**Molly:** Hey, this Molly, just popping in before the show starts to give you many content warnings. Normally, we put the content warnings in the show notes, but there’s many of them and I wanted to make sure you didn’t miss them. In this episode, we talk about assault, we talk about racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny. Starting around minute 41 or 42 to minute like, 48 or 49 we talk about suicidality and depression, a lot.

This is, I think, my favorite episode of Gender Reveal I think that I’ve ever made, mostly because Vivek is incredible. And so typically I have a strict cap on how long I let these episodes go, and on this one I blew past it by like 10 minutes because I just really wanted you to get to hear the whole conversation. And so it’s a long one. If you need to take a break and come back that’s fine. If you need to skip a section, that’s fine. If you are struggling with suicidality I would urge you to call [1-800-suicide](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/), the [Trans Lifeline](https://www.translifeline.org/), or [The Trevor Project](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/) or a friend and if you can’t call them, maybe text them. If you can’t text them, just hold on. I’m so happy you’re here, I love you so much. I hope you enjoy the episode.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

**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.

[*Gender Reveal* theme song ends]

**Molly:** Hello and welcome to the penultimate episode of Gender Reveal Season 2. This week I am *finally* sharing my interview with Vivek Shraya which I recorded months ago but have been saving as a special treat to all of us for making it through this season. Vivek is an author, a musician, a filmmaker, a professor. She has a new book that just came out. She does so much incredible work and I’m really, really in awe of her. I’m really excited to share our talk, but that’s all coming up later.

First let me tell you that I have been working on so many Gender Reveal projects, like really way *way* too many Gender Reveal projects and I will announce more of them next week. But this week I wanted to tell you that I finally made an Instagram account for the podcast, like our Twitter the handle is [Gendereveal](https://www.instagram.com/gendereveal/), that’s gender reveal with one ‘R.’ The question is will I actually use this account? And the answer is maybe, let’s all find out together. If nothing else you can use it to tag the podcast when you’re telling all your friends to listen to the podcast. *Youy!* My other announcement for this week is that at the last possible second I figured out a way to go to Third Coast next month. Third Coast is the audio storytelling conference that all of the very successful and relatively famous podcast people go to and some extremely not famous podcast people like me. So I’ll be there with stickers and business cards and a lot of feelings about gender inclusivity. And if any of *you* dear listeners are also going to be there with your podcast or if you just live in Chicago and want to hang out, please let me know. I’d love to meet you.

And speaking of you: you are the sponsor of this week’s episode. Thank you so much to all of our wonderful Patreon donors. I wouldn't be able to go to Third Coast without your donations. I wouldn't be able to do my six other secret projects without your donations and I'm really really excited to tell you more about those projects soon but in the meantime if you're able to chip in a dollar or two a month to support the show please do that at [patreon.com/gender.](http://patreon.com/gender.) I really appreciate it. If you donate $5 or more, of course I will send you stickers and in the meantime it's time for This Week In Gender.

[This Week in Gender intro music]

**Molly:** This week in gender, passports! Should transgender Americans be able to get passports with their genders on it? A few days ago the US State Department removed a page from its website called Gender Designation Change. That site had previously explained that if trans adults or kids have received quote: “appropriate clinical treatment” they could change the gender marker on their passport. According to the site, appropriate clinical treatment is totally up to your physician, so all you needed was a doctor’s note that says “hey, this person is getting appropriate clinical treatment.” There are no rules about what that treatment had to look like. I will point out that this site made it explicitly clear that trans folks still had to chose male or female because life is a nightmare so this wasn’t helpful for nonbinary folks but it did allow binary trans kids and adults to get updated passports without requiring any specific surgeries or hormones or any particular treatment. They just needed to have a physician who was on board.

Okay, so last Wednesday the State Department takes that website down and replaces it with one called Sex Designation Change which replaces the phrase gender transition with sex change (which, if you don’t know, is a very outdated and sort of stigmatized term at this point) and removes links to several medical associations that support transition-related care. They also added a paragraph on the site that says quote: “a US passport does not list the bearer’s gender identity. The sex marker on your US passport is based on your evidence of US citizenship and identity, including a medical certification of sex change. The sex marker may not match the gender in which you identify.” Unquote.

So do be clear passports don’t indicate your gender identity they just indicate, like, your genitals? Or chromosomes?...What is the purpose of having that on an identity document? There’s literally just no reason why you would need that for international travel. But anyway, this happens. A bunch of folks wrote stories about it, and literally one day later the State Department walks it all back and makes a new new website called Change of Sex Marker that removes all of the weird new transphobic updates and is in fact virtually identical to that of the old gender designation change website except for that is says sex instead of gender but everything else is the same. And there are still no strict rules about what your transition needs to look like. You still just need a doctor’s note. So, all’s well that ends well. Right? Well, maybe, but also maybe not. Because we live in hell. And trans folks are reporting heightened scrutiny from the state department, even before all this happened, multiple trans women have reported they’ve had trouble renewing their passports under the Trump administration. One woman has had a female gender marker since 1998 and yet was still recently denied the right to renew her passport because she’s trans. So, as I said in the beginning, can trans folks get new passports? Maybe, who knows? Maybe they’ve launched a new new new website in the time since I recorded this. Keep your eye on the state department I guess. This has been, “This Week In Gender.”

[This Week in Gender outro music]

[transition music starts]

**Molly:** Vivek Shrayou is an artist whose body of work includes several albums, films, and books. Her book [*I’m Afraid of Men*](https://www.penguin.com.au/books/im-afraid-of-men-9780735235939) was published last month by Penguin Random House. Vivek is one half of the music duo to Too Attached and the founder of the publishing in print VS Books. She is currently a director on the board of the Tegan and Sara Foundation and an assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Calgary. She has received too many awards to fit into this bio, so just trust me she’s won many, many awards.

[transition music ends]

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

**Vivek:** I identify as trans and I use she and her pronouns.

**Molly:** Just curious, do you identify as binary trans, do you identify as a woman, do you identify as nonbinary, as of those things?

**Vivek:** Ooh (laughs). Yeah so I would say nonbinary trans. It’s funny when I came out as trans, the way I came out was that I was using she and her pronouns and then the word woman was like attributed to me and I feel like such a slow trans. Like I came out when I was 35. Like I just got my first bra this year, you know like, it was two years later. So, you know one of the things I really struggled with was just sort of like owning the word women and like, you know I wrote a whole album about it and I guess where I came to with it is that I really like the idea of woman being a term that can be adopted by nonbinary people. Because I think the reality is that language is really limiting, and I was sort of in this predicament of like, do I correct every person who uses woman to describe me and there are, there are times when saying trans woman has a certain connotation and a certain power. I mean obviously gender and sexuality are two different things but um, there are certain contexts where I will use the word gay as opposed to queer or vice versa or some contexts where I’ll use bisexual instead of queer so I don’t know, you know, I mean to answer what you asked was a very seemingly simple question um, the thing I like about trans is that it’s this umbrella term in the way that queer is sort of an umbrella term. Um. But within the umbrella sure like nonbinary I like and woman that I struggle with but I also have owned so I’m going to check off all your boxes, how bout that?

**Molly:** That sounds great, I love that. Alright it’s hard to know where to start because you do so many things but you wrote a book called [*God Loves Hair*](https://vivekshraya.com/projects/books/god-loves-hair/) and in the book you talk about how stoked you were to go to the Hindi Center on Sundays and sing and pray and it also sounds like the way Hindu gods express their gender made you feel really seen and like that’s just so different than the experience of so many queers that grew up going to worship on Sundays. So I just was wondering if you could talk bit of your experience with faith and queerness and gender and all of that.

**Vivek:** Yeah I mean for me um a lot of my art does connect to Hinduism and largely because I do want to push against this idea that like queerness and faith like can’t coexist for me. I was really fortunate that I grew up within a culture and a religion where masculinity wasn’t the sort of masculinity that was being pushed onto me in school and in sort of like a western context. So, you know, Indian gods have like really long hair and they are decorated in flowers and they wear jewelry and all their friends are women and, you know I was like “hey that’s kinda like me.” You know? I feel like in some ways Hindu gods, especially male gods were sort of like my earliest queer role models in the absence of queer role models and certainly in that religious space as well. Me, being a dancing, prancing boy didn’t actually make me abnormal in the way that it did at school. It made me special and almost holy so, yeah I think the older I get the more that I realize that I grew up with a very specific kind of Hinduism and so I’m careful to like, [not] over romanticize Hinduism because there’s certainly like fundamentalist Hindus and, you know Hinduism has does its share of um damage and violence in the world. It’s by no means an idealized religion but the version of it that I grew up with was in a lot of ways exactly what I needed as sort of like a gender non-conforming, you know, kid in Edmonton, which for, you know, your listeners basically is like the Texas of Canada in the 80s.

**Molly:** Oh no (laughs)! Well great, I’m so glad that you had that. That’s awesome.

**Vivek:** Yeah, I’m really grateful to have it too honestly like it’s funny even though I would say I’m an atheist now, you know, looking back I feel like, you know, having Hinduism and having that religious base was largely what kept me alive.

**Molly:** Yeah. So you made a couple of really amazing albums in the last couple years and they feel like pretty different in terms of tone and theme and instrumentation and uh I want to start with *Angry* which you made with your brother. You two perform together as a band called Too Attached. And I love this album and it’s so powerful and it makes so many strong points and I feel like you get to really voice a lot of rage and frustration that a lot of marginalized folks experience so I was wondering if you could just talk about some of the themes that tie the record together for someone who hasn’t listened to it yet.

**Vivek:** I mean basically what happened is this is our second album and this time around I really wanted the album to have more of a narrative. You know the first time around my brother would sample like old Indian vinyl records and then he would send me like beats and you know, trying to sing over someone else’s like, melody is like strange. It’s like a very new process for me. So I kinda just sang like gibberish over it. I think that there are definitely like messages on their first album *Bronze*.

And you know, arguments can be made for cohesion, but this album I like, very deliberately wanted it to be more of a story and more linear in that way. And so we didn’t really know what the narrative was. But halfway into the song writing process it seemed quite clear that a big part of the message was rage, and I ended up writing a song called “Angry. And you know, this album was largely written in like a post-Trump kind of climate. And you know, one of the songs we wrote was called “Bare Minimum” which is sort of like pushing against like liberal wokeism. You know, where people you know, read a book or sign a petition and get to feel really good about themselves but, you know, how that’s like doing the bare minimum. Or like, you know, one of the songs “Veins” pushes against biphobia which is something I’ve experienced a lot in my life. And another track on the album is called “Love is Not Love” which, you know, pushes against, you know, our LGBTQ saying of the moment or flavor of the moment saying Love is Love. Which, you know, I have resented and had complicated feelings about for a very long time. In the ways that you know, so much of our movement gets reduced to you know, fighting for our right to love as opposed to our right to who we desire and how we desire. And as a trans person, not only does love is love invalidate desire. I think it does invalidate gender and not even for trans people. I think so much of the violence and discrimination and harassment that LGBTQ people face often has less to do with who we love and more to do with our gender presentation.

And so this album just became sort of a place to vent and put forward some of these ideas in pop music which you know, still feels very new for me. Like, I’ve been, you know, political on other mediums whether its poetry and prose but in music it did feel you know, quite fresh and kind of exciting. And you know, a big part of what inspired this was that we had the opportunity to open for Tegan and Sara back in 2016 and um during that time we closed our set with one of my own songs like a solo song called “Girls it’s Your Time” which I released as part of my coming out as trans announcement online. And you know, at the end of every show we did, you know, we were always sort of like lovingly bombarded with you know, trans and gender non-conforming audience members who are like “thank you so much for being visible” and you know, “thank you for saying the things you’re saying.” And you know, some of these young audience members were like “this is the first time I’ve seen a trans person openly on stage.”

And it just made me think a lot about music as a medium that is really about embracing the universal and toting the universal but universal often means straight, white, cis, you know? So pop songs are not generally written or addressed specificly towards trans listeners, specifically to POC listeners, specifically to queer listeners. And I really wanted this album to speak to listeners who don't get spoken to directly in pop music. You know, like I think we can all sort of imagine that Maroon 5's album *Songs About Jane* is maybe about us in some ways. But let's face it Jane probably does not look like me probably does not (laughs) sound like me. Anyway to end my rant um *Angry* just felt like a really important opportunity to, yeah just touch upon a number of things that we're angry about and also just speak directly to people who are often not spoken to directly in pop music.

**Molly:** Yeah I don't think I consciously realized that but like thinking about “Bare Minimum” which you mentioned. Like, I'm obviously paraphrasing, but there's a part where you're basically like I can do more but why would I do that when I'm already doing one thing. And it just resonated with me so hard.

**Vivek:** Well exactly, like that song is like hilarious because you know, we've had a lot of people say that it's one of the catchy songs on the album and I just love the idea of people listening to this song who are just like “I have a black friend, I have a gay friend.”

**Molly:** Yeah (laughs).

**Vivek:** And you know, these are things that people say all the time as a way to sort of equate themselves with being good people, um, or good citizens. And you know, in some ways it’s also a callout to us. Right? Like I think my brother and I can also be doing a lot more than we are. And so, yeah. I think that again, I think that pop music has such an incredible capacity to ignite change and obviously I'm very like new to this. This is not a radical and new thought by any means. People have been using pop music as a political tool way before I was born. But for me I think, I mean what's interesting is so often I felt I had to hide who I was in pop music if I wanted to be successful. And so I think that's part of why like now that I don't, like now that I'm in my 30s and I kind of am like whatever I'm gonna do whatever the fuck I want. I'm just like I have so much to say and so much to sing about.

**Molly:** No I'm so glad you're not hiding because like, I almost exclusively listen to women and queer and trans people now. Because I am looking for people who are speaking towards experiences that I may have had, instead of just like, sort of generic like, I don't know. It's really nice instead of *Songs About Jane*.

I do want to go back and touch on one more thing from “Love is Not Love.” It also reminds me of the phrase that was going on in America that was Love Trumps Hate and like how angry I would be when I saw that because I'm like it clearly didn't. (Laughs) Like, that's not happened. But uh you mentioned about how you feel like a lot of times like, the hate that LGBTQ people folks experience is coming more from gender presentation than from sexual orientation. I was wondering if you could talk about that a little bit more.

**Vivek:** I mean yeah of course. I think that like, for me uh I was called fag ever since I was in you know grade seven. And that wasn't because I was like smooching hot boys I mean I wish that's what was happening. But it was largely because of my gender presentation. I was not acting like what a typical boy is supposed to act like. So you know, fag was really more of a word to police my gender as opposed to policing my sexual orientation or my sexual desire. And again, I think that this is really common for LGBTQ people where our gender is the thing that makes people more uncomfortable as opposed to you know, having desire or attraction to the same sex. And so yeah I think that framing things around love I understand why it's done I understand why love is mobilized. But I think we can also now see the danger in framing our rights around love. Because I mean certainly here in Canada we've had gay marriage for a very long time which was largely framed like, won through fighting for love and we have so many more issues um in our communities that are just sort of like lingering and unresolved because a lot of people think #lovewon. And you know, it's really not that simple. And I think there's a lot of us whose rights and experiences are sort of like pushed aside because #lovewon.

So yeah that's really what that song is trying to do like I also think like because part of several marginalized communities I think so often we accept the bare minimum right? We are like “oh, you mean you're going to give us this one little thing? Great!” You know, like a lot of us see like a rainbow flag at a Starbucks or our straight friends posting love is love and we feel a certain kind of like, gratitude. Yes, thank you. And I get where that comes from. That comes from scarcity that comes from a place of not being seen, of not being heard, of not being loved. But I think there's such a cost to that because you know, we accept things like rainbow flags and love is love but then trans communities still can't use the washroom. So like, there's a cost to that kind of acceptance of us and from us. And so for me “Love is Not Love” is in a lot of ways is actually addressed to the LTGBQ people. It's for us to be like listen we can do so much better like, than for like asking for love is love. You know like, that shouldn't be the bar like that's not what we should be fighting for here. So you know, I think for me one of the things I've been really excited about playing *Angry* live is really addressing these conversations less to the cis, you know white, straight people in the crowd but really engaging with the POC, queer, trans people in the crowd and framing these songs as being for them you know. Or being for us I should say, and wanting us to demand for more.

**Molly:** You also recently made a record called *Part Time Woman*, which you made The Queer Songbook orchestra and just as a tangent like what is that? That sounds great.

**Vivek:** (laughs) Yeah so, god I have such long answers for everything. But basically the Queer Songbook Orchestra is I believe 12 piece or 11 piece orchestra in Toronto, that takes songs with a queer history or sensibility so not just sort of songs by Katie Lang which are awesome but also let’s say Christina Aguilera “Beautiful.” And then sort of reimagine it and rearrange it with an orchestra. So they had been I'd been sort of watching them in the Toronto community for about 4 years and when I decided to return to making music I taken about a six year break-ish from solo music; and when I decided I wanted to return, I approached them with sort of like doing like a joint project together

**Molly:** Can you talk about the title track for *Part Time Woman*?

**Vivek:** Part of it is going back to the conversation we started with. Where you know, I'd really struggled with this word woman. And part of it really comes from you know, the limitations of language. What does it mean to embody a number of different um, genders I suppose. But also, the truth is a lot of it comes from my own internalized transphobia right. You know when that whole Chimamanda you know conversation about trans women not really being women was emerging. The truth is a lot of what she was saying there was a small part of me that was like yes this is what I have thought and this is exactly why I have felt like I don't deserve to call myself woman. I think also as someone who has come out in what feels like a little bit late in life I really like the word girl because I do feel like I'm young like I'm in my infancy like I'm old as a human but as a girl I feel very young. And woman is like I don't feel like I'm grown into I don't feel grown yet.

So anyways I think that like basically like again so *Part Time Woman* was written before *Angry* and again I think in my six year hiatus from music one of the things I really wanted to bring back to music was what I've learned from writing books which was storytelling. And again I was like what's the story of this project. And when I wrote “Part Time Woman” it felt like where I wanted to situate the narrative. Because again I'm very fortunate in that my coming out largely has been met by a sort of acceptance. You know, people for the most part use my pronouns but it's sort of like the everyday challenges of femininity that have like weighed on me which I think is conveyed throughout the album. Anyways to go back to your original question “Part Time Woman” just sort of emerged from my feelings of not feeling entitled to womanhood. And also because I don't present like a cis woman consistently or ever. Uh. I am often read as male still and that often makes me feel, especially when I'm not wearing makeup, but even when I'm wearing makeup so again that also makes me feel like I'm not a complete woman. And I really wanted to challenge what is our idea of complete woman. What does that even mean? And I thought, like what is a full time woman, you know? And I thought by naming the project and the song “Part Time Woman” it would sort of you know, get at those questions.

**Molly:** Yeah I mean when I was listening to it I thought a lot like about how trans women's gender presentation is policed at such higher levels than cis women's gender presentation.

**Vivek:** Exactly. Exactly, like trans woman have to display a hyper femininity and it's constantly a juggling act. Like I'm like okay I'm meeting this new person for coffee and you know a lot of cis women don't like wearing makeup right? Like I remember having that conversation with this cis woman where I came out just being like fuck I really don't want to put on makeup all the time and she's like I don't always put on makeup and I don't like it. And I like oh right like it's not… but if I were to go meet said new friend not wearing makeup then it immediately sets the tone for how I'm read and so anyway blah blah blah.

**Molly:** Yeah. So also on the album you have a song called “I’m Afraid of Men” in which you ask are you hitting on me or are you going to hit me? And you also in general really feel safe at home and maybe on stage but how you live in like fairly constant concern for your safety. And I was wondering if that's something that's happened since you transitioned or that you've always felt?

**Vivek:** Um I think that the degree in which that I worry about my safety definitely has like vacillated and changed over the years. But I mean, this is the truth I've always been like afraid of men. Certainly you know, in my teenage years, in my 20’s I submitted to masculinity and like adopted a hypermasculinity. I was you know, eating two chicken breast a day and you know, sporting a beard. And even during that time I was still worried about my safety because no matter how much you might appear a certain way on the outside it doesn't necessarily negate the experiences that you had, the histories that you have, and who you like you know ultimately the tender person I have felt am on the inside. But I will say for like a good chunk of my twenties I didn't worry about my safety as much because of the way that my gender presentation was so hypermasculine. But certainly now coming back out as trans, or coming out as trans, it's funny “coming back out” that's actually quite accurate. Umm. Yeah coming out my fear has definitely gone back up yeah.

**Molly:** You also have a book coming out called *I'm Afraid of Men* so can you tell us about it?

**Vivek:** Mhm yeah I mean essentially it's a lot about what we're talking about here. The title stemmed from that song on *Part Time Woman*. And it's sort of a single essay exploring my relationship with masculinity as someone who was you know, harmed by masculinity, pushed into masculinity, submitted to masculinity, and then pushed against masculinity, and now continue to fear masculinity. So you know, as a trans girls I feel like I have engaged with masculinity in so many different ways and so many different ways and so many different angles and so that’s sort of my experience from these perspectives. And then also my perspective on how masculinity and our relationship to masculinity might be reimagined.

**Molly:** You wrote this really incredible collection of poetry called *Even This Page is White* and I have many feelings about it. But one thing that really struck me is how you handled the topic of indigenous folks. It seems like you thought really hard about it about the fact that even though you’re experiencing your racial oppression on this land you still have to grapple that you’re living on colonized land that was taken from other oppressed people; and you don’t want to appropriate their struggle but you also don’t want to erase their struggle. And it’s really tricky and as a person who is a mixed indigenous person like I really appreciated you grappling with it in a public way and I was wondering if you could talk about the ways that you addressed it in the book?

**Vivek:** Yeah I mean thank you for that sort of generous reading I really appreciate that. I mean it’s funny when I started writing *Even This Page is White* like, I knew I wanted to delve into white supremacy. I knew I wanted to talk about especially systemic racism because I think that so often um you know, white people think that racism is like being called packy and that’s sort of it. So I think consequently like white people don’t think they’re racist. So you know, for me obviously as someone who has experienced systemic racism largely as an artist but in so many other ways I was like how do I convey that? Simultaneously though, the two things that were sort of like weighing on me one was is this book for white people? I don’t wanna write a book for just white people. You know, like that to me…and so I’m like who is this book for? Do you know, indigenous, black, and brown people need another book (laughs) about racism? You know, like honestly, do we? Like I don’t know. And you know, the other issue was that like I felt that I could be mad at white people enough to fill a book. But again, it felt really one sided and I started thinking a lot about my relationship to white supremacy in like small and innocuous way. So like you know, one of the things that I grapple a lot with in the book is the fact that I have a white boyfriend, you know? And like what does that mean? And you know how much does my sort of like growth and maturity and confidence ultimately tie into the fact like I say in one of the poems like in my bed there’s a white man. You know, like I’m constantly receiving validation from a white man, how much does that impact who I am. You know, and again there’s no answers to these questions. And that’s one of the things that I like about poetry is that it allowed me especially in this context to ask really hard and vital questions but not necessarily be forced to have answers in the ways that I think prose sort of requires. And in thinking about my own relationship to white supremacy I was sort of forced to encounter you know, my sort of relationship to anti-black racism. Which again was a very new concept to me even though I had experienced shadeism in my communities. And I didn’t really make the connection between shadeism like, so the privilege of lighter skin over darker brown skin. I never made that tie to anti-black racism.

And also thinking a lot about anti-indigeneity and colonization. And you know, one of the poems in the book is called *Indian*. And you know, what does it mean for me to have been raised under that identity while simultaneously you know, overhearing my parents condemning indigenous people who are also often called Indians in our city? You know, here we are, here my parents are as immigrants you know, who fundamentally understand what it means to be you know, oppressed and marginalized. And yet they have no problem you know, marginalizing people. And not only other people but people whose lands we’re essentially on. And so I really wanted to draw more attention to that and also just the other thing that felt really important too, was thinking I’m a very sort of like action-based person. And I don’t know what it’s like in Portland, I mean I suspect in Portland it is this way but certainly in Canada now, land acknowledgements have become just like vey second nature here. Which is like, amazing to watch but also a little bit disturbing because of how performative they’ve become. Like I’ll never forget you know being in Victoria in a room of 200 people and the land acknowledgment being read and like 200 people clapping. Which I also refer to in this poem Indian. And I’m like, what are we clapping for here? Are we clapping that we stole this land and we got away with it? Like I just you know, like and again like it’s tricky because like I’m not indigenous so again one of the things I really wrestled with was like am I in a position as a non-Indigenous person of color to be critiquing land acknowledgments or the performativity of land acknowledgements. Um. I don’t know right so. You know, so like again for me poetry felt like a way to ask questions like that, and grapple with questions like that because again I don’t know I’m the person to answer those questions but I do think that I had a responsibility to be asking those questions certainly of myself.

**Molly:** Yeah. We don’t have a lot of land acknowledgments here unless it’s in like really radical circles. But you had a creative solution because you also donated a certain amount of profits from your book to an indigenous organization, right?

**Vivek:** Yeah and a big part of that was thinking about land acknowledgements and how you know, and again I’m not indigenous but I was just sort of like if it was me I would be like ‘okay thanks for your land acknowledgement but like are you gonna give us some money from this event no longer equal?’ And again maybe that’s a very capitalist perspective but the reality is that we do live in a capitalist system. And you know, I just feel like 200 people in a room can do a lot better than just clap for like a 20 second land acknowledgement.

And so from that perspective, I was sort of like well here I am as a non indigenous person of color getting to write a published book about racism in Canada and white supremacy in Canada. And this book will hopefully sell, I mean it’s poetry so there’s no high expectation (laughs). But you know, how am I also benefiting from a system that is able to digest conversations about racism and white supremacy from a brown person as like from a south Asian person as opposed to an indigenous person? And so for me donating half of the proceeds felt like a way to you know, hold myself accountable. Like again I can write a poem that criticizes the performativity of land acknowledgements, I can you know, question my own relationship to indigeneity and my parents relationship to indignity. But I’m still creating a product that’s you know, selling copies and so it just felt important to me as a small, very very small gesture to give back to an indigenous organization that’s like doing incredible work for especially LGTB indigenous populations and like some much of that work doesn’t really get a lot of like funding or notice so yeah.

**Molly:** When you mentioned your parents being Indian but being sort of phobic of the other type of Indian that indigenous folks, I think there’s a false belief that oppressed folks don’t oppress other oppressed folks. Because if you’re experiencing marginalization then you wouldn’t put in on other people. But in reality we do do that all the time, and there’s a lot of racism in the LGBTQ community. And you’ve spoken about how you’ve actually experienced biphobia within the LGBTQ community so I was just wondering if you wanted to talk about either of those two topics?

**Vivek:** Yeah I mean I’ll never forget going to a gay bar in Edmonton. The first time I went I was 19 years old and you know, like I said, Texas of Canada. So here’s the context this is in let’s say the mid to late 90’s. And you know, I have been called fag or you know, gay for a good six or seven years. In my mind I imagine this gay bar is going to be like a utopic brotherhood. I’m going to meet fellow gay men, we’re all going to hold hands, we’re going to weep. People are going to say Vivek “you’re home, you’re safe.” Like I don’t know. This is like you know this is what I’m imagining on some level. And I walk in and one of the first comments I hear is fucking drag queens need to get their own fucking bar. And over time my experience in the gay bar is also one in which I realize being brown makes me almost like bleed into the background. Where like I’m only either like noted for being exotic or not noted at all. And so, this was sort of like I think my first, I think, major experience of like well I mean, to summarize my first experience of going to a gay bar not only quickly illustrated femmephobia/misogny/transphobia in terms of the comment about drag queens. But also soon revealed a certain racism as well um, within queer community.

And I feel like this is something I was inducted into well basically as soon as I walked into the gay bar. But that I’ve had to encounter over and over and over again in queer community. And it is this unfortunate reality that just because you’re marginalized doesn’t mean you don’t marginalize other people. And in fact, in some ways you know in *I’m Afraid of Men* the book you know, one of the groups of people I feel like I’m the hardest on is like gay white men. And because I think that one of the things that I’m realizing now is that being oppressed almost gives people more of a license to be racist or transphobic or misogynist because you think you’ve experienced oppression so you know what hardship is and so you’re somehow entitled to whatever you believe. Because you have now, you’ve gone through the ringer and you know whatever it is. So yeah, a lot of my work does sort of address what I would call internalized conversations around oppression or even lateral violence. You know whether it’s like a song like “Brown Girls” on *Part Time Woman* thats really came from a place of noticing that often the people who struggled the most with my pronouns or refused to use my pronouns were other brown cis women to you know *She of the Mountains* which is like my novel that was largely written to challenge the biphobia that I experienced in queer community. And also “Veins” the song on the Too Attached album which is also about you know biphobia experienced in queer community. So I think it’s something that I think a lot about because I think at the core there’s a part of me that’s still that 19 year old in Edmonton that is still sort of imagining that people that are marginalized are going to have a certain kind of compassion or understanding and having to relearn over and over again that that’s not the case at all.

**Molly:** Yeah, absolutely. Okay. (laughs) I have a big question for you. Before this, um, I want to put a trigger on this for suicidality but you have a short film called *I Want to Kill Myself* which I haven’t actually watched for *my* safety reasons but I do know that you’ve talked about the difference between folks who have singular depression episodes or like a short term suicidal ideation versus folks who are chronically depressed and chronically suicidal at least in a passive way if not in an active way. Um. And that part of the problem is that because we can’t really fix it through internal work because the world wants you to die right? Like it’s all these external messages about the value of trans folks or brown folks or whatever. And that’s just something that really I really *really* relate to feeling like I can’t go to therapy enough to get all of the depression out of me because it’s not really all coming from inside of me. A lot of it is coming from messages outside about like, my worth and what people like me should do. And I was just wondering if you could speak to that? I don’t know if you have any advice for people who are just trying to survive that whole thing. Or if you just want to talk about that experience but I just sort of wanted you to just thank you for talking about that because that’s not something that I hear people talk about a lot.

**Vivek:** Oh thanks so much. I mean again like, I was on a panel in Toronto and I was talking about my experience about something and just like referring to the fact that I was having a hard time and a fellow panelist interrupted and was like “really? You were having a hard time?” and I was like “Yes” and she was just like “Oh that’s just really shocking to me because you know, I see you out here doing all the things and you’re constantly out there making art and getting involved.” And you know, I’ve heard comments like that before. And you know, it’s funny in some ways coming out as someone who struggles with mental health has been like the hardest coming out because, and you know I’ve come out as so many fucking things in one lifetime, but as we know there’s such a stigma around you know, depression and mental health and certainly suicide, And there’s also not you know, you come out as trans and like I mean obviously it’s not all rainbows but there’s certainly like a community so to speak. Even if the community is flawed there’s like an infrastructure or like an illusion of community.

Coming out as someone who struggles with depression nobody waves a flag at you. You know? And in fact, I think people do change how they see you. My biggest fear around making that film was like are people going to feel sorry for me. Um, and that wasn’t really the point of making that film. Or like you know I mentioned it to my brother and his first response I told him about the title and he’s like “well that’s sure gonna get attention.” And again, like that’s not the point. Like the point of the film was not to attention seek. Which is interesting because that’s the narrative around people who um, want to kill themselves, is that they’re trying to get attention.

But I think because of all of these things it felt really important to make this piece because I do feel like I was living with a kind of secret. Because people sort of know me as like high functioning, high producing individual. And so much of that is tied to anxiety, so much of that is tied to feelings of urgency around my life. So much of my productivity is tied to the fact that I you know, had always thought I was going to die when I was a teenager. Because of the kind of homophobia and gender phobia I faced. And so I’m constantly living minute to minute with like kind of an, irrational perhaps, fear that life could end at any moment. And so yeah. For me it just felt really important to just push against some of the, I think, assumptions about myself. But also the assumptions that people make about suicide. That you know, it’s something that you’re doing for attention. Or that you know, it happens only once when you think about it in your and that it’s something like you grow out of. It’s a teenage thing.

You know, one of the big things that I really wanted to challenge with the film too, is that people who kill themselves or who think about suicide or who struggle with like depression are lonely, you know. So for me my like parents are in the film, my brother is in the film, two of like my ex and my partner are in the film. And that felt really important because I wanted to show that like, a lot of us do have love in our lives.

You know so often when someone kills themselves it’s like you know if only we had listened more, if only we had loved that person more, or we should have shown them more love. And truthfully in my experience I couldn’t possibly be loved any more than I am. But that doesn’t necessarily make the world easier to live in, and that doesn’t make the world stop wanting me to die. So you know, there was just like a number of things that I felt it was important to push against. In making the film *I Want to Kill Myself* and the way that it sort of structured. I mean you haven’t seen, it but it’s basically structured where it’s almost like a letter where it’s like I wanted to kill myself when I was 11, and then I sort of go through it. And then I wanted to kill myself when I was 13, and I sort of go through it. And because I really do want to talk about the fact that like, I think in our culture I think there’s such a pressure to be fixed or to get better. And a lot of us it’s not about getting better it’s just learning different kind of coping mechanisms. You know, for me the reality is like it’s so funny when people like I literally walk in that film I literally walk almost like age 11, 13, 15, 17, all the way to 35. And you know, a lot of people watched it and one of the most common responses was like I hope that you feel better now. Or I hope that you feel like you’ve conquered this now. And I was like ‘wow you really missed the point.’ Like, the point of the film isn’t like ‘here let me tell you my story now I’m better, I’m cured, I’m healed.’ It’s like ‘I will probably think about suicide for the rest of my life.’ And for me it’s been talking about suicide openly that has been a coping mechanism.

**Molly:** Yeah, so in *Even This Page is White* you quote your friend Alok saying “I do not believe we will win. I do not believe hope should be a prerequisite for trying anyway.”

**Vivek:** Mmm hmmm.

**Molly:** I heard Ta-Nehisi Coates say a similar thing and it felt really important to me. I felt like it really reframed a lot of how I felt about the work that I’m doing. Do you think we’ll win and what does it mean to keep trying when you don’t think that we’ll win?

**Vivek:** I mean I think part of it is like reframing what our ideas of winning is. I mean do I believe that you know, in my lifetime or at any point, misogyny and racism will end for instance? Or white supremacy will be overthrown? Um, no. But I do think that there are small wins to be grateful for and small wins to celebrate nonetheless. And that there is value in the work. Because ultimately we’re here and I would rather spend whatever time I have left on this planet trying to fight for a better world even if I don’t ultimately think it’s gonna get that much better than doing nothing. (laughs)

So yeah, I don’t know. I used to work at a Toronto college and I used to do all the anti-homophobia anti-transphobia training for staff. And when it first started the climate was you know, not the most accepting. And six years into the job I remember seeing two queer men holding hands in the hallway. And I mean I certainly don’t want to take credit for that, but it was hard to imagine two men holding hands on campus six years prior. And to me, like those are the sort of small wins that I’m talking about. Where it’s like and I mean it’s funny because in some ways I feel like I’m contradicting what I said earlier about accepting small gestures. So I’m trying to figure out how to like, describe the difference I guess in an articulate way. But I think that for me, I think that there’s one thing to sort of like accept nominal gestures from people in power as opposed to appreciating small wins that have been sort of like earned within community. I think we should always be pushing people in power for more and for better. Um. But I also think that within community, recognizing that a space that might’ve been unsafe has now allowed for two men to hold hands is beautiful is also worth celebrating. So I think both things can be true at once.

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

**Vivek:** \*deep breath\*

**Molly:** Yeah that’s the response it pretty much always gets. (laughs)

**Vivek:** I would really love the future of gender to like, do away with like what’s masculine and what’s feminine and like I don’t even just mean attire but I mean bodies. I just think it would be so lovely. And that’s not to say that feminine expression should die. Like I feel you know, it’s been interesting being someone who is more nonbinary but choosing feminine pronouns. And so much of that is because I really believe that my femininity was taken from me. And so it’s felt important to reclaim it through feminine pronouns. So I don’t necessarily believe in like the eradication of feminine expression or even masculine expression. But I would love for those expression to not have to be identified as masculine or feminine.

And it’s tricky to say that because I do think that there’s power in naming and often the eradication of language creates a kind of blanket nothingness. So you know, diversity is a word that comes to mind where you know, here’s a word that has been sort of conjured as a way to not speak about racism and not to speak about homophobia. It’s just to talk about caring about diversity. And so I’m hesitant to be like ‘we need to do away with masculine and feminine labels’ because I would hate for the beauty of femininity to be lost somehow. But simultaneously, I feel like those words have often been used in oppressive ways as well. And, this is like obviously very personal, but I would love, I often imagine what my life would have been if I wasn’t assigned male or female at birth. If I wasn’t told certain things were feminine and so I shouldn’t do them you know?

[outro music begins]

**Molly:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time, please buy Vivek’s new book *I’m Afraid of Men* and don’t forget to check out her other books and music and films and all of the amazing stuff she does. As we mentioned at the top of the show, we are now on Instagram.com. so if you have any questions, comments, thoughts, feelings, you can find us there as well as on Twitter both handles are gendereveal. Also by email, same thing, that at gmail.com. There’s also an anonymous Google form. All of that is listed in the show notes. Also in the show notes are links to donate to the show. We accept PayPal, CashApp, Patreon, any other way you can figure out how to get money to us. I promise that you are going to love the announcements I have next weekend they absolutely wouldn’t have happened without your support so if you are able please throw in a couple bucks in to support nonbinary media.

This episode was edited by me, Molly Woodstock, and Liza Yeager.

Our logo is by the talented Michelle Leigh, and our theme song is by the legendary Breakmaster Cylinder.

Next week is the last episode of Gender Reveal season 2, so this is the last time that I get to say this for awhile, but we will be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[music ends]