

Women at Warp Episdoe 114: Queer Interpretation of Trek

GRACE:

Hi and welcome to Women at Warp: A Roddenberry Star Trek podcast. Join us as our crew of four women Star Trek fans go on our biweekly mission to explore our favorite franchise. My name is Grace and thanks for tuning in. With us this week we have Andi.

ANDI:

Hello!

GRACE:

We have Sue

SUE:

Hi there.

GRACE:

and we have Jarrah.

JARRAH:

Hey

GRACE

and I of course am Grace. Now before we get to our main topic we have a little bit of housekeeping to do first. Our show is entirely supported by our patrons on Patreon. If you'd like to become a patron you can do so for as little as a dollar a month and get awesome rewards from thanks on social media up to silly watch-along commentaries. Visit www.patreon.com/womenatwarp.com. You can also support us by leaving a rating or review on Apple podcasts Stitcher or wherever you get your podcasts.

So Daily Star Trek news on the Roddenberry podcast network is coming up!

SUE:

That is the new show on the network hosted by Allison Pitt that comes out every day Monday through Friday. and I believe she keeps it to less than 15 minutes you can get all your Star Trek news right as you're starting your day.

ANDI:

That's useful. There's a lot of it lately too.

GRACE:

in infomercial voice What a time saver! Just in 15 minutes?

And as you can probably tell because it's getting hot out and we're getting progressively more excited, Star Trek Las Vegas is coming. It's right around the corner.

ANDI
It's coming

GRACE:
it's coming.

ANDI:
We can't avoid it.

GRACE
No, it's out there. It's looming large as life, like the moon about to crash a planet beneath it.

ANDI:
cackling Is it the moon where we left the pope? the space Pope?

GRACE:
I was thinking Legend of Zelda spooky looking moon but I could see a space Pope hanging out on one of those.

JARRAH:
It is the prophet's ineffable plan.

GRACE:
Well we gotta respect the prophets. *And* we gotta respect heroic programs.

SUE:
Chase Masterons organization Pop Culture Hero Coalition is working with Scott Palm who, you know, is often appearing with Chase and speaking with Chase at different events to create the Heroic Program, which reaches out to kids with disabilities and their peers, with lessons on inclusion self-worth and resilience, and they are having a fundraiser right now and all summer long the Roddenberry Foundation is matching dollar for dollar with any money donated. So we just want to bring that to your attention. That fundraiser can be found on gofundme under Scott Palm, P-A-L-M, heroic fundraiser. If that is too difficult search for, too hard to find, there is a pinned post at the top of the mission log Facebook page that has that link in it and you can find it on Facebook as well.

ANDI:
That's cool.

GRACE:
Well, with no further ado, on to our very special topic. Because it's time, once again, for a very special episode.

ANDI:

A very special gayl episode.

GRACE:

Yes. that's what we mean by special. Can I get some like, lifetime original movie music in the background or something here?

ANDI:

I immediately just wanted to do like saxophone noises and I don't think that's quite where we're going. *crew laughs*

GRACE:

If it's a melancholy saxophone then yeah that works.

ANDI:

What's the song where it's like. *to the tune of Careless Whisper* Doo doo doo doo doo doo doo doo

GRACE:

Careless whisper?!

ANDI:

Yeah! That's immediately what came into my mind.

GRACE:

No that's too sexy it's not melancholy enough!

SUE:

Let's just make sure we don't get sued.

GRACE:

What if we do *starts scattng woefully* do do do do do do do do do here. So it's like soulful but not sexualized.

ANDI:

There you go. Yeah, I like it.

GRACE:

You're welcome. And that's what I got from my music composition class.

JARRAH:

Not going to be confused with any actual song, soo..

GRACE:

Yeah it is! I just wrote it! It's a song now. I've *birthed* it right here for all of you.

ANDI:

You've also patented it by claiming it right now so

GRACE:

yeah

ANDI:

don't steal it nerds

GRACE:

Original song. Please don't steal. So in case you couldn't suss it out we are talking about, for pride month, more LGBTQ related topics. Today's main topic is queer-coding in Star Trek. Now for those of you who aren't hip to the jive we're coding occurs when characters or relationships are given traits associated with LGBTQ people without explicitly stating that they're queer. It does not necessarily imply that the character actually *is* queer. Queer-coding can be positive, it can be negative, although it's more commonly negative. Our understanding of these characters as queer is equally related to our learned understanding of their behavior through the media we've consumed as it is to the creator's intention.

ANDI:

Yes so, like think of this is where a lot of stereotypes come from.

GRACE:

It's where a lot of them originate in pop culture. Definitely.

ANDI:

So if you're thinking about like stereotypical queer traits, this is like little nudge nudge wink wink to the audience that this is a character that is queer. But they never explicitly state that. It's supposed to be just like silently understood by the audience sometimes even subconsciously understood. You can code characters queer through a lot of ways, through the way that they move, through the way that they talk, the way that they dress the way that they relate to other characters. There's lots of different ways to do it but it is an interesting and very vast topic that I'm excited to talk about.

GRACE:

One thing that I thought we should also have *you* be the one to address is how is this different from queer baiting as our resident queer baiting expert.*crew laughs*

ANDI:

So queer *baiting* is a different term, where you have a character that's queer coded but you never allow them to become queer and it's kind of a way to draw in people, like hungry for that representation, and then they will back off it. They won't ever quite go past that like, invisible line where there's, like no way to just pretend anymore. And it's super frustrating. This is, queer baiting, I would say is more popular now or even like the last 10 to 20 years where they wanted queer audiences but they didn't want to go far enough where they would have to stand up for their queer characters.

GRACE:

What are some good examples of this?

ANDI:

Oh! You just want me to talk about Dean Winchester and Castiel in Supernatural. I see where you're going with this Grace. I'm trying *not* to talk about them too much *Grace laughs like an evil gremlin* and you're just throwing the red meat out there. *Grace continues* You are baiting me. You are queer baiting me on this topic!

GRACE:

through laughter I'm baiting your queer-baiting rage!

ANDI:

Yeah, Supernatural is a really good example of this where this show has gone on for, it's going to be 15 seasons soon and it-

GRACE:

exasperated Just let them go guys!

ANDI:

Yeah yeah! And like the way this show has managed to do this is like they built up this huge audience of shipping and like queer fans, and then they're like "Yeah but not really."

GRACE:

Wink!

ANDI:

Wink! And it can get really really frustrating for people because it's like we're good enough for like to buy your merchandise and to watch your show and to keep your show alive as a zombie for years and years and years. *crew laughs* But we're not good enough for you to go like "you know what? It's cool that our main character is clearly queer".

GRACE:

and we see- this isn't the only franchise where we've seen this happen. We saw it happen in Hercules, we saw it happen with Xena, we saw it a bit also with Sherlock with them playing around with the whole like *mocking voice* "oh people think we're gay! Isn't that adorable?"

ANDI:

"But we're NOT! No homo!"

SUE:

Well, and one of the things that the show runners will do is they'll go after it intentionally.

GRACE:

Yeah

SUE:

they will create those like show previews of *pitchman voice* "come watch this week's episode where this stuff might happen!" That sort of thing and lean into this like "This queer thing might happen! These two characters might finally kiss. They might get together" and then they back off of it when the actual show airs. So they rearrange the preview of an episode, or of a movie, or of any kind of property, to get that audience and then back off of it in the actual production.

GRACE:

I feel like it's safe to say they did that with some of later seasons of Buffy also right?

JARRAH:

cough cough Star Wars.*cough*

CREW:

Oooh!

GRACE:

Mercy! We have opinions!

ANDI:

It's a very common tactic.

JARRAH:

Yeah

ANDI:

It was a lot of this was why I said it was more common in like, the last 10 to 20 years, is because it was right in the area of time where things were starting to move forward with representation-

GRACE:

at a glacial pace.

ANDI:

Yeah. But like creators were becoming more comfortable with the idea of queer characters but say producers or networks weren't.

JARRAH:

Mm-hm.

ANDI:

so they were trying to walk this line of like, *kind of* giving us these representation. But like, not far enough that they'd have to defend it to the network.

SUE:

Yeah, and queer baiting is far more recent than queer coding.

CREW:

sounds of agreement

GRACE:

Oh absolutely.

SUE:

And we also need to draw a distinction, I think, between characters that are queer-coded and characters that audiences interpret to be queer for-

GRACE:

Absolutely

SUE:

-things. Coding, at least traditionally, implies intent by the creator and plays on, like, well known stereotypes. Interpretation is based on what you see in the character. What audiences relate to, that sort of thing. And sometimes that's intended by a creator and sometimes it's not. There's a whole bunch of Star Wars fans that interpret Luke Skywalker as asexual. is Luke coded asexual? No, because first of all how would you do that? I don't think that was an intent of George Lucas in the 70s.

GRACE:

Definitely not George Lucas. Mark Hamill has definitely said that he approves of the idea and welcomes any interpretations of the character.

SUE:

Right, but that doesn't mean that he put that in there.

GRACE:

Of course

SUE:

and that's where that difference is. More recently you know in a newer media and stuff coming out now I think it's a lot more *nuanced*. But in general when we're talking about coding we're talking about something that is put into the property by one of the creators and is meant to fly over the heads of straight audiences and connect with queer audiences.

GRACE:

or the people who are **suggestive voice** in the know

SUE:

right.

ANDI:

If we're talking about stereotypes, this is where say a lisp might come in

SUE:

Mm-hm.

ANDI:

Or like moving your hands a certain way, these sorts of things. Dressing really over the top and flamboyantly. Like, these sorts of things are specifically chosen to give the audience like a nudge that this is a queer person. Whereas interpretations are more like people get invested in these characters and they start putting things into them that might not necessarily truly be there in intent but like, they embrace those characters. And that's fine too! We should be clear. It's totally fine if you read something into a character. But when we're talking about coding we're talking about specifically intent by the creators. So just, try not to smush them together.

GRACE:

So for a little historical background here let's talk about that **enraged** incredible version of Hollywood: the Hays code. The Hays code was put into effect to try and regulate the moral decency of Hollywood and America. It was pretty much just absolute bullcrap.

ANDI:

What a kind way to put it.

GRACE:

I'm being very generous. The Hays code, for those of you who aren't all that familiar with it, was the code where you couldn't show actual danger happening to a child, if you had couples sleeping in bed together they had to be in separate beds, or if there was anything romantic happening they had to have at least one foot touching on the ground. It's full of a bunch of

backwards very odd arbitrary rules, and they had a lot of opinions on how gay characters and homosexuality were meant to be portrayed in Hollywood. Because God forbid we don't regulate that. One of the most unfortunate aspects of the Hays Code was that you could have a character be openly homosexual so long as at the end of the plot that your character is punished for it i.e. usually killed or dies horribly. Suddenly Last Summer is a very good example for Tennessee Williams.

SUE:

Suddenly Last Summer is so disturbing.

GRACE:

It *is* on many levels. There's really good coverage if it in 1995s The Celluloid Closet which is a documentary about early queer-coding and queer cinema.

ANDI:

Yeah. One of the non cinema examples that I always like to point to for this is a lesbian pulp novels.

SUE:

Yeah

JARRAH:

Yeess

ANDI:

They are *amazing* by the way, and a lot of them are actually written by queer authors.

GRACE:

Yeah!

ANDI:

And they're truly truly amazing. But the only way that they could be published is like at the end everything goes to shit and they die horribly. And this is where "bury your gays" which is another trope that we have discussed in the past comes in is like this idea that if you have a queer coded person like often they will die horribly. or even just an explicitly queer character like they must be punished for their transgressions against society kind of thing.

SUE

And this is what led to so many queer coded characters being villains.

ANDI:

Yes! If you're wanting to find some super classic examples of queer coding, especially villains, you cannot get more classic than Disney villains.

GRACE:

Hell no. Hell no.

ANDI:

The Disney villains are basically where huge chunks of this like, history is. Ursula is based on Divine, the Drag Queen. I mean Scar?! really?

GRACE:

Jeremy Irons is the campiest campy gay.

ANDI:

I don't think people were expecting when they did this, especially the straight people, is the way that queer people embraced a lot of this.

GRACE:

Yeah because we've got no real role models this is what we've got work with..

ANDI:

Really! Like, if you think you're being served crumbs you will turn them into a feast! And so if you want to find a bigger queer icon than Ursula. Good luck. *crew laughs* I wish you luck in that endeavor because to queer people, they are like "Yeah she is queer. She is ours and she's fabulous."

GRACE:

She is MUTHA.

SUE:

The idea with with making the queer coded person the villain, making the villain the monster is that it's supposed to give the idea of like this type of behavior, this type of queerness is unacceptable and it's immoral and it's what bad guys do.

JARRAH:

Mm-hm.

SUE:

And it's selfish. It can be dangerous. It can be violent. And so, just like the movies are trying to teach the audiences, the kids especially when it comes to Disney, that teaches us to be good people. It's also teaching us not to do these things. Not to have these characteristics that are associated with queerness.

JARRAH:

I'm willing to bet though that those of us who grew up wanting to be Ariel ended up having to deal with unpacking a lot more stuff than those of us who grew up wanting to be Ursula.

GRACE:

I know!

SUE:

But that's I think how it backfired right? Because yeah, the villains in these stories have power. But you know in our our lives as queer people we are so rarely in those kinds of positions of power.

GRACE:

So they've become the is queer power fantasies.

SUE:

Yeah. We so rarely have this outlet for the anger that builds up but we see, you know, Ursula grow to 500 times her size and start a thunderstorm and shoot lightning out of a trident. And it's *amazing*.

GRACE:

It's pretty frickin fabulous

JARRAH:

Plus, like just compare it to the straight characters, for women especially .Liike who is more interesting? Like if you're looking at the Lion King there's a heck of a lot of guys you can choose from that aren't Scar, but if you're a woman you're like, Nala. I guess?

GRACE:

I wanted to be the Whoopi Goldberg hyena. *crew laughs*

SUE:

So we are a good ways into this discussion.

GRACE:

We got a lot to say.

SUE:

Let's turn it to Star Trek.

GRACE:

Yeah! *valley girl voice* let's do it!

SUE:

I think are most obvious example of actual queer coding is Garak.

GRACE:

Definitely.

ANDI:

Well can we start with how is he coded? Like if you had to point to you like specific intentional ways that they showed us that he was queer?

GRACE:

He's a man who's into women's fashion for one thing.

SUE:

Yeah! Like that's the first thing I think of too, is his job. His job is not super traditionally masculine. I find it very interesting that a spy decided to have his cover be a tailor

GRACE:

rather than a tinker or a soldier.

ANDI:

There are a lot of scenes where he's just like "Come! look at my fashion."

GRACE:

flamboyant voice "I love what you're wearing." We also have that concept of him being a spy introduced. Like, in the first scene that we see him and so it's just like oh this is a sneaky subterfuge-iest character here. What does he really want?

ANDI:

Yeah. Just that there's something underneath what he's showing everybody else.

JARRAH:

Yeah. And like right off the bat he's touching Bashir. He doesn't indicate interest in women for quite a ways into the series and by that time it feels really just like erasure. But like, he's like massaging Bashir shoulders and like just very like *pause* attentive to him.

GRACE:

And we've got a quote here from Andrew Robinson. Would someone like to read that for us?

JARRAH:

Sure. It says "He's not gay, he's not straight. It's a non issue for him. Basically his sexuality is inclusive but it's Star Trek and there were a couple things working against that. One is that Americans really are very nervous about sexual ambiguity. Also this is a family show. They have to keep it on the "straight and narrow". So then I backed off from it. Originally in that very first episode I loved the man's absolute fearlessness about presenting himself to an attractive human being. The fact that the attractive human being is a man, Bashir, doesn't make any difference to him. But that was a little too sophisticated I think." That said, I think this quote is a

little bit dated by *this* point. It gives some background to what he was thinking at the time but anyone who saw the Deep Space Nine documentary recently, but one of the biggest things going around I think that made most fans happy coming out of that was him just being like yeah he was totally gay.

ANDI:

Also, my favorite is that they're like "Well what, so Bashir?" and he's like "Oh he wanted to sleep with him." Yeah that's the last thing that we need to discuss is he wanted to. He wanted to sleep with him. I was like, all I can say to Garak and to Andrew Robinson for playing him is it came through bro. And you should be very proud of how much chaotic gay energy you managed to push past all of those prosthetics because I picked up on it immediately.

SUE:

Except, that a lot of people didn't.

GRACE:

For *some* reason!

SUE:

But no seriously there was, well, for every single like queer person or just person in the know who saw that in the DS9 doc and like punched the air, there was like a straight person who never thought about it before who went "What?!"

GRACE:

That's part of what I'm loving about us just recording this episode. There's gonna be *sooo* many things that people just hear and go "What?!"

SUE:

Maybe not in our audience, but in general. I did a panel on queer coding and Star Trek it at Northeast Trek Con last fall and somebody in the audience, like, started getting kind of upset and asked a question and was like "I always thought I was a good ally. I try my best, but all the stuff you guys are talking about I have *never seen*. I never noticed, I never thought of this before. Am I wrong? Am I doing something wrong? Should I have known about this?" And I just want a blanket state: No. If you're a straight person the point of queer coding is that you don't pick up on it. It's for the people in the audience who have this vocabulary who already speak this language. So like, it's not for everyone to get. So if you don't notice it, it doesn't make you a bad person. Which I bring up, like this guy was like *truly* upset. It's ok friend.

GRACE:

We're all learning.

JARRAH:

I mean and I think that there's this, just to distinguish and the point you made Sue, that like it has kind of changed because that didn't used to be the point of queer coding. The point used to be to like whack it over everybody's heads that this was queer and this was wrong. And now it's like, more of a signal that they aren't really actually willing to back up. And I think that's what was happening with Garak, where it wasn't meant to be like negative about what it meant to be queer but it was like, "but we also aren't going to put our reputations behind this. We want to have deniability."

ANDI:

That's one reason why I really appreciate Andrew Robinson. Being like, "No man", you wanted to bang.

GRACE:

He wrote an entire book about it!

SUE:

Well, we'll get there. But I think the point changes based on the time and the piece.

JARRAH:

Yeah

SUE:

Because I think definitely there are times that they wanted to get across like this person is queer and that is bad.

JARRAH:

Yeah

SUE:

and there were other times they wanted to just slip jokes in, and there were other times they didn't want straight audiences to pick up on it. And it's all based on the property and the time period.

JARRAH:

Oh yeah.

SUE:

And I would say like, especially in the time that DS9 was being made it was just a "let's see who gets this".

JARRAH:

Yeah, like there are certainly moments peppered throughout Star Trek where like aliens mistake straight characters for gay or characters mistake aliens for gay and it's like a like a *whimsical

voice* little chuckle moment. *Grace makes insufferable chuckle noises*. Oh yeah. So there's still those types of situations, just with Garak it's more of the other.

SUE:

I do want to mention the Star Trek novel that Robinson wrote about Garak. It's called A Stitch in Time, and it's basically Garak writing a letter to Bashir chronicling all of his past loves, of all genders, and-

GRACE:

it's basically him writing out a little black book for Bashir

SUE:

- and sort of professing his love as well. It's kind of amazing and you should read it.

GRACE:

Yeah! It's so hard to find though. In terms of a hard copy.

SUE:

Yeah it does have a Kindle e-book. I'm not sure if it has another type of like an iPad e-book but it's definitely available for Kindle.

GRACE:

Let's talk about the fact that the character who with Deep Space 9 who we most associate as our queer character here is also supposed to be the duplicitous spy character. That kind of plays into this idea of again, queer people being sneaky. We've got Richard Dawkins writing whole screeds about how genetically gay people *have* to be sneaky in order to have survived through history and this idea that pansexual and bisexual people are just naturally duplicitous and tricky and untrustworthy, and that is something worth thinking about when we think of this character as an archetype of untrustworthy and as playing into a bunch of these ideas of being queer.

ANDI:

Yeah. And I think it kind of ties into the way that the Mirror Universe has been used.

GRACE:

Absolutely.

ANDI:

Because 90 percent of our bi/pan like representation is in the mirror universe and it's all about like, promiscuity.

JARRAH:

Yeah.

ANDI:

And untrustworthiness again,

GRACE:

the “high risk lifestyle”.

ANDI:

Yeah it's super frustrating. I mean they're doing it even now with Discovery where we don't know if prime Georgiou is, you know, queer in any way but like mirror Georgiou is

GRACE:

I want to believe.

ANDI:

I know! But it gets so frustrating like the only time we get it is when she's having threesomes. And do you know how much I want to be excited that Michelle Yeoh is playing a queer character that has threesomes? like that I should be excited about that and I'm not!

GRACE:

As should we all!

SUE:

Even later in season two where we get that scene with her you know sort of like teasing slash flirting with Stamets and Culber. They they both feel the need to reassert that, although they might have been pan or bi in the mirror universe, their prime universe selves are gay. Period. And that's not a bad thing. You don't have to be everything but by having your prime characters reassert that they are binary, it continues to relegate pansexuality and bisexuality to the mirror universe which is known for being deceitful and sneaky and evil

ANDI:

And manipulative. She uses her sexuality to manipulate people.

SUE:

if they had even just said “but we are in a relationship together” I think that achieves the same goal without *pause* doing *that* to a whole group of people. If that makes sense.

JARRAH:

The Mirror Universe is also hedonistic and very, like, pleasure focused. Which again, that's not a bad thing, but it also implies that like you can't somehow have like a deep relationship as a pan or bi person by that stretch as well because people in the mirror universe don't have like long relationships they just sleep around.

ANDI:

I would like them to stop that.

JARRAH:

Yes.

GRACE:

So the real rebels in the mirror universe of people who stick to their vanilla monogamous relationship.

JARRAH:

The Jennifer Siskos, who are just there stewing.

SUE:

One of the other things in the DS9, not just Garak, a lot of people point to Jadzia for queer representation, and I totally get it but, I remember before the episode rejoined aired and all of the buildup all of the advertising was about this kiss. Right?

JARRAH:

Yeah

SUE:

and I mean the kiss happens on screen. It *is* there, but there is this whole story around it where, you know, what excuses the the gay relationship in this episode, if you can allow me to use that word, is that one of them used to be another gender. So like *really* this is a heterosexual relationship. And to me that's baiting. Like, you baited me in this episode of Star Trek. Sorry about it. And one of the things that Dan Deevy says, even though he appreciates this episode and what it did and what it means for people, Dan is the founder of gays and space. He says "I look forward to a time that we don't have to be a metaphor" because that's what happened in that episode.

JARRAH:

But could you look at, I would say, the characters in the Outcast are more queer coded than Jadzia. If we're looking at like queer coding as like sending signals about sexuality that, like in terms of stereotypical representation, I think part of the problem with Jadzia is that by this point in our culture that the like first of all our culture has never had as concrete ideas about what lesbian stereotypes are as gay men. Like at least you know growing up until the 90s that like there was there were ideas about butch-ness which I think are represented in the outcast. But if you didn't meet that then there was like a degree of confusion or like maybe it was just a misunderstanding.

GRACE:

There definitely are lesbian stereotypes out there but they aren't quite-

JARRAH:

oh for sure

GRACE:

-as wide and pervasive as the stereotypes of the gay men.

SUE:

They still mostly relate to butch women

JARRAH:

and they're not as fixed, I think.

GRACE:

That said, I have known various lesbians who considered Jadzia even pre Rejoined to be kind of an icon for them in terms of her being a pro-active woman.

SUE:

Oh for sure

GRACE:

and there are people I know who just were like "no no she she gives out that lesbian vibe and I love it."

ANDI:

I think that kind of runs into is she coded that way or are they just claiming her?

GRACE:

Or is she just flirtatious?

ANDI:

Yeah. If we're talking about coding I feel like Kira is more coded to be queer than Jadzia is. Even just if we're talking about haircuts. *crew laughs* Short hair is queer coding for women! Absolutely. This is why Tasha Yarr, I feel, falls into this as well. If you have a woman with short hair or like a masculine haircut in any form that is queer coding.

JARRAH:

Especially if she has shoulder pads and likes to punch people.

ANDI:

Exactly! So like, when you first meet Kira and she's yelling at someone one of the easiest ways to like notice coding is is your female character acting more traditionally masculine or vice versa. That can be considered coding. In like stepping out of those stereotypical like traits of masculinity or femininity. And Kira does that. She does that from the very beginning. She's extremely aggressive in a lot of ways. She's got short hair. She's wearing a uniform. Like, a lot of that is, I feel, like queer coded more than Dax.

SUE:

And you'll notice that right away with both Yar and Kira they tried to feminize them. Right? The second episode with Yar "Oh I wish I could wear pretty things! I want to have a relationship with Data!" and Kira's relationship with B'Elanna starts very early on right? It's not B'Elanna yet. It's somebody else.

ANDI:

They went out of their way to show that both Yar and Kira are at least attracted to men quickly. It's like they had this character that was a bit queer coded, a bit different than your typical like feminine character, and they had to immediately be like "But remember! She is a woman and she does like men."

SUE:

Yeah. And that's what happens with Garak too.

GRACE:

And to me that always reads so much of a "Don't worry she's safe."

SUE:

Yeah. Andi, cover your ears.

ANDI:

Ok. *deadpan* Tra-la-la.

SUE:

With the introduction of Tora Ziyal later in deep space nine, it feels like they're attempting to like butch up Garak.

GRACE:

Oh absolutely.

SUE:

It's around the same time in the series that the lunches with Bashir also stop. So we see him having this love and developing this crush and whatever relationship they have with Ziyal at the same time that he is sort of ignoring who a lot of people paired him with because there is so much Garak Bashir fanfic out there can't even tell you

GRACE:

They have chemistry!

JARRAH:

Well then, like you know Bashir is hanging out with the man's man, Miles O'Brien. And you know, listening to Miles complain about his wife and stuff but it's like "let's go and play war on the holodeck!"

GRACE:

please think of the children voice We had to inject heterosexuality!

JARRAH:

I mean, don't get me wrong I also like a good, you know, Bashir O'Brien pairing. But yeah.

SUE:

Well, and they give Bashir a relatively stable relationship in the last season as well.

GRACE:

Yeah. I guess. It's meh but I don't hate it. *crew laughs*

SUE:

I think in some ways I think Bashir is queer coded as well because there is a bit of a stereotype with this guy who calls himself a ladies man but never gets a date. From what we see always fails at it, as like the way to act when closeted right? Like this is a thing.

GRACE:

It's kind of like that one radio host on Frasier who's just always talking about "Me and my gym buddies are going cruising for women!"

JARRAH:

Are we seeing that with Geordi as well?

GRACE:

through laughter a little bit!

SUE:

Yeah.

GRACE:

Geordi just hasn't figured it out yet.

JARRAH:

I definitely don't think there was intent there but I think that there is a bit of a stereotype and certainly like you're going like "Oh God what are you doing with women?" Doesn't mean he'd better with anyone.

GRACE:

We know there is definitely *initial* intent with Malcolm Reed to begin with, and then they just kind of went “Nah!” which is a cop out of the highest order. Them being like “Yeah we're going to do it we're gonna have a gay character! it's going to be grea-up no.”

JARRAH:

Well they never said it publicly really as far as I know. There were just discussions behind the scenes but it's on like the DVD extras and there's some interviews going around and if you look up on our blog there's a great article about Malcolm Reed intergalactic hero of confusion or something and talks all about that. The history of that representation and some you know maybe feeling the actor may have not been super super fond of that, but also that you know despite it being 2001 apparently the show wasn't ready for that. Or something and so then you know you have him and Trip stuck in a shuttle talking about and like him just like getting drunk and fantasizing about T'Pol's bum and awkwardly trying to pick up aliens by getting them to smell cheese and *crew laughs*

GRACE:

Star Trek has a really weird and complicated relationship with cheese doesn't it?

SUE:

Jerry you and I have watched Cogenitor too many times recently.

GRACE:

Yeah I watched it more than once which is too many already.

ANDI:

And we're talking up men, I don't think you can get much more queer coded than Q. He is super dramatic. He loves costumes.

GRACE:

He wears a dress a couple times.

ANDI:

He dances a lot.

SUE:

He's basically got the whole Disney villain thing going on.

JARRAH:

He shows up in Picard's bed.

GRACE:

Picard doesn't ever actually reject him though..

ANDI:

He falls out of the sky basically naked at Picard's feet!

GRACE:

If that's not a come on, I don't know what it is.

ANDI:

And I've always thought that it was kind of interesting that the more, I guess, backstory you got and like the more he was used the less queer he was coded. So like he starts having his thing with Vash or whatever. I guess he shows up in Voyager. I don't want to know about it but like it feels like from where he started they probably didn't intend to use him that much, and so it was more ok. And then as they used him over and over again. He became such a important character they kind of backed off on some of that. Which seems to be a *theme* here.

JARRAH:

I think it was also just, and sorry Andi close your ears for two more seconds,

ANDI:

rapid deadpan Tra-la-la

JARRAH:

But let me also just that they couldn't figure out how to get Q to relate to Janeway without making it romantic. And because Q still seems to like that kind of treat the idea of sex as distasteful throughout the whole arc and he certainly doesn't like parenting but, which of course that has nothing to do with your your sexual orientation, but he's like you know he maintains these characteristics about just being very like aloof, loving costumes, loving drama, loving historical reenactments..

GRACE:

Comparing every other human against Picard.

SUE:

He's like the Dean on Community! *shrill giggles*

JARRAH:

Yeah, but it was like they couldn't fit him into Voyager without being like " He's showing up in Picard's, bed Sisko punches him. What would Janeway do? I don't know. Let's let's see what would happen. Like he wants to get in bed with her."

ANDI:

When I was first time trekking TNG I really could not believe it. I was like Really? He's falling from the sky. At Picards feet.

JARRAH:

He's trying to set him up with Vash and dressing up in a like nefarious Sheriff of Nottingham costume.

GRACE:

horrible John De Lancie impression "Does this excite you Picard?"

ANDI:

I love Q

SUE:

And his predecessor Trelaine, they basically dress like Liberace.

CREW:

YES

JARRAH;

Notice the proto-Q is definitely the most queer coded TOS villain for sure.

GRACE:

He's got a phaser candelabra

JARRAH:

he's like frivolous and just wants to like party and play his music and have people be his guests and yeah it's very

GRACE:

just terrible Liberace voice "Party at Vincent Prices house!"

JARRAH:

Very stereotypical. I did want to throw in the Borg Queen briefly. As another example of queer coded villain.

GRACE:

Butch woman and flattop haircut.

JARRAH:

Yeah well I mean you know she's got, certainly in First Contact I wouldn't call her queer coded, but in Voyager she definitely seems more interested in the women characters. And is that like a problematic example of queer coding villains?

GRACE:

In queer media you see this really intensive repeating trope of lesbianism, in particular, portrayed as something that like an older woman kind of seduces a young waif into or is like taking advantage of her and seduces her into lesbianism. That's a trope that pops up a lot.

JARRAH:

sensual voice "Come join my collective."

ANDI:

Okay! Sounds good to me.

GRACE:

I'm serious look into lesbian media and you will see that happen an uncomfortable amount of time. Like "Oh no! you've been seduced by these scary butch women!"

ANDI:

I think that's true in a lot of queer media in general because there's like this idea of a mixture of mentoring and then like someone who like, ushers in your sexuality. Like, even Call Me By Your Name is an example of that. I think.

GRACE:

That age gap though...

ANDI:

Yeah! Exactly! And I mean sometimes those age gaps aren't healthy but you can kind of see like if you're alone and you're not sure of yourself how an older more experienced person can kind of like almost guide you. And that can be either healthy or unhealthy. I think it's certainly a vulnerable position.

GRACE:

Absolutely. This is seen as predatory definitely though. And you do definitely get this concept of the predatory lesbian a lot.

ANDI:

Let's talk a little bit about Spock and data

GRACE:

Let's!

ANDI:

Because there are a lot of people who consider them to be possible representation for asexuality and I feel like this is a more nuanced topic and I just want to know what y'all think of that. Because to me, bear in mind I'm always OK if you want to claim someone for your community that's always cool with me, but I worry a little bit that we try and read people who are supposedly emotionless as asexual. Because that's not how asexual people are. That's not what asexuality means. So..

SUE:
Correct.

ANDI:
Yeah. Again I guess I just want to open the conversation to that because there's always been a part of me that's uncomfortable with the idea of, "well Data is asexual because he doesn't feel feelings". Ummm no.

GRACE:
Sexual attraction and feelings though don't necessarily go hand in hand

ANDI:
Exactly, and I feel like people are conflating the two in some ways.

SUE:
So in a Twitter thread somebody brought up the idea of Data being coded as asexual. Because coding sort of relies on stereotypes, I am not sure how that's even possible. Like, I sort of said at the beginning with Luke Skywalker. I don't know how you intentionally code him as ace like during the 70s. If anything the one stereotype that the ace community does have is that we are emotionless which is false and since this is a more misunderstood, I think, sexuality I will just state, you know, all asexuality means that you don't experience sexual attraction. The concept of "that person is someone I want to have sex with" like is does not exist in my brain. You can still be romantically attracted to someone you can still be aesthetically attracted to someone you can still have sexual desire. Like you can still want to have sex but just not with a specific person. Sort of like being hungry but not wanting to eat anything that's in your fridge. People relate sex to food a lot in discussions. *Andi laughs* OK?

GRACE:
You're just keeping that ball rolling.

SUE:
But I mean I've been having this conversation on Facebook for like the last day or two. And sooo many people have talked about food. That's the easiest way to sort of convey that. But like I think there is a lot to relate to with Data in ace community. The couple of times we see him in what we can call a relationship, if you include Tasha Yar, you know it's been the intimacy has sort of been initiated by the other person. And he seems to be trying to like do whatever he has to because he wants to please his partner.

JARRAH:
And be more human because like the way that what meant to be human at that time was like considered such an important part.

SUE:

Yeah. But you know that is certainly one way for an asexual person to be in a relationship. There are plenty of ace people who are, and you know engage in sexual acts because their partner wants to and it's consensual. But it's you know something that they wouldn't do otherwise. There are lots of other ways for ace people to be in relationships because we're not a monolith. But like the most harmful thing that comes from this type of representation is the stereotype of not having emotions of being cold and distant and the the most harmful. *chokes up* Sorry y'all. *pause* The most harmful, like, current example I can think of is Sheldon Cooper.

CREW:

groans in unison

SUE:

Like to the point that when they put Sheldon in a relationship, I haven't watched the show for several years because it made me so mad, to the point that they put Sheldon in a relationship. His partner did not respect his boundaries and there is an episode in which she fakes being sick so that he'll continue to like rub Vapo-Rub on her chest. And basically tricking him into intimacy. And then you know, gross to begin with, when he figures it out he's like "Well you deserve a spanking." And like it's supposed to obviously be a joke but it's very clear that like she's enjoying it while he's upset about something and, basically, manipulating this person into, not sexual relationships, but intimacy which would likely not be consensual otherwise. So it's certainly difficult and harmful when your only characters who you might think of as Ace are ones that *sighs* are emotionally stunted I guess. Are ones who also have traits where their emotions are not *pauses* *there* at all or they're suppressed with Spock or you know the character is just weird. In the case of Sheldon. I guess Jughead was supposed to be ace on Riverdale until they changed it but I didn't watch that show.

GRACE:

They kept it in and some of the comics at least.

SUE:

But yeah, it's difficult when it's not there and your stereotypes are like, just really about your lack of being able to engage in a relationship in any way.

GRACE:

Is it fair to say that this is commonly treated as something that needs to be, in the characters arc or story, to be fixed?

SUE:

Oh for *sure*. Yeah, a huge thing in the ace community is feeling broken. and when you realize you're not but you're experiencing everyone else around you is talking about like "I feel this way and I feel that way and I can't wait to do that." And the human response to that is "why don't I experience these things? What's wrong with me?" The answer is nothing is wrong with you, but

that feeling and that self-doubt is certainly still there. We do see Spock and Data as you know complete characters otherwise. So there's something positive there. But the frustrating thing for me as an individual is like *every* story out there in the world has to have a love story in it. Every movie has a love story so the narrative that all of our media pushes on us is that a person is not complete when they're not in a relationship. And for me personally I think that is the more frustrating thing than the ace stereotypes. But I have also never really given a crap about being in a relationship.

ANDI:

Is there a character that you think has, from the wider world of media even, that you feel like has been done well for representation?

SUE:

There haven't been, at least that I'm familiar with, a lot of pieces of media that focus on ace people.

ANDI:

Yeah I was going to say that the closest that I've seen recently was a Netflix show called Sex Education.

JARRAH:

Oh yeah.

ANDI:

And they kind of dropped the ball at the end. So it was kind of, I don't think it was intended to be bait-y, but it kind of was because throughout probably at least half of the show I was starting to get really excited. I was like "I feel like I'm finally seeing an asexual character being well portrayed" and it's not so much that they ruin that. It's just it turned out to be a different story than I was hoping for.

SUE:

Mm hmm.

ANDI:

So I would still recommend that show, but I went online afterwards because I was like "I can't be the only one who's like really struggling with this portrayal" and the ace community seemed to be really divided on it as well. But for the first time I felt like I might actually be seeing it. So there was good things there. I just feel like this particular aspect of queerness is not really understood. So like people mess up when they're trying to portray it because they don't actually understand it.

JARRAH:

I don't know that they *try* that much. I think that it's sort of where it was where it was, like you know, there *may* be characters that could be read as ace because we haven't seen them explore a relationship. But you know that like the creators and most of the people out there and probably the actor are assuming that they have sexual attraction.

ANDI:

Yeah. This is why I was so disappointed by this this character in Sex Education because that whole show is about this. It's about sexual attraction. And so I think they got closer than I've ever seen before because there was some intent there and there was at least some understanding of what these different kinds of attractions mean that I haven't seen explored in other places yet.

SUE:

I really like the interpretation of Luke Skywalker as asexual. And there's no particular reason for it other than he practically makes it through three movies, you know we're talking about the original trilogy here, without his story arc really being, I'll say it, distracted by a love story. He's got stuff to do and that's not one of those things. And that that feels the truest to me at least that I've seen in TV and film. There is a really good book by Seanan McGuire called Every Heart a Doorway, which they are turning into I believe a sci fi TV series, where the main character of the first book is Ace and it's brought up *sparingly*. And just mostly in like her relationship to one of the other kids at the school.

ANDI:

There's also good trans representation in that book.

SUE:

Yes for sure. And so the whole series is great, but that character Nancy is only in the first book.

ANDI:

I want to kind of talk about, because you brought up Luke Skywalker and you kind of like claiming him. I guess you could call it-

SUE:

Yeah for sure.

ANDI:

We've been talking about coding but I do want to talk about claiming a little bit. So to me, and I don't even think this is a real term this is what I'm just calling it, claiming to me is when you relate to a character and so you basically decide this character is this because it feels right to me.

CREW:

Mm hmm.

ANDI:

And I think this is the more common way that people relate to this particular topic now than they do to coding because if we're talking about, say me, there is nothing about me while walking down the street they're going to look at and go "Oh yes bisexual" unless I'm suddenly dual wielding that particular day. *crew laughs* So there's not anything about me that is coded queer but I am queer. So for me when I start to claim characters I claim them because like, they speak to me in a certain way. I claimed Bashir very early. I was like "This here is a bisexual and he's mine." you know?

GRACE:

MAH BOY!

ANDI:

Exactly. And if you actually asked me to sit down and explain step by step why Bashir is bisexual, I mean I could do it. I have some slides, but mostly it's a feeling. And I've done that for a lot of characters because although I will say that I think bisexual characters have come a long long long long way. And especially after hearing Sue talk about your struggle with the ace representation I feel particularly lucky, because there are great canon explicitly bisexual characters in media right now. Rosa Diaz from Brooklyn-99 is a great example. Eleanor Shelstrop from the Good Place is a chaotic disaster bisexual that I love with my whole heart but it's still something that we're looking for and it isn't complete. So like claiming these characters that have never been like explicitly made queer is important to me I guess. And a lot of people when I ask them "who are the queer characters in Trek?" came up with lots of different answers. Riker is pan. Kirk is pan. You know like all of these characters that were claimed, you know, in some way, or like read in some way as queer and then like beloved for that.

GRACE:

Or just speak to a certain community.

ANDI:

Exactly. And I think it's powerful and I like it and I will continue to do it and no one can stop me.

GRACE:

I have a deep love for this concept. One of my favorite people on the face of the entire planet post transition identifies with Frankenstein's monster very heavily. Just in the "I am self made!" sense.

SUE:

It feels sometimes to me that Lwaxana Troi was sort of intended to be a twenty fourth century gay icon. She's basically a drag queen.

GRACE:

Mm hmm. Have we ever met a gay Trekkie who didn't love Lwaxana Troi though?

ANDI:

I'm sure they're out there but like-

GRACE:

numerically like in terms of statistics probably, but I haven't met any of them.

ANDI:

If we're talking about why people kind of claim people as queer icons there's usually one of two reasons. One is they are struggling in a way that you relate to them, and the other is they are living their life without fear and you want that. So for me Lwaxana Troi is a good example of "she does what she wants and she is who she is and she is not quiet about it in any way" and I think that a lot of queer people wish that they had that courage or don't feel like they can do that. And so that's why they relate to her and kind of claim her. It gets into a lot of personal emotional stuff.

GRACE:

Well to be fair representation is a very personal matter. It's hard not to take it personally.

ANDI:

Yeah. And what I can say to you is if you are interested in exploring various characters and their queerness and canon has not done well by you? Fanfic.

GRACE:

sage voice Fanfic is the way.

ANDI:

And I know like GaraShir fanfic is after Kirk and Spock probably the most heavily written about on AO3. So like if that's your 'ship-

GRACE:

-if that's your 'ship you've got a hardy crew to sail with.

ANDI:

Exactly. That's not a rare pair by any definition. And this is one reason why I love fanfic so much. I mean you've heard it here from us that representation and poor representation and bad representation and all of those things, like, can be very hurtful. It can influence how you feel about yourself and make things more difficult. It is hard to overstate the importance of there being thousands and thousands and thousands of healthy loving happily queer couples living out their lives in fanfic

GRACE:

And individuals.

ANDI:

Yes true. Just frolicking in the fanfic fields.

GRACE:

In the ether of our minds and hearts.

ANDI:

Exactly. So I mean obviously it can vary in quality but-

GRACE:

So does all media!

ANDI:

Yeah. There's something to be said for this free representation that you can always take a look at. I know it's really helped me.

SUE:

But I think understanding this history helps people understand why the Stamets Culber thing was such a big deal for so many people in the queer community. You know we finally have this relationship with these two characters who aren't coded they are explicitly gay and they are in a relationship. And one of them is killed. And like, it still *hurts* like that. That scene is still in "Previously on" and it's like a continued trauma almost.

ANDI:

But there is a lot of good there too. And I really appreciate it. Especially since now we have Wilson Cruz and Anthony Rapp and they're very vocal and they're very proud. And it's lovely to have them in our community and I think this and all of this that we've been talking about, I think it can only get better.

SUE:

Yeah. I just hope that they are a happy couple living their lives.

ANDI:

That would be lovely.

GRACE:

Let them be happy. God damn it.

ANDI:

I mean I've said this before but it really does get to a point where the most almost transgressive you can get is letting a queer couple be happy because it's so rare.

GRACE:

And in the words of Dorothy Parker “sometimes the best revenge is good living.”

ANDI:

Yeah! Like we don't get it very often and it's nice to see when it happens. And yeah that doesn't mean that they can't have conflict or struggles or anything like that but-

GRACE:

Heck no.

ANDI:

It would sure be lovely. And also can we talk about the fact that now we have Jet Reno who I would kill for

GRACE:

dreamily Oh Tig!

ANDI:

It's getting better. It's getting better slowly and surely and painfully but we're getting there.

GRACE:

And we will claw our way up that rock face until we're at the top.

SUE:

I just hope for a Star Trek in which, which we kind of have now, characters are no longer queer coded but are just queer.

GRACE:

That would be so nice.

SUE:

I wish that for all media indeed.

GRACE:

And if you have opinions about media, as we very clearly do, you can contact our show by email at crew@womenatwarp.com or visit us on Facebook Twitter or Instagram @womenatwarp. And for more from the Roddenberry podcast network visit Podcast.Roddenberry.com. That was a subtle Segway wasn't it guys?

ANDI:

Good job.

SUE:

Very pro.

JARRAH:
Super green.

GRACE:
And where can people tell you how good my segue was Andi?

ANDI:
You can find me online on Twitter @firsttimetrek. I am always around to talk about mostly dual wielding.

GRACE:
And what about you Sue?

SUE:
You can tweet me your favorite ace characters @spaltor S-P-A-L-T-O-R.

GRACE:
And what about you Jarrah?

JARRAH:
You can send me all your Garak gifs @jarrahpenguin on Twitter. That's J-A-R-R-A-H Penguin.
Or you can find me on Trekkie feminist dot com.

GRACE:
And I'm Grace. You can find me on Twitter @bonecrusherjenk.. And remember I'm extra powerful during Pride Month. Thank you so much for listening.