[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

**Tuck:** 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.

Hello, everyone! I hope you’re all hanging in there. Thank you so, so, so, so much for your patience on this episode. It took so much longer than I thought, but, today, on the show, we speak with journalist, Lewis Wallace. Lewis just released this really vital new book and this new podcast series. They’re both called [*The View from Somewhere*](https://www.lewispants.com/). The podcast is out now. Please go subscribe. It’s about the myth of journalistic objectivity, which is what we’ve been talking about all season on this podcast, and I would love to play you the trailer of Lewis’ new podcast right now.

[*The View from Somewhere* theme music plays]

**Lewis:** I’m Lewis Raven Wallace. In 2017, just after Donald Trump’s inauguration, I got fired from my job as a public radio reporter for speaking out against Trump’s white supremacy and calling his lies what they are. Ever since then, I’ve been digging into the history of so-called objectivity in journalism and other people who challenged that idea.

**Unnamed person 1:** Objectivity is the ideology of the status quo. It is!

**Unnamed person 2:** White journalists’ obsession with objectivity comes from being a white person in a white-dominated country in which all of the laws were in the favor of whiteness.

**Lewis:** And I’ve been talking to all kinds of journalists who’ve taken on racism, transphobia, and sexism in order to tell the truth.

**Unnamed Person 3:** As journalists, we don’t have the luxury of being comfortable. If you’re a journalist and you’re comfortable, you’re not a very good journalist. You should be uncomfortable every single day of your life.

[Theme music starts playing again]

**Lewis:** *The View from Somewhere,* a podcast about journalism with a purpose, drops October 15. Subscribe now.

[Music ends]

**Tuck:** Okay, so that conversation is coming up. I’m really excited about it—but first, I have some *huge* announcements. I’m going to save the hugest one for last, of course, but, as you may have heard, our grant program is once again open for applications. The first round of grants, we gave away $600. The second round, we gave away like $1,100. This round, I was planning to give away $1,500, but I’ve heard a rumor that we’re gonna get an absurdly large donation soon that would let us give away more money, so we are giving away *at least* $1,500, possibly more, to any person who’s not cisgender who’s doing rad stuff around gender or trans support, so check out that grant application, it’s at [genderpodcast.com/grant](http://genderpodcast.com/grant). Please apply. Please tell people in your community to apply. Applications are open until October 31st, so apply soon at genderpodcast.com/grant. By the way, we fund this program solely through Patreon and other donations, so if you would like to show up and help us support trans artists and trans educators and trans activists, please, please, please consider making a small donation at patreon.com/gender. When you do that, you get access to our weekly newsletter and all sorts of other fun stuff. Or make a huge donation. It’s up to you.

Speaking of supporting trans artists, we have really incredible new merch in the store from Cassandra Fontaine. They’re shirts and tank tops and stickers that say “What the hell is gender?” I’m really excited about them. I hope you like them. Also, “Support trans media” the shirt is back for a few days, so grab that if you haven’t yet. That’s all at <bit.ly/gendermerch>. I’ll be throwing new stuff in there all the time, so just keep an eye out. [Bit.ly/gendermerch](bit.ly/gendermerch). All proceeds go to trans artists and trans organizations.

Okay, quickly, a follow-up from the “Molly Shares Their Secret Feelings” episode. Thank you so much to everyone who reached out with words of support and congratulations. I think no one knew how to react because they were like, “Good job being in love—also, what if you ate?” So, just so you know, I eat food now. I sleep sometimes, but that’s not Wellbutrin’s fault, that’s Love Island’s fault. Also, I just wanted a correction. Wellbutrin is not a stimulant, apparently. Someone wrote in to say Wellbutrin is not a stimulant. It’s just very similar to a stimulant. I’m sorry that I lied to you.

Also, a quick note that the link to our Slack broke. I don’t know why, I don’t know how, I’m mad about it, but, in the meantime, if you want to join our Slack, which is very cute and wholesome, it’s at bit.ly/genderslack2. That’s bit.ly/genderslack and then the number 2. See you there!

Last but not least—

[drum roll sound]

We’re going to do a live show. The first ever Gender Reveal live podcast. I am so, so, so excited. I will be hosting a live show as part of the Trans Action and Care Conference at Portland State University on November 23rd. It will be a free show. There will be really exciting special guests. Some of my favorite people who listen to this podcast will be coming to see the show. I would love for you to come. More details such as where and when exactly it will be are coming out later. And so please follow us on social media. I’m @GendeReveal and @MollyWoodstock on Twitter and Instagram. Follow there. I will let you know the details, but Gender Reveal live show November 23rd. I am so, so stoked.

You may have heard that I went on a weird media spree a couple weeks ago, talking about like dress codes and trans therapists and dating apps and gender-neutral dolls. So, I’m going to talk about that last part on our next segment. You know it. You love it. It’s “This Week in Gender.”

[This Week in Gender theme plays]

[music transitions to chill guitar and bass]

**Tuck:** Okay, so, a couple weeks ago, when I was in Toronto without data or cell phone service, I ended up being interviewed twice by NPR about Mattel’s new gender-neutral dolls. I was speaking very briefly and for cis people, and I wanted to speak with you, the transes, and then I wanted to tell you a little bit about my experience on NPR, if I have time.

As you may have heard, Mattel, the company who makes Barbie dolls, Ken dolls, all sorts of dolls that uphold very traditional ideas of what men should like, and what women should look like, and what roles men and women should have in society—that Mattel, they put out this new line of dolls that are branded as gender-neutral. And each doll comes with two hair kinds, there’s a wig so you can have short hair or long hair. And it has a variety of different gender expressions as far as clothing is concerned, and it also has a variety of skin tones. And I really appreciate the variety of skin tones because I am really tired of the idea that, like, only white people can be non-binary or only white people can be trans because that’s, like, ahistorical, and like, if anything, white people are very late to the game on gender diversity, so I appreciate the range of skin tones. Again, there’s a range of hair, there’s a range of clothing—the bodies, however, are all the same, they’re all, like, super thin, there’s no hips, there’s no breasts, there’s no facial hair, there’s no shoulders. There’s like no distinguishing sex characteristics, and I personally can’t tell whether it’s supposed to be like a tiny, skinny child or like a tiny, skinny, androgynous person, and that’s kind of what I want to talk about.

So, NPR kept asking me if this was a good or bad thing, and I think that, like everything else, it’s nuanced. There’s some really incredibly good things about this line of gender-neutral dolls. The first is obviously just representation for gender-creative children or children who might realize that they are trans or non-binary later. I didn’t know that being non-binary was an option until I was, like, in my early to mid-twenties, and if I had known that when I was a child, it could have potentially changed my entire life, right? Normalizing the concept of gender-creativity, normalizing that not every boy needs to look like a Ken doll and not every girl needs to look like a Barbie doll is really important to me. Normalizing that there are genders other than Ken and Barbie, the two genders, are really important to me. And, also, I think it's really important for parents to see that because I think a lot of the time the kids are so far ahead of the parents that the kids can say, like, “Hey, this is my gender.” And the parents are like, “This is just a weird fad that you're making up, right? Like, this is just a weird thing kids are doing.” So I think by seeing a really Normie company like Mattel making dolls that appeal to a wide range of audiences but including gender-creative kids and trans kids—seeing that can be really powerful for parents to be like, “Oh, this is like a real thing.” Like, do we need validation from Mattel in order to be real—of course we don’t. The reason Mattel is getting into this, I'm sure, is not out of the goodness of their hearts. It’s out of capitalism and wanting to profit off of trans and gender-creative bodies, right? So, I’m not like Mattel will save us all, but I do want to acknowledge that whether or not we *need* Mattel in the fight to end gender or whatever the hell we're trying to do, it's nice to see things like that.

But also, even though these dolls aren't specifically labeled as non-binary, they’re labeled as gender-neutral, they’re clearly existing in part to appeal to gender-creative and gender-nonconforming youth and non-binary and trans youth. And what worries me is just like Barbie perpetuates this wild notion of what female bodies should look like, these dolls, I think are perpetuating this really harmful idea of what non-binary bodies need to look like. First of all, in order to design the faces, they literally digitally mashed up faces of TV stars like Cole Sprouse and Camila Mendes to make a quote-unquote “androgynous” face that doesn't exist on anyone else's body.

[music transitions to a mysterious and spooky synth]

Like, a Times article described the face as quote, “Carefully manicured features betray no obvious gender. The lips are not too full. The eyelashes are not too long and fluttery, the jaw not too wide.”

And I understand that the point of this doll was to not be able to quickly project a gender on to it, but also, like obviously you can have full lips or long and fluttery eyelashes or wide jaws and still be non-binary and, like, still be trans or still be whatever gender at all. And I just hate that this doll is in some ways reinforcing the idea that a neutral androgynous non-binary body is rail thin with no breasts, no curves, no facial hair. I don't want kids thinking that they need to achieve this like super thin status to be gender-neutral. I don't want kids thinking that they can't have any secondary sex characteristics to be gender-neutral. Trans kids also face eating disorders and dysmorphia and dysphoria during puberty in this really dramatic and painful way. Also, people of all sizes can be non-binary. People of all abilities and bodies can be non-binary. And all of the, like, famous androgynous or non-binary representation of these thin mostly white people who are like leaning slightly masculine-of-center or maybe slightly feminine-of-center, but like they’re all sort of the same body over and over again. And something that's so important to me on this show is that we show this wide representation of bodies, of what it can look like to be non-binary or gender-neutral or gender-creative or trans or whatever.

So, I don't expect this doll to, like, solve all of our problems, and I'm not mad at Mattel for making this, like, skinny-ass doll because that’s Mattel’s brand. But I would also love to see dolls that look like, you know, Indya Moore or like Amandla Stenberg or like, you know, all of the guests we’ve had on the show and have those be branded as gender-neutral as well. Uh, I don’t want the gender binary to be turned into just a gender ternary, right? There is just no need to teach gender roles to kids from such a young age the way that we do, and I think that making gender-neutral dolls the rule rather than the exception would be great. And I think that also having a variety of body sizes and shapes and kinds can really go a long way.

I've already gone too long. I guess I'll tell you my NPR experience another time. Basically, what I wanted to say was that I went on NPR, and I was misgendered a bazillion times, and I got off the phone and started sobbing. And I would like to live in a world where sometimes I can go on, like, national media—well, ok, this is like— [laughs] —a very, um, privileged problem, but I would like to live in a world where I could go on national media and then not cry afterwards about how much I was misgendered and how much I was mistreated by cis people.

[music playing in background resolves and stops]

This has been “This Week in Gender.”

[This Week in Gender outro music]

**Tuck:** Lewis Raven Wallace is an independent journalist and rabble-rouser based in Durham, North Carolina. Lewis’ forthcoming book and podcast are about debunking the myth of objectivity in journalism.

[music stops playing]

**Tuck:** The way we always start the show is by asking: in terms of gender, how do you identify?

**Lewis:** Oh— [laughs] —I identify as trans and genderqueer, and I guess that’s it. Yeah, I actually sort of surprisingly don't answer that question very much or don't get asked that very much.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I honestly don't think people do. A lot of people get really surprised by it and have to think for a minute. In the past, I've heard you refer to yourself as a transsexual a lot. Is that something that still resonates with you?

**Lewis:** Yeah, you know, I do, and I guess that's always also been sort of a tongue-in-cheek, like, designation for me. Like, I have had at least one gender-related surgery, and, you know, that’s sort of a, like, medicalized term for people who have undergone a quote-unquote “sex change.” That, I think, feels a bit dated, but I also kind of like it cause I feel like it's an important part of my identity that I have, like, transitioned in certain ways in my physical self. And, like, I see myself and my body, you know, in a different way than the body I was assigned to, and I kind of like the terminology for that. It’s like a reclaiming thing, I guess.

**Tuck:** Totally. What pronouns do you use?

**Lewis:** I use he or ze or they. Any of those are fine.

**Tuck:** Do you have a set that you would prefer in an ideal world?

**Lewis:** I guess in an ideal world, probably ze and hir. Yeah, I’ve, like, primarily gone by he for such a long time, um, but I think a—a lot of that has had more to do with like other people's comfort level using pronouns. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah!

**Lewis:** And that has led, too, to, like, misunderstandings that, you know, I've been in the media a few times where people referred to me as a trans man, which I am not. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah, I was actually about to ask about that. How does that feel to see you like confidently referred to in the media as a transgender man when that's not how you identify?

**Lewis:** It’s kinda just hilarious. I don't really care—

[Tuck laughs]

**Lewis:** I, like, honestly, I don’t really care. I just am like, “haha, that’s funny.”

[They both laugh]

**Lewis:** I’ve never identified as a man, but people are just really set on the, you know, on the binary genders, so they apply that even when it's not there. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah, uh, so, you came out ages ago. When did you come out as trans?

**Lewis:** I came out, I think it was in 1999. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah, so can you tell me what it was like being trans in literally the last millennium?

[They both laugh]

**Lewis:** I was really in so many ways really lucky and also really privileged, and I think those are sort of two things that are intertwined but different. So, in terms of being really lucky, I had a bunch of friends who are also queer and trans when I was a teenager, who are still some of my closest friends and support system. And a number of us came out around the same time, and came out right as the sort of terminology of genderqueer was first starting to circulate. And I remember hearing that, learning that word, when I was, like, 15 or 16 and going like, “Oh, maybe—maybe that's the thing that I am”— [laughs] —you know?

And then kind of emerging to this identity of, like, a person on the boyish spectrum of things, and, you know, what would now often be called non-binary, but that just wasn't terminology that was around then. Like, it was trans man or trans woman, and that was what, you know, what was out there. And I remember my parents got a book that was, like, the book that was available that I believe it was called “True Selves” about, you know, the female-to-male transsexual, and they read that book. And I think they were just confused cause they were like, that's not what this person seems like who is our child. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Lewis:** This all seems very different, but there just wasn't as much terminology or stuff in, you know, popular culture as there is now. And then I would say in terms of kind of the privilege piece, you know, I’m white. I grew up upper-middle class in a college town, you know, liberal college town, so I was in this environment where there was a lot of transphobia, but there's also a lot of cushioning for me for sort of the risk that it took to come out swinging and say, you know, “I'm going by gender-neutral pronouns that none of you have heard of,” when I was 16. And people were, you know, defensive and mean and nasty, um, but, also, I was in a safe position to—to do that and to advocate in that way starting really young.

**Tuck:** So, in the media, I feel like North Carolina has been, like, uniquely villainized as a bad place for trans people, but when I speak to trans people who actually have spent time in North Carolina, they say it's not really any better or worse than anywhere else they've experienced. So, I'm curious what your experience has been like living in North Carolina and what you feel like “coastal media elites” miss about living in North Carolina as a queer and trans person.

**Lewis:** I love this question— [laughs] —uh, because I, you know, voluntarily moved to North Carolina after HB2, and for most of my life, I’ve lived in the Midwest, um, and now the South. But I was in New York City when I moved here, and I think the reality is that, like, a lot of people have this perception that there are bunch of protections in place, legal as well as social and cultural protections for trans people that is just not the case. And what you just said is true. It's not specific to North Carolina. Half the states in the country have nothing on the books that says that you can't be fired for being trans.

**Tuck:** Right.

**Lewis:** I’ve lived in another such state before, which is Ohio. So moving from, I mean, New York City has its own unique set of both legal protections and kind of cultural specialness, but I would say living in North Carolina, to me, has been just a wonderful experience of really, really strong queer and trans community. And then also really strong and involved and aware ally community, and I think that that has developed around all the activism that’s happened here, where the places here that are trying to be trans friendly and the spaces here that are trying to be trans friendly are, like, trying really hard— [laughs] —and going kind of out of their way, and it's less taken for granted. So, I mean I've experienced transphobia all over the place. Uh, one of the times that I've been approached in an aggressive way in a bathroom was in Berkeley, California. Um. [Laughs]. Another one was in Chicago. Uh, that's never happened to me in North Carolina. And, honestly, I think that’s not a reflection of those place—of any of the places, right? It's just that that particular type of bigotry can be found anywhere.

**Tuck:** Yeah, absolutely. So, when you started working in radio, you said that often people would read you as a boy and then, once you spoke, they would read you as a woman, which is funny cause that’s something that literally happened to me today. So, anyway, if you wanted to pass as something that’s not a woman, you basically couldn't speak, but, in radio, all you do is speak. It’s an audio medium. So, I'm curious what that experience was like for you, having so many people know you only by your voice and also having to listen to your own voice so much.

[Lewis laughs]

**Lewis:** Well, my favorite thing—when I was on the radio, I worked in local public radio for a while—my favorite thing was when people just literally had no idea that I was me. So, like, at one point we got an email to the station that was like, “Are there two Lewis Wallace-es here?”

[They both laugh]

“Because we know there's, like, girl Lewis Wallace, but there appears to be, like, boy Lewis Wallace, too.”

[Lewis laughs]

**Tuck:** Oh my god.

**Lewis:** So that, you know, I kind of love that. It's like being totally incognito in this kind of funny way, and I was really nervous about it before I started radio. I was really nervous about just this idea of being only known through my voice, but what I ended up finding was that it was this really enjoyable form of performance for me to be not physically visible to people, but just using my voice. And my voice has changed somewhat since then, and I'm still really enjoying that process, you know? I like the kind of intrigue that it is for other people to not know what type of gender expression is behind this particular voice. And I like enjoying that in the other direction too, you know, hearing people's voices and not being able to make some of the assumptions that we might make when we look at people.

**Tuck:** Totally. On the show Nancy, you talked about transphobia and homophobia, like, not being binary and that we couldn't easily separate, like, these are the transphobic people, and these are, like, the cool, chill allies. And you, you know, gave your own family member as an example of someone who would, like, say to your face that they hated you being trans but then would also, like, treat you with respect out in public and, like, get your correct pronouns. So, I'm just curious if you could just talk a little bit more about that ‘cause I think that's an important thing that we don't talk about enough.

**Lewis:** Yeah, I think I learned so much from my grandmother, Sarah McCuery who died, uh, a couple years ago. She was 96, um, Southern lady her whole life, lived in Columbia, South Carolina. And, she, you know, was raised into this really, uh, racist, sexist, homophobic, if you could even call it that, environment. I mean an environment where just that gay was not a thing, right? Nobody was talking about that concept, um, it was so unacceptable and sort of vile and disgusting. And she just tried hard her whole life to change the way that she thought about things because she did not want to be a bigot, but she had these really bigoted ideas that she’d grown up with. And so I think I've learned a lot from her as well as from, you know, mentors and teachers that I've had in the world of activism, one of whom is Mariame Kaba, the prison abolitionist activist who writes the Prison Culture blog and Twitter feed. And Mariame is another person who I think just really models in the world that, like, we're all a work in progress.

We're all kind of trying and doing our best, and that’s not an excuse for, like, the shittiest behavior that comes out of each of us. But it is a reality that, like, nobody is just born woke, right? Like nobody just, like, pops out not influenced by the culture that we've been raised in, and so, you know, for me, as a white person, trying to, like, constantly interact and engage with, not just, like, my own white privilege but white privilege and white supremacy in the world around me, it’s like this is not a process that can be perfected. There's no, like, good way to do this. It's just an ongoing thing, and so I think that's true with any form of allyship.

And, again, it's not an argument for, like, holding people to a lower standard, but I'm really interested in what it takes emotionally and politically to stay in that struggle and not, at a certain point, sort of say, “Okay, you know what? I did my good work. [Laughs]. I did my best. I tried to be an ally. I'm done.” You know? [Laughs]. And I think with that, I really try to look to some of these role models, like my grandmother and like Mariame, of people who, like, keep working at it throughout their lives and keep trying to learn from people younger than them as well.

**Tuck:** So, journalists and mainstream media, as you know very well, are expected to stay politically neutral, so, for example, I probably could never work at the New York Times or NPR because my political views are out on the Internet and on this podcast. But I just don't understand that on like a couple different levels, and I'm hoping that since you’ve researched this for your book and your podcast, you can help me understand how we got to this point even if you don't agree with it. So, something I've never understood is how we got to the point that, like, very smart people in media have decided that somebody who doesn't say their political views out loud is somehow more objective than someone who does say their political views out loud because, like, not saying them doesn't mean you don't have them?

**Lewis:** Yeah, so I think there are two threads: one is a thread of legitimate reasons for the rise of this quote-unquote “objective” framework and—and those, there, you know, there’s a variety of things there, but some of the legitimate reasons are—have to do with an increasing belief in public interest in facts, right? And in verifiable facts—in this idea that journalists in particular should be people whose professional role is to gather facts and truths from out in the world that can in some way be verified and reflect them back and—and, in part, that was a response to the rise of propaganda and the, you know, the use of mass media to—to brainwash people. [Laughs]. So, that’s like, “Yay, journalism, we need to have facts,” and I—I still agree with all that stuff.

At the same time, the idea and the ideal of objectivity was developing as part of journalism’s changing business model starting in the middle of the 1800s, uh, and then really—really developing in the early 1900s, and so journalism had been primarily associated with political parties or with sort of trades. It was an elite thing, so you read it because you were reading the commercial papers or you read it because you were associated with a political party. But as newspapers became more widespread and then later we had radio news and then TV news, journalism became mass media became something that was for these large audiences.

And so some of it was just a business model thing to sort of say, “Oh, we need to have a paper that everybody's going to want to buy, so we shouldn't associate with a political party, and also we need to have a paper that everybody's going to want to advertise in, so we shouldn't associate with a political party.”

That was in mainstream journalism, but that sort of value set was never true for journalism that was for specific audiences, like black journalism. Black papers, you know, didn't always abide by that same sort of divide. Later, we have, you know, the whole movement of gay papers. That’s something that I looked at in the research that I did for my book. And then, just sort of throughout, there—there have always been these sources of factual journalism that have not claimed to be objective, so, in a lot of ways, the reason it developed was for business reasons.

Another way that it has been used over the years—that objectivity has been used—is to sort of bludgeon worker organizing within the world of journalism, so the very first person that I was able to find who was fired supposedly for not being objective was actually trying to form a union in the very earliest days of the newspaper guild, the first journalist union in the 1930s. He ended up suing and winning his case because the Supreme Court found that there really wasn't evidence for, you know, firing him for not being objective enough—that, really, he was being fired for his Union organizing. But it’s still legal to fire someone for not being objective enough. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah, interesting. So, I am a queer, trans, bi-racial person, and these things are inherently political. I didn't choose to make them political. I would love if being trans wasn't political, but other people have decided to make it a political issue. So, if my literal existence is inherently political, how can I possibly work for a mainstream media organization without ceding my right to defend my own existence, and if I can't, does that mean that trans people and other marginalized folks aren't allowed in media?

[Lewis sighs]

**Lewis:** That's the conundrum, I think, and that's the reason why—that is the path that sort of took me to having such a strong, kind of public stance against objectivity. I think there are things that are a part of the overall framework of objectivity that can still be preserved, but this overall idea that the ideal way to do journalism is to stand back from all things political about yourself is so contradictory to who I am and who so much of my community is that, you know, it was like the more I thought about it, the less I liked it. It did not go in the other direction. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Lewis:** And that—and it keeps coming up because you see the ways in which trans people, black people who don't want to get harassed and shot by the police, trans people who want to be treated as human beings, uh, indigenous people who want representation of their communities that's not extractive and exploitive, like, all of us are being talked about as quote-unquote “activists.” But it’s also just the hand that we were dealt, right, and I'm, for myself, like, proud of that hand, and I want to advocate for my community, and I think I can still be a good journalist and—

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Lewis:** —do my best at telling stories in a complicated, fair way, you know? Fair from my perspective, sure, but that's true of everyone else's too, so— [laughs] —I think that it really is untenable, this framework of objectivity that's, you know, really only about a hundred years old in its sort of fully-formed self really, to me, isn’t reconcilable with today's identity politics. And I mean identity politics in—in a positive way and that today we do have visibility and voice and space for people who are systematically oppressed to emerge in—in media, uh, and that’s been sort of branded as identity politics, right? But I think that's a good thing and that it's inevitable that that would ultimately pose a challenge to the concept of objectivity ‘cause that concept was developed at a time when newsrooms didn’t have women in them— [laughs] —you know?

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Lewis:** Let alone trans people and people talking about being biracial and people, you know? And so we're in a different moment and we need different frameworks and tools, like, absolutely, so I think it's just a little weird and kind of sad that so much mainstream media is hanging on to that. We all know that there's a trust deficit when it comes to media, and I don't think quote-unquote “objectivity” is the cause per say of that trust deficit, but I think it's abundantly clear that sort of pretending that identity and position and perspective is not political for some people isn't working to build trust.

**Tuck:** Yeah. So, to this topic of increased diversity in journalism, for example, you worked at *Marketplace*, and it's my understanding that they encouraged you to blog and develop your personal voice, but as soon as your personal voice said something that they didn't love, they fired you? So, that reflects to me this larger trend of media and other large companies wanting to have this diverse range of *faces*, so they can check this box that they hired, like, one trans person, one person of color. But they don't actually want diverse thoughts and opinions, so a lot of people who are in these positions of tokenized hires aren't able to actually express their opinions and bring the stories that they'd be the best at to the table because they’d be frowned upon by their colleagues for doing that. So, I’m curious if you have an idea of how we can, going forward, not only have, like, diverse newsroom staffs but also have space to let that staff have a diverse range of thoughts and opinions without other people at the top saying that those thoughts are against the rules.

**Lewis:** Mm-hmm. Well, I think, at a minimum, we need to change the rules— [laughs] —

**Tuck:** Yes.

[They both laugh]

**Lewis:** —of journalism, you know, and the expectations for sort of what makes a good journalist, what makes a legitimate journalist. Um, we need to do away with this sort of archetype of the, like, rugged, manly, removed, white fellow with a microphone or a notepad or whatever. I do think that's going away, but we really need to just say goodbye to it. I think part of that is uplifting the stories of journalists of color and queer and trans journalists from, you know, different points in history and sort of saying these folks have been here. They might not have been canonized in the same way as Edward R. Murrow— [laughs] —

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Lewis:** —or whatever. These folks have been here doing this work and telling these stories. And then I think the bigger picture stuff for me is around not just representation but—but power and really shifting who has power and control over media organizations, over storytelling itself. And I think that can look a lot of different ways, those shifts. I continue to see a lot of opportunity and possibility for that in spaces like public media and community radio because, at least nominally, those kinds of organizations have an obligation to be responsive to the public and have a platform and so I think that's a great place for folks to be focusing that kind of advocacy. I'm also just really supportive of and excited about, like, people using all the platforms that are available to make their own thing like you're doing and, like, so many other people who are doing the groundbreaking types of media work today.

**Tuck:** Mm, well, thanks, I try. So, a while back I was listening to this podcast called “Against the Rules” with Michael Lewis, and the podcast is based on the premise that the role of the American referee in various forms is declining and our belief in fairness is changing. And one of the main theses from the show is that we are now better than ever at identifying our own internal biases and therefore counteracting them and doing a better job at being as objective as a person can be, but when we do that and we identify our own biases, other people can see that and can perceive us as being more subjective and less objective. So, basically, what I'm trying to say is that the more we acknowledge our own biases publicly, the more objective we become but the more subjective we appear to other people, and I'm wondering if that’s something that you also see happening in journalism.

**Lewis:** Yeah, I think that's a fascinating and kind of wonderful point in that, right, the ideal of objectivity doesn't exist without the reality of subjectivity. Like, you have to have a self-awareness that there’s such a thing as bias to even care— [laughs] —about the concept of, you know, being more objective or trying to, like, tackle your own bias. And so—and I think one of the places where objectivity has gotten really twisted up and become a concept that’s untenable is where it's been presented as more about the performance of—

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Lewis:** —objectivity, that you have to, you know, stay out of the fray and seem like you're staying out of the fray and seem like you don't care and seem like you don't have a stake and act like you don't have a stake. Because everybody has a stake but also, typically, it's a privilege to be able to believe that you don't have a stake in something. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Lewis:** You know? Especially in sort of the big political issues of our day, to see oneself as outside of that is a type of perspective that's only really available to people with a lot of privilege. And, you know, we're all implicated in these different ways, and I think, I mean, that makes a lot of sense to me, the idea that the more aware you are of how you are implicated, the more sort of open about that you would want to be and transparent. And that for as long as we keep attaching the sort of ideal of, like, a neutral kind of outside or objectivity to journalism, that's—that’s going to create a conundrum for people who are trying to do, like, transparent work as ourselves as journalists. I do think that a lot of journalists these days have adopted more of this idea and ideal of transparency and started focusing on that over objectivity, and I think that's a really, really good thing. And—and I just think there's a certain sort of narrower group of people who find that uncomfortable— [laughs] —and a lot of those people still have a lot of power.

**Tuck:** People who are starting podcasts of their own often ask me if I pay the people that I interview for their time, and I don't because I'm a journalist in the rest of my life and if I ever paid a source as a journalist, it would destroy my entire career. And so I just keep it as never paying people, but also I'm asking trans people for their time. I'm asking trans people of color for their time. We know that trans people, particularly trans people of color, have, like, no access to money, like, it's—it's so difficult. Uh, so many trans people live in poverty and asking them to be vulnerable and tell their stories and take up their time and, like, not compensate them for that feels really bad, but because I'm a journalist, paying a source feels really bad. And so I'm curious, like, what your thoughts are on the power dynamic between journalist and people whose stories they're taking and if there's any way to make it more equitable.

**Lewis:** Yeah, I mean, I think that our whole economy of stories is so twisted up and backwards right now, right? Like, someone can write or tell or speak, like, the most gut-wrenching story that takes just the most out of them and get paid very little or nothing, right, and, like, be on the news or be in re—in even reality TV you know?— [laughs] —But, speaking in terms of the news, like, going on the news with your gut-wrenching story or writing a gut-wrenching personal essay is, like, very low-value work, and journalism is also low-value work but is higher value than that— [laughs] —like, more professionalized and that in itself is this messed up sort of starting dynamic. And so I—I, you know, I also work primarily as a—as a journalist and as somebody going out and talking to people about their lives and stories and then putting out that story under my byline and making money and that's never separate from this uncomfortable dynamic around just the real economy of that.

I understand the reasons behind the ethical boundary that says the journalist can't or shouldn't pay sources, and I—I too have never paid a source, uh, and—and wouldn't do that in the context that I'm working in now. But I—I do think it calls into question just sort of the bigger picture around who benefits from these stories that we tell. And I think about that a lot because I cover communities that I'm not a part of quite a bit, and I cover economic and racial oppression in those communities. And I think that the hope that I and a lot of journalists have is that there's some way in which our stories, like, make a difference by being out there or some way in which our sources benefit from being a part of the process. And I think that can be true, and I try to understand what my sources are, like, getting out of— [laughs] —working with me, you know?

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Lewis:** Whether that's, like, the personal healing of telling your story and having that out there or whether that’s a political sort of purposefulness of like advancing an—an agenda or a desire or a demand, you know? Usually, people who are sources also have a reason to do it— [laughs] —a reason why they want to do it, but I'm not telling that to myself to make myself feel better. It's more of, like, a sitting with the uncomfortableness of, like, well, is it enough of a reason that I’m not exploiting them or am I kind of? [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Lewis:** You know? And I think that's just real. It's all the time real, and I—I try to just be in relationship with people and, like, understand that, like, none of us are going to be in right relationship with all this money stuff until, uh, we don't have capitalism anymore. [Laughs]. So, that’s a—

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Lewis:** —bigger picture issue.

**Tuck:** So, something I've been thinking about a lot is that, a while back, a cisgender reporter reached out to potentially interview me for a story she was writing about trans people, and she disclosed that she had already interviewed— [sighs] —Jesse Singal and Katie Herzog. And those are two like transphobic cisgender reporters, and I had asked why she would do that, and she said it's because they're the most well-known reporters writing about trans issues. So, to hear someone list two cisgender reporters as the most well-known writers on trans topics just really flagged to me, like, how— [sighs] —how much we’ve fucked this up— [laughs] —and how many people see trans people as being inherently biased when reporting trans stories instead of being experts in trans stories, which is obviously how I see it. So, I'm curious what your perspective is on that and how we can shift that mentality.

**Lewis:** Yeah, I mean, it's a completely backwards kind of setup, right, that I think very much to our credit, like, to our community’s credit, like, that is changing. I really think that trans activists have done just a *lot*— [laughs] —to really get out in front of all this stuff and sort of say, “We should be the ones telling these stories. We should be the ones telling these stories.” And I think that often gets misunderstood as, like, we’re these really rigid people who think that you have to only have this one exact experience in order to be the one doing a story about it, and there's just some people who think that, but I don't think that, right? I think that, like, what I want to get out there is that there's always a power dynamic that's making it harder for trans people to be taken seriously and seen as legitimate in talking about our own experiences and in talking about trans experience.

And overcoming that power dynamic requires, like, going out of your way to find a trans writer to do the story, you know, or going out of your way to center trans voices in the story. And so writers like Jesse Singal and Katie Herzog that go in initially knowing very little about a community and become overnight “experts” quote-unquote are, like, riding on the privilege and access and pre-existing trust and relationships that they have because they are white, cisgender people, you know, and then, in addition, doing work that misrepresents trans communities in certain ways and—and undermines their trust and reliability there. And so it's kind of Opposite Day to me that these people would be the people who are more trusted on trans issues and more known on trans issues than trans people, ourselves, and it reveals a lot about the power dynamic that we're up against and that we have been up against.

But I honestly think that trans activists right now are, like, winning that fight— [laughs] —in this way that the amount of defensiveness that's coming up on the social media and all of that around this stuff is actually a reflection of a huge advancement in the direction of, you know, more and more people questioning these power dynamics and—and problematizing these power dynamics, and I think that is really, really great. I think that's also happening to a certain extent around, um, you know, race and class and geography and journalism and sort of outsider journalists going into a community that they're not a part of in that way, too. And I just think the more that we have those conversations—they are challenging. They are complicated, but the more that we have them, um, the more sort of willingness and readiness it opens up for journalists to really talk about power and oppression within our industry and so it's really important.

**Tuck:** Yeah, absolutely. I feel like the only complicating factor in that is folks who conflate trans activists with any trans journalist because, like, there are trans journalists, like Katelyn Burns, who are just trying to report in, like, an objective way, but because they're trans people who exist publicly, they're viewed as trans activists with this activist agenda. So—

**Lewis:** Yeah, totally, and I feel like the problem there is that “activist” is used as this, like, dismissive term or a term that immediately undermines your credibility as a journalist. A—a lot of my sort of platform with the book is about just really trying to obliterate that binary. I’m just saying you can be an activist and a journalist at the same time. Not every activist journalist is a good one.

[They both laugh]

**Lewis:** You know? [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Lewis:** But not every non-activist journalist is a good one, so—

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Lewis:** Um, you know, and certain activist journalists are going to be more trustworthy and credible in certain contexts because of that advocacy. It—I understand on a professional level why people wouldn't want to be associated with the concept of being an activist right now, today, because, I mean, I’ve been asked in a job interview before, like, “Oh, you've been an activist in the past. How can you do the work of a journalist?” I mean, it's considered a qualification for—for a lot of journalism jobs that you not be an activist— [laughs] —

**Tuck:** Right.

**Lewis:** —so I get why people want to disassociate themselves from that right now, today, but, to me, the goal should be to melt away that divide between those two concepts because a lot of journalists in mainstream media today are activists for keeping things exactly the way they are. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Um, you were in the news so much a couple of years ago for getting let go from *Marketplace* for saying that objectivity is fake, which, you know, it is, so I'm just curious since you were getting covered so much mostly by cis people, is there anything in the story that you feel like other reporters missed or portrayed inaccurately?

**Lewis:** Aside from being called a trans man a couple of times— [laughs] —there wasn't any egregious misrepresentation of me. I think there were things that were hard to talk about at the time about the story, the biggest one being the sort of invisible double standard and—and probably unconscious bias on the part of the people who fired me.

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Lewis:** But because I didn't want to get into sort of a media battle with them, I steered clear of all of that kind of stuff and—and tried to really focus on talking about this sort of broader contradiction of, you know, these liberal-run media organizations like public media say that they want diversity but don't have room for voices that actually challenge their status quo frameworks and say that they want diversity but don't have room for people who are trying to protect and stand up for their communities. And for those of us who have never been able to separate our work from our voice from our identity from our livelihood, that's just, uh—uh, untenable.

And so that was the thing that I wanted to really focus on ‘cause I was very aware at the time when I was fired that, you know, lots and lots of people of color had come into public radio, experienced, like, white-dominated, white supremacist culture of that space and left or been pushed out in one way or another and not had the kind of media spotlight that I had at that time as a white person talking about my trans identity. Which, you know, is this sort of issue that people are like, “Oh, it's so interesting. It’s a tran—you know, a trans person got fired. Um, it's this interesting thing.” And so I—I really wanted to use the platform, I guess is all I’m saying, to—not to, like, re-litigate exactly what happened to me, but I do think that transphobia in the form of, like, double standard as well as unconscious bias was very much a part of how and why I got fired. That I wasn't given leeway that other people would have been given because they were more powerful than me and less threatening than me.

**Tuck:** So, I typically end the show by asking, “In your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?” But I'm first curious: in your ideal world, what would the future of journalism look like?

**Lewis:** Fundamentally, journalism would belong to the people, like the people would control the means of production—

[Tuck laughs]

**Lewis:** —of journalism. [Laughs]. Um, and—and journalism would be a catalyst for transformative social change in the many, many ways in which we need it right now. And I think, you know, climate change and white supremacy are kind of at the center of that story and so, to me, that's not just about, like, journalism needs to do more stories about climate change and white supremacy, right, but like completely reimagining, like, what would a climate change-resistant practice of journalism look like? And I don't think we're quite there yet in terms of really thinking about that, but we're probably going to be forced there in the not-too-distant future anyway, so— [laughs] —yeah, we need our communication systems, um, to belong to the people. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah, wow, I love that vision. Um, alright, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

**Lewis:** I'm kind of a gender anarchist. I just want everybody to, like, be their own star. I have a friend who used to say, “Gender is a universe, and we're all stars.” You know, not a “spectrum”, not a “three genders”—

[They both laugh]

**Lewis:** Um— [laughs] —but, uh, a universe where—where we’re all stars, and it's something that we can play with and do, like, fun sex things with but not something that we’re oppressed by or that’s a justification of or a source of any form of violence. And I think that's totally possible. [Laughs]. I think it's, like, visionarily possible, um, but also means, like, breaking down a lot of the violent systems that surround us in other ways right now.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. Thank you so much for listening. Don't forget to pre-order Lewis' book and subscribe to their podcast wherever you get this podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, please share it with members of your community. That's the only way we get the word out about the show. Also, please consider leaving a nice review on iTunes or tweeting about the show, posting about it on Instagram, all of those things really, really help. And speaking of social media, follow us on social media @GenderReveal to learn more details about our upcoming live show, November 23rd, at the Trans Action and Care Conference in Portland, Oregon.

Our merch, it’s so good. Check it out at <bit.ly/gendermerch> and check back because all of those items are only there for a limited time, and when they're gone, new items come in. bit.ly/gendermerch. All proceeds go to trans people.

Also paying trans people is our grant. Our grant applications are open until October 23rd. We are giving away at least $1,500 to trans folks who are helping other trans folks and/or doing rad shit around gender. That's all at genderpodcast.com/grant. Apply by October 31st. As you’ve heard, our Slack link is broken. It’s now <bit.ly/genderslack2>. The number 2. The Slack is where all of the cool listeners of the show hang out and talk to each other and create a rad, supportive community, so join us there if you miss us. If you would like to donate to the grant program or donate to me for the work that I've done here, you can do that at [patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender). I am going to get all of the Patreon rewards out over the season break, so if you donate $5 or more, you get stickers. $10 or more, you get a letter, handwritten letter, and some pins. $40 or more and you get a whole box of fun stuff. Donate any amount and you get access to our newsletter, which I send out most weeks even during a break.

Thank you so, so, so much, everyone who’s donated. It's changed my entire life in more ways than you even know, and I am excited to tell you about those ways really, really soon. Today’s episode was produced and edited slowly but surely by me, Molly Woodstock. Our logo is by the talented Michelle Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. This is the part where I leave you for a while. It’s the end of the season, so I'm going to go record the interviews for season 5 of *Gender Reveal*, and we will be back as soon as we possibly can with a new season full of new, amazing people.

Thank you so, so much for being here. I love you so much. We’ll be back next season with more feelings about gender.

[*Gender Reveal* theme song ends]