

Jay Pryor Video Transcript

Intro by Marsha Hystead:

Nothing's more powerful than leading by example and Jay Pryor is a living example of the power of possibility. Jay represents with heart, humor and wit—so it's a lot to live up to.

Jay—“We'll see how witty I am this early in the morning.”

So audiences are left more aware, educated and inspired. Jay's a speaker, an executive coach and facilitates corporate change. Enough said, welcome Jay Pryor.

Jay Pryor:

Good morning. Thank you.

As I said my name is Jay Pryor and I call myself a woman in man skin. That's a very purposeful statement because I transitioned at the age of 34 but I didn't ever do that to become a man. I did it because I wanted the beard. And the breasts gone, that was never good for me. But nothing ever made me angrier than when I was full-on in woman skin and living as a lesbian than someone who was male-born who would say I'm a man but I'm really a woman—and they weren't trans—but they were just saying I know what it's like to be a woman. That just pisses me off because no male-born person who's been trained as a man their whole life knows what it's like to be a woman. You just don't. So I'm very conscious about the words woman in man skin in saying that I was female-born and I think that that's really important.

The other thing that I want to be conscious to say today is that this is my narrative and it's not a narrative of any other transgender person nor do I represent the transgender community or the gender-nonconforming community. And most importantly this is another white narrative. The transgender people of color have a very, very different narrative. And I would be remiss if I didn't say that I can't touch that. Their experience, especially my black trans friends who become men, become criminals. The things that they deal with in our society is intense. And black trans women of color or trans women of color—murders of trans women of color is an epidemic right now. And so I just want

to be conscious that this is a white narrative. And I want to make sure to speak that out loud.

So I am a consultant and I create conscious leaders and I've been creating conscious leaders for a long time. In 2010 I had a tagline and a slide on my website that said "wake up" and I was trying to wake people up because for years and years and years I had been walking around in man skin and I could see the difference in how, the drastic difference, in how I was treated as a man versus a woman and I wanted to impart that knowledge to people. And so I started coaching women exclusively. And whether it was executive women or executive teams, just either by being around me and hearing my story or by me consciously sharing with them some of the experiences they had, or the way they were moving through the world, I woke them up to their gender consciousness.

However, what I do and what I teach and what is in my wheelhouse is in raising your consciousness. As human beings I assert that we aren't taught how our brains work very much in our society. So we go around, or human beings go around, thinking that the thoughts that they think are actually who they are. And in coaching school our very first lesson is that we coach to the who of a person. We don't coach to your thoughts, we don't coach to your concerns, we coach to the who of a person.

What I say is that the who of the person is a spark of divinity that lives within every single one of us. And that that spark of divinity is in me and it's in every single one of you. And it's who I'm speaking to today. That spark is in every single one of you.

I'm not speaking to your thoughts, I'm not speaking to your concerns, I'm speaking to the who of every one of you because regardless of anything else, that spark is the one thing that not only do we have in common, but that makes us one. And if we could tune into that as a country we would be way ahead of where we are. But what we do as humans is we come from a place that our thoughts actually are who we are. And the reality is that your thought is a synapse in your brain. We think as humans, we think of good thoughts—I'm a good person. I think a bad thought—I'm a bad person. And the reality is a thought is a synapse in your brain.

I think the weirdest thoughts that you ever thought. The other day I was thinking, if I was trapped somewhere in the world and my family was with me and we were snowbound or something, I'd eat that dog first. Right? What the hell is that from? I mean, your thoughts

are nuts. They come from all kinds of places. Yet, as human beings we have a tendency to think that we are our thoughts.

So, what I am master at is moving people from any level of victimhood into manifesting their lives by having them start to observe and watch their thoughts and know that those thoughts aren't who they are. However, we practice thoughts as humans and some of the thoughts that you practice are not the truth and actually don't serve you very well.

So the other way that I create conscious leaders is having them become conscious of their thoughts that do not serve them. I would assert that human beings, especially transgender human beings, who walk the planet, all of us have a thought I'm not good enough. And we practice that over and over again. As an LGBT human on the planet, everywhere we look we can see that message because we just don't fit in anywhere. And that's what it feels like. But the feeling isn't the fact and being able to acknowledge that and raise our consciousness to watch that is part of what I do in business with leaders everywhere.

Today however, my goal is to introduce what I called gender consciousness. Gender consciousness, I say, is what people start to obtain when they realize that gender is all made up. Like we made it up. It's not real at all. However, human beings, at least the ones I'm around, are so intense about gender.

Can you imagine, if you're so intense about gender that you have to know what it is in the belly? First question people ask a pregnant woman—is it a boy or a girl? Why do we ask that question? Why are you so intense on knowing that question? It's because we have to know how to treat it when it comes out. I guarantee you that whether you're conscious of it or not, from day one of a human being's life, if it's a boy or a girl we treat it differently. That boy is a strong little boy. Look how big he is. Look how strong he is. Isn't she precious? Look at that little angel. We start in utero. We start from day one treating people differently. And it's all just the water you're swimming in and it's all made up. And I know this because I have walked both in a woman's skin and man's skin and I've had my brain full of testosterone and not full of testosterone. And I can tell you that the only difference is how people treat me. That's the only difference. That's what gender boils down to. How we treat each other.

So if we could raise consciousness and do away with gender completely I would be ecstatic. That would be amazing. However, we're not exactly there yet. Not even close, really. So I thought, how can we at least start to have the conversation?

So part of the way that I help people to raise their consciousness around gender is to share my story and my narrative.

So there's me, adorable little girl, aren't I? So I like to say I was born a female, in the transgender community and gender non-conforming people, we like to say we are assigned our gender. You're assigned female at birth, you're assigned male at birth. But I like to say I was born female because I continue to believe that I'm a woman in a man's skin. But I was born female. My life was pretty great. Just a normal little kid until I was about 11 years old.

At 11 years old all of my friends started wearing makeup and carrying purses and doing these things that I just felt really awkward about. And if I could explain it to you I would guess if you would look at a young boy who was 11 years old and you asked him to start carrying a purse and wearing makeup, that's how I might feel. My most vivid memory is standing in JCPenney like this with my mom strapping a bra around me. I was humiliated.

And those kind of stories for me were just a great big evidence that there was something wrong with me. That's all I knew. There's just something wrong with me. So finally, at the age of 14 a girl kissed me. And my head exploded. Now I've been kissing boys since I was in third grade so that wasn't a big deal. But when this girl kissed me it was like fireworks went off. It was really like what they talk about in the movies. So I had this moment, it was just like this grand moment, where I thought. Oh my God! That's it! I'm gay! I'm just gay! And in the next breath I thought fuck, I'm gay. I'm so screwed! I'm in a town of 500 people and my dad is the mayor. I am so dead. I'm dead. I knew that if I came out as a young lesbian I would be dead. I mean violence. I would experience violence and shame and all of those things.

So that was not going to happen. I was not going to do that. So I had a strategy. As sick as it was, my strategy was that I would drink as much alcohol as I could possibly drink and then go have sex with boys so that I could prove that I wasn't a lesbian. Because, it was safer for me to be considered a slut than was for me to be considered a lesbian. So

finally at the age of 16 years old I'd had enough. I drove my parents' car at a hundred miles an hour down a country road and I flipped it. That car turned end over end and I came out without a scratch.

Two years later, two years of suicidal ideation later, I landed myself in a psychiatric unit. I was there on a psych ward at the age of 18 years old with 34 year old schizophrenics, 40 year old manic depressives and a 50 year old woman who was so depressed they used shock treatment to wake her up. And I was there, 18 years old, hating my own guts because I was gay.

Now that psych ward turned out to be the best gift that any human could have ever given me. The first thing that happened was, I came out. Actually, the best thing that happened, is I met my first butch. This butch dike stepped onto the floor, her girlfriend was there as a patient, and she stepped onto the floor and I was like I was seeing Fonzie. I was so excited I couldn't even believe it. She was so cool she had on motorcycle boots, a leather jacket and jeans and I thought, oh my God. That's me. That's what I want to be.

And so I met this person. She and her girlfriend hung out with me and they said these words to me which I'll never forget. Kid, there's nothing wrong with ya, you're just gay. And that really changed my life. It enabled me to come out. So I came out then as a young butch.

The other thing that that psychiatric ward did for me is it taught me that I love humans. And at that tender age of 18, I started studying human beings. And the psych ward taught me that the way I approached human beings makes all the difference in the way of their response. Right? And I was on that unit for six weeks. So six weeks of hanging out with people with severe mental illness will teach you a lot. And that one lesson for me has guided me the rest of my life and it's also given me that drive and love for human beings that I've had. That now I get to teach and I get to be with humans and I get to do all that, and it started because I landed myself in a psychiatric unit.

So I'm going to fast-forward here. I came out as a young butch. Right before I transitioned I looked something like that. And, I never really dressed like that. I was going to a redneck party. But where I grew up, that's how they dressed. It's true. But I

came out as a young butch and I was happy and I was good and life was good. And it's too long a story to tell you now but, I ended up going to college because my dad, on his deathbed, asked me to go back to school. And I had a story that when I went back to school that I couldn't be a butch.

So at the time I was going by Jay and I was butch. And then I went back to college, I grew my hair out and asked my sister to give me a lesson in make-up, I donned a power suit and went back to my original name which was Janet. And so long story short after that, I met somebody who asked me why wasn't I being my butch self and I said because I thought I had to. No one would take me seriously, no one would really listen to me if I looked like that and so she sent me the book *Stone Butch Blues*. That is a book that is part of the LGBTQ history and it's also a free pdf online if you're interested. It's written by Leslie Feinberg who is a transgender leader in the movement and it's a powerful book. That book changed my life and put me on a path toward transition.

So I went back to being known as butch and Jay and, at that point, and at the age of 34, I decided that I would go ahead and start on testosterone. Now, like I said before, I did not take testosterone to be a man. I took testosterone for the beard only. And I did not know what I was getting into. Right? Even though, yes, it should be obvious that if you take testosterone you're going to look like a man. Your world is going to shift. That was not my thought process of a human when they're dealing with just wanting to be comfortable in your skin.

So I transitioned and for the last seventeen years I was on testosterone. And a few months ago I went off testosterone. So July 5th I took my last shot of testosterone and it took about a couple of months for my brain to shift over and, I would assert, that now my brain has shifted over. I don't have that thought of sex on my shoulder all the time. I can cry a lot more easily. Other than that, that's about the only difference that I can feel having gone off testosterone. Now, it's been not a long time. But I'm off testosterone. So, I've been on testosterone, I've been off testosterone. I'm living this way. And, I educate and teach about LGBTQ issues because, it is mine to do.

Now, I want to be clear about the difference between sex and gender. Because just to be conscious, my story is a good one because it's got variations in all of the above. So gender/sex is the anatomy you're born with. Right? So we have men born with penises, women born with vulvas. They are a different sex. We have male and we have female. Gender on the other hand, is varied, right? At least we would assert that it is. So, my

gender identity, I identify as, actually I identify as a human. Right? I do not identify as a man or a woman. I identify as a human or if you push me I will identify as a genderqueer. But, my expression, right, is masculine. I love the beard, I'm glad the breasts are gone, I don't really like the hair on my chest and everywhere else but I deal with it. And, I like men's suits. I like men's clothes and I like men's boots. I like everything there is about men's fashion. I've never felt comfortable in women's clothes. So my gender expression, how I express my gender, is masculine. My gender identity however, is different than that. It is human. Some people have the same gender expression as they do their gender identity. Some people it varies.

Now, opposite of that is your sexual orientation. That's who you like to make love to or sleep with, or who you'd like to be related to. My sexual orientation is also queer, I would assert, because no matter who I'm with, it looks pretty queer. And I'm with my wife who—we have the same parts—so that would be queer, if I was with a guy we'd look queer so I just call myself a queer. So sexual orientation is who you're related to.

And then there's sex. There's female sex, there's male sex. So, cisgender people, right, are people we would say, cis means same, means the same gender. So if you are, those of you in the audience, I'm going to assert many of you are cisgender. So cisgender people are people whose sex, the biology, and the gender identity all match-up. Your sex, your biology, your gender identity, your gender expression, all of that matches up as the same. So there are men and there women in terms of sex. And while I assert that you would like to believe that you are the only ones here, that you're not in terms of gender expression. I would be so thrilled if we could understand that there are so many variations of gender and we could accept that that would be great. But where do we start? And, if we could start in one place, and this is where the medical industry could come in here big time, if we could start in one place, it would be to acknowledge the fact that there are more than two sexes. There are more than two sexes.

1.7% of the population is born intersex. We used to call these people hermaphrodites. Do not use that word. Do not use that word. I'm telling you that as part of your education, do not use that word. They're intersexed. The variations of people who are born intersexed are many. Right? There's many variations of how they're born. Some of them are born, for example, with ovaries and testes. So, these people are born this way.

Now, if I have ever had an argument about gender from someone who tells me that I'm going to hell or that something is wrong with me about how I present myself the argument is, well you weren't born that way. So, these people were born that way. They were born that way. And rather than allow them to be a third sex and to be, you know, just who they are, instead we do surgery on them as babies. We castrate them. We often make them asexual and we decide for them what box they're going to fit into. Whether it be male or female, by golly, they've got to have a box!

So we decide for them and we do surgery on them and often, or over 50% of the time, we are wrong about what box we choose for them.

So, wouldn't it be amazing, if all we did is just acknowledge that there's a third sex? Right? Now, you would think, 1.7% of the population—well, that's not very many people. Why is it such a big deal? Well, it's the same percentage of people who are born with red hair. And, I am a ginger. And I see gingers everywhere. And I don't know about you, but my guess is you see gingers everywhere. And I want you to know that every time you see a ginger, that many people are born intersex in our world. And instead of allowing them to flourish and be who they are, we decide for them. So if we could start anywhere it would be the medical community deciding to stop doing surgery on babies.

Now I want to honor and acknowledge California because they're the first state in the Union to say we're going to ban surgeries on babies. Germany is starting to say there's a third sex and starting to ban surgeries on people who are born intersex.

But that's it. We have just barely begun that conversation.

Now, the people that break my heart are these people. These are my kids. These kids go to Johnson County Q Space. It's a safe space for LGBTQ kids.

Out of the 30 or so kids that go to this group, 24 of them identify as gender nonconforming. When I met these kids, the first thing they say to me is, you're the only old trans guy we know. It's true. What they're really saying to me is, I don't see myself in the future. I don't see myself in the media. And I get this because when I was coming out as a lesbian I was suicidal. There was no Ellen. The only person that I related to was Jody Foster and I beat her way out of the closet. So I mean I blazed a trail for Ellen and Jodie Foster. So I know what it's like to be a young person and feel desperate to have anybody who looks like you and not be able to see that anywhere in the world.

So the other hat that I wear is an advocate for young LGBTQ youth and especially for young trans people.

I want to share just one story, a medical story, about an advocacy that I did for a young trans person. Now, I would assert that this person is grown. This person was 28 years old. At our local community Mental Health Center, when they have a young trans person in therapy, they know me and know I'm out. And so when that person wants to meet somebody who's out and healthy and trans, they bring me in just to have a conversation with the kid. So I'm there, at this mental health unit, and I talking to this person and this is the story that I hear.

He has 16 cysts in his ovaries. He has been having his menses for 100 days. Now, for those of you who don't really understand that, to be a trans man, to someone who has a female body that you don't want and to be bleeding for that long is horrifying. I mean it's just terrible for this kid. This person also was already depressed, already dealing with a lot of stuff, having issues at the workplace—all kinds of stuff. So here's what I find out.

The 16 cysts bleeding for a hundred days finally they get a doctor's note for the hysterectomy that they have wanted all along. They get a doctor's note, they go to the hospital to have the surgery, the surgeon decides that she will not perform the surgery because "she" might want to have babies someday. Oh boy. Now, for me nothing pisses me off worse than something like that. This person is 28 years old and you're going to decide for them that "she," let's just misgender them altogether also, might want to have babies someday.

So I called every gynecological office, every surgeon I could find. And nobody called me back. And I worked on this for like a month. Until finally, I found a surgeon.

I went with this person to the appointment with the surgeon. Fortunately we found someone, a woman who was about to retire, who said to this person, to my kiddo, "You know, I just want to check to see if it's medically necessary, but I would do this for you anyway given that you're transgender and it's something that you want."

And so she did check, and it was a medically necessary hysterectomy. And the surgeon who refused to do the surgery, that doctor's suggestion was an IUD. Now, if you ask me, that's violence. It's violence. It's violence against a person who cannot advocate for themselves. So when it comes to medical barriers, transgender people have them

stacked up. And one of the things that's most important is that they don't have advocates.

What we found in terms of statistics is that trans youth are 46% more likely to commit suicide than their peers. 59% of transgender people attempt suicide. So here we have these young people who if they don't have an advocate or parent of their own, they don't have anybody advocating for them.

So part of what I do is work and work and work so that these kids have an advocate. And what I'm looking to the medical community to do is to start actually paying attention to the fact that these kids need advocates and need people who will speak for them and with them about what they really want and what they really need. Especially when they're facing a doctor who feels like they have the power to be able to tell these kids what they want or what they need. In spite of what they say they want and what they say they need.

So making these kids safe is part of my issue. And I would guess that we would think that that's common sense. How hard is that? Don't we want all the kids to be safe? You would think that. However, let me give you a moment to read this. This is about a 12 year old girl who wants to use the bathroom in Oklahoma. All she wants to do is use the bathroom. These are actual tweets from parents about this child.

They call her "this thing." This half baked maggot. They're threatening violence against her. A good sharp knife would stop that student. These are actually tweets from adults, from parents about a twelve-year-old. And I promise you that these are some of the mild ones. I have seen and heard more violence against trans kids from adults than I can hardly bear.

However, what's important to note is that we could "other" these people in a minute right? We could say that's not us and I'm sure that's not you people and it's none of your employees or anybody like that, or is it? Is it you or is it me?

When I was 14 years old, I called the radio station and said all gay people should be shot. I used to say that I wouldn't walk across the street to piss on a queer if they were on fire. And I meant it. Because that's the level of self-loathing that I had inside of me.

You know, it's not rocket science to get that people who are violent against something might have it within them. But we as humans tend to “other” those people. And as long as they are “other” than us, we never ever, ever have to be with them, deal with them and transform these things.

So I stand here today as someone who always says, and continues to say, that I can love the transphobia out of anybody. And it is my commitment to love and serve and to be one with all of those people. And my commitment is to start with a knowing and a building of community around creating conscious leaders who are conscious enough to be able to deal with their own stuff. See, in personal transformation, I think personal transformation is the answer for all of us. It takes every single one of us one by one personally transforming all of those thoughts that we've practiced over and over again that don't serve us. And some of those thoughts are violent. And some of those thoughts are about violence against others. And we believe that's then who we are, right?

And so, if we can transform that—and what I want to know and what I want to give you—is that I really believe this is happening now. And I'm so excited.

See, in 2010 when I was saying wake up to people, I was like a dog whistle that nobody could hear. And now, because of the Me-Too movement, because of all of the things that have happened, people are actually hearing me. We're actually having this conversation. And women everywhere are dealing with their stuff.

And not only, you know, when we transform as human beings, we know that what happens is that some of our stuff from our past has to come up and we have to look at it and deal with it and move through it and get into forgiveness. Because that's the only way that we heal those things.

And for the first time, at least in our culture that I know of, we're actually doing that in community. We're holding space for each other very powerfully. And I'm very excited about that. And that's the hope right? Because I know that there has to be some ray of hope. And that's my hope is that we move through this and that we raise consciousness and we start to understand that gender is just all made up.

And we're here today because we believe in better. We believe, and can see a vision, where a little boy can wear a skirt to school without any shame. We believe and see a vision where a 12-year-old can use the girl's bathroom without getting violence against them. And we believe, and can see, a vision where women before the age of 24 don't have to know that they're already going to deal with sexual violence against them.

I know that the only way to do this is through personal transformation. That's where I stand and that's why my book is called *Lean Inside*. Because, there's nothing out there that's going to solve this. I offer you a free copy of my book in case you'd like to have it. But more importantly, I just want you to know that I know, that we can stand and that we can raise consciousness. And I am always going to be out there leading, loving the transphobia out of all of you.

Thanks for being with me.