Episode 58: Elle Halo

September 2, 2019

Molly Woodstock: Okay, this week before we start the show, I wanted to share a piece of They Mail. They Mail is our program where you send us some money and we read a message on the show. Find more info in the show notes. Here it is. From The Corners of Their Mouth Press.

“Join the creators of The Corners of Their Mouth, a queer food zine, for the issue two launch party. Issue two is a collection of recipes, comics, poetry, and essays on topics including self-care, and queer crushes, learning to cook in a new country, and queer-nilism’s connection to vegan food.”

Wow, that’s very interesting.

“The launch party will have free food and a satirical gender reveal cake”

This sounds so good. It’s in Seattle. Ok.

“Saturday, September 7th. 2-5pm at Outsider Comics in Seattle. Learn more at [thecornersoftheirmouthpress.com](https://thecornersoftheirmouthpress.com)”

That’s so rad. If you’re in Seattle, you should go. Anyway, here’s the show.

[Gender Reveal theme song by Breakmaster Cylinder]

[Music continues under Molly]

Molly: Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host, and resident Gender Detective, Molly Woodstock.

[Music continues]

[Music ends]

Molly: Hey everyone, hope you’re all hanging in there! I haven’t slept in, like, 4 days, it’s fine, it’s fine, everything’s fine. This week on the show, we spoke to Gender Reveal grant winner, Elle Halo about all of the obstacles that black trans women face and how we can all do a better job supporting them. The audio on this piece is pretty wild, but I think we’re gonna make it through. I’m gonna give it a shot. I hope you give it a shot. Apologies for this type of audio, hopefully won’t happen again. Also I want to note that Elle talks quite a bit about two-spirit identity as far as she’s researched it. If you want to hear a more comprehensive overview of two-spirit identities, I would go back and listen to our recent interviews with Kai Minosh Pyle [episode 53] and Jack Malstrom [episode 45]. But first, a bunch of fun announcements for you today. First of all, Gender Reveal was featured on premere queer-lady website: [Autostaddle.com](https://www.autostraddle.com). I did a really long email interview with Vanessa at Autostraddle. Check it out if you want.

[[Insta Crush: Gender Reveal Podcast is Living the Queer Dream](https://www.autostraddle.com/insta-crush-gender-reveal-podcast-is-living-the-queer-dream/)]

I’m really excited and grateful to Autostaddle for giving us that opportunity.

Also. I was featured on the podcast Gayish with Mike and Kyle. If you need even more Molly Woodstock content in your life for some reason, you could check out that episode of the Gayish podcast which came out last Thursday.

[[Episode 133: Non-binary (w/ Molly Woodstock from Gender Reveal](http://www.gayishpodcast.com/index.php/2019/08/29/gayish-133-non-binary-w-molly-woodstock-from-gender-reveal/)]

Also, don’t forget we have an amazing back-to-school sale going on right now on our Patreon. If you donate at the $6 a month level, or more, by September 10th, you’ll get the usual bonuses, which is the newsletter and Gender Reveal stickers, and our undying gratitude. You’ll also get six awesome stickers from Jery at Stick to Resist, Jery was last week’s guest. [episode 57] And they’re doing really really rad stuff for us. So yeah, I’d encourage you to check it out at [patreon.com/gender](https://www.patreon.com/gender).

Finally, we have a really really rad new shirt in the merch store. I think it’s up for two more weeks? It says “Support Trans Media,” which, I would love for everyone to do. Shirts are selling really well, if you want yours, again, there’s only a couple weeks left, so check it out.

And now it’s time for This Week In Gender.

[News-y, This Week In Gender intro music]

Molly: Ok Friends, there’s a lot of actual gender news and I will try to get to that in the following few weeks. I’m very tired and very crunched for time, so I’m just gonna tell you about this show that I love, because I think it will bring you trans-joy.

Y’all. Have you been watching, *Are You The One,* season eight?

*Are You The One* is a dating show on MTV. The past seven seasons were straight—we don’t care about them. But the premise is basically there’re ten men and ten women and they each have to find the, like, perfect match in the house. But this season there’re 16 people and they’re all quote-unquote sexually fluid, which means, bisexual, or pansexual, anything in that ilk. Basically it’s just like 16 extremely extremely hot, like, bisexual models in their 20s, just like making out with each other. There’re two trans contestants, one of them is a trans-masculan person, who is white. And they take T, they take testosterone on the show. Has your brain ever exploded from representation? They take testosterone on the show! They have top surgery scars, you see them all the time, it’s amazing! They other person is even more amazing, their name is Basit. And they are a black trans-femenine person, who uses they / them pronouns, and watching them be themselves on the show is ju- so rad. It’s just not something that I ever see in television.

So. There’s like two weeks left of this season, but you can go binge the whole thing at MTV.com. Just make a bunch of fake 24-hour logins, it’ll be fine. I really, really hope that you enjoy this and you feel as seen as I do. I am completely obsessed with it. I might just like apply to go be on the show, even though they’re not going to let me in because I’m not like a messy 22-year-old model. But, yeah, I hope that you love it as much as I do, and I will try to have more robust This Week in Gender next week. Thank you for your forgiveness for this.

This has been This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender outro music plays]

[Gender Reveal music plays]

[Music continues under Molly]

Molly: Elle Halo, is a black woman of trans experience, who is dedicated to the equity, visibility, and inclusivity of all LGBTIA and QTPOC. She currently serves on the boards of two state-funded prevention programs, is member of the Black AIDs Institute Ambassadorship of Biomedical Prevention and is a new member of the board of directors at Diverse and Resilient.

[Music ends]

Elle Halo: Hi, my name is Elle Halo, and my pronouns are she / hers.

Molly: So when you were applying for this grant you told us that you’re involved with the group called SHEBA, that’s for Sisters Helping Each Other Battle Adversity. And it seems like that organization is really important to you and I would love to hear how the organization works and what’s important to you?

Elle: Absolutely, SHEBA began as programming from the House of Infinity, which was a all black-owned and ran prevention agency, and it began about 10 years ago. Really small at first and continuing to grow, all the way until about four years, when I began my medical transition, and became a member. We’ve continued to grow as a group, and have been able to do some of the cool things and I wanna see the program have the ability to grow and be able to produce more for the core participants and also be able to have more outreach to new participants.

Molly: Totally. What are some of the cool things that you’ve been able to do so far?

Elle: We’ve been in a fashion show and the art museum here, which is really, really fun and beautiful, and a lot of our core members, a lot of our women, participated. SHEBA is a all-black trans women’s group. We all are different ages, different backgrounds, and it’s really, really interesting and so it’s always a good time. We meet bi-weekly for different programming, training, and different activities. We’ve also been in a national trans photography campaign about two years ago.

Molly: Oh! That sounds amazing. So, we hear a lot about how black trans women are one of the most vulnerable populations of LGBTQ folx, so I’m wondering, what other LGBTQ folx can do, in your opinion, to, like, better support black trans women?

Elle: To go beyond. Often, I work in prevention, so I work with a lot of people that come from the clinical world, or the academic world, and what I like to tell them, is something that they can do, and I think that it applies to everyone, is to come from behind the white coat, or rather just to come from behind the bias, or the apprehension, even the fear or the ignorance itself, just to be in solidarity with us, when we need that. Too, we’re also integral in many different communities, for instance, all the women of SHEBA, each one of them is a mother, a leader, a caretaker, a sister, a aunt, in their respective worlds and in our respective communities, and our local community. And, we do deserve, you know, some respect. We deserve equal treatment, we deserve to have a fair shot in a new area, in a new field, in a relationship, in our families. Just support us! You know, like, for instance, in terms of my, like, personal safety, in terms of like, where I’m able to go in my, career pursuits, or any pursuits. All of those things are because I have people supporting me, and there’s a whole world of trans people in general that don’t have the right types of support. Or even access to the right types of support, that includes support in your medical care, that includes support in social services, bein’ able to get connected to social services, bein’ able to get connected to tests and resources, to learn more things about healthy relationships, about yourself, about your identity, about your self-awareness. So just kinda being a part of making those things inclusive to trans women, I think makes a difference. You can always help support people financially when they need it. You could always, you know, extend a hand, extend a car ride, extend, you know, whatever you have, or whatever type of connection that you had to a trans woman in your life, you should utilize that, and there’s so much that we could teach you. There’s so much I feel like, mainstream culture is—is lacking and some of the things we see in our world are lacking because people don’t have the experience that we have as trans people and as trans women, and there’s so much more that you learn living in such a unique life than the average person, or the average cis-person.

Molly: Yeah, can you talk more about that? And about an example of something that maybe mainstream culture is missing that you feel like you’ve learned by your exp—life experience?

Elle: Absolutely, empathy for sure. For me personally, my mom is a minister, and she also was a foster parent, so those things instilled different things in me. And a sense of community and a sense of feeling that even when people don’t show it, is one of those things. Like, I’ve been out, like I was out in my birth identity as a young gay man since I was in the eighth grade. So, like, now coming into my transition for five years, coming into, you know, just adulthood and the rest of, my sexuality and my identity, I’m now beginning to see some of those burgeoning areas of activism and supporting community that we’ve—all deserve, that I have personally always believed was possible. And it’s refreshing; and it’s reinvigorating. But definitely empathy. As a trans woman in particular, people think that our relationships, for instance, with the context of trans-attracted men, are just about whatever people assume that they’re about. But it’s a very unique type of relationship to have—any type of, I feel, romantic relationship with us, or with a trans woman—because it’s just different, and it’s definitely more intimate, it’s more of an intimate relationship than one might assume, or one thinks is capable, for that type of interaction. People tell us things that they would never tell us, that they would never tell other people; that they have never told other people. People that also live in other types of, non-traditional lifestyles also outreach to us like people—like people that are down on their luck even or—or people that are in the fabric of your community, that may not have the best personal financial standing, or the best access in their own personal life, they outreach to us. Like, I can’t tell you how many times that people have surprised me around my, like, local community. I’ve lived in the same area of Milwaukee for 15 years, I can’t tell you how many of the people just over the years have done things—looked out for me and different things like that—and how much of a difference it makes for people that don’t have that, or that haven’t been able to stay in one area for that long, or… At this point people know me over there and that’s why that’s a part of what happens. But definitely, like, to be very specific, people that have drug and alcohol addictions and problems, and also people that have mental health issues, they are able to communicate with us, and they’re able to understand us and we understand them, in some very profound ways I have personally found. And so, I just think empathy, is missing from—obviously—from our mainstream cis-hetero-normative world. And I definitely think that’s one of many things—including many talents, many gifts, many types of expression—that we have the tools for; that people need those areas of their lives as well.

Molly: Yeah absolutely, so you mentioned being the child of a minister, and I’m interested in how that has affected the way you think about your identity?

Elle: It definitely caused me to struggle, like, a—a lot, when I was young, in terms of establishing an identity for myself. I also was a child assault victim, a child sexual assault vicitim, and so those things—those two things together, and that impact on myself and my future, and my family, and my relationship with my mother, have always big struggles and big factors. But we’re resilient, and theres always been love there, and—and definitely never had a sense of that I wasn’t supported, so… That struggle was like my identity in that I never used, like, “boy” language in my head. Like, never. Like, even to this day, like, I’ve never used it in my head. And that was definitely, when I did begin my transition, that definitely one of the things that, like, kinda made me, like, “Huuuuu?” …like, kind of like, always wonder about it kinda. But I never, like, used boy-language in my head. But I never really noticed that I didn’t use it, cause I just was operating as myself. So, I would kind of say, I was kind of, really, moreso, like, androgynous. Or really, moreso, like, femme. But, kind of fluid—feeling about myself, like I felt like that was the right identity. But, as a young person specifically, it definitely caused me, like, a lot of depression, and confusion, that Inactually, like, just personally, I made a very specific covenant with God. Which is like, a thing that you do in prayer, or in worship, and a commitment that you make between yourself and God, or between yourself and a higher power. And I would, like, promise that I wouldn’t do things to directly hurt—harm myself (or different things like that) if he would, like, help me to find a balance and find that. And so that’s something that I lean on *constantly* and it’s something that I’ve always leaned on. But as an adult—because I had that to lean on—and, like, because I made it out of that time with that commitment, I’ve never really struggled with it as an adult, feeling like I was wrong to feel a kind of way. As far as me going from my birth identity—wer—yeah, my birth identity, to transition into a woman. It was just a matter of me knowing that it was possible for me to do it. And possible for me to do it in a way that made sense to me. And, that aligned with…my—who I am, and not me trying to necessarily, fall into something predetermined for me.

Molly: Yeah. So when you were transitioning—or when you were thinking about transitioning—did you have any role models, anyone you looked up to, to see that, like, it was possible?

Elle: So, I didn’t begin my transition with, like, an intention. But a bunch of my friends, a bunch of people that were my age and—and, you know, other trans women, have began transitions, and were beginning transitions, and we were all together, and it definitely affected me in a positive way to be able to kind of realize that. But, I will kind of say, as far as role models, definitely when you’re outside of the community, and then you—you still have some of those biases and some of those thoughts, that aren’t necessarily equity producing towards us, until you’re one of us, you kinda don’t know how to, kinda, look at us. And, how to understand the many different layers and levels to our lives and our culture and why, you know, people express in the ways that they do, or things like that. So, I actually would kinda say that I didn’t have a role model, but I definitely had my close friends. And, I find that a lot of people tell me in transition that they began their transitions after having close friends that had transitions. And I would say that my best friend, she began hers like a year before I began mine. But again, I can’t say that I really had an intention of beginning it, I just wanted to try more with my presentation specifically. I wanted to try more feminine expression.

Molly: When do you feel like was the moment when it went from, ”oh, I’m just gonna try this out and see how it feels,” to, like, “I am gonna exists as a trans woman in the world?”

Elle: It kinda was immediate, I will say that. Like, the response that I got, it was like, people saw you for the first time.

Molly: Mmmmmm…

Elle: If that makes sense.

Molly Mmmhmmm.

Ell: And also—I also often equate the feeling that you have when you begin a transition to… for me it was kinda like a death. I experienced a ve—a very dark deep depression, I experienced transitions in my family, transitions in my life, and my livelihood in a non-, like, -tangible way, like, not a way that I could have said, but I just knew. I just—you can’t—I can’t go any further, like this. Like, I didn’t have opportunities for work, I didn’t have opportunities, you know what I mean. Just, like, every different level of a life, kind of, was kinda fallin’ apart. That’s how I feel about beginning it. But when I realized, and began to realize more, I started to research and started to come across more things, and definitely a lot of things that I read about, or researched, touched me. But in particular, one that really, really touched me was 2-spirited ideology and terminology from native culture. I do have some native heritage that I’ve personal—that I personally feel is modern, like is relevant, [laughs]

Molly: mmmhmm.

Elle: But, um, I do identify as black, and I do—I do want to pursue learning more about my heritage and my culture, but I know, like, on my dad’s side, it’s—it’s—it’s close, it’s, like, you know, it’s close, like his mother.

Molly: mmmhmm, mhmm.

Elle: And, our great grandmother. So, Anyway, not it being a native ideology, that’s not what, struck me, but it did add to it. But what, like, really struck me about the ideology is, in specific, they said that the people—that they would be born in their birth gender, but that they would just live in their true gender, which is you’re two spirit. And that’s kinda like me, like, it’s kinda like, I don’t know, that’s just one of the things that kinda made me like, “Ok, this is something realistic, and is historical, and is out there, and it’s real.” You know what I’m saying? It’s not just something that was made, for instance, in the modern era.

Molly: mmmhmmm.

Elle: I mean, and then, they also said that these people would als—would oftentimes be caretakers to other people in their lives, specifically their parents. Me and my mom have like had, a very deep connected relationship, and we take care of each other. And I’ve been a caretaker to her, and she’s obviously, as a parent, been a wonderful caretaker to me. And you know, did everything she—does everything she can for me. And so, those things just kinda touched me. And just kinda brought clarity to things that had been bigger themes in my life already. And it’s like, something that I equate with trans women, is this person is a caretaker, this person has people on their back, this person, is upholding a community, definitely in the same way that a ci—a woman does. And even more.

Molly: Yeah. So you applied for this Gender Reveal grant, so that you could help send more women to the Black Trans Advocacy Conference and I was wondering if you could talk about what that conference is and why it feels important to you?

Elle: Absolutely! So, two years ago, April 2018, myself and another member of our SHEBA group were able to go to the BTAC conference that year. And it was, for me personally, a life changing experience. And it really, really, touched me and motivated me to pursue making a change in doing my prevention work at a volunteer level, to trying to pursue it as a career, or trying to pursue it in terms of, like, full time ability to work in the area. I want to get more into diversity inclusion and LGBT youth leadership, and I do a lot of prevention work right now. I’m a Black AIDs Institute ambassador. I’m a health navigator at Health Connections Inc, which is a private health clinic, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And I’m a board member at Diverse and Resilient, which is the mother– home of our SHEBA group. Those are all things that have happened for me since going to BTAC that year and it just definitely gave me access to other—to—to some role models now—or to *more* role models—now. I’ll say I had them once I got in the community, and—and in the same way with BTAC, I got—I got more of them once I got into the BTAC network and community. And it’s huge! And it goes back ten years, and they have already well established this network, well established this collaborative. And the people work together, they uplift each other, support each other, promote each other’s messages. Promote each others initiatives, and organizations, and groups, and it’s just a really, really wonderful community to belong to. It’s all black community. It’s all trans community. It’s incredibly unique. It’s incredibly nurturing. It’s incredibly welcoming. Again, it’s, for me, it’s just, an actualization of that community that I always wanted to be a part of. But specifically, [indiscernible], in terms of work, just having had the access has given me so many ideas. Has given me a framework of how to operate through some of my new experiences, that I wouldn’t have had before, because I wouldn’t’ve seen that people had already been doing it. It’s definitely, like, really been very influential to me. This year, 2019, April, we were able to take, myself, two other SHEBA ladies, we took a young trans man, and we took an anchor—one of our SHEBA lady’s spouse, which is called a anchor– our program director, as well as community partner. I was nominated for a rising star award there, which was a wonderful experience being nominated with and by my peers. And also, when I got it, the reception, like, the applause… I grew up a theater kid, and performer, and a choir kid, and I never got an applause like that.

Molly: Awww.

Elle: For something I did by myself. And so it just was really, really a wonderful experience.

But, we were able to take those, like, five—I think—of us this year, and I wanna see the whole group go, there’re core members that have been a part of SHEBA since the very beginning of it, years ago. I—I want my contribution to the group to be helping to further develop the programming and helping to coordinate it. And also, to be able to take the whole core group there one time. I think it’s important. Some of them, it’d be their first time flying, some of them it’d be their first time going out of the state.

Molly: Mmm.

Elle: Some of them it’d be their first time going to, like, a national conference, or—or anything. Or just being in the space with that many trans people is definitely by itself a—a singularly, like, moving experience. And so I definitely want all of, all of my personal direct peers here to be able to have that experience.

Molly: So, I think when we think about, specifically black trans women and trans women of color, we, like, here a lot about pain, and safety issues and danger and violence. And I would love to just hear, what you do for fun, or what brings you joy?

Elle: I sing and I write. and those are things that I would like to pursue more personally as well, and, expressing them and sharing them, to pursue more. Like I said, I grew up as, like, a theater kid, and a choir kid, so, you know, I always performed, I always sung, I always did talent shows, was in plays. But in terms of, like, becoming an adult and having access to do, kind of, those things, that access kind of went away. And as you grow into a sexual identity, like a gay man, those opportunities go away. And as you grow into an identity as a trans woman, those opportunities go away. And so, I definitely wanna, like, develop some more of my own personal music and personal things that I’ve written. I write fiction, and I write, like, poetry and lyrics. And, so, I definitely want to pursue those more.

Molly: So, you mentioned, at some point that you have a lot of goals and visions of the future, so, I’m wondering if you could tell us anything about that, and where you are working towards being in a few years.

Elle: In a few years, I would like to make a transition in my life, and in my lifestyle. I would like to be more financially stable. I’d like to be at least, you know, like, approaching some type of settling down or something like that [laughs] like, as far a like a relationship or something. I’d like to try to go back to school…

Molly: Yeah, if you went back to school, what would you want to study?

Elle: Probably, like, music or some type of community organizing, or business type of thing. Yeah, like, I do a lot of prevention work, and I’m honored and blessed to do—to do that, and have some of those experiences. But I feel like that’s a, like—I feel like that’s a responsibility. I feel like that’s a responsibility that all LGBT people have, is to give back in that way because it affects all of us and we’re all living in a post-HIV epidemic culture.

Molly: Mmmm

Elle: That’s why I have those opportunities and why I pursue them. But I definitely, like I said, I wanna move more into diversity and inclusion and just educating about us. And just establishing myself more. I’d like to publish a book. Or so—or some [laughs] and, record a project, record a, like, a singing project. So, yeah.

I also wanna be a foster parent. I will mention that, just real quick. I do wanna be a foster parent. I specifically wanna be a foster parent and work with kids that are gonna age out of the system, because I always think that’s really sad. But in specific I think, like, Mom—my mom being a foster parent, it connected her to a whole network across the country, of black foster parents, where their stories aren’t horror stories of them being in those foster homes. Sometimes a black foster parent being a foster parent is the difference between those kids ever seeing their birth families again.

Molly: Mmm

Elle: Or having that connection, or being able to stay in that city, or being able to stay in that neighborhood, or—or in some type of communication with them. So I definitely think it’s important that more people do foster care in general in our—in our culture. And yeah, I just wanna, you know, do something about that, and help them to, you know, get a first job, or apply to college, or something. Just, have something for themselves, for when they age out of the system. I think would really be good, and something that I feel like I’d be able to do.

Molly: Yeah.

Elle: Yeah.

Molly: That’s great.

This is the part in the show where I just ask, is there anything else that we haven’t talked about yet that you wanted to talk about?

Elle: Just community and how we are with each other, and just to be safe with [sighs] our bodies and—and the things that put us at risk of HIV and STIs, and with our lives, and to, you know, just to keep fighting, and not to give into all the things that, um… [holding-back-tears sound to voice] we facin’

Molly: Mmhmm.

Molly: Yeah. What are you thinking about right now?

Elle [holding-back-tears]: Hm. [sighs / laughs] All this stuff we be facin’ [cries / sighs]

Molly: Yeah. Yeah. Like what?

Elle [holding-back-tears]: Our own mental health issues. Stability, financial stability, safety. Finding community… work access… health.

Molly: Mmhmm

Elle [holding-back-tears]: Familial support, familial abuse, interpersonal violence.

Molly: Mmhmm.

Elle: Physical assult, bullying, harasment, sexual assult, rape…

[holding-back-tears] Especially with me being connected to prevention work, it’s not really a lot of time where I’m not really thinking about all of it. So, yeah. You know, so. Thank you for this opportunity.

Thank you, I’m a crier! [laughs]

Molly: No, yeah! Of course!

Elle: [laughs]

Molly: Of course! Yeah, I appreciate you.

Molly: So the way that we always end the show is just by asking: in your ideal world, what do you think the future of gender would be like?

Elle: Just for us to be free, and people—more and more, younger people are just being free. More people are waking up and getting woke [laughs] of gender, and about gender expression, and—and also people are more supportive and more expressive of their support in modern time and just in general, than people would think.

[Gender Reveal theme music begins, and continues under Molly]

Molly: That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. If this felt valuable to you, please share this episode with your community. Also, if you want to support folks like Elle, please consider a patron at [patreon.com/gender](https://www.patreon.com/gender) or donating via [PayPal](https://www.paypal.me/mollywoodstock), or [Cash App](https://cash.me/$MollyWoodstock) so that we can continue to run our grant program which gives out more than a thousand dollars every six months for folks like Ellle.

Remember that if you join at the $6 or more level you will receive a bunch of extra rad stickers from Jery if you do that by September 10th!

That’s all at [patreon.com/gender](https://www.patreon.com/gender)

You can also find us at [genderpodcast.com](https://www.genderpodcast.com/)

On [Twitter](https://twitter.com/gendereveal) and [Instagram](https://instagram.com/gendereveal) @gendereveal

You can find our merch, including our current featured shirt, which says, “Support Trans Media,” it’s by Beth Easton, it’s great! You can find that at [bit.ly/gendermerch](https://bit.ly/gendermerch)

And you can find our really wholesome Slack community [bit.ly/genderslack](https://bit.ly/genderslack2) we’ve had so many new people this week, it’s been really incredible, come on and join us.

This week’s episode was sleepily edited and produced by me, Molly Woodstock.

Our logo is by the talented Michelle Leigh.

Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder.

We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[theme music ends]