[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

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

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**Molly:** Hello, everyone. I hope you’re still hanging in there. It’s been a really rough week to be trans in the United States or the United Kingdom or large swaths of the internet. Speaking of which, you may have just discovered us on the internet via my semi-viral post on both Twitter and Instagram. If so, welcome. We’re a podcast about gender. Maybe go back and listen to some of our normal episodes.

Anyway, both the United States and the United Kingdom are currently facing federal changes to policies surrounding transgender folks, which has led to really horrific public discourse about whether trans people are, in fact, people. The Trump administration, for example, is literally arguing that certain folks such as trans folks, and possibly also queer folks, don’t deserve basic civil rights. Where have we heard this before in American history?

As you know, I am currently in the middle of producing season three of Gender Reveal, so I typically wouldn’t be releasing any new content right now, but I did feel like it was incredibly irresponsible to not cover what’s been going on in both the UK and the US. I’ll be tackling the situation in the United States in a later episode, but I did already start working on this episode about the UK before the news in the US even broke. Because I don’t live in the UK, I asked two of our listeners to fill us in on what’s been going on across the pond.

**Sophie:** My name is Sophie Corvidae. I’m a non-binary person from Brighton in the United Kingdom.

**Molly:** Sophie works for an organization that helps domestic abuse survivors. Sophie is also involved in activism around the Gender Recognition Act which is the policy at the center of the discourse in the United Kingdom. I asked Sophie to explain what’s going on.

**Sophie:** The Gender Recognition Act that we have in place at the moment in England and Wales was passed in 2004, so it needs updating. And it basically covers legallyhow trans people can have their gender recognized. It needs updating because the trans community has moved on in terms of understanding gender and gender expression, and I think the law and society basically need to follow.

The current act makes trans people jump through hoops to identify as the gender they are legally. It’s not accessible to some trans people because of how

medicalized it is, how complicated it is, and how expensive it can be as a process. So, it’s quite centered, for instance, around gender reassignment surgery, which is only relevant for some trans people and is quite a medicalized view.

**Diana:** The update is to make this easier in making it by self-declaration. De-medicalizing it.

**Molly:** That’s Diana, our other guest from the UK.

**Diana:** My name is Diana James. I’m a woman, feminist, trans lesbian, and Jewish.

**Molly:** Diana works in the criminal justice system specializing in trans image-based sexual abuse, same-sex domestic abuse, and hate crimes. She also volunteers with the domestic violence shelter, which is known in the UK as a refuge.

Both Diana and Sophie asked me to stress that their views are 100% personal and are in no way meant to reflect the views of their employers. Okay, back to the GRA.

**Sophie:** It’s just in the process of being updated so there’s been public consultation around what those updates will look like.

**Molly:** That’s Sophie again.

**Sophie:** So, what would a positive reform look like? For instance, non-binary people like myself would be able to be legally recognized, which would be great. Yay! I actually exist! And it would allow trans people to self-identify without going through grueling measures to validate their gender. Reform could also make self-identification easier for teens—

**Molly:** Okay. That sounds great, but unfortunately nothing is ever so easy when it comes to transgender politics. And as you may remember from previous This Week in Gender segments on this show, the proposed GRA updates have sparked backlash from groups of TERFs and other trans-exclusionary extremists.

**Sophie:** There’s been similar concerns as well expressed by trans-exclusionary women’s rights groups here in the UK about domestic violence survivors who are women. Much like the bathroom bill in the states, there’s been an attempt to build a picture of cis men who are burly with beards—and of course criminals in this particular mythology story—putting on a wig, calling themselves women, and doing this in order to attack vulnerable women in women-only spaces. This propaganda paints a scary picture and it flies in the face of the facts.

Firstly, these concerns don’t take into account that domestic abuse services already serve trans women and have been doing that for decades. Secondly, the idea that domestic abuse services’ frontline workers would be so shoddy as to let a perpetrator into a refuge, and that they don’t have safeguarding measures put in place to deal with this sort of thing. You know, just because this perpetrator puts on a wig—this is just pure fantasy.

**Molly:** Diana—who, remember, works in a refuge—agrees.

**Diana:** When anyone enters a women’s or men’s refuge, cis or trans, they’re interviewed, and police checks are run. We do not want someone’s partner who is lesbian, bi, or gay gaining access to re-abuse so stringent checks are carried out.

**Molly:** Of course, the GRA doesn’t really have much to do with who can access specific refuges, shelters, other single-sex spaces. But as they often do, right-wing extremists, in this case trans-exclusionary women’s rights groups, use refuges as a fear tactic to rally anti-trans sentiment.

**Diana:** If there was a basis in fact or reasonable danger, this could be discussed. Fears assuaged.

**Molly:** That’s Diana again.

**Diana:** This update changes nothing in the law. It just makes it easier to get a gender recognition certificate. What these groups did by telling lies, scaremongering was to create confusion and worry. A great many women who didn’t know what to believe, and they became concerned for their own and many women’s safety. In sowing discord, what they did was to polarize the debate, which was their intention. And that debate turned from the GRA to the right for trans people to exist as real women or as second-class citizens with different toilets and changing facilities, et cetera. This is of course basic segregation, and we all know where that leads.

**Molly:** But wait. It gets worse.

**Sophie:** What has not helped was the recent story of Karen White in the press. Previously, Karen had raped and sexually assaulted women. Karen started self-identifying as a woman in jail and was moved to women’s prison, where she then sexually assaulted and raped more women. The press had a field day with this story, using it to argue against self-identification and equate all trans women with dangerous criminals like Karen White. Even more center, left-leaning news titles who had carried a more balanced view beforehand, including trans opinion pieces, couldn’t resist the sensationalism of this piece in a desperate bid to sell papers, and they used the press hook of the Gender Recognition Act unfortunately.

Never mind the fact this is awful and it’s a tragic story of how the legal system let women down. The question that should have been asked was how someone like Karen, with her history, was allowed to access these women, not should people be allowed to self-identify. Asking that question is a distortion of the issues and it’s a real strawman argument.

**Molly:** Unfortunately, issue distortion and strawman arguments seem to be the norms in the press these days. As Sophie explained to me, many of the most widely read traditional news outlets in England and Wales are politically right-wing, including several owned by Rupert Murdoch. According to Diana, the bullying in the press has targeted trans women, trans men, and even cis women who don’t fit society’s perception of what a woman should look like.

**Diana:** This coverage has been extreme in its vilification of the trans community. Please believe I do not exaggerate. Trans women are categorized as bearded, hairy-legged men in dresses who wish to invade women-only spaces for sexual gratification. Trans men in this discourse are described when mentioned at all by these feminist groups as confused butch lesbians who have been subornedby the patriarchy into wanting to become the oppressor. I have never met a trans man or a butch lesbian who could be told to do anything they didn’t want to by anyone.

Also, women in the semi-public eye who do not meet their view of how a woman should look are challenged. Larger nose, broader chin, wider shoulder. Things that many cis women have, but if they do not fit their pattern, they can be challenged. It has become open season on any woman. A cis Indian woman who was on a TV program defending trans women was challenged about her facial hair, told she had a five o’clock shadow.

**Molly:** Both Diana and Sophie expressed extreme disappointment in the quote unquote “feminist women” who are openly lobbying against the basic rights of trans women.

**Sophie:** From my own personal perspective, the worst part of this is from trans-exclusionary feminist and LBG women’s groups who are trans-exclusionary. As harmful as the right-wing press is, I kind of expect that ignorance and scaremongering from them. I’ve found the hate from these organizations the most soul-crushing, to be honest.

They’ve even gone so far as to team up with right-wing members of Parliament who are anti-abortion to get a platform at some points. And as a queer intersectional feminist, I found their divisive actions, behavior, and language has just added to the woes of the trans community, and it’s in a time where we really need solidarity. And instead of being on side, they’ve campaigned against the Gender Recognition Act reforms, and against self-identification, and the right-wing press has actually given them a platform. And the right-wing press usually hates on feminists, but this one time they’re in agreement with these trans-exclusionary groups. They’ve given them airtime and published them, but I think it’s really short-sighted on the part of the women’s groups because once this is over, the right-wing press is just gonna go back to belittling them, attacking them, or ignoring them.

**Molly:** Diana and Sophie both also expressed concern over the health and safety of transgender individuals in the UK. According to Diana, many trans folks are too scared to leave the house, and if they do, they avoid eating and drinking in order to avoid having to use public restrooms. Sophie mentioned that hate crimes have gone up as a result of the anti-trans discourse and of course there’s fear of increased suicide rates.

**Diana:** The suicide rate for trans people is excessive, but this is not due to any inherent condition, but with the pressure society places on the individual who is trans. This atmosphere of vicious bile and hate is hardly conducive to lessening this pressure, and I fear for next year’s statistics.

**Molly:** The extremely contentious public comment period for the GRA ended on Monday, October 22nd. I asked Sophie to share the best and worst possible outcomes going forward.

**Sophie:** The worst outcome would be reform not happening after this consultation, and I’d be personally really concerned that it would be used from a platform from which trans rights could be further rolled back. And the best possible outcome, in my opinion, would be a review of the Equality Act, as well as the Gender Recognition reform. Basically, the Equality Act was passed in 2010, and in England and Wales, it protects all protected characteristics of which trans identity would be one of them. And it refers, at the moment, to gender reassignment, but it currently excludes trans people from single-sex services. I don’t think we’re likely to reform the Equality Act because there’s been a fair amount of backlash against that idea because it concerns around vulnerable women, and there’s been trans-exclusionary groups that have been particularly vocal around that happening. So, there’s been promises made to keep the single-sex exclusion measures that are within the Equality Act at the moment.

But the best outcome just for the Gender Recognition Act I can imagine being legally recognized as non-binary. That would be incredibly validating to be able to have that on my passport. And I think that our current binary system is really letting people down. It erases non-binary people and it erases other genderqueer people and intersex people, too. You know, trans people being able to validate themselves rather than having to have their gender experience validated by someone they barely know would obviously be incredible for everyone in the community.

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**Molly:** It’s a rough time to be trans in the United Kingdom, but Sophie and Diana have both found reasons to hope.

**Sophie:** I wanted to add that there has been a lot of love—a hell of a lot of love—online and where I live, which I’ve seen firsthand as well as everything else that’s been discussed. This year, Trans Pride in Brighton was the biggest there’s been so far, year on year, and it was trending all day on Twitter as well, which is amazing. It was such a beautiful day full of so much love and so much acceptance, and there was not a trans-exclusionary protester in sight, which is what we were concerned about beforehand, so it was a fantastic day.

**Diana:** We in the LGBTQ+ community have fought many battles against authority, legalization, equal age of consent, Section 28, and marriage. But this is not a battle against authority. It is the worst of all battles. A civil war, pitting woman against woman and sister against sister. As in all civil wars, this will take a long time to heal and the arguments will echo on. But I will not end on a down note. We will persevere. These women will not be silenced or marginalized. The pain we suffer now will mean that those in future will not have to go through this. This is a battle worth fighting. We will not be defeated.

**Sophie:** We’ve had the LGBT community really rally around us. There’s been the hashtag, L with the T, and at demos there’s been an LGBT presence with one of my favorite banners at the one in Brighton recently saying, “When trans rights are under attack, we’ve got your back,” with a big rainbow LGBT fist in the air. So, we really hope that respect and equality is gonna win the day and results of the consultation.

**Molly:** Thank you so much to Sophie and Diana for generously sharing their experiences and insights with us. Thank you all for listening. This was my first audio piece in this format and I threw it together in about six seconds, so recognize that it’s not the most artful piece in the world, but hopefully it gets the job done.

This is a really important time to support trans folks in whatever way you can. If you’re a cis ally looking to share financial support, you can donate locally to LGBTQ focus groups in your area. You can donate to individual fundraisers and GoFundMe’s for trans-related services which you can find all over the internet. And you can donate to national organizations. In the United States, those include Trans Lifeline, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, the Trans Justice Giving Project, GLSEN, the Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund, and the National Center on Transgender Equality. And of course, if you want to support media made by trans people for trans people, please pitch in a few dollars to Gender Reveal.

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**Molly**: Thank you so much again for listening to Gender Reveal. If you’d like to make a donation, you can do so at patreon.com/gender, paypal.me/MollyWoodstock, or on the Cash App, that’s $MollyWoodstock.

While we’re here I wanted to make a couple of reminders. First, I am available for trans-inclusivity trainings and other assorted workshops and lectures. So, if you’d like to pay me to tell cis people how to be better, I’d love to do that. You can learn more about that at our website genderpodcast.com, where you can also find transcripts of the majority of our episodes.

You can also at genderpodcast/grant apply for the first ever Gender Reveal grant. More details are on the website. Applications close on November 1, 2018. So, get those applications in when you can.

If you have questions, comments, feedback, just want to say hi, you can do that on our website as well. We’re also on Twitter and Instagram at G-E-N-D-E-R-E-V-E-A-L.

This episode was produced and edited by me, Molly Woodstock. Special thanks to Jonathan of Breaking the Boy Code podcast for transcribing Sophie’s interview for us and thank you again to Diana and Sophie for being on the show. Our logo is by the talented Michelle Leigh. Our theme song is by the legendary Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week is by Blue Dot Sessions.

I’m hoping to be back soon with a US-related trans nightmare update, but honestly everything happens so much, I’m not sure what will happen. So, just keep in touch, hang in there, and I’ll be back real soon with more feelings about gender. I love you so much.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]