[*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, Tuck Woodstock.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

**Tuck**: Hey everyone, I hope you’re all hanging in there. Welcome to the long overdue season finale of Gender Reveal season 5. So much has happened since the last time we spoke. Every day is 100 days long and yet somehow it is August already? For everyone who is new to the show, welcome! This is a show where trans people talk to other trans people and today I am very excited to share my chat with Hideo Higashibaba, which I recorded way back in the second before-times. Hideo and I talk about his experiences growing up in a cult, we talk about how his drag persona allowed him to explore his identity, we talk about rebuilding your entire worldview from scratch. We talk about so much, but before we get to all that, just a couple of house notes. First, thank you so much to everyone who bought merch during our special Pride month merch extravaganza. We raised more than $1000 for different trans artists, trans organizations, black-led organizations and sex worker-led organizations. More details if you want them, but basically it was a huge success and I appreciate you all very much. The merch store is currently empty, I will get new designs in there soon, but if you would like to contribute to the store, you can reach out to us at genderreveal@gmail.com and we will work with you to see if you can contribute a design to the store, assuming you are trans.

Secondly, if you are lacking in trans community during this long, long, long, long pandemic quarantine situation, check out our Slack, the Gender Detective Slack, it is a great place to go if you are trans, if you aren’t sure what your gender is, if you’re queer. It’s just a great place to hang out with hundreds of other queer and trans people around the world. That’s at <bit.ly/genderslack2>. And lastly, thank you so much to everyone who has joined our Patreon or upgraded their pledge in the last few months, particularly when I have not even been making new content. But some of y’all are still showing up, which is so important and so, so kind. Thank you so much! As you know, I am incredibly behind on Patreon rewards, but I will be sending those out within the next few weeks, hopefully, literally just the second I have time in between protest stuff. You know I cover… you know this… I’m gonna tell you anyway, I’ve been covering the protests in Portland and I keep thinking they’re stopping but we’re on day 72 now. So as soon as that calms down enough for me to get all the Patreon rewards out I will do that. I have to handwrite like 50 thank you notes, so it’s gonna take a while, but it’ll be there soon, and thank you for your patience and I love you and you’re wonderful and I appreciate all of the support for all of my wild projects. That was just all one big sentence; so I’m going to take a breath and then we’re gonna go to “This Week in Gender.”

[*This Week in* Gender theme, a newsy fanfare, plays]

[slow folk music]

**Tuck**: So this week in gender there were a number of things that I thought about talking about but I really want to talk about what happened with Queer Appalachia. I don’t know any more than you do, but I had a few different trans folks come to me and say “I saw there was an article about something bad about Queer Appalachia, I did not read it, and now I don’t know what to think.” So in case you are one of those people who opted out of reading it, but are trying to form an opinion anyone, this is, this is for you. So on August 3rd there was an article written by a journalist named Emma Eisenberg and it was published in the Washington Post. It was called “A Tale of Queer Appalachia: A Popular Instagram Account Raises Funds for LGBTQ People in Appalachia, But Does the Money Really Go Where It’s Supposed To?”

I am assuming that you are familiar with Queer Appalachia, if not it is an Instagram account and general internet presence that shares memes. It has a merch store, it put out at least one zine, and it also raises a bunch of money, allegedly for queer and trans people in Appalachia, particular trans people of color. So, I will be transparent in that I have taken Gender Reveal fundraiser money and given it to Queer Appalachia before, just like I have done to many other trans groups. So I personally believed in this, was a patron of Queer Appalachia. However, after reading this article, I’m feeling very differently. The article talks about the creator and operator of the Queer Appalachia account, their name is Mamone, and they speak to Mamone’s, you know, previous volunteer/assistant/coworkers they talk to an ex-partner, they talk to organizations that Mamone claims to be in contact with. And what they have found is that, through rigorous reporting and exploration, sort of detective work, they were really unable to substantiate almost any claim that Mamone has made that they have actually given money to trans people of color.

There was a few instances in which they doled out portions of a grant but in many cases they would fundraise, and then they would not be transparent about the amount of money they had made, and then these reporters could not find any examples of the folks actually receiving the money, or the coats in some instance, or whatever the care was. When that happened, Mamone put out a comment on Instagram. I will read part of it, it says “The writer is a known harasser in my community. For the last year she’s been harassing me, my family, and others with aggressive and misleading questions. It is a poorly written hit piece that sees disorganization and my mental illness and reframes it into immorality.” It’s just like you can be disorganized and you can have mental illness but at some point you need to have actually done the work that you’re claiming to do, right? And there are just all these cases in this article where their like, what happens here, Mamone also claims to have been involved with this record label that they say is like the number one record label of it’s kind in the world, but there is not really any proof that this record label exists in any meaningful way. Or they claim to have won this award but that award doesn’t exist. Or they claim to have worked for this company but this company says they’ve never worked there. So it’s not just Queer Appalachia, it’s just painting this picture of them having lied or fabricated or stretched the truth about things over the course of their life.

[dramatic folk music stops]

Like I’ve said, I’ve heard a bunch of people, so if that’s you don’t feel called out say, “I didn’t read the article, but I did read the comment and Mamone said it was a hit-piece.” And I just want to say, yes, it is so important to take everything with a grain of salt, please take the media you read with a grain of salt, and also please read the Instagram post with a grain of salt. So my suggestion is to look at both statements and say, “Ok how much detail is in here? How many facts are in here? How much research is in here? How much fact-checking is in here?” So the Washington Post article has lots of sources, lots of concrete examples, Mamone’s has a lot of feelings and feelings are valid, but at no point did they actually come forward with receipts. And I know it’s hard to stay organized as an organization like this but you know, Gender Reveal is just me. I have receipts for every single interaction for our entire $100,000 mutual aid fund.

[bluesy, percussive music plays]

If a reporter went out and tried to find people that Gender Reveal has supported via grants or whatever, the same way they’re doing with Queer Appalachia, it would be incredibly easy to find, you know, all of our grant recipients for instance. To say “yes Gender Reveal did actually pay us the grant”.

So we’re not trying to blame anyone’s mental illness for anything or their disorganization for anything but it is important that if people are collecting money under the guise of supporting trans people of color, that trans people of color actually get that support. Because otherwise that is, you know, a racist and transphobic situation. Right, I understand the instinct not to trust journalists over members of our community but unfortunately we have to put a critical lens on everything and it seems like, in this case, members of our community were being harmed. So, you can believe anything that you want to believe, you don’t have to listen to me, but I will say if you go to QueerAppalachia.com now there’s just a statement that says” At 8 PM on August 6th Queer Appalachia was deplatformed and the Instagram login credentials and Facebook page were handed over to a regional queer Black activist.” And if you go over to their Instagram page there is a post that says “QA Decolonize, Queer Appalachia is officially under new management. This platform has been taken over by force, your demands for deplatforming have been heard, please be patient.”

And there’s another statement that says, “After getting ownership of the QA page, I noticed many QTBIPOC people and possible creatives’ accounts were blocked or restricted on Facebook and Insta. It appears some people who may have called for accountability had been blocked or restricted.” Which corroborates the comments from the article. So, if you want to do more sleuthing, check out the Instagram page for yourself. It’s @QueerAppalachia and, I don’t know, just keep an eye on it. I just, I know it sucks when it feels like we can’t have one nice thing. I know a queer friend of mine compared the feeling to finding out this about Queer Appalachia to the feeling of finding out that Power Bottom, the band, had an abuser in it. And it sucks. It sucks that so often things are ‘milkshake ducked’, if you know that term. So often things that we think are good turn out to be harmful to our community in some way. But I am really proud of our community for holding each other and ourselves to such high standards. That really is amazing and it doesn’t always go perfectly and sometimes it gets a little bit much, but on the whole I’m very proud of the way that our community looks out for each other. And when people who purport to look out for each other are not actually doing that, we hold them accountable too. I think that’s really, really wonderful.

Before I go, since we’re taking a break, just a quick thing that in other news the internet is freaking out because the Wachowski sisters confirmed that the Matrix is a trans allegory, obviously, and also Netflix threaded about that and told cis people what an egg is, so that’s fun. This has been “This Week in Gender.”

(theme music plays and stops)

**Tuck**: Hideo Higashibaba is an independent audio producer, podcasting instructor, standup comic, and drag queen based in Durham, North Carolina. He is the creator and producer of the podcast “Growing up Moonie,” a memoir of his time in the cult, The Unification Church, and is now working to pass the skills of podcasting to the people in the movement towards liberation. Please note that this interview was recorded in mid-May, also known as the Middle Before-Times, and many, many, many things have changes since then.

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

**Hideo**: I know that a lot of people say this on your show, because I’ve listened to it, so I have thought about it. That’s basically the main reason I feel really prepared for this. But I’m really excited that after a lot of struggle, I identify as a transfemme man.

**Tuck**: Hmm, I love that, can you talk a little about what that journey has been like and how you tease that out? Because it’s one of those things that like feels intuitive to me, but maybe not all of our listeners.

**Hideo**: Yeah, and not even to me for a long time actually. I came out as trans only a couple of years ago, I turned 28 this year. I kind of had no context, I did not have a lot of queer community when I came out, very little trans community, so almost no context and a lot of my context was actually taken from the internet, which can be good but also can be very challenging because the internet, internet discussions about gender and about identity and labels can feel very prescriptive, at least to me. Along the way, I was like I’m definitely a man, I feel like that’s correct, I don’t feel it all the way, but how can I be a man who just loves jewelry and makeup and like all these things? Men of course can love those things, and my like general principle around gender is that there are no rules, you can make up your own rules. And so if I want to be a man who likes lipstick and wearing high heels and wearing dresses then that’s who I get to be. And I was identifying strongly as a transmasc person because I am an AFAB person who is transgender, right, so I was always very serious about the ways in which, and very much noticed, the ways in which my privilege and my safety as a person really changed as I became less and less passing honestly.

I was kinda an ugly girl for a long time and then once I started medically transitioning and changing the way I dressed, I became less and less able to pass as an ugly girl and was really more of, clearly more of a gender non-specific person. So that was really startling to me and really surprising and actually a lot of this has come through my drag, so we can talk about this more later, and what I say might make more sense later. But conversations about what femme means and who gets to be a femme are also something that I have noticed are really, really intense and important conversations. So as a transitioned AFAB person into what I would consider being a man right, was, I was trying to be like too aware, hyperaware of my privilege as a masc person, but I was noticing that I actually didn’t feel that privilege very often. You know, obviously, the way I dress will change it, but so much of the way I express my gender and so much of the way of, when I wake up what I want to put on or how I feel as a person did not really match with a masc identity. And so, I think that, I did identify as a transmasc person for a while but I think it came out of, “Well I’m an AFAB person whose had surgery and hormones so that must mean that I am an a masc person” and putting a context onto myself instead of just trying to feel who I am from the inside out.

Actually, my drag character Kiki Miyazaki really helped and held me in a lot of ways to embrace my femininity and not have to like give up my transness or give up my like manness, while embracing my femme side. And so much of the accounts that I’ve read about people who are femme and what makes them femme I really, really identity with. And so, in cis gay communities there are femme men, and if a cis man gets to be a femme man then I really see no reason why I can’t be. (laughs) Like it presents its own challenges around passing, or being, like my pronouns being respected. Because my pronouns are he/him regardless of what I am wearing, unless I’m Kiki right (laughs). And so, yeah that is a moment of heart sadness or heart ache for me. That, for some people for me when I put on my dress I lose my right to my pronouns, or when I put on shorts and a t-shirt, I lose my right to my femmeness, you know. But those are other people’s projections and I try to just really embrace who I am, you know, out of the context of everyone else and that is actually a lot easier during a pandemic (laughs). Uh, surprisingly.

**Tuck**: It is! Can you talk about that?

**Hideo**: I’ve just spent so much time alone, for the first six weeks I was alone in my house because my roommate for various reasons had to be away. And so there wasn’t really anybody to challenge what I was saying. I was joking that there was no one around to trigger my shame, so my kinks kinda just went everywhere and it was actually very liberating to not be around anybody, or wonder, as a Leo I wonder what people think like far too much, so it’s harder for somebody to challenge your gender or challenge your expression when you aren’t seeing very many people. And I am not seeing very many people right now and those people are people who are very close to me and are understanding of my gender or something that doesn’t really come up very much or whatever and don’t really care about the label part of it specifically.

And so, yeah, that makes it easier, just the fact that I’m not really around queers I don’t know very well, very often, or anymore at all actually, right now, does make that easier, and I don’t hate it. I won’t lie about that. (laughs) I hate a lot of other parts of the pandemic but I don’t hate this part.

**Tuck**: Absolutely, yeah. I was really excited when I realized that no straight person was allowed to get within 6 feet of me for the duration of the pandemic. (Hideo laughs) That was an extremely exciting moment for me.

**Hideo**: Yeah, I have this joke on stage that I have that on OKCupid there’s a box you can check that “I don’t want to be seen or see straight people” and I’ve always joked that I need that for my life. I need a checkbox that says “I don’t want to see or be seen by straight people “and pandemic has been pretty close. I have actually not encountered any straight people, wow .

**Tuck**: Congrats!

**Hideo**: Wow, what a beautiful time! Thank you so much.

**Tuck**: So we don’t have to wait to talk about Kiki, I would love to hear more about how drag has allowed you to explore that side of yourself. As well as just how you got into drag and into that persona in the first place?

**Hideo**: Yeah, I didn’t actually know that I could do drag as a brown person until I saw “House of Cocks”

**Tuck**: Mmm

**Hideo**: Which is the local drag, queer drag, social justice oriented house in Durham, North Carolina where I live. I know I moved to Durham and a few months later someone was like “you need to go to a show” and I didn’t really, my context for drag was campy drag that I’d seen in Ohio with white performers and RuPaul’s Drag Race, right? Unfortunately.

So I didn’t really have any other context and I got to the Pinhook, which is the queer bar in Durham, that’s where “House of Cocks’” home is and I saw like Brown people, and queer people, and they/them pronoun people just busting out gender in a way I’d never seen before and it was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. And that made me believe, oh I could do this! And I love makeup and I love the idea of figuring out outfits and I realized very quickly that I’ve always loved dress-up. I really like imagining myself as like a small, gay boy. Just, I loved the dress-up box. Like all these stories that feel very familiar to a lot of gay folks, I was, I sort of feel like I can identify with those stories too. So yeah, I did thrift store shopping, I was really broke when I started Kiki and drag is not an inexpensive hobby. And I also had always wanted to do standup so I just decided to put the two of them together. I didn’t feel ready to start dancing in drag because at the time I didn’t think I was a good dancer. And so I just put the two of them together. So Kiki was born at an open mic on January 2019.

**Tuck**: So she’s a Capricorn (laughs)

**Hideo**: She is a Capricorn but she’s definitely a Leo also. Like she could not do what she’s doing unless, I just have a constant need for attention. It was just an art form that I had never realized was accessible to me. I was never allowed to wear makeup or any kind of adornment, you know earrings… If I paid too much attention to my hair as a child my mom was very suspicious. My little sister could get away with dyeing her hair and cutting it every other week, but not me. And so just being able to play, it just felt like playtime for me. And it felt really healing as for a younger version of Hideo and it was a good excuse to explore all of these things that I didn’t really get a chance to, even though I was an AFAB person. And so, yeah, that’s how Kiki sort of started and going back and forth between, honestly, a lot of dysphoria in Kiki and I was like, “is drag just dysphoria if you’re trans?“ And it can’t be! These incredible people in House of Cocks couldn’t possibly being getting on stage and being in this much agony and perform this beautifully, you know?

And so, a lot of my first year of Kiki was just trying to figure out who she was. And instead of conforming myself into an idea of what I thought a drag queen was, which was frankly really, really influenced by RuPaul’s Drag Race, also unfortunately because I don’t really know if that’s the kind of drag that I’m doing (laughs) or that House of Cocks is doing. It was also just such an artistic journey for me of: it’s good when it feels good, right? Even if I look perfect but I don’t feel good, if I feel like I need to crawl out of my skin because I’m having so much dysphoria, then it’s not good, you know?

And so it somehow took me a year (laughs) to figure that out and so, as I became more comfortable going back and forth into Kiki, who is slightly different from Hideo, I was able to see the ways in which I really love things that people identify as femme, that I identify as femme. And the ways in which I work hard to present a certain appearance, a certain experience for the people I perform for, is also like deeply a part of my femmeness. My idea of what a trans man was before all of this didn’t really have room for playing with makeup or things of that nature, you know? And Kiki gave me permission to just love dress-up in a way that I was never allowed to love dress-up, you know? And drag is just so much about playing with gender and trying different things and Kiki was just a space to do that in and get a lot of attention at the same time, which is really perfect for me.

Of course, all the things that I said about makeup and dress-up and stuff are all a part of being femme and are really sweet, important parts of that to me, but for me you know, of course there’s more to being femme than just putting on lipstick. I really think that the way that I move through the world, the ways in which I interact with people, the way I dance, the way I walk, the way I talk are all very femme to me. And being able to find words to describe that as transfemme man has been really freeing and feeling like I’m inclusive to myself right. I don’t have to press down these feminine parts of myself just because you know I’m an AFAB person who’s trans. And that feels really good. That feels really good.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I love that for you. Well, let’s talk about “Growing up Moonie”, and maybe that will be more soothing now because everyone will know that it ends up ok with you having this wonderful, gender free life. But can you tell us what “Growing up Moonie” is and what your goals are with the show, briefly, so that we can talk about it more?

**Hideo**: Sure, “Growing up Moonie” is a memoir podcast I released in 2019 telling the story of my experiences in the Moonies, which was the cult I grew up in. And I interviewed and talked with other people who had grown up in the church with me.

**Tuck**: Yeah so, a lot of the folks that you talk to and about in the show are straight and cis and some of them are white and one main theme of the show is how those people can be partially in, partially out of the church and still maintain reasonably close relationships with their families and their friends from the church but that you, as a queer, trans, brown person cannot do that. So, can you talk more about that and about the feelings it brought up when you were diving into that topic for the show?

**Hideo**: I think one thing about being somebody who is estranged from family, which I’m sure many people can relate to, is all of the excuses people say, all of the reasons why you should reconnect with your family that people say. Like you know, like “Your mother loves you,” or you know “You owe your parents this or that.” My point by saying that is that yes, technically I guess I still could be friends with some people in the church, a select few. I know that a lot of people express care for me who are still in the church. But how can anyone bear walking into a room, or being face to face, or talking to somebody who believes in a religion that absolutely has no space for the existence of trans people or for the existence of queer people. I grew up remembering how Moon, who is the leader of the church, once called homosexuals “shit eating dogs.” You know, there is no going back from that. There is no reform. I mean, I know this church inside and out, I grew up in it, I know there’s no reform. There’s no coming back from a religion that in its very texts believes that there are masculine and feminine and those are the only two ways of interpreting gender, you know. It was really, really hard. The reason I started the podcast really was because I got to a point about a year and a half out of the church, I think, maybe a year, where I just realized how horribly equipped I was to be a human being in this world.

I didn’t really know how to find a roommate, I didn’t know how to be friends with people who weren’t in the church without being extremely judgmental towards them. I didn’t know how to find a job, I just didn’t have any of the skills that I felt a person needs to be a human in this part of the world. And so I was really curious if other people that I grew up with felt that way, even if they didn’t leave the church you know? I was just really curious if , I grew up in a very specifically abusive relationship within a cult and I was like, “is this just my family, is this the church?” I just was curious. So the impetus for the project was to find people to relate to. And in some ways I found that and in a lot of other ways this exact thing is what made me feel even more alienated. You know, people who have these crises of faith but they still get to talk to their parents. People who had to walk away from it for a while but when they come back people are just really excited that they are back.

So it was really hard, it kind of made me feel even more lonely than I already was. You know, I made “Growing up Moonie” during one of the loneliest times of my life, in a very lonely life to begin with (laughs). And also at the time I was in a relationship with a transphobic, cis man and so there was just, yeah, it just made me feel even more lonely and isolated. And that, the reason why it became a theme in the podcast is because I just kept coming back to that point, and was like “I don’t know what to do with this.” I don’t know how to make sense out of the fact that people marry outside the church, and broke all these rules when they were younger, and it just feels like none of that matters now that we’re adults, and I was a really, really good kid. I was a good Moonie. I worked very hard to not just follow the letter, but the spirit of what we were asked to do and it just didn’t matter in the end.

**Tuck**: Yeah, (sighs) yeah, I’m so sorry it’s a real fucked up situation, you’ll be shocked to learn.

**Hideo**: Yeah, I thought about that a lot (laughs)

**Tuck**: I’m so sorry. So do you want to talk about why that’s the case? Why other folks with different identities could walk away and break all these rules and still be accepted and why you, this very good kid who tried very hard was not given that opportunity?

**Hideo**: Well a lot of it is my family, the way that Moonies’ sort of lives are structured are very centered around the family, the nuclear family. And so the family I grew up in was really abusive and really toxic and a lot of other families in the church also had arranged marriages just like my parents, but over time things just sort of softened, things got easier. The church realized that just throwing two random people into a marriage wasn’t a recipe for success, so they started putting out materials to encourage couples to communicate, to talk about love languages, to spend time together outside of being a parent or work or whatever and my parents just never did any of that stuff because they didn’t want to? I never really noticed my parents feel anything except for irritation or disgust with each other. So, I think a lot of it is my family, right? Your entrance into the church is your family. And because of the nature of my family also, I didn’t actually have a lot of friends outside of them, in the church, you know, outside of my family.

My mom’s kind of general feeling about it was like, “you have sisters why do you need friends?” (laughs) “You have us, why do you need friends?” So we didn’t, neither me nor my sisters had very many close friends in the church to begin with. And so when I left I lost my connection to my family, which is traditionally the avenue you have into the church. And forging new relationships with new friends was not something I was equipped to do because I was not encouraged to do that as a child and was much, much harder when I know that I’m trans, I’m brown, I have this… my politics are getting more and more liberatory, more radical and so forging relationships as an adult is really hard to begin with and then if you add layer upon layer (laughs) to it of my transness, the fact that I know that this person has grown up to hate people like me, and regardless of whether or not they do I know that that’s their background, made keeping or making friendships in the church hard, but also, you know, not that appealing, to be honest. Once I came out as trans, once I came out as queer- I came out as queer first.- it really felt like there was no going back to my family, honestly, that’s not the reason why we don’t talk anymore but it makes it really, really hard to imagine that we’re going to be able to cross ALL of the things that we will need to cross in order to reconcile.

It just makes it feel really, really far away and hard and I think the reason why some kids can come back to the church is because their parents feel like they know who they are. They raised a girl who married a man. They raised a girl who married a man who had a baby, you know? It’s not that different actually from what, you know, a lot of Moonies were hoping for their children to begin with right? If you’re cis and you’re generally white and you’re generally heterosexual and you can pass in all of those ways it makes it a lot easier for family to be like “Oh, well if you don’t believe in God the way I do, that’s not really a big deal.” But there are just, count them out on your fingers, too many differences for me to just sort of waltz back in and say like, “I love you and that’s enough.”

**Tuck**: Yeah.

**Hideo**: At this point.

**Tuck**: So on the podcast you talk about realizing that you were gay, that’s the term you use in the show at least, and you were so, so, so hyped (Hideo laughs) when you realized that you were gay, which is… I relate to, but is wild considering this background of this religious faith that said that being gay was absolutely one of the worst possible things and gay people were literally Satan and caused all these terrible things to happen in the world. So can you talk about why you were hyped? How you were able to be hyped?

**Hideo**: Yeah. By that point I was pretty estranged from the church in general. I had kind of rejected everything that it had told me (laughs). I was going through a process of going through everything I knew about myself and about the world and double-checking it against reality, or what I perceived to be reality and basically the entire church’s teachings went out the window in a week or two of me leaving the church. None of it made sense, all of it was bullshit, I just didn’t’ care anymore. So the whole homosexual thing, also went out with it. I also went to a college that was very, very liberal and had a social justice mission, so there were gay people everywhere, people were coming out all the time, and so I was at school at the time and that made it feel a lot safer.

The feeling is hard to describe unless, I guess you have been forcibly, violently kept in the closet (laughs) your whole life. Um, it was just something that was all mine. I think that’s what made it so exciting it was like I knew that this had come from me, you know. Growing up in a cult where kinda your opinions and your beliefs are handed to you and you don’t really get a chance to think about “What do I believe? Who am I outside of all of this?” I knew that like, there’s no way the church had handed to me the fact that I was gay. Nobody had talked me into it and it just felt really, really true. And not true because the minister had said it, or because the leader of the church said it, or because my mom said it. It was true because I said it and that felt amazing.

It also just made so much more sense. You know, human beings are constantly writing the story of their life. I was reading a book about memory and memory, the ability to integrate memories into our lives, is basically integrating story and the story of ourselves, and the story that I had for myself just made no sense. Cis woman just wasn’t making any sense. At the time, I still thought I was a woman, I wasn’t ready to go there yet, but so many things about my life just made so much more sense and it was just such a relief. It feels so relieving to have an explanation that makes sense for all of the things that I was teased for, all the things I felt ashamed about. I was like, “Well these are gay things, that’s why you were teased and that’s why you felt like scared or guilty was because you were told, you were told, you were made to.”

**Tuck**: Yeah, absolutely. So I was thinking about queerness and transness in people who had this background as kids, and I feel like I am almost in the minority of people I know as someone who comes from not a religious background. My partner is a queer, trans, former cult kid. My girlfriend is not a cult kid but is like a queer, preacher’s kid.

**Hideo**: Mmhm, that’s some experience.

**Tuck:** One of my roommate’s partner’s is a former cult kid who is trans, I think my roommate’s girlfriend is also a queer, former religious it’s like all, like everyone is coming from either religious cults or really, really, really religious backgrounds and now they are queer and/or trans. Am I making this up? Is this like a thing? (laughs)

**Hideo**: No, it’s definitely not, it’s definitely not something you’re making up. It’s totally a thing. It’s not a majority or anything at all, but the number of people who I’ve told about this who are like “Oh, oh I think I might have been in a cult also!” (laughs) it’s pretty, it was surprising to me too, actually. I don’t know what it is. I mean I’ve also noticed that a lot of what I would consider pretty boring, straight, cis people have really loving parents and so my joke is my dad really, really wanted me to be a boy with a penis and he prayed and prayed and prayed for it and I was like, “That’s what you get for not being grateful for what you had, you get a trans kid!” (laughs) Which isn’t to say my gender is about my dad, (Tuck laughs) but I, I do think that… and now we’re going into my philosophy of trans people, I do believe that trans people are far more sane than cis people.

We know in our bodies and we cannot deny that gender makes no sense or gender is far more beautiful and complicated and infinite than the, our world really allows us to believe. And so I wonder if these intense gender roles that we grow up in sort of feel so grating to our, because they are so violently forced into us, it feels so grating to who we are as people that we have to break free, right? And we have to get out, and maybe there are people who identify as cis- I can think of at least one person who I am fairly certain is queer- who just doesn’t have to go there. You know, the ways in which she grew up doesn’t, didn’t feel like gender, genderly oppressive. You know, she has choices to maintain her cis womanhood and also explore gender in her own ways without consequence of losing everything so I don’t know if that means we hold on, that I hold on to these labels more because of it. I don’t know if that rocketed me into highly fabulousity transness but, I have no idea, you’re not wrong, I guess is the fact of the matter. Many, many queer people who I’ve told about this experience, or have heard about this experience, really seem to identify with it, and it doesn’t make me feel any better about Christianity when I hear those stories, to be honest.

**Tuck:** Yeah, you mention that all of your beliefs and teachings from the first 22 years of your life sort of fell away all at once and it sounds really challenging to lose your framework for understanding the entire world and have to sort of rebuild that from scratch, and rebuild your community and sense of family all at the same time, and you know we just said that this is not an experience that is unique to you. So do you have advice for anyone else who is trying to recover from this void of losing family or community or belief systems, all at the same time?

**Hideo:** I mean, I wouldn’t say, so challenging is kind of an understatement to be honest. I literally went insane. I thought aliens were attacking us,. I thought the floor was gonna come out and grab me. Yeah, I just totally lost my mind. Like when, you don’t understand what they mean by losing your mind until you fucking lose your whole mind. So my advice would be to get yourself stable first, you know if meds and therapy is the right thing, do those. I highly recommend both of those things to anyone but also not everyone has the same experience with therapy or meds so I don’t want to be prescriptive or universal about it. But for me a big part of it was just getting stable, just being able to identify a feeling versus a reality, (laughs) was just such an important skill and I only just, right now, after 2 years of very intense therapy, feel like I’m getting a handle on it. So, yeah that’s one thing. I mean honestly, if I imagine anyone going through this I’m just so sorry, you deserve so much better than this. And I would say go toward the people who have time for you.

I think I spend a lot of time, wasted time, a lot of time, trying to get people to love me who couldn’t or wouldn’t in the way that I needed. And so the people who have time for you will show that they have time for you, you know? They’ll ask to meet up or they’ll be available, you know if you’re, if you have a friend or a partner or somebody who you’re interested in and they just always seem to be too busy for you, then that’s not a judgment on them necessarily, it just means, you deserve to have people in your life who have time for you and that’s something that took me a long time to learn myself. So I guess that would be another piece of advice that I have.

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Hideo:** And I was actually just thinking, I recently heard of the passing of a friend of a friend, I didn’t know them very well but I knew her and she had taken her life and for the, it was obviously very, very hard, always hearing that kind of news is very, very hard, but what surprised me is I didn’t wish she had taken me with her for the first time in a long time. So I guess it does get better, who knew? (laughs) Yeah, I don’t know how else to say this, but I never thought there would be a point in my life where I was like, where I would rather be alive than dead and I didn’t know that was possible, so it is possible. And if it’s possible for me it’s definitely possible for everyone.

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Hideo:** So that’s pretty amazing.

**Tuck:** Yeah. So I mentioned that my partner also grew up in a situation relatively similar to yours and I asked them for thoughts on your podcast and they said, they said quote “So I think some of the more interesting conversations I’ve had about my upbringing are centered around what I liked about it and how I’ve used and twisted it to fit me now” Cause obviously it’s terrible growing up trans and brown in a religious cult. So I’m curious is there anything that you have carried with you and twisted to still be in your life?

**Hideo:** Yeah, I’m glad we’re having this conversation now because even a year ago I would have been like, “there was nothing good about it” (laughs) but I think there are things that I carry with me that aren’t good because they came from the church but they’re good because of me, you know? And I have like a deep generosity towards others and towards others in need and that’s a very Christian thing. The way my family raised me was if someone’s hungry, you feed them. If they come into your house you offer them food or you ask them to sit down. You take care of them. I really feel that came from my family and from the church and I hold onto that. And I don’t know if it is really from the church but I have a really strong and keen sense of being able to understand reality and other people’s realities. I think growing up in a cult you’re constantly having to conform to a reality that’s not yours and so, so much of leaving the church was trying to craft my own reality all by myself.

They don’t make kits for that you just have to do it from scratch. Like in the olden days. So I’m really good at seeing different people’s realities and for me being able to see where someone is coming from because of the reality in which they are existing is a really useful skill. And also being able to be… this is, I don’t know if this is a gift or a curse but, I have a really strong sense of self versus community. There’s a lot more cult behavior in the world than we really think about. When I’m stoned at a drag show and everyone is just screaming and the person on stage is just owning everything and is giving everything and you feel just so connected to everyone that is how being in a cult feels like! The difference is that I get to go home and sleep off my high and then I’m my own person again (laughs) you know? But being able to see those things really clearly is not necessarily from the church but to be honest, as an answer to your partner’s question, it has been really, really hard to find things that have been salvageable and it is either because there is nothing salvageable or because I’m just not ready to. But that is really the honest answer. Is that it’s really hard (laughs)

**Tuck:** Yeah, I think both of those answers are valid too. It could just not exist or it could be just too painful to think about. There are certainly really dark periods of my life that I don’t want to weed back in for better takeaways, you know. No that just sucked. I just don’t wanna touch it.

**Hideo:** Some things just suck. And I think that’s really hard for people to hear, that for people that tell me that I need to call my mom or people who tell me like “Don’t worry you guys will definitely reunite someday!” Maybe, I don’t know but holding onto that right now isn’t healthy, but I think it is hard for people to be like sometimes things are just unsalvageable, sometimes things are just like icky all the way down and it is ok to bury those in the ground and have them compost rather than try to make something out of something that is just going to keep hurting you, you know. Honestly the hardest part is that I do wanna talk to my mom, it’s just not a good idea right now you know? And I would also hate it if I couldn’t talk to my mom for three years, I’m currently hating it. And you telling me it might change and that I should go into a situation that might not be safe for me just because I hate it is really not helpful. And also, you don’t know me. Try not to tell people their lives unless you really, really are sure you’re right, is my general advice to the world actually.

**Tuck:** Mmm. Yeah (Hideo laughs) Well speaking of things that suck and are hard, how are you coping with drag, comedy, Pride, all of these things that are important to us as queer people being cancelled in the real world indefinitely as we wait out the world existing again?

**Hideo:** Yeah, I don’t like Pride, it’s always too hot. I don’t want to sound unprideful, I’m very proud of being queer and gay it’s just always too hot (laughs with Tuck). I do love going to Pride and seeing young people, that’s my favorite part. Drag has just been really hard, dude. I’ve done, I started a comedy group called Punch Up Comedy during a pandemic and we’ve had many successful shows and, like online shows and online open mics, which has been super gratifying but I tried to do drag during those and it was just really exhausting and demoralizing, frankly cause the amount of work it takes to get into drag I better fucking be seen in person (laughs with Tuck) you know? Also it’s just, it just not the same and performing is fun because you get, at least performing is fun for me because of the energy you get back from an audience right? I give so much and then I get back so much and that feels so amazing and it just feels sort of like a one-way street over video, you know? It’s hard to be an amateur drag queen over video (laughs). I did my first ever show two weeks before the pandemic hit us and so I was fired up. I was like, 2020 is going to be my year. I’m going to hit every amateur drag show I can. I’m gonna wheel myself in, see if I can get into a show, I’m gonna improve. Cause my first show was just, I just knew exactly what I needed to do to improve, I was just so excited.

I guess that’s what I’m saying, as an amateur drag queen I’m, I don’t know of any places that will nurture me to be a better drag queen. I think the people who are doing drag over video right now are fucking heroes, incredible. But I don’t know how to grow as a drag queen like this. Especially since I’m dealing with crazy anxiety and depression because the world is on fire. Comedy though, I think there’s something, if I just perform as Hideo, which I have done before and I actually do like, that could be a lot of fun. I haven’t tried it very much yet because I’ve been a little bit busy. There’s a pretty strong comedy community here in Durham and a queer community and I just wanted to bring more comedy to queer spaces and that’s what Punch Up Comedy is: open mics and stuff where you can invite your trans, queer friends and they’re not sitting there waiting for something horrible to be said, you know? Comedy shows are so much more fun when you don’t have to worry about your friend sitting next to you being dehumanized.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Is there a way that folks can watch or get involved with that comedy that you’re building online?

**Hideo:** Yes, so our Instagram is @Punchupnc. My Instagram, my personal Instagram, which is mostly me and my weiner dogs is @dr\_miyazaki and then for Punch Up, if you want to be on our email list, our email is punchupcomedync@gmail.com.

**Tuck:** Awesome. Do you want to talk about what else you’re working on now or anything you’ve been up to since you put out “Growing Up Moonie.”

**Hideo:** I guess I can talk about this thing that I’ve been thinking about. If yoy imagine a Venn diagram in one circle it says “jobs that are fun and interesting and creative” and then you put another circle and you put “jobs that are stable income”.

**Tuck:** Yeah, they don’t touch (laughs)

**Hideo:** They don’t touch at all. They aren’t even in the same galaxy. So I’ve decided to take a turn toward the stable income part of things and as a fire sign it’s been very hard (laughs) but I’m um getting my certification in medical billing and coding so that I will have stable income through the recession that’s definitely about to happen. And so, I guess the reason I want to talk about it is that it is the only practical idea that I have ever had. And it’s really forethinking and it’s really responsible and medical coders make good money. And so I’m kinda proud of myself for that. It’s just very out of character for me to make such a practical decision. And so I guess, what I want to express is I’m not really working on very much right now, I’m writing a little bit but nothing for anyone to see, and I feel like what I want to share is the grief I am experiencing of having to choose a stable income and stable mental health, because having stable income is way better for my mental health and having to, not let go of but just put aside, or save for later, my creative pursuits, including podcasting. I lost my job in podcasting like 10 minutes after the pandemic hit.

**Tuck**: I’m sorry.

**Hideo:** Yeah, me too. So I just put those aside for a while and I guess I just want to share my sadness about that.

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Hideo:** Capitalism sucks.

**Tuck:** Yeah, it sucks, a lot. I’m really sorry that you and so many, so many of us are in that position. And yeah, it’s really fucking unfair.

**Hideo:** Super unfair.

**Tuck:** Especially because like your voice and your perspectives are so important and are not what we hear already you know? It’s not like the dominant narrative that we get exposed to and so, yeah, it just makes me really mad and sad that voices like yours are not able to make all the art and all the work (Hideo laughs) that you should be able to make. It should be different

**Hideo:** Yeah, nothing, everything is temporary so hopefully this will change to but yes, I agree.

**Tuck:** This is the part of the show where I ask if there is anything else you want to talk about that we haven’t talked about yet?

**Hideo:** I guess I have one thing about what you were saying for other people who maybe have experienced something similar to me. In queer community and LGBT spaces we talk a lot about chosen family, and I just want to validate the feeling of if anyone is feeling any kind of feelings around when people who have their bio families still also have chosen family. And so I just, for myself also want to validate the feeling that it’s ok to feel frustrated when people already have a family and then they get to have another one also. I know it is more complicated than that but my chosen family is all I have and chosen family is a lot more fluctuating than bio family is. And I think, when we talk about family and chosen family there’s this sense that chosen family is just like having a bio family and the truth is I am still, after 5 years out of being in a cult, still struggling to find my chosen family and I just want people who are in this kind of position, who are still struggling with this to know that you’re not doing anything wrong (laughs) you’re not unloveable or broken it’s just that finding family is really, really, really hard. And if other people make it look easy it’s not because they have some sort of special power that you don’t, you know?

**Tuck:** Yeah, thank you for saying that. That feels really important. And I think, in my experience, the people I know that don’t have bio families take queer family a lot more seriously, like queer family isn’t just a label that they toss onto any friend you know? It’s a real investment in having a life-long connection with someone and really showing up for someone, and yeah. That is really different than the way that some other queer people approach that concept, because they can afford to lose that and they’ll still have family, you know, so…

**Hideo:** Yeah. Thanks for saying that, I really appreciate it.

**Tuck:** Yeah, of course. Well, the way we always end this show is by asking, in your ideal world what would the future of gender look like?

**Hideo:** I love this question and I never know how to answer it (laughs). In the future of gender for me, when we say there are no rules about gender we really mean it. There are no rules about labels, there are no rules about flags, there are no rules about presentation or pronouns. When we say that there are no rules that means that there are no rules for anyone, including ourselves.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music, a rockin track with leading electric guitar, plays]

**Tuck**: That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. If you liked what you heard, you learned something, or you think someone else could learn something, please send this show to a friend or other members of your community. Don’t forget to follow Hideo on Instagram. It’s @dr\_miyazaki linked in the show notes and listen to his podcast, “Growing Up Moonie.” You can follow us on Instagram and Twitter @gendereveal. I’m on Twitter @tuckwoodstock. You can also learn more about the show at genderpodcast.com. Also, did you know that I’m half of a consulting company to tell businesses, journalists, other folks how to be better to trans people, also folks of color for that matter. You can find more information about that at <Sylveon.co> linked in the show notes, all these links are in the show notes. If you’d like to support the podcast as well as my reporting and any other work that I do, you can join us at [Patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender).

Thank you so much for your patience and support it is truly too kind and it means the entire world for me. I am also on CashApp @tuckwoodstock now and I finally have a Venmo after years of refusing to make a Venmo .if you need me on Venmo for any reason I am @tuck-woodstock. If you would like to join our beautiful, gender detective community you can do so at <bit.ly/genderslack2>. Our merch shop, which is empty but maybe won’t be by the time you hear this is [bit.ly/gendermerch](bit.ly/genderslack2). You can contact us if you would like to submit merch for the shop. Our logo is by the talented Ira M. Lye. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder, additional music this week by Blue Dot Session. I am still on the Portland protest beat. The police keep doing brutality and we can’t go home until they stop, but I will whip up a new season of Gender Reveal for you as soon as I possibly can and we will be back so soon with more feelings about gender.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

**Tuck:** [whispers] throw a brick at a cop.