

**Scene on Radio**  
**Be Like You (MEN, Part 9)**

<http://www.sceneonradio.org/episode-55-be-like-you-men-part-9/>

**[Outside ambience.]**

**Lewis Wallace:** Yeah. So, we're in the parking lot of the YMCA that I go to a few times a week. This is the one that doesn't have a gender-neutral changing room, it's just men's or women's. So we're gonna have a little adventure. Which changing room do you usually use?

**John Biewen:** I would usually use the men's.

**John Biewen:** Lewis Wallace and I meet up one day in Durham, North Carolina, where we both live. We're wired with lavalier mics so we won't draw attention to ourselves or the fact that we're recording. Before we go in, I ask him to describe his own appearance, gender-wise.

**Lewis Wallace:** I've been pretty androgynous since I was about 15 or 16, kind of boyishly androgynous-looking. But now I'm in my mid 30s and I have like gray hair – some (laughs). And so it's sort of a different thing. Yeah, a little harder to navigate than it used to be. I'm about 5 foot 7, I have short hair. Most people

glance at me and think they're seeing a boy, but probably about half the people then do a double-take and think they're seeing a girl (laughs). Or a woman.

**[Sound: inside of a YMCA]**

**Lewis Wallace:** Hi, how are you? (Woman at counter: Hi, how are you.) Good.

**John Biewen:** Lewis checks us in. **[beep]**

**Lewis Wallace, to John Biewen:** Got your guest pass...

**John Biewen:** The music and voices are pouring out of a Zoomba aerobics class. The weight machines and treadmills are nearby – not too many people on them, midafternoon on a weekday.

**Lewis Wallace:** I'm a little nervous about this.

**John Biewen:** Are you?

**Lewis Wallace:** Yeah.

**Lewis Wallace:** Okay, now we're gonna walk in the men's locker room, but before we do, we're like standing at the threshold, I feel like there's a couple things we should talk about.

**John Biewen:** Yeah.

**Lewis Wallace:** First of all, I don't think I've ever gone into one of these and talked to someone. Because that's one of the gender things that can be a giveaway for people, like – I've had a pretty high voice most of my life. Now it's a little lower, but if people would look at me and perceive me as male until I talk and then be like, Oh, my goodness, it's a she! So if I do use a men's room, locker room, or bathroom, I don't talk at all. So this'll be like a first. (laughs)

**John Biewen:** Yeah.

**Lewis Wallace:** And normally I just avoid this kind of space. In general I go to places that have a gender neutral option. All right, should we do it?

**John Biewen:** Let's do it.

**[Sound: ambient noise.]**

**John Biewen:** We walk into the locker room itself. There are just two or three men in there, one sitting on a bench, one coming out of the shower. They ignore us, which is what men generally do in locker rooms if they don't know each other. Lewis tells me what he would do if he were here alone and were actually going to use this locker room.

**Lewis Wallace:** I keep my head down and walk in over to this side, and go in this single-stall kind of changing stall. Change, and get out. Now I want to know about you. What is this space to you?

**John Biewen:** Um. It's comfortable. Yeah, I would walk in here like I own the place. (laughs) I mean not really, but like I certainly belong here and have every right to be here, and have zero concern about the way anybody's gonna perceive me or react to me.

**Lewis Wallace:** Uh-hmm. See how I just smiled at you? Smiling is one of the things that I don't do in spaces like this. 'Cause ever since I came out as trans people would say to me, oh, your smile's so pretty, your smile's too pretty to be a boy. Big smile. So you don't smile, you don't make eye contact, like keep your head down. Don't talk.

[MUSIC]

**John Biewen:** Those precautions, and Lewis's nervousness in a men's locker room, as a trans, genderqueer person, are not about shyness. He's not thin-skinned about how people see him. In fact, he's used to people's uncertainty about his gender and is fine with it. He doesn't correct the ones who call him "she."

**Lewis Wallace:** In general, it's sort of a free for all. He, she, whatever. It's such a daily thing I don't have time (laughs) to think about it all the time.

**John Biewen:** His wariness is about something else, of course.

**Lewis Wallace:** It's about fear. Of violence, harassment. Arrest. That's not out of the question. People get the cops called on them for being perceived to be in the bathroom of the wrong gender.

[MUSIC]

**John Biewen:** Hey Celeste.

**Celeste Headlee:** Hey John.

**John Biewen:** So, I've had to add something to my list of privileges – something I hadn't really thought much about.

**Celeste Headlee:** In this case, a privilege you have as a cisgender person, right? The freedom to use gendered bathrooms and locker rooms without fearing for your personal safety. And for that matter, to go anywhere at all without worrying that somebody might decide you need to be harassed or beaten or killed for not conforming to the gender binary.

**John Biewen:** And of course, the people that Lewis legitimately has to fear as a trans person are cisgender, heterosexual men like me.

[Music – Theme]

**Celeste Headlee:** From the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and PRX, it's *Scene on Radio*, Part 9 of our series, MEN.

**John Biewen:** Our season-long look at gender, masculinity, sexism – the patriarchy.

**Celeste Headlee:** This time, Lewis Wallace. He's a journalist, writer, radio reporter. You might have heard of him because he was fired in early 2017 by the public radio show, *Marketplace*, for an essay he wrote on his personal blog challenging traditional ideas about journalistic "objectivity." Lewis wrote, for example, that as a trans person, it doesn't make sense to expect him to be "neutral" about whether trans people should have the same rights as everybody else.

**John Biewen:** Lewis is not here to talk about journalistic objectivity, but let's just say, we at *Scene on Radio* did not ask Lewis to be "objective" on this topic.

**Celeste Headlee:** In the series up to now, we have made references to the fact that the gender binary is not the whole story, but we're past due to hear directly from a trans person.

**John Biewen:** We invited Lewis to produce a piece telling his story, and I guess I wondered something like this: What is it like to transition from female-assigned to – well, male-*ish*, *more* male ... given all the problems, the toxicity that so often comes with manhood in our culture, all the stuff we've been exploring here?

**Celeste Headlee:** Before we get into Lewis's story, he has a couple of disclaimers he wants to put on the table.

**Lewis Wallace:** So one disclaimer is about me, and the other one is about representation in general. First, about me: I'm trans, and I was female-assigned at birth...but I'm not a man, even though I go by he and wear pants and stuff. I identify as genderqueer and androgynous. I am also white, and come from class privilege...so those are my intersecting identities that give me a lot of privilege in the world. Which gets me to the more general disclaimer, which is that talking about being trans is always really scary because we are so underrepresented—a lot of people don't know anyone who's transgender, or don't think they do—and so I just wanna be really really clear that I'm speaking from my very specific limited experience. We'll also hear from my friend Melvin in this episode, who is a Black trans man ...it's a tiny slice, so please know that we only represent ourselves!

**John Biewen:** Celeste, Lewis told me that one thing coming out as trans has revealed to him is how much maleness is defined in terms of negatives – ways that we're *not* supposed to be: So, *getting rid* of parts of yourself that are considered feminine, sometimes violently rejecting those traits.



**Celeste Headlee:** So Lewis wanted a flat chest and a lower voice, and maybe some facial hair. But that doesn't mean he wanted to give up all the so-called feminine parts of his personality. Here's Lewis.

**Lewis Wallace:** You start learning about the limitation of what "man" or "male" is really young...my dad Bruce remembers HIS dad teaching him that:

**Bruce:** ....This is important to him, I mean he was worried that I would come across as a sissy, even when I didn't give him much to worry about in that regard. But he made it clear that, you know, that was a thing to be avoided at all cost.

**Lewis Wallace:** Bruce has always been really tall, and pretty traditionally masculine—deep-voiced and strong. And not really into traditionally feminine things, for the *most* part—

**Bruce:** At some point when I was like 12 or 13 we would, you know, it's family Valentine's Day and he said you know you really shouldn't be giving me a valentine. I'm not going to give you a valentine anymore, it has these pink hearts. You know we don't do that. I was just a kid. Giving out valentines, and he was worried that it had some sort of... you know, sexual implication or something. He was... he was pretty extreme in that way.

**Lewis Wallace:** His dad didn't want him getting braces, either—because that too might make him seem like a sissy. So my dad's teeth are crooked, to this day.

**Bruce:** I thought the highest compliment you could receive as you were growing up was that, you know, that you had a hairy chest, and it just never came. I think I wished for it so hard that I probably affected my own hormones and drove them into hiding.

**Lewis Wallace:** He studied French literature in college, which his dad hated—and then joined the military, just like his dad had...

**Lewis Wallace:** I had different role models than my dad did. For starters, I had my dad: He cried easily, and loved French poetry and long discussions about ideas...

But my *real* idol, no offense dad, was my older brother Clint. I wanted to be like him. He played basketball, so I tried to play basketball. He liked Janet Jackson, so I liked Janet Jackson. He had a bunch of girlfriends, I wanted a bunch of girlfriends. And so on.

When Clint was in sixth grade, there was a school dance and Clint had his hair slicked to one side with that DEP gel, and this button down shirt that was red and

blue and yellow squares. I remember him so clearly primping in the mirror, blasting Ace of Base and practicing his VERY COOL dance moves.

Which is just to say, that my brother wasn't super traditionally masculine he was more of what you might call a pretty boy...

Meanwhile I was still pre-pubescent, had short hair and often passed for a boy too. But that skinny tomboy thing only lasted another year or two before I got breasts and menstrual blood ... and it started to feel like could *never* be a pretty boy like Clint...

Until I realized, *sure I could...*

**Raven:** One way to start is to say that although when you were a little girl you were very girly, you also were like me and like my mother and never really conformed to any of the gender stereotypes that people wanted you to conform to.

**Lewis Wallace:** This is my mom, Raven. My mom and grandmother didn't care for gendered expectations—at all. My grandmother Sarah was a notorious badass, one of the first women in South Carolina to ever get a law degree. My mom was a

mathematician and worked in construction—she went to Smith college, the women's college—

**Lewis Wallace:** And at some point along the way you became a feminist, would you say?

**Raven:** Yeah I mean way early on, yeah. In high school.

**Lewis Wallace:** How did that happen?

**Raven:** How did that happen? How could it not happen? I mean you know.

**Lewis Wallace:** So feminism was a given in my family, and femininity was pretty flexible too. I remember just playing around with that...

**Raven:** So you performed girl the way you wanted to when you were a little child. And then as time went on that became less and less gendered.

**Lewis Wallace:** Most children even still are raised in an environment where there's an expectation, you know, you're a girl or you're a boy. And that's kind of

what you're going to be. There's some amount of stereotypical things that come with that. And I don't think of myself really as having been raised that way.

**Raven:** No, you weren't raised that way. I mean, you've pointed out to me many many times that I did give you a barbie doll. But, first of all I don't remember that, but I have evidence in a photograph that it did happen. But you know I have seen parents who really emphasize all this stereotyped gendered stuff, like princess, little girls who are getting Princess suits and those funny dolls. What are those things called? You know, those dolls that cost hundreds of dollars and you have tea parties and things like that ...American Girl dolls and things like that, we didn't do any of that. And we didn't do any frilly frilly dressing up or the male version of whatever that is.

**Lewis Wallace:** I had barbies, and these like butterfly wings I'd wear around. And I also had a top hat that I got when I was about 9 and didn't take off for several years. But gender flexibility—letting girls be tomboys or boys be a little frilly—is not quite the same as actually being transgender. And THAT was harder for her...

**Raven:** At the time I just thought a girl was a girl and boy was a boy, and fine whatever. So it didn't occur to me that you wouldn't be a girl.

**Lewis Wallace:** And then at some point in my teenage years I started to explore being trans and explore gender and come out about that, sort of gradually over some time. What do you remember about that?

**Raven :** Well you know even in elementary school at some point you started, you dropped all the feminine kind of play that you had done, like wearing wings, and you know dressing up that way and started wearing a hat all the time, a male hat, and dressing like a tomboy and that's all fine you know and I thought that was very interesting that you would do that. But what—

**Lewis Wallace:** I refer to that as my butch phase, third grade—

**Raven:** Yeah, there you go, third grade butch phase, but it went on for a while. But what I remember most about it was how scary it was, when the first thing I remember was when you start wrapping your breasts. And I was just scared for you that something awful was going to happen to you. That's the main thing that I remember about how I felt about it, just fear that something bad was going to happen to you, it was a time when bad things were happening to people because of sex and gender, to young people. And that's the main thing I remember about it, is the fear that I felt for you, and for us, that we might have to face something awful.

**Lewis Wallace:** Were you surprised?

**Raven:** Surprised is not a word I would use for it. I mean, not really surprised. I was puzzled. I think puzzled. I don't know that I was surprised. I was puzzled and confused. I was confused yes. It wasn't a common thing to even have heard of, back then. You'd heard of cross dressers maybe transsexuals, you know, people who were extreme versions of whatever. But it wasn't anything that was a kind of a normal—a normal condition or normal attitude or normal reality. And so it was confusing, it was confusing.

**Lewis Wallace:** I remember perceiving that you felt sort of almost like abandoned, like you'd had this daughter. You'd hoped that I would have been a daughter. Why did I have to go over to this other thing that was more like my dad and my brothers?

**Raven:** Yeah, well, when, there was a time when it seemed like that's what you wanted to do, was be more like your dad and your brothers. And that did trouble me. You know, you didn't want to be like me? It hurts your feelings. But I don't know, it's just time. And I now know that you don't, you're not trying to be like your dad or your brothers. You're trying to be like you.

**Lewis Wallace:** I guess I'd wondered if that's about sort of, maybe at the time there was a feeling of, that there were just sort of these two options if you were gonna, you know quote unquote transition, you would do it because you wanted

to become a masculine man or something, which was never true of me, but it seemed like maybe you perceived it that way.

**Raven** : Yeah, I definitely perceived it that way. Whether that's what you meant or not that's the way that it felt to me, like you were saying I want to be a man. And I interpreted that to mean, *man* man. Whatever.

**Lewis Wallace**: Man-man, what does that mean?

**Raven**: Maybe man-man-man.

**Lewis Wallace**: Triple man...

**Raven**: Triple man. Or we could just say super man.

**Lewis Wallace**: My mom Raven did have this idea of a super man – a normal man, like my dad, or her dad – who was soooo much less sensitive and gentle and caring than me. And didn't like dolls or pink. It sounds silly when you say it out loud but this is the stuff trans people get told all the time. Like, you can't be male because you're too... nice?



**Raven:** I mean I can remember thinking that there was no way you were gonna ever be a man, *man* man as I would say, because you weren't going to give those parts of yourself up. You know, the female, feminine kind of parts of your being, which are your emotional connections with people, and I don't know, the way you interact with people. It's not going to change. Which is good.

**Lewis Wallace:** And then it makes you think about what men are being asked to give up.

**Raven:** Being asked to or, I don't know if they're being asked or...I don't know.

**Lewis Wallace:** When I came out as trans, I got so much unwanted feedback. Your hands are too small, your voice is too high, you *smile* too much.

Clint, my brother with the awesome 90s dance moves—was one of the people who just didn't get it. I remember sitting at a bar telling him about my plans to have my breasts removed—he was totally confused by it.

You just don't seem like a guy to me, not like a normal guy, he said.

I was so hurt. In my mind, I'd always been like Clint—maybe more feminine, but not *that* different from him. It felt like because I had a high voice and tits, I was invisible. So I asked him...what about, you know, swishy gay guys? This question was so silly, but also, he had lots of gay friends and it wasn't like every guy he knew was hypermasculine...

Clint looked at me... and I could almost see the little lightbulb going on...

So you're...like a gay guy, he said. Internally I kinda giggled because I don't see myself as a gay guy exactly, but we were getting warmer. Yes. I said, I'm *like* a gay man...

He sipped his beer and thought about it. About five years later, he started introducing me as his brother.

[BREAK]

**Lewis Wallace:** It took people a long time to get it. But I was determined to be a he, some kind of he, without getting rid of the things that were supposedly feminine about me.

My friend Melvin has been through something similar.

**Melvin:** So my name is Melvin and I identify as a transgender man. I also identify as a man, gay, queer. I used both of those to describe how I identify.

**Lewis Wallace:** Melvin lives in Athens, Georgia...and unlike me, he *mostly* passes as male, but he still navigates gender stuff all the time.

**Lewis Wallace:** He told me this great story about that: he used to be part of a big, progressive Black church on Chicago's south side. The men's fellowship was having a game night, and Melvin was there with about 60 guys, mostly aged 40 to 70...

**Melvin:** I was definitely on the younger spectrum there. And so yeah, so the game, the first game that we played was two truths and a lie.

**Lewis Wallace:** That's an icebreaker game where you say three statements about yourself—two are true, one is a lie. Then everyone else has to guess which one's the lie. In this case, it was a competitive version of the game—whoever tricked everyone the hardest would win a prize...

At this point, Melvin had been going to the men's group at church for quite a while. But no one knew he was trans.

**Melvin:** So the three statements I gave about myself were, I once called my dad the N word when I was eight, I once ate an entire three layer chocolate cake in one sitting. And I used to be a woman. So those were the three statements that I gave.

**Lewis Wallace:** He wasn't sure if he should go there...but right in the moment....he just did.

**Melvin:** Clearly (laughs) as you can probably imagine, everyone thought that the the third statement was the lie. And then I was like, well actually the chocolate cake statement is the lie. And you could hear a pin drop Lewis. There was silence.

**Lewis Wallace:** Melvin won the SHIT out of that game...he got an iTunes gift card, which was awesome because he's a deejay.

**Melvin:** But then afterwards people came up to me and they thanked me for sharing. They invited me to be part of their different ministries that they were part of. They hugged me. They just showed all this tremendous support and appreciation for sharing what I shared. So that was really affirming.

**Lewis Wallace:** By this time Melvin was definitely passing—which is why the guys in his church group were so surprised. But it had been a long process, and it came with real sacrifices....

**Melvin:** I remember when I first started transitioning, feeling that I had to adhere to some sort of masculine norm in order to be accepted as a man, as a transgender man.

**Lewis Wallace:** He came out around 2008—before the more recent explosion of images of different kinds of trans people in media ... and so he remembers getting a lot of this same feedback, that to be a trans man you had to be hypermasculine. YouTube was a big place for getting information about other trans people.

**Melvin:** What I mostly saw on YouTube were masculine trans guys who were straight, and so I, on some level, understood that in order to be accepted as trans, I had to be very conventionally masculine. And so I remember around that time, that same year I came out trans, I gave away all of my feminine clothes my jewelry, even though I didn't want to. But I felt that I had to. So it was like this big moment.

**Lewis Wallace:** Then there's the story of the laptop cover.

**Melvin:** Definitely earlier on, even after I transitioned there were transgender men in my life who said that, who would call into question some of the things I did like, I had a pink laptop case, one transman said something about that like why are you carrying around that pink laptop case?

**Lewis Wallace:** Of course not every trans guy was giving off that kind of message.

**Melvin:** It was literally a few years ago when I had a friend of mine who is also trans wear a necklace, and I said something like I miss wearing necklaces and he was like, well wear a necklace (laughs) you know...

**Lewis Wallace:** These days he wears pink and carries a purse if he wants. He's kind relaxed into it, now that he generally passes. But it can be unsafe for a man, trans or not, to embrace femininity.

Melvin recently posted a story on Facebook about being harassed on the street.

**Melvin:** So this particular day I was wearing some booty shorts and tank top. I think the shorts might have been pink as well, hot pink...

**Lewis Wallace:** He was walking downtown in Athens, which is a college town--

**Melvin:** I had gotten called a faggot by some guys driving this pickup truck past a downtown area where I was at. I also was just experiencing a lot of stares and finger pointing from people based on what I was wearing that day I'm assuming... it made me feel uncomfortable, I was super self-conscious about it. I could tell one woman was really pointing at me and sort of laughing with the person she was sitting next to.

**Lewis Wallace:** Here's what Melvin posted on Facebook:

**Melvin:** Today was exhausting. I'm exhausted by the stares, by the people pointing at me and leaning over to the person next to them like I was a joke. I was exhausted by the shouts of "Die faggot!" from a car passing by as I do something as audacious as simply walking down the street in some booty shorts. Yes, none of this is new, there are folks who go through far worse, even killed particularly trans women and femmes of color. Yes I know that many women and femmes experience things similar to this daily. Yes, the fact that this country is thoroughly transphobic and homophobic is not new to me or lost on me. I know all these things, *and* I think there's something powerful in continuing to name these everyday acts of violence so that we do not normalize them. That is to say I'm invested in not normalizing our dehumanization. And a reminder to all my queer and trans nonbinary fam that we are beautiful and precious. Athens, Georgia is getting all of my side eye today.

**Lewis Wallace:** He says he did get a few nice compliments from other Black men, but mostly that day he just felt really angry...

**Melvin:** There are a lot of people who love me in my life. And it's just hurtful when people look at me and they see me as someone to be despised.

**Melvin:** I think that for us to express ourselves is a is an act of resistance.

**Lewis Wallace:** Awhile ago I had an experience sort of like Melvin's.

Sometimes I wear a short dress and a long curly Black wig, and I do makeup. I think I look hot—like a boy in a dress, something I've always liked. I was wearing all that, at bar in Ohio with my partner...and this guy started looking at me with just open disgust. What are you, some kind of freak? He said. You're a man...

He was looking at my genitals, talking about them, and when I told him to fuck off, he got up in my face—other people watched but didn't say anything. I was pissed off, but also scared: I wanted to stand up to him but I was afraid of getting beat up. I backed down...grabbed my partner off the dance floor and left in tears. I haven't worn a dress in public since.



**Lewis Wallace:** One thing I'm sure of is that this anti-femininity stuff damages all of us.

**Lewis Wallace:** James Baldwin once wrote that "Everything in life depends on how that life accepts its limits."

My reality, and the reality of a lot of my community, is that we've decided not to accept the limits of gender. Why can't I be boyish and sweet, soft-spoken and tough, emotionally accessible and sexually dominant at the same time? Why can't my dad be butch and study French poetry? Why can't my mom be maternal and run a construction site? I just can't bring myself to believe in binary gender, but there's no way around the fact that not believing in it means working to transform it.

My mom struggled a lot when I first came out as trans. She didn't want me to be a man man man. But now, I feel like she understands...

**Raven:** You are making a very strong statement about life and reality in the way that you live, and that's really important. You are living the life that you think it's important to live in the face of pressures that would have you live it a different way. And that's the way it seemed to me for a long time now.

**Lewis Wallace:** Women and other kinds of people—transmasculine and non-binary and genderqueer and two-spirit folks—are constantly asked and expected to be vulnerable. It's also a strategy sometimes—for getting what you need. The #MeToo movement is a prime example, where there's no justice until some woman makes herself extremely vulnerable, personally and professionally. And the flip side is men, not being vulnerable. Not learning how, and also fearing it, pushing it away by being cruel to each other and to women and feminine people.

So how can we make it *safe* to be vulnerable, not just for men, but for everyone? How can we make it *safe* to be feminine, no matter what gender you were assigned at birth? How can men be a part of that?

**Lewis Wallace: [Ambient noise]** I'm just opening up packages with needles in them. And this might be my favorite part, you put the big needle into this little vial and draw out the gel. Testosterone gel.

**Lewis Wallace:** I started taking testosterone pretty recently—17 years into being out as trans, and that was a decision that was totally about me, my comfort in my own body. Not about wanting to pass as a man.

**Lewis Wallace: [On tape]** And then switch to the tiny needle, and this is the one I'm gonna stab into my leg and inject, it doesn't hurt....

**Lewis Wallace:** Still, as these changes happen to my body—my voice lowering, muscles growing, whiskers filling in—I feel people looking at me differently. I feel how I become less of a target. And in a way, less is expected of me—less kindness, less gentleness and vulnerability, less listening. But I don't accept that. I don't want to eliminate masculinity necessarily—I want it to be more flexible, less violent. I don't want a masculinity that means getting rid of everything feminine, harming feminine people.

So every time I give myself a shot of testosterone, I commit to transforming that reality.

[MUSIC]

**John Biewen:** Lewis Wallace. And we're back.

**Celeste Headlee:** Lewis used the word “vulnerable” several times. It's such an important word in this whole discussion about problematic masculinity and patriarchy. There are lots of ways to describe the differences between what we consider masculine and what we think of as feminine in our culture, but it's really hard to think of a single word that's better than *that* one for capturing the difference.

**John Biewen:** And specifically, the enormous damage that comes from teaching boys and men that we *can't* be vulnerable, that vulnerability equals weakness. Women are vulnerable, men are not.

**Celeste Headlee:** And it's telling that that has come through so clearly for Lewis, having lived life as a female child and then transitioning to someone who is at least perceived as male most of the time, and goes by "he" – the fact that he has to resist the assumption from other people that he would give up his vulnerability as part of that transition.

**John Biewen:** Before we go any further in talking about all this, I think it's important to pick up on Lewis's point about the rich and varied spectrum of people who don't identify as simply male or female, and that he speaks only for himself. Trans and genderqueer people across that spectrum face different kinds of barriers and threats and limitations.

**Celeste Headlee:** And intersectionality really comes into play here. Every trans person is vulnerable to transphobia. But Lewis would be the first to say that transitioning, as he's doing, from female *in the direction of maleness*, in a patriarchal culture, is not as fraught or dangerous as doing the reverse.

**John Biewen:** Yeah. The writer and activist Julia Serano coined the term "transmisogyny," to refer to the intersection of transphobia and misogyny. Trans

women are vulnerable not only to the stigma and danger of being non-cisgender, they are transitioning to female in a sexist, man's world. You could say that's the ultimate challenge, the ultimate betrayal, to patriarchy.

**Celeste Headlee:** From the standpoint of straight, cis men – far and away the most likely people to harass or harm trans people -- at least a trans *man* is trying to join the men's club. A trans woman, or a male-assigned person who identifies as genderqueer, is a traitor, giving up their manhood to join the lesser sex. So some men committed to traditional masculinity and the binary ... find that deeply threatening. Enraging, even.

**John Biewen:** The larger perspective is, again, that all of this is unnecessary. The fact that it's such a *huge deal* that some people don't identify as either male or female, or they identify as both. Our society has taken real steps in a very short time, just in the last decade or two, in acknowledging trans people and accommodating and accepting them, compared to just, you know, within our lifetimes.

**Celeste Headlee:** But we're just at the beginning of moving away from the complete failure to acknowledge non-binary people, which lasted for centuries if not millennia in Western culture. And as we've heard, many other cultures, past and present, do recognize more than two genders, or they at least understand that people fall along a spectrum with regards to gender identity. It's really

patriarchy that created this rigid binary, that declared men are like this and women are like that, and also men are in charge.

**John Biewen:** Yes. And Lewis wanted to make sure we make this point clear: the problem is patriarchy, and the notions of masculinity that it manufactured.

**Celeste Headlee:** Not just because straight, cis men are the ones most likely to harm trans people. But the whole reason that being trans is in any way a big deal, a problem for anyone, is the result of gender norms built by patriarchy. Sounds like one more very good reason to burn it down.

**John Biewen:** Or at least, as Lewis suggests, let's make more space in masculinity, if we're gonna keep masculinity around. Space for vulnerability, gentleness, simple kindness and acceptance ... of everybody.

**Celeste Headlee:** Next time: A story about raising a boy. Through that Bermuda Triangle known as male adolescence.

**John Biewen:** John Barth signs off on our scripts. Music by Alex Weston, and by Evgueni and Sacha Galperine. Music and production help from Joe Augustine of Narrative Music.

**Celeste Headlee:** Follow *Scene on Radio* on Facebook, and on Twitter. I'm on Twitter, too: @CelesteHeadlee – h-e-a-d-l-e-e. The show comes from the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, and PRX.