**Laverne Cox’s speech at the Transgender Law Center’s
SPARK! Gala, San Francisco, CA
October 18, 2018**

**Speech text from the Transgender Law Center:**[**https://transgenderlawcenter.org/watch-the-laverne-cox-speech-you-need-this-week/**](https://transgenderlawcenter.org/watch-the-laverne-cox-speech-you-need-this-week/)

 *Content Warning: suicidal ideation*

Thank you so much, Cecilia. Make some noise for Cecilia!

She has been doing this work so long and she is a living legend as far as I’m concerned, thank you so much.

Thank you so much, TLC, for this incredible honor. Thank you, San Francisco, for this incredible honor and just getting to meet some of you earlier and looking out at this room right now I’m reminded that #transisbeautiful.

So beautiful, and in this world where we are constantly under attack, it is so important to remind ourselves each and every day – I don’t know if anybody follows me on Instagram – but I have always… [cheering] pretty much every post is #TransIsBeautiful.

I started #TransIsBeautiful about three years ago. I was doing a talk and I thought how amazing would it be if we started something in social media to empower trans folks. Specifically it was about for me embracing all of those things about myself that make me uniquely and beautifully trans. And over the years, I’ve had a lot of trouble struggling to fully love myself because I might not fit some cis-normative idea of what beautiful is.

And so I started #transisbeautiful to remind myself that I am not beautiful despite my big hands, my big feet, my wide shoulders, my height, my deep voice… I am beautiful \*because\* of those things. I am beautiful because of those things that make me uniquely and noticeably trans — and so are you.

I wanted to tell you a story that I have not told in public before. Um, so… [laughter] Oh my gosh. It’s gonna be hard. Bear with me.

So about 16-17 years ago I was about three or four years into my medical transition – so I started medical transition twenty years ago last month. That’s the first time I’ve said that in front of a roomful of people. I’m kind of cagey about my age. Forever 21 is not just a store… [laughter]

I had to prepare myself for being harassed on the street every single day. So I would leave my house and I would be misgendered pretty much the second I walked out of my house. I would be misgendered and harassed on the subway. I often feared for my life and this is a daily occurrence and so before I medically transitioned, I kind of existed in a gender non-conforming space, so this wasn’t new for me. And I grew up being bullied and I’m from Mobile, Alabama, so I grew up being bullied and so most of my life I’ve dealt with being harassed on the street, being bullied, and it had just gotten to a point where it was so hard.

I’d imagined that I’d start my medical transition and I would start to be able to blend in and people would realize that I was trans and I could be safer and I can move through my life with more safety and just pursuing my dreams. And about three or four years into my transition that was not happening.

I would still walk down the street and people would still misgender me, harass me, make me feel unsafe and I’d gotten to a point where I did not want to live.

So I was seriously thinking about committing suicide and I remember when I was contemplating suicide that… I remember that when I was contemplating suicide I took time to type up notes that said: ‘my name is Laverne Cox. I should not be referred to by any other name, and my gender pronouns are she and her. I should not be referred to by any other gender pronouns.’

And my plan was I was going to jump out of a really tall building because there’s a lot of those in New York, and I would have two notes in my pockets just in case someone missed it and I would plant the notes all over my apartment so that I would not be misgendered in my death and dead-named in my death the way I was being misgendered and disrespected in my life.

And it was a really difficult time, but for some reason I decided not to kill myself.

I was in therapy at the time and I started studying with this amazing acting coach in New York who gave me a new lease on life and I decided not to commit suicide. And I am so grateful, because I wouldn’t be standing here with you.

Slowly over the years, through therapy, through support groups, through community, I’ve come to value my life. I’ve come to understand that I am here for a divine reason.

The universe has shown me that.

I am here to tell you that each and every one of you is here for a divine purpose.

You might not see it right now but you are here for a divine purpose and so you have to survive. You have to survive.

We have to get to a point where we are all deeply valuing trans lives.

Trans lives matter and that is why I am here.

That is why I’m here tonight to praise the work of TLC. Because each and every day they center the lives of trans people. Trans people of color. Trans people with disabilities. Just trans people across the spectrum and that is really crucial in this world. We all know what’s going on. This group knows what’s going on in the world more than anybody else.

We are an under attack in the way that we probably have never been before, scapegoated for political reasons in a way that we never have been before.

But this is a moment, this is a moment for each and every one of us to connect with our divine reason for being here, for our purpose in the movement. And I believe each and every one of us has a purpose in this movement.

It’s really tricky right now not to get discouraged, not to be perpetually angry. And part of what I’ve been doing is saying to myself every day – every single day, and it’s harder some days – is ‘I can choose love today, not fear.’

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And I can operate from that place as I go out into the world and fight for my rights, fight for the rights of my community. I can choose love today and not fear.

One of my favorite quotes, I’m sure many of you heard me say this before, it’s from Dr. Cornel West. He reminds us that justice is what love looks like in public. Justice is what love looks like in public

I’ve been thinking about this concept of love and what exactly is love, and one of my favorite definitions of love comes from Dr. Brene Brown. Her new book just came out this week, it’s number one.

Dr. Brene Brown who’s a shame researcher came up with this definition of love from her research as a qualitative researcher, and she does long-form interviews based on people’s lived experiences. And from her interviews came up with this definition of love that I love:

“We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and honor the connection that grows from that with love, respect, kindness and affection.’ She says, ‘I saw no examples of love that do not consist of trust, respect, kindness and affection.

Love is not something we give or get, it’s a connection we nurture and grow. And it can only exist between two people when it exists within each of them. We can only love others as much as we love ourselves. Can I get an amen?

She says that shame, blame, disrespect and withholding affection damage the roots of love.

And love can only survive these injuries if they’re acknowledged, healed, and rare.

I often like to think what would it look like in our public discourse, in our political discourse, if we eliminated shame, blame, disrespect, and the withholding of affection.

What if we had real accountability, because what Brene Brown is talking about in this definition is accountability and tenderness and a sense of respect for each other. I believe we can begin to restore that in our public discourse and it’s sorely missing right now. We do not have to play into that narrative. We can choose the love today and not fear. We can choose love today and not fear.

Let’s choose love today and not fear!

Thank you so much.

You are beautiful! Trans is beautiful! Have a great night.