**Molly:** Hey friends! Just popping before the show to let you know that the audio for this week’s interview is a little glitchy, and that’s because Skype Call Recorder betrayed us, and Skype also betrayed us. A double betrayal! And so, you might not even notice, I think you’re still going to have a really great time, but I just wanted to acknowledge it up front. Still perfectly listenable. Probably shouldn’t have brought it up in the first place. OK, here’s the show!

[theme music plays]

**Molly:** Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we ask intrusive personal questions and hopefully get a little closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host, and resident gender detective, Molly Woodstock.

[music plays]

**Molly:** Hey friends! Hope you’re staying hydrated. We have a great episode for you this week, but before we get to that, I have a bunch of announcements. First of all, thank you so much to everyone who sent in questions for our upcoming advice episode. We’re still looking for a few more questions, so if you need advice on anything gender or queerness related, or are confused about what a specific term means, you can hit us up via Twitter, email, or the Google form in the show notes. Secondly, Gender Reveal is on Spotify now! I’m so excited! If you have a friend who doesn’t listen to podcasts because they don’ t want to figure out how podcast apps work, now they don’t have to. We also made a really handy link to our iTunes listing. It’s bit.ly/genderpod. So those are two extremely easy ways to find the podcast and share the podcast. So please tell your friends, and thank you to everyone who’s helped us spread the word so far by tweeting about the show.

**Molly:** Finally, as you know, we are 100% listener-funded, so thank you so much to each and every one of you who are helping us fund the show. We currently have 96 patrons, and I’d love to get to 100 because I love found numbers. So, for this week only, July 16th to 22nd, anyone who donates three dollars or more gets stickers, and anyone who donates five dollars or more gets an extra special surprise. And with that, it’s time for a segment called This Week in Gender:

[music plays]

**Molly:** This Week In Gender, I guess we should talk about the London Pride Parade fiasco. So, the London Pride Parade is enormous. It includes something like thirty thousand people, and like five hundred different groups. And this year, it was set to be led by the mayor of London and NHS staff carrying a huge rainbow flag. But instead, a group of like eight TERFs forced themselves to the front of the parade, and demanded that *they* should be allowed to march directly behind the big rainbow flag instead. These women are part of a group called “Get the L Out,” which appears to be a group of trans exclusionary cis lesbians, and they were carrying a lot of really hateful signs and literature.

**Molly:** According to a statement later released by the organizers of London Pride, organizers felt that since these women were not committing a criminal offense, they could not have security forcibly remove them from the parade. They also cited safety concerns, and something about the heat, in their decision to not remove these women from the march. Instead, they allowed the TERFs to march *in front* of the parade, *in front* of the mayor and the big rainbow flag, so that the first thing that all of the spectators saw– by the way there’s like literally a million spectators- the first thing that they saw were these women holding signs saying things like “Lesbian, Not Queer” and “Trans Activism Erases Lesbians,” which is obviously bullshit because many trans women *are* lesbians. The TERFs were also handing out hundreds of fliers that said really really hateful and completely false propaganda things about how everyone is like trying to force cis lesbian to socially and medically transition, which is just not true. And “Get The L Out” also says that the fact that some trans women have penises, and thus that some lesbian sex involves a penis, is literally rape culture- which is just not at all what those words mean.

**Molly:** So, anyway, obviously folks were extremely upset about this. PinkNews was reporting live from the event, so folks around the world were finding out about it in real time, and it was really confusing and appalling. And obviously we can’t go back and, like, re-do the parade. That sucks, it will always suck. But some good things *have* come out of this. For one thing, cis lesbians and other allies all around the world took to social media to show their support for trans lesbians specifically, and trans folks in general, under the hashtag #LwiththeT. Lots of people made public statements condemning “Get the L Out,” including organizers of London Pride, and it was honestly pretty heartwarming to see so many folks rise up to support trans women. So, in many ways the TERFs’ stunt like completely backfired, because it actually led to this huge uprising of support for the very group that they were trying to marginalize and suppress.

**Molly:** Another cool piece of backlash is that Dazed magazine teamed up with this campaign called Address The Nation, which is a group that projects statements onto famous buildings in London. So, last Wednesday I believe, the words “Repeat after us: trans women are women!” were projected onto the Ministry of Justice, and it was very good and cool! So, repeat after me: trans women are women, trans lesbians are lesbians. This has been This Week in Gender!

[music plays, and continues as Molly speaks]

**Molly:** Ryan Cassata is an award-winning singer-songwriter, actor, performer, writer, and LGBTQ activist and motivational speaker based in Los Angeles. He has been both published and featured in the New York Times, he’s toured with Warped Tour, he’s appeared on the Tyra Banks and Larry King Live shows, he was the first recipient of the Harvey Milk Memorial Award, and he’s the youngest keynote speaker to ever be selected for the largest transgender conference in existence. Currently, Ryan is in the final stages of editing his memoir and writing and recording a new album of original music.

[music ends]

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

**Ryan:** I identify as a transgender man, uh, female-to-male, and I consider myself not binary. So not “non-binary,” but, I’m not binary. And I consider myself to be androgynous and queer.

**Molly:** Can you tell me more about what it means to be not binary, but not non-binary?

**Ryan:** From my understanding, what a lot of non-binary people have told me, is that they feel no gender at all, or a little of both sexes. So, yeah, I feel 100% a boy, but I don’t fit into the gender binary. My appearance, and in terms of the way I act, and- also I’m more fluid in the way that other people perceive me. Like, I don’t really get upset when I’m misgendered by people I don’t know. Yeah, it just doesn’t really upset me.

**Molly:** This is kind of an aggressive first question, but I know that you have never been on testosterone and you’ve sort of gotten a lot of shit for that. Can you talk about that a little bit? About that decision, and about the reaction to that decision?

**Ryan:** Yeah. When I was sixteen, I wanted to go on testosterone, and I was approved to go on it through gender therapy, which was like a crazy process back then. And my parents said, no, wait until you’re eighteen. So I waited til I was eighteen, and I got top surgery about two weeks after I turned eighteen, and after that I didn’t want to go on T anymore. And there’s been moments in my life, even in the last couple years, where I’ve wanted to go on T. But, for me, it seems too risky for me right now. I’ve released dozens of songs with the voice that I have, I have spent a lot of time to develop this voice, and I don’t think that my voice would change in a negative way but I definitely think that my voice would drop to a lower octave- or lower register. It would sound completely from what it is now. And I think that- I don’t know, I’ve grown, I’ve developed a brand and a following for my music and I just think it would be silly right now to change all of that.

**Molly:** That makes sense. You mentioned that you transitioned a while ago, and I just wanted to emphasize that- did you know any other trans kids when you started transitioning?

**Ryan:** I knew one trans guy that was maybe four or five years older than me, and that was it. That was the only person I knew in real life. I wasn’t really close with him, to be able to talk to him about it. There was three YouTubers at the time, that was it. There was Boys Don’t Cry, that’s it. And there was a place called Hudson’s Guide, and that was a place you could go to get some resources, which were very little. And there was Original Plumbing magazine, that was it, as far as like publications go that were talking about trans men, that was it. There was nothing, really. There was five or six top surgeons at the time.

**Molly:** Wow.

**Ryan:** Yeah, things were really different. Some trans elders call it “The Dark Ages.”

[Molly laughs]

**Molly:** Yeah, you’re like the youngest trans elder, honestly. What year did you start your transition?

**Ryan:** Um, I realized in 2007, late 2007, it’s been at least ten years that I started my transition publicly and everything. And before that, coming out as queer, I came out when I was twelve.

**Molly:** Wow! You’re just really on top of your shit. I’m just really impressed, as someone who came out a lot later in life, I’m always impressed when kids who are much younger than me already know exactly who they are. That’s just, like, really inspiring to me. But it also seems really hard! Because, like, when I was in high school, there were like two gay kids, let alone trans kids. Did you feel really alone in your transition?

**Ryan:** Yeah, I did feel really alone. After I came out, and I was in high- well, some people came out after me, and that made me feel better. But I still had that feeling of being alone. Like I said, there was not much on the internet back then. And that also made me feel really alone. And when I was fifteen years old, I got a call to go on the Larry King Live show. And I was only out to a small amount of people at that time, going by Ryan. And I was out to my mom and my brothers, but I wasn’t out to my extended family. I was out to all my close friends. I wasn’t out to other people. They called me “Ryan” but they didn’t know why!

[Molly laughs]

**Ryan:** Or people would just call me by my last name at school, starting in ninth grade. So yeah, I felt really alone. So when I got that call to go on the Larry King Live show, I was like, yeah, I need to go on this show because I need to show other transgender teenagers that there’s someone else like them in the world that’s close to their age. And that’s why I went on that show. And when that show aired, after that, the weeks preceding the months- you know, coming after. I received hundreds and hundreds of letters from people all over the world. And that solidified my mission, it made me know that I have a purpose in life, and I just went with that and ran with it and made that my ultimate goal- to help others connect and to help others feel like they’re not alone. And that’s what I’ve been doing ever since I was a young teenager.

**Molly:** Yeah. Uh, when you were on Larry King, your mom was still deadnaming you and misgendering you, and I was wondering what it feels like to have been deadnamed and misgendered on national television?

**Ryan:** Well, at the time, it wasn’t too big of a deal, to be honest. My mom was supportive of me, but she wasn’t ready to call me Ryan or he/him pronouns yet. And I really think that Dr. Drew was trying to do the best that he could, you know, calling Ryan to me and my birth name to my mom. So, it was really interesting. And I was anxious to be on the show, but I was more anxious that I was on international television coming out to every single person I knew at once. The fact that I was being called the wrong name and pronouns, because it was already happening in my life, so it wasn’t that big of a deal to me at the time. If I went on now, being out for ten years, I’d be like, you know. Why? But back then, it didn’t bother me so much. It bothered me, because my mom wasn’t all the way there yet for me, but it didn’t make me not want to go on. Because I knew going on the show, that my mom was going to be calling me her daughter and she and my birth name. And I still wanted to go on that show with every ounce of hope that I had to help another teenager.

**Molly:** Yeah! And now you have. You’ve helped so many teenagers! A bunch of folks, like Billboard and Logo, they’ve put you on lists of “Nine Trans Musicians You Need To Know,” or “Ten Trans and Non-Binary Musicians To Listen To.” And, like, on the one hand that’s super rad that you’re being recognized. But I’m wondering if you ever feel like you’d rather be recognized as a musician, rather than always a trans musician? Or if you have sort of embraced that as your brand?

**Ryan:** Yeah, I mean, I’ve embraced it because that’s who I am. But I would rather be known as a human being before being known as a trans human being.

**Molly:** Totally.

**Ryan:** I don’t want that to be the main focus about me, and I do have a lot of people that come to my shows that aren’t even in the LGBT community. So I have reached other people than just trans people and just queer people. So that does feel good. And I have been in a lot of music blogs that don’t have anything to do with LGBT community. So, I do feel like I’ve expanded enough to be included in more mainstream things. But, I still- being trans is my identity, and it’s a political thing right now. It’s a hot topic. So that’s what happens, you know? And maybe in twenty years down the road, hopefully, it’s gonna be way different, people are gonna be more accepting. It’s not gonna be that big of a deal to be trans, or even a big deal at all, hopefully. And just, it’ll be, you know? People just go around, “what pronouns do you want to use?” And just accept each other, you know? And love each other for who they are, and not get so hung up on genitals and stuff like that.

**Molly:** Yeah, totally. The culture has changed so much in the last ten years since you transitioned, as you alluded to. What’s the most surprising or exciting thing about the way that the culture around transgender folks in mainstream media has changed since you came out?

**Ryan:** It’s hard to explain how much better things got to people who haven’t been out that long. But, being out for a decade, I’ve seen so many things change! And some of the things that I could really point out, is like- ten years ago, when I would tell people I’m transgender- I wouldn’t even be able to say “I’m trans,” I had to say “I’m transgender”- people would say “what is that?” Most people, ninety-nine percent of people, say “what is that?” and it would take forever to explain it. And now, starting about four years ago, I can say “I’m trans” to a complete stranger that’s not in the LGBT community, and they know what it means, to a certain degree. So that’s a way that things have changed.

**Ryan:** There’s definitely more trans people involved in entertainment, especially in movies in TV. There’s a lot more press about trans people. We don’t only have to be in trans magazines, we can be in mainstream magazines like Billboard and Huffington Post, and all that stuff. So, things have changed so much.

**Molly:** Just based off of things I’ve heard you say, it sounds like at this point you don’t experience a lot of physical dysphoria- like, you’re pretty happy with how your body is. But you still experience social dysphoria, that’s sort of foisted upon you by society. So I’m wondering if that’s accurate, and if you can speak to that at all?

**Ryan:** Yes. The only dysphoria that I feel towards my body is, sometimes I get dysphoric just about looking so young. That’s a safety thing. The other- sometimes I get dysphoric about my hips or my butt, and I get in my head about it, and I try to distract myself away from it. As far as social dysphoria, my main thing is public bathrooms. Like, I’m terrified, I’m so terrified. I’m only five feet tall, and if I go in the women’s room people look at me, and if I go in the men’s room people look at me. And I’d rather be in the men’s room, because it feels like my brain, but- it *is* nicer in the women’s room.

[Molly laughs]

**Ryan:** Because it’s less smelly, it’s just way- I don’t know, it’s more hygienic. But, either way is scary, so…

**Molly:** How do you deal with that? When you’re out in the world, and you need to go to the bathroom, and both bathrooms are scary, how do you deal with it?

**Ryan:** Yeah, well, if I’m going into a place where I haven’t been before and I know that there’s not a gender-neutral bathroom, I wear a fitted baseball hat. Well, not a fitted, but a snapback. Like a flat brim. And that just- I feel like that kind of makes me “pass” more, and I’ll put it lower on my head so that people can’t see my face as much. So I’ll do that. And in other places, if I’m just more feminine, I’ll use the women’s room. I just judge it on that, and- I don’t know. It’s been happening to me lately where I’ll be out with my friends, and I’ll go into the men’s room, and there will be one stall and it’s being used for like ten minutes?

[Molly laughs]

**Molly:** Yeah!

**Ryan:** So then I’ll go in the girls’ bathroom. Because, like- sometimes you’ll wait for like an hour. Like people are watching a movie or something!

[Molly laughs]

**Molly:** So in addition to touring as a musician, you’ve also toured as a speaker. You’ve spoken at high schools and colleges and conferences, and I’m wondering what your speeches are like, and what the key message is that you really want folks to take away from your talks?

**Ryan:** So, yeah, with my speeches I usually open with a song just to break the ice a little bit. And I give my speech, I talk about coming out to my family and their experience. Then I talk about transitioning in high school, and I talk about the positive changes that I made in my high school to be able to survive high school. And I really talk about, like, what type of young person I was, that I had no confidence and I was extremely shy. I’m still really shy. And I just talk about, like, you know, how I felt like a nobody. And I was still able to make such impactful changes that- people still message me from that school. You know, there’s no one in that school that I went to school with now, or even siblings of people now. And people still message me like, “Oh I heard *you* were the one who made it so that we can use this safer bathroom,” or that “I’m allowed to use the guys’ bathroom because of you,” or “I could have my name in the yearbook because of you,” or “I could walk in the graduation gown of my choice because of you,” and you know? That’s like, it’s just so amazing that- you know- I did it for my survival. I was forced into activism to survive.

**Molly:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** That’s the truth. [*inaudibe*] my school. I mean, I started- I started doing activism work when I was thirteen. I started speaking at schools with a team on Long Island, we’d go into middle schools and high schools. And really how I got into it was ‘cause I was forced to, and that’s kind of what my speeches talk about. Just making positive changes, and that it doesn’t matter how small you feel you are. And, you know, it doesn’t matter how in-confident [sic] you are, you can make a positive change. And I let these young people know that, like, it doesn’t matter how young you are. It doesn’t matter if your parents don’t support you. It doesn’t matter, like, you can make a change. And I fought tooth and nail in that school, I was always out there with petitions getting students to sign petitions. And just, like, rallying, to make these changes so that other people can be free- including myself.

**Molly:** That’s so incredible! I’m just so impressed by you. That just sounds really amazing. Do you ever resent that you were the one who had to do all that work?

**Ryan:** No, I don’t resent it. I just feel grateful, you know? I feel grateful that I was strong enough to do it. I feel- you know, I struggled with my school with the bathrooms for over a year. For a long time, I wasn’t allowed to use the bathroom at school. For a long time. And I fought to make that different. And I’m grateful that I was strong enough to do that, because a lot of people who are put in that position feel like they can’t do it. You know? And I feel like anyone could do it, but they need a little push to do it. They just need that little boost of confidence. So me coming into these schools and telling them, hey, you could do this too, and I felt just like you- that helps them to motivate them to make whatever positive change they have to make.

**Molly:** Yeah, that’s incredible. So, I’ve heard that you often do Q&As after your talks, and I was wondering what the most common question is that you get from folks?

**Ryan:** The most common question, hm. Well, people always want to know what my birth name is.

**Molly:** Oh! That’s so rude!

**Ryan:** Yeah. So, probably when I was around sixteen, I would open up the Q&A, and I would say “you can ask me any questions besides the question ‘what is your birthname,’ because I want you to know me as Ryan.”

**Molly:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** And I tell them- I used to say “don’t ask me about sex,” and I still say that at high schools because it’s inappropriate. I mean, at colleges it’s fine, but not to people under 18. And I think the most common questions- I don’t know, it’s really been different everywhere I go. A lot of people ask about coming out and what advice I have for that. A lot of people, sometimes ask- they’ll tell me about “well my school’s not letting me do this and that.” There’s been schools where I’ve gone, and they’ve told students they can’t use the males’ bathroom, you know, trans guy can’t use the males’ bathroom. So I just go into the principal’s office and talk to the principal. You know, I’m just like, I don’t really care if that means I won’t be asked to come back. I want that kid to be able to spend the next four years of high school being able to go to the bathroom! You know?

**Molly:** Yeah, that’s so rad! Cool! Let’s turn it around. Do you have a question that you’ve been asked that was particularly surprising, or that stuck with you for a long time?

**Ryan:** There’s one thing I remember really clearly. I must have been like seventeen, and I was speaking at a college somewhere where it’s a bit more conservative. I can’t remember what school it was. People were forced to go to the speech to get credit for their class, so a bunch of people came who probably weren’t cool with being trans and whatever. And this was a while ago, too. This was about eight years ago. So, I gave my speech, and I was walking out, and a woman stopped me and she said, “I was forced come to your speech, I didn’t want to come, and before this speech I thought that God wanted me to hate LGBT people. And now I know, God just wants us to love everyone.” And that- that’s stuck with me ever since then.

**Molly:** That’s incredible! Wow! You must be, like, a really amazing speaker.

[Molly laughs]

**Molly:** That’s a hard pivot! Like, that’s a really big change. Cool! Well, I’m so glad that you’re out there doing all that work. Is there anything else- I know you do so many things. Is there anything else that you want to talk about that I’ve missed?

**Ryan:** Oh, maybe some- about the new song. Can you play the song? Or?

**Molly:** Yeah! Do you want to tell me about it?

**Ryan:** Sure, this song is called Daughter. It’s about my personal experience with my transition from female to male, and my dad’s experience with that. So it’s about my dad’s transition, really.

[song plays, lyrics as follows:]

*10 years ago I cut my hair*

*And I changed my name as people stared*

*And I went on TV and I so did declare*

*That this is who I am, for anyone that cares*

*I didn’t change who I am*

*I’ve always been a man*

*Still, it changed your world*

*But dad, I’ll always stay your little girl*

[song continues playing as Ryan speaks over it]

**Ryan:** And I wrote this song because, before I came out, I was- Me and my dad were like, you know, father-daughter, very stereotypical. He would, you know, put my hair in a ponytail. We used to listen to that song “Butterfly Kisses” all the time, and that was, like, our song. And it was about like, a little girl growing up and having her sweet sixteen and getting married. And all that. And that was our song. And I remember singing that at five years old on my little cassette boom box, you know, in the nineties. So that was my dad and I’s song. And really, the turning point in my dad- to accept me, because he didn’t accept my transition at all. I heard that we were at a party- I was seventeen, I think, maybe younger. And I heard- that song came on over the loud speaker at the party, and me and my dad looked at each other. And we were like, oh my God. We finally, like, just connected. And I realized that my dad was like really struggling with my transition, because he felt like he was losing me. So I wrote this song to tell him that he’s *not* losing me.

[song continues, lyrics as follows:]

*I didn’t change who I am*

*I’ve always been a man*

*Still, it changed your world*

*But dad, I’ll always stay your little girl*

*I didn’t change who I am*

*I’ve always been a man*

[song continues playing as Ryan and Molly speak over it]

**Ryan:** And it really took, like, a lot of opening up to my dad about my transition to really get him to understand my transition and to accept me, and to help me get top surgery and all that. So, it took a long time.

**Molly:** I think that is a hopeful narrative, and one that I’ve heard a lot- although not always- but one that I’ve heard a lot from trans folks is: even with parents when it seems like they might never come around, it can take a few years, but they will surprise you sometimes.

[song ends]

And they’ll eventually come around. So I’m glad that’s what happened with you and your father. So, the way we always end the show is by asking: In your ideal world, what is the future of gender? And you actually already touched upon this right at the very beginning. But if you have any other thoughts about what you hope the future of gender looks like, now is the time.

**Ryan:** I want the future of gender to be equal for everyone. I want everyone to just be treated with the love and respect that they deserve regardless of how they identify. And I want people to express themselves how they want to express themselves, and throw away all of the- all of the ideas they have in their head about what makes a man or what makes a woman. I just want people to be themselves, you know? And identify how you want. Act how you want- so long as you’re not hurting somebody, you know? But, you know, express your gender however you want! Because, like- a guy- I don’t know! It’s just, like, you can do whatever you want!

[Molly laughs]

**Ryan:**  You know, I’m a trans guy. And, like, I wore a dress one time in an Instagram post, and I want that to be OK. You know?

**Molly:** Yeah!

**Ryan:** And I got a lot of [*inaudible*] for it, but, I should be able to do that. You know?

**Molly:** Yeah!

**Ryan:** And whatever sex you are, you should be able to wear whatever clothes you want to wear. And I want people to know that there’s more than two genders, and it’s valid to identify as any gender. You know? We’re just human beings, and everyone just wants to be loved. That’s all anybody wants. And I just want people to stop being afraid of trans people.

[music plays]

**Molly:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. But don’t go away, because we have a special surprise guest message after the credits. If you had fun, please send the show to your friends, share it on social media, or leave us a review on iTunes. We don’t have any sort of marketing budget at all, so your help really really really makes a huge difference! Speaking of help, you can also donate to the show at Patreon.com/gender , or Paypal.me/MollyWoodstock. That would be really really kind of you. And don’t forget that we’re still looking for gender questions from listeners, so if you have any questions or you just want to share feedback about the show, you can do so at gendereveal@gmail.com or on Twitter at @gendereveal, or you can use the anonymous form in the show notes. This episode was edited by me, Molly Woodstock. Our logo is by the talented Michelle Leigh, and our theme song is by the legendary Breakmaster Cylinder. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender. But before we go, here’s a special message from our allies at the Gayish Podcast:

**Mike Johnson:** If you always wanted a gay best friend, don’t listen to our podcast, because you’re not going to get that kind of action here!

**Kyle Getz:** Have you always wanted a mildly uncomfortable gayish best friend? You’re in the right place!

**Mike:** I’m Mike Johnson.

**Kyle:** I’m Kyle Getz.

**Mike:** And you’re not.

**Kyle:** And we are the hosts of Gayish, which is a podcast that talks about gay stereotypes.

**Mike:** And straight stereotypes.

**Kyle:** And the fact that both of us are gay, neither of us totally fit gay stereotypes.

**Mike:** Right.

**Kyle:** Thank you for that contribution, that was solid. Award-winning contributions by Mike Johnson.

[both laugh]

**Kyle:** We talk about a different gay stereotype or straight stereotype each one of our weekly episodes. We’ve talked about depression, drag queens.

**Mike:** Butt stuff.

**Kyle:** Fisting.

**Mike:** Animals.

**Kyle:** Uh, fisting and animals are two different episodes, just to clarify.

**Mike:** You can find us on iTunes, or wherever podcasts are given away for free. Tell your mom!

**Kyle:** She’s probably gay!

[both laugh]