, they still use palm oil, they still use things that deforest the rainforest. People are trying to use our anguish, our frustration, our marginalization in the feel-good, Cinderella story that someone finally sees us, to sell us something that is a beauty product that has ugly

practices. And I really do want to encourage you all, like if you take something away from this, it's just, continue to educate yourself and really do the work.

>> [00:39:00] There are some really great apps that can scan the bar code, or even like the UPC code on all products. So if you have a favorite product you can just use the app and it will tell you where it sits on an ethical scale. I know it might be a little bit more expensive for ethical products, but that is the cost of a clean conscience. And we really have to invest money in people who truly want to invest it back in us. Yeah.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Thank you. We have a question over here. PERSON: Thank you guys for coming. I want to know what you guys think about how we can raise the next generation to approach this subject in a better fashion. I heard one of you, at least, is a parent, how would you raise your kids, basically?

CHASE STRANGIO: Um... Well –

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Let's examine you.

PEPPERMINT: Your parental skills.

CHASE STRANGIO: Well no, I think that in general, it's so easy to be-- [00:40:01] First of all, caretaking is hard labor that disproportionately falls on women and people who are femme-identified for a lot of reasons, and also people of color. If you walk around a rich, white neighborhood in New York you'll see lots of people of color caring for older people and younger people, and I think we have to be really conscious of like, the white supremacy that's at play in our caretaking in general, so I just wanted to say that. Because that just always strikes me in New York. But I just think we have to be really conscious of the fact that gender is a system. And that every single day, we are gendering people and behaviors, and that there are costs and consequences to that. And so if we can do anything, my sort of goal is to urge us to stop assuming coherence of bodies. So for example, my child doesn't have a concept that body parts correlate to genders. It would make no sense, because my child has seen me naked. And I can't be like, "Oh, a penis is a boy thing but your dad doesn't have one." [00:41:01] And so, that--being really conscious in naming our bodies and destabilizing the idea. Because if we think about the violence against trans and nonbinary communities, particularly femmes of color, women and femmes of color, it's based on the idea of a betrayal of the truth of a body that doesn't line up with people's assumptions. And if we don't start to get rid of those assumptions, we're gonna keep seeing this violence. And just to go back to Geena's point about representation, you all may not have consumed "Jerry Springer," but I bet you watched "Silence of the Lambs" or "Ace Ventura" or "The Crying Game," and these are predicated on the idea of "Oh, my God, there's a penis!" And "Oh, my god, that's so shameful." And our kids still internalize that because we are participating in the idea that bodies are coherently gendered and a gender is not a system but a biological truth, and if we don't move away from that, then I think we're just gonna keep entrenching the binary, and keep making it harder for people to survive, and that's on all of us. Listen to your language. [00:41:57] How often you say "ladies"? How often do you say "dudes"? How often do you say "girl parts," "boy parts"? How often do you assume that peoples--in the men's bathroom stand up to pee at a urinal? What are the ways in which we're participating in this, and imposing that on a younger generation, and the people that we caretake, because we all do it. We do it, too. 100%.

GEENA ROCERO: It's a lot of work, but it's a worthy endeavor to do. Certainly, because it affects everybody.

RAIN DOVE: Yeah, you've been brainwashed since birth to use a particular type of language. I still make mistakes, actually. I preach the thing of like, we need to drop and change our language, but I still make mistakes all the time. I say "dudes" a lot. Or like, "Hey man, what's up?" And that comes right out of my mouth. It's this like, natural thing. So it's not something that happens overnight.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Yeah. Thank you for that. I want to go back to something you said, Geena, about sort of who gets to play the roles. Who gets to write the stories and tell the stories. And Peppermint obviously you are-

PEPPERMINT: I'm writing all the stories.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: You're writing all the stories!

PEPPERMINT: I've written them all.

GEENA ROCERO: This is the next show.[00:43:01]

MICHAEL SHAYAN: As the storyteller—

PEPPERMINT: For history.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: For humanity. No, I just kind of want to ask the question of, what does it mean for you to be a trans woman playing a sort of like, nonbinary role on Broadway?

PEPPERMINT: It means everything, and even before just before that, it was--even though I've been doing drag for 20 years, I was made to feel after so many of my contributions and hard sweat--blood, sweat, and tears in the drag world and New York City, sometimes earning \$50 a show, traipsing to the bar, and having to take the subway home. After all of those dues that I feel that I paid, I felt that I didn't have support--and marching across the Brooklyn Bridge for marriage equality, showing up for AIDS and HIV research and education and prevention events, and giving my time to charity, which I think charitable work is a huge part of drag for me. After doing all those things I felt that I didn't have a single friend or ally in any single one of those spaces when I was dealing with--sorting out my trans-ness. I didn't feel that my jobs would be protected. I worked seven days a week in bars and clubs, and I was in the room when a very popular queen who had since transitioned and was kind of sorting all that out--I was in the room when the manager of the bar was like, "Well let's fire her because she's a trans woman now." As if she doesn't have rent to pay in New York and maybe medical expenses. And so that terrified me that I would have to choose between the two. And the reason why I really went so strong into drag was because I went to college for musical theater performance, thinking that maybe I'd have a career on Broadway. [00:45:04] And there was none of me represented in any of the rooms in any of the scripts, and so--in school I was told that I would have to butch it up. At best, you might be able to play a handful of characters that are written as Black gay guys. And none of those people were leads. And so--not that that was what I was seeking, but just to have an existence in being able to earn a living in Broadway, and then also as a drag queen on a major platform, seemed impossible to me. And I was faced with the very real thought that I would have to--if I want to do anything more than pay my rent--which is exactly what I was doing with those seven jobs, seven-day-a-week jobs. [00:45:59] I would have to investigate and consider survival sex work. This was just three years ago that I would not be able to continue my medical

transition, or do anything more, have a dollar to spend more than my rent after working seven days a week, I'd have to engage in survival sex work. And that was the only option that I thought that I had before auditioning for "Drag Race." And even then, no one was saying, "Come do 'Drag Race,' you are a trans woman. We'll put you on." No one was saying that. I just had auditioned several times and I just said the last time during the audition, I'm just gonna do my thing. I probably won't get on. Who cares? And obviously I got on. And so I didn't really--to answer your question, I didn't envision any possibility that I would ever be on "Drag Race"--on a Broadway stage at all, let alone a principal. [00:45:56] And playing a character who is self-aware and reassured and confident in who they are, and a very real character in that way. And representation does matter because when I was growing up, the closest I had to seeing myself was Richard Simmons. And you know... That's that. So I'm so happy we have shows like "Pose" among other things that are bubbling up. And I have this role on Broadway which is rare now and it feels so good to have it. A moment in history. But it also, at the same time as everyone on the panel has said, it also reminds me of how little opportunity there has been for people like me, and including myself. Did I answer the question? MICHAEL SHAYAN: Has the publicness of this role and of your time on "Drag Race," has that changed your sort of understanding of allyship and your feeling a valid ship at all?[00:48:05]

PEPPERMINT: Yeah, I mean, not those things alone. I think the times changing has clearly helped. I think for so long we'd be remiss by not acknowledging that drag queens and trans folk and gender nonconforming folk have always been connected to the queer community obviously, but gay bars and night life. And I would entertain in Chelsea and in Hell's Kitchen, primarily gay, white, male audiences every single night giving my all, every single night all those seven nights. And then not one--I just didn't feel like there was any understanding at all or any sense of responsibility or any acknowledgment that there is a privilege that even gay white men have. Even though they are a minority. [00:48:57] And we are a family within the queer community, there are moments and certain things that I will never have access to and certainly in the past have never had. And so it was very upsetting to me to march across that Brooklyn Bridge for marriage equality. I am not getting married and even if I were, my partner would not be seen for who he says he is as a heterosexual woman. You know, a lot of women would attack my partner for being gay, and even--I've seen gay guys in the presence of my partner or trans women's partners say, "Oh, you're really just gay. You know what you like. Just come over to our side." And so that feels like a betrayal. And then in 2013, Islan Nettles was one of many trans women of color to be murdered viciously on the street, and there were several vigils and kind of public moments that were had. And I went there and--there were no people from our community that I could see. There certainly weren't a lot of white faces or gay white faces that I knew of that were there. [00:50:05] And that felt like a betrayal as well. Like, I'm a part of this community, I've been entertaining and you know who I am, and if I were murdered, would you show up? And that's a real thing. You know? But it's changing because I'm hearing conversations that are different. This conversation helps.

CHASE STRANGIO: But also, I just want to say, you're now put in the position to say--I want to say as a white person, I want to call on the white queer community. Like, we consume the Black and brown labor, and then don't show up. And Peppermint has been putting herself out there and educating folks and dancing and performing for people, and then to not show up? Like, what is that? And what does allyship really mean in our community because the LGBTQ community is horrible at not showing up for each other and especially when it comes to bi folks, trans folks, and nonbinary people. We erase and exclude, and then benefit from their labor. [00:50:59] So I just want to say like, we can stand here and

congratulate ourselves, yes, we're doing better. But not good enough. And the fact that three years ago Peppermint could not afford to basically survive is an indictment of how much work we have to do internally. And I just want to say like, you shouldn't have to name that but I feel like we should hold that.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Wow. Thank you all so much for this really beautiful and important conversation. I wish we could go all day. I hope we can continue the conversation as a community, and that we take this with us out of this room. And for those watching at home, just really take these words with you. And yes. So before we close, we do have a--please give them a round of applause. [00:52:07] And follow them on social media. Should we get handles real quick?

PEPPERMINT: Peppermint247.

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Perfect.

PEPPERMINT: On all platforms.

RAIN DOVE: RainDoveModel. RainDove was taken, someone took it.

CHASE STRANGIO: I'm just ChaseStrangio on Twitter.

GEENA ROCERO: I'm GeenaRocero, that's G-E-E-N-A, Rocero, R-O-C-E-R-O. Get into it!

MICHAEL SHAYAN: I love a good plug. Okay, so thank you all again. We are going to welcome back Bonnie Milligan and Taylor for a final performance. Taylor Iman Jones!

["Automatic Rainy Day" by Bonnie Milligan and Taylor Iman Jones]

[00:53:05]

BONNIE MILLIGAN AND TAYLOR IMAN JONES singing: You walk into the room and the temperature falls. The mood disappears, chased away by the gathering storm that is here. I look up. Painted sky full of memories. And this house has no roof to shelter me. It's an automatic rainy day when I see you. It's the perfect consolation prize, a little piece of blue. It's an automatic rainy day. It's an automatic rainy day just when it feels like the world is together and whole. [00:54:04] You come around, dragging your permanent cloud and the weather turns cold. Hang around for a repeat of history. Falling down in the hole you dug for me. It's an automatic rainy day when I see you. It's the perfect consolation prize, a little piece of blue. It's an automatic rainy day. It's an automatic rainy day. And when you see the reaction you cause, does it make you sad?

[00:55:00] Do you even realize that you're such a drag? It's an automatic rainy day when I see you. It's the perfect consolation prize, a little piece of blue. It's an automatic rainy day. It's an automatic rainy day. It's a rainy day when I see you, yeah. [00:56:07]

MICHAEL SHAYAN: Taylor Iman Jones, Bonnie Milligan, and the fabulous Miss Ann Klein! Keep it going!

HENRY: Thanks for listening. If you have any feedback about this or any other episode, we'd love to hear from you. You can visit G.co/TalksatGoogle/ PodcastFeedback to leave your comments. To discover more amazing and thought-provoking content, you can always find us online at YouTube.com/TalksatGoogle, or via our Twitter handle @GoogleTalks. Talk soon.