[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

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

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

**Tuck:** Hey everyone. I hope you’re all hanging in there. I don’t even know what to say at this point. On Wednesday there was an attempted coup at the US Capitol amidst a global pandemic, and here I am making my lil podcast like everything is chill.

This week on the show, I’m hyped to share my conversation with Ari Robbins Greene. I had *so* much fun talking to Ari; you will probably hear me laugh more in this episode than in *all* of the 2020 episodes combined. We start by talking about Ari’s work with trans healthcare policy…

**Ari [voice clip]:** A lot of people want these surgeries not because they feel trapped in the wrong body, per se. They feel totally unsafe when they’re going to their apartments, when they’re walking in a parking lot...

**Tuck:** ...and then we move on to talking about raising kids in a gender inclusive way, and about giving birth as a transmasculine person while being filmed for a TLC reality television special.

**Ari [voice clip]:** I’m trans. And people are like, “What?” and I’m like, “I have a uterus.” They’re like, “Oh my god! I had no idea!” And I’m like, “I don’t care. Anyways, I’m *pregnant!*” And they’re like, “*What?!* How do you do that?!” And I was like, “*With sperm*.”

**Tuck:** But before we get to that, two quick things. One is that we have a bunch of new stuff in the merch shop this month, including Maia Kobabe’s trans pirate ship design and Meg’s *gorgeous* Trans Folx Are Sacred design. That’s all available through January 31st at bit.ly/gendermerch.

Secondly, I’m really *trying* to have better work-life balance this year, and that sometimes necessitates bringing other folx in to help me out. I would not have been able to make this episode without production help from Isaura Aceves and editing by Babette Thomas. They’re both *amazing* trans radio makers, and I would love to hire them again in the future. To help me to do that, please consider donating as little as $11/year at patreon.com/gender. You will get our weekly newsletter and some other fun stuff and it will help us out a lot.

And now, it’s time for This Week in Gender.

[Transition sound effect, with low metallic chimes and hi-hats plays briefly]

**Tuck:** A few days before the world’s most bumbling coup attempt, Nancy Pelosi was being decried among the right-wing for “banning gender terms like ‘mother, father, daughter, son’ in House Rules.”

If you just read the tweets and headlines about this, you might think that Pelosi banned every Congressperson from saying the word “dad” ever again. Vanesh Jesuza said that “the whole gendered vocabulary is essentially abolished.”

What actually happened was that—I’m going to quote from Snopes.com here—“Pelosi and House Rules Committee chairman James McGovern announced House Resolution 8, a set of measures intended to re-adopt the existing Rules for the incoming 117th Congress with some significant amendments.” One of these amendments *would* replace gendered terms with gender-neutral alternatives in the text of the Rules of the House of Representatives specifically.

So, it’s not that you’re going to get kicked out for saying “grandma” on the floor of the House. They’re just suggesting that in this one document, the Rules of the House, that they use gender-neutral language. So, for example, “chairman” would be changed to “chair”; “husband” or “wife” would be changed to “spouse”; “himself” or “herself” would be changed to “themself”; and “seamen” would be changed to “seafarers.”

The resolution would also establish an Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which it seems like they should have had...centuries...ago? It would also bar former House members from entering the House if they had been convicted of a crime connected to their election to, or service in, the House, and I don’t know who they’re subtweeting with that one, but I *am* interested.

Anyway, the resolution was passed along a party line vote last Monday, so...I guess, pour one out for the seamen.

This has been, This Week in Gender.

[Transition sound effect, with low metallic chimes and hi-hats plays briefly]

[Gender Reveal theme music excerpt fades in]

**Tuck:** Ari is a Seattle-based new dad of two. As a lawyer, Ari is committed to trans healthcare policy work, and supports efforts from the grass roots to the state level. In their spare time, they indulge in the trashiest of reality TV, powerlifting, and perfecting his breakfast spread.

[Gender Reveal theme music excerpt fades out]

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

**Ari:** I use they and them pronouns, and I also use he and him pronouns.

**Tuck:** Do you have any words you use to describe your gender?

**Ari:** I say that I am transmasculine.

**Tuck:** Cool. I am *not* going to dive in by asking you a bunch of questions about your TLC special—that’s for later—but I do want to clarify, because the TLC special is very, “You’re a pregnant man”; you describe yourself as living in the world as a man a lot. Is that a choice you made to make it simpler for the show or is that just a thing that they did where they made a mistake, or…? Tell me about that.

**Ari:** That’s a thing that they did to make it easier for *them*. [laughs] I do not identify as a man; I do not really see myself in that way at all. I have to, for my own personal reasons, live as a man in my professional life; it’s much safer for me and it’s much easier for me to do that, and that is really the only way that you could get it twisted. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah. So, as your professional life, you’re a lawyer, right?

**Ari:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** How much of your work is on trans healthcare policy? I know that you’ve worked on that quite a bit.

**Ari:** It’s sort of a side hustle or a hobby. I work for the state of Washington—

**Tuck:** Oh!

**Ari:** —so it’s extra square on top of being an attorney. I work in healthcare, but it’s not on trans healthcare policy. But I’ve been able to sort of on the side do some of my policy work through my connections within the Attorney General’s office. I’ve also worked for the Department of Licensing in achieving their gender X marker; I was an attorney supporting them in that work. I also am currently working on more of a community-based effort around a specific bill to enable better access specifically for facial feminization surgeries for people.

**Tuck:** What are the challenges that have—the biggest challenges, I’m sure there are a ton—that have come up so far in that work for trans healthcare policy advocacy?

**Ari:** There’s a total lack of competence across the board, not just with understanding what trans people are and what their needs are; basic things like what even is facial feminization surgery is a big one. People who are seeking coverage, health insurance coverage, for facial feminization surgery are often denied coverage for those surgeries under the premise—the false premise—that those surgeries are cosmetic. They’re denied not just by private insurers, but also by our public health insurance. Our Health Care Authority, that’s what it’s called in Washington state.

This has also been an issue in Oregon, but recently there was—I know there was a lawyer who settled a case for a client—like, the client won—against a private insurer where the insurance company denied the client coverage for facial feminization surgery and that client got a *large* cash settlement. So I know that people are working on this issue and trying to move it forward through litigation, and I’m hoping to draft a bill that makes it very clear that it’s actually just gender discrimination, which is illegal in Washington state. It’s illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender identity specifically; that’s clearly laid out in our statutes.

And so I want to make it really clear under the law that if you’re just an average lawyer who’s not thinking about gender and sex all day long and crafting beautiful arguments about why denying trans healthcare is discrinatiory, then I want to make it really clear for you that you should take that case; that there’s incentive there to take that case against a health insurance company; that’s it’s going to be, you know, pretty cut and dry. That you’re going to get a settlement in the process of taking that case and so you’re going to have a lot of reason to take it.

It’s an important issue to be especially because I was on Medicaid; I was able to use Medicaid to get top surgery. It was really hard at the time to find a provider, to find a competent surgeon, but I never had an issue with Medicaid. They at that point had gotten to this point where they understood that double mastectomies, or top surgery is what I called it, top surgery was sort of run of the mill. That’s like, of course! Of course you get top surgery.

They have *no* problem covering genitalia. The, you know, healthcare industrial complex, if you will, has no qualms changing out my vagina for a penis, but when it comes to what the world is seeing, for the most part, for a lot of us, *that* is totally off limits, or that has nothing to do with gender; *that* is cosmetic. When it comes to our faces and what we’re walking around with, that’s where they draw the line. And I think that’s interesting, that there’s this total disconnect there about, you know, what’s really important to people. And not that a lot of people don’t want to change things about their genitalia; I know they do. But I also know anecdotally that if you talk to most of my friends who identify as non-binary or trans, they are *not* looking for bottom surgeries that often. They’re much more likely to look for surgeries that are going to help them be perceived in the world that they feel more comfortable and not just about gender dysphoria. Like really, this is not just about gender dysphoria; this is about safety. A lot of people want these surgeries not because they feel trapped in the wrong body, per se. They feel totally unsafe when they’re going to their apartments, when they’re walking in a parking lot. And, you know, this could be life-saving not just because of suicide linked to gender dysphoria, but straight-up people being murdered. So it’s an especially important issue to me and if this particular approach, drafting a bill, that’s just, you know, one of the many ways that I hope to continue work on this issue in my personal and my professional life.

**Tuck:** Yeah. I have a few different guesses myself, but do you have a guess as to why they are so eager to offer top or bottom surgery, but so reluctant to offer any sort of FFS or other similar surgeries?

**Ari:** So a lot of it has to do I think with just sexism and, especially in the case of FFS, really seeing femininity or things that are associated with femininity—because we could talk about femininity and there being a “female face”—that’s in quotation marks, we could talk about that for a while, that’s a whole other different issue—but I think that they see that as cosmetic. I think they see femininity—“they,” the general “they,” society, healthcare—sees femininity as *obviously* cosmetic. Whereas—I mean, this was an issue for breast implants, too, for a really long time, a lot of providers weren’t covering breast implants for trans and non-binary people and they would say “You’ve achieved a certain amount of growth from taking hormones, so you don’t need—there’s no medical necessity now for you to have breast implants,” but of course everybody’s body looks *different* [laughs], and is perceived different based on a lot of factors. So a lot of people would certainly need breast implants to feel good in their bodies and to feel perceived as feminine.

I think that that has something to do with this simple approach, like “Oh, well, if we just swap out the peepee for a vagina, then you’re good, right? ‘Cause it’s just your body; it’s just you looking in the mirror.” But it’s *not* just you looking in the mirror. It’s you walking around in a parking lot. It’s you going into a bar or a coffee shop. It’s you being in public for a lot of people. And you know, I think that can be—for me, that’s a mix. When I was alone, did I want my body to look different? I’m not sure. I can’t really say how much of society impacted my internal and alone experience of myself because we just don’t live like that. We live in society. [laughs] The world sees me and that’s how I see myself a lot of times. It’s hard to say how much one influences the other, but me changing my genitalia? That doesn’t do it for me at all, right, but they’re obsessed.

**Tuck:** So you got pregnant very intentionally last year, right?

**Ari:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** Is that something that you always envisioned for yourself as a trans person?

**Ari:** Yes. I always wanted to have a baby. [laughs] It’s probably because I’m a slight narcissist [Ari and Tuck laugh] and I think my wife would attest to that, but I’ve always wanted to have kids. I don’t even really know why. I just *like them* and I wanted to have a family. I wanted to be a gestational home for one of those family members, at least. So yeah, I always did. And that never changed at all.

And I’ve heard other trans people who get pregnant say this, and it’s always rung true for me. That when I started to take testosterone and I started to appear more masculine and I started to really live my life more masculine-presenting in the world more comfortably, the more I wanted to get pregnant and the more that became a real possibility in my mind. I think because I always knew that pregnancy is associated with being a woman, and I didn’t really want the world to see me as a woman in that way. And so being able to be, when I wanted to be seen as a man or seen as transmasculine, I felt affirmed and comfortable to carry on with my other desires. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah. That makes a ton of sense to me. So what were your expectations about what it would be like to go through pregnancy and birth as a transmasculine person, and how did that compare to the reality of your experience?

**Ari:** I had to just take it one day at a time and be super in the moment and not think too far ahead, because if I did, I would really talk myself out of it. I had to think of course about some of the logistical and real challenges and about physical safety, but I tried to really not let myself think too far in advance. I think a lot of pregnant people in general do that just because the labour and delivery is really an intense experience for a lot of people. [laughs] So in that way, it was very similar to a lot of non-trans people’s experience.

**Tuck:** We talked earlier about how behind the medical field can be on gender and biological sex. How was that going through, you know, the process of having to go to different, you know, OB-GYN appointments as a trans person and giving birth as a trans person from a healthcare perspective?

**Ari:** So I went to a hospital to have my baby. And I went to a couple appointments there for sonograms and stuff, and yeah. I remember early on, when I went for one of my first sonograms, I also had, like, I would call—in the Pacific Northwest it would be called an altercation—with the person at the front desk who was like, “This is not your appointment.” You know, that stuff. When I hear stories like that I’m like, “Oh, fuck that person.” In reality, of course, this was an older person who was probably Filipinx and was super confused by me in that moment, and I was not going to be shitty to this worker of color, also. And also didn’t feel like giving a primary to her, either? It felt like that *would* be disrespectful, even though I don’t know that that’s true—that being honest is not disrespectful—but it didn’t feel good in many ways. [laughs]

And I mean, there was also disheartening moments like that throughout the whole thing. There was always some underlying thing going on with the paperwork, constantly, ‘cause I had a different name on my old insurance, so I had to have my name that I didn’t use coming up all the time. And when I was in the hospital, they had to put little F’s and little M’s on everything. [Ari and Tuck laugh] They just do! They’re so weird. And I’m sure that a lot of trans and gender diverse people in general deal with this, where you’re like, “Everybody always wants to know whether you have an F or an M!” and this binary question. It becomes obvious that everybody’s obsessed with this question, and it’s really unclear why, or what happens. [laughs] As a result, what? [laughs]

**Tuck:** Right. I mean, we can go back to the gender markers on the driver’s license, right, and be like, “Why do we need a gender marker on a driver’s license at all?”

**Ari:** That’s what the—I was originally trying to get rid of them entirely, but they didn’t go for that! [laughs]

**Tuck:** Well, good on you for trying!

**Ari:** So, totally! It’s like, why is this of any consequence? So, I think that that was always a challenge because any time I subject myself to these different systems, there’s a barrage of these questions about F and M’s every time. And so this was just another one where I was just firehosed with F’s and M’s for no apparent reason, especially considering they all thought I was an M, and then the thing I needed care for to them was only associated with an F, and so it was *definitely* of no consequence *then*. Like, I’m proving my own point just by being here! Don’t ask me to check a box!

So that was frustrating. And it really, in retrospect—so my wife just had a baby, our second child—and being a bystander in her experience—support person, I guess—I really reflected a lot on my experience and how, especially when it came to being in the hospital, so much of my experience was clouded by this fear and anxiety that I had totally blocked out, or pushed away, because I couldn’t deal with that while I was trying to bring my child into the world. I just had to do what I had to do. And in retrospect, it really weighed heavy on me. It was a big part of my birth plan, it consumed my thinking. You know, when other people are thinking about all the things that can go wrong in your pregnancy, and, you know, there are so many—I was often just thinking about how to stop a person from sort of misgendering me while I was in labor. The things I was focused on had a lot to do with my gender identity and protecting myself when I was going to be really vulnerable for my labor and delivery, yeah.

Ultimately, it doesn’t even matter that I had a good experience at my hospital because, like I said, my experience was so clouded by the fear of what could happen given how people think and just being with Caitlin and her being—she’s not trans, and just being with her and having people be—it’s more rote. It’s more expected. Even when people are nice, it’s a lot to be constantly a topic of conversation. It takes a lot of energy, and you can’t afford to be a dick when you want to. It just sucks. If my wife was a diva during her labor and delivery, nobody would even remember. And I felt like I had to be Mr. Fuckin’ Popular Nice Guy, right? In order to represent, you know, like, [bro-y voice] trans people. [Tuck and Ari laugh] [singsong voice] Captain Trans! Super Trans Man! [Tuck laughs]

And it goes back to, too, with the TLC special, being represented as the most simple version—being like, “I, trans man,” and not being like, “Well, I’m transmasculine, but it really depends on the space, and sometimes I…” [laughs] You don’t have time and people don’t have the bandwidth for you to be nuanced, and I was already presenting such a nuance that I really felt like I had to shift to curtail my behavior all the time, and you just really feel that big spotlight on you. And that’s not comfortable or pleasant when you’re trying to do something really hard, like have a baby!

**Tuck:** Yeah, I can’t—there’s so many things about this that I can’t even imagine. So let’s get to another one. [Ari laughs] Not only did you have a baby as a trans person—those are already two things—but you also had that baby on a national television special? And first I just want to say, wow, so brave. Not as a trans person, just in general, as a person, to give birth on camera—trans gives another layer to it. Also, completely side note—you know, I was watching your special the whole time and I was like, “Mm, yes, all right, mm, okay, this is a show, yes,” watching it, watching it, and then the second that you actually gave birth and they handed the baby to Caitlin, Caitlin hands the baby to you and you’re both crying, my whole body, my hormones went to a thousand and I was like, “Should *I* do that?!” And then I was like, “Tuck, there’s other ways to experience joy. Please, do not do this.” [laughs]

**Ari:** Oh my god! That’s so funny.

**Tuck:** But I watched it, like, four times. I just kept rewinding that part.

**Ari:** That’s so sweet.

**Tuck:** So thank you, I think? It was amazing. Backing up a little bit from my specific obsession with this, how did you get involved with this television special? And I guess we should also explain a little bit what it is, because we’ve kind of just been dancing around it.

**Ari:** So when I first got pregnant, I remember trying to research everywhere, like, “trans people pregnant”! Like, come on! There was so little information out there, and the only information that I found was really sensational, in my opinion. And then there was a couple people who actually seemed like regular people, but they sort of made careers out of being pregnant trans people—*no shade!* No shade!

**Tuck:** [laughing hysterically] Eyeball emoji, okay, yeah! [laughs] Go ahead!

**Ari:** No shade! Do you. But I guess my point was I really wanted information about how people were going off T and how long it was taking them, if they were never on T in the first place, if it was affecting their ability to reproduce, did they have a known donor? Did they have trouble at a sperm bank? Actual, logistical questions that were specific for somebody in my situation. And when I was first trying to get pregnant, I couldn’t find anything! It was just like, [singsong] “This trans man had a baby!” And I was like, “*Cute*. But how did they do it? It seems different!” [chuckles]

**Tuck:** Right. I mean, because so much trans media is made for cis people, all that cis people care about is that a trans man had a baby. They don’t want to go into the nuances of how it felt to go off testosterone for a specific amount of time, they just want to be like, “Wow!”

**Ari:** Right! And I had so many questions about, like—I really want to feed my baby breast milk, and I was like, “How do you do the breast milk? Did you induce lactation? Can you, if you’ve had top surgery? Do I even want to?” *So* many questions. So I, with my buddy Ben—he’s really good at media stuff, he has his own podcast, and he was like, “Hey, why don’t I just record you talking about this a little bit?” ‘Cause it seems like—I should say, once I finally did get pregnant and navigate that myself as somebody with lots of resources, family support, and a supportive partner, I was super passionate about spreading the world. And I had a young transmasculine friend at the time who was like, “I’d kind of think about getting pregnant,” and I told him everything he would ever need to know, and he was like, “Oh my god, I don’t actually have any of those questions,” but I needed to tell everyone all these secrets that I had discovered.

So Ben helped me film myself giving some explainers on some of those early steps, and I did two or three videos—just put it on YouTube. Ben did it for me; I don’t do YouTube. And Ben started getting emails from—this was not the only production company that emailed me, I will say.

**Tuck:** Wow.

**Ari:** There were multiple production companies that really wanted to get me on some show. It was super weird to me, because maybe a hundred people looked at my videos! [laughs]

**Tuck:** Wait, so no one—not no one, but very few people were watching them as a resource, but TV production companies were watching.

**Ari:** Yeah. So TLC approached me through a production company that’s contracted by TLC, blah, blah, blah. They said, “Hey, we want to put you on a special with this other couple who were on this other show, and they’re both trans. And it’s Myles and Precious, and you should look them up. They want to do a show—they *pitched* the show, and they want to do it, and we need another couple, and you seem great. A.k.a. You seem normal, and white.

**Tuck:** Yup.

**Ari:** And Caitlin and I did a lot of research on Myles and Precious. [laughs]

**Tuck:** I just Googled this, because I watched the special but I didn’t Google them outside of that, and there’s a headline in the Chicago Tribune that says, “High-profile transgender couple Myles and Precious…”

**Ari:** Yes. That’s exactly right! That’s exactly who they are. They’re a high-profile transgender couple. And I reached out to Precious, but I never heard back. But she has many, many Instagram followers, and so I thought I kind of got buried. And she was sort of communicating—the producer who reached out to me had a relationship with her, and was sort of relaying stuff from them and sort of like, “Hey, we actually finished filming for Myles and Precious and they’re so excited about this part, and this part, but we can’t get the show greenlit without another couple.” And I was like…[sighs] “I feel really conflicted about this.” [chuckles]

**Tuck:** Yeah. Tell me about that.

**Ari:** Oh. I just felt like, “They want their story out there for their own reasons. I don’t really know what they are; I can’t get ahold of them and find out what their reasons are. But I know they really want to do this.” And I had this sort of sense that based on just their Instagram and the work they’ve sort of done, and—they’re public figures and they’re cultivating that. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that. I think that we need that, and, you know, when non-trans people do that there’s nothing wrong with it; that’s just being a person with a public profile. And it was clear to me, I had this sense that that was sort of what they were cultivating. And I wanted to help them do that. [laughs]

And I felt conflicted because I also didn’t want to be a sensational figure. I knew that they would take my story and boil it down to the “trapped in my body” story. I knew that. I knew that no matter what I did. But I thought maybe there’s a couple sentences that will get through that won’t be like that? And I think it’s really important to support Myles and Precious in doing this and it’s really gross that they need another couple, a.k.a. they need another white couple. But I decided that was an okay and good thing for me to do in my values, was to join them in this special. And ultimately, it was sort of what I thought it was to them. It’s a really big deal. I don’t regret doing the special in that sense. [laughs] Like, I don’t regret doing it—it didn’t hurt me at all. And I don’t know that it was bad for trans people as a whole. So I’m okay with it. [laughs]

**Tuck:** [laughs] Glowing praise! Okay. I want to get to that, but for people who haven’t watched this, which I will assume is—

**Ari:** —which is most people. It’s $0.89 on Amazon Prime! [laughs]

**Tuck:** No, I watched it for free!

**Ari:** You did? Awesome!

**Tuck:** It’s free on TLC—if you can log into anyone’s cable account, it’s free. If you’re like me, you have your ex-coworker’s mother’s login. [laughs]

So! Oh, I was just going to say, yes, it sucks and is bad that they were like, “We cannot do this without a white couple,” but it was very interesting to see the contrast, especially when they’re pairing scenes where you and your wife are going to this neighbor to be like, “Guess what?”

**Ari:** And Myles is straight up getting arrested all the time! Like, what the fuck?!

**Tuck:** That’s exactly what I was going to say! Yeah, Myles literally got arrested, for people who didn’t see this, because his baby bump was perceived as him smuggling clothes out of a store and so he’s literally getting arrested, trying to be like, “Don’t be rough on me, I’m pregnant” to these cops who are perceiving him as a man and a criminal—

**Ari:** Not just approached. Not just asked. Not just detained. Arrested and I think brought in for being Black and pregnant.

**Tuck:** Yep. That was the biggest takeaway for me, was that intersection of oppression in that really specific, somewhat unique experience.

**Ari:** And to give them credit, they put that up there. They obviously—that’s the drama, but they did that contrast, I think, well. And I was really glad that that’s what they decided to show. It was funny because the whole time that they were trying to set the scenes and everything, they kept being like, “Well, don’t you have someone you need to *tell?*” and basically, like, “Can you upset anyone with your secret vagina? Is there anyone left to offend with your hidden uterus?” [Tuck laughs] And I was like, “No. There’s no one.”

And I was like, I told my work. I work for the state of Washington. Do you know how *uncomfortable* it was to go to my J.O.B. in a suit and tell thirty-five lawyers and fifty staff that I was going to make a baby out of my hidden vagina that they didn’t know about? [Tuck laughs] I’d already done that. I’d already done it. So I was like, “You’re not going to get that on camera and there’s no way you’re going to—there’s no way I’m going to let you come in to the Attorney General’s office and film me, let alone are you going to get permission from my boss, *the Attorney General*, to film. [Tuck laughs] That’s ridiculous, people.

So I was like, “I guess we’re just going to have to make something up.” And they were like, “Okay.” So my neighbors definitely already knew I was trans, and they *definitely* already knew I was pregnant. There’s no *way* I was going to *surprise* out myself to somebody on—how would you even set that up?!

**Tuck:** So I—in addition to having a being transgender background, I also have a documentary film background, so I have one hundred questions for you that I will probably condense down to two that are just about the schematics of being on a reality television show, but that was one that I did not write down but had, was how can you possibly explain to someone, “We’re going to go over to your house and film a scene for a TLC reality television show but we’re not going to tell you why”?

**Ari:** That makes no sense! [laughs]

**Tuck:** But they were compelling actors! It was fun.

**Ari:** Thank you. I’ll tell Brendan and Jill.

**Tuck:** Anyway. Okay, actually, I’ll ask you another reality show question. Because I have an audio production background—obviously, we’re making a podcast right now—I can hear, and other people who work in audio production can hear, the cuts in the tape of reality television talking heads more than the general public can, so when I’m watching reality television, I can hear how fake all of the sentences are. [Ari laughs] So my question is, did they make you say anything that’s just blatantly wrong?

**Ari:** Oh, yeah. Well, they didn’t make me—well, I proposed to Caitlin and then she proposed to me, so we both proposed to each other. They cut it so it sounds like I never proposed to Caitlin and that only she proposed to me. And then of course the coming out to the neighbors. We did not come out to my neighbors. It was sad because I had this whole conversation with my mom that they didn’t show, and it was actually really fun to have and actually really sweet. I had this whole conversation with my mom that they wanted to film, because that was part of it—part of it was terrible, this whole experience, was that they wanted to get me to just talk about my secret vagina to everyone all the time, just constantly—

**Tuck:** [laughs] Because that’s what we do as trans people! Talk about our secret genitals that may or may not cause us dysphoria!

**Ari:** [laughs] Yeah, just constantly, “I have a uterus and I’m usin’ it!” I should get that as a t-shirt, it’d be cool. Merch. Pay that, merch! That’s merch. That’s merch. [Tuck laughs]

My mom and I had—they were like, “Can you talk to you mom? Can you talk to your mom *and* your dad?” I’m like, “Hell no I’m not talking to my *dad* about my secret vagina, that’s gross, what’s wrong with you? I’ll talk to my mom about my secret vagina a little bit.”

And they had me do this whole conversation with my mom, and she ended up telling this wild story. I played soccer as a child a lot, and I was the goalie because I hated running and I was enormous, just bizarrely large—my child’s now in the 98th percentile, so it all adds up—but I was just so big. Everybody thought I was twenty when I was like, seven. [Ari and Tuck laugh]

And I had this soccer tournament that I played in and we fuckin’ killed it, and at the end, it was the last game of the tournament, the finals, and it was my against the other team, and the final score is 0-0, and so they had a shootout where they shot five goals from the box line at each goalie. And I stopped three shots, and the other keeper—three shots got in, so they didn’t do all five, right? We won, 3-0. It was my Mighty Ducks moment; my coach tried to lift me. [Ari and Tuck laugh] There was water everywhere; it was a beautiful moment where I was the sports hero. It was one of the greatest moments of my life.

And my mom told me that all the parents from the opposing team went to the people in charge of the tournament and told them I was a man, that I was a boy, and that they had snuck me on the team. I had really long hair, and so they were like, “It’s obvious that’s a boy.” And this is what happened to me my whole life. People would think I was a boy when I *was* a girl, I wanted to be a girl, when I was little, and people were constantly he-ing me and it would make me so upset and it was so embarrassing; it made me so mad. My mom told me that they demanded my birth certificate from my mom. I had no idea that that ever happened! [laughs] She didn’t want to tell me! I was, like, ten!

I thought that that was so interesting and so compelling because—and it was eye-opening for me because it was like, “Oh yeah, that’s how these things work in a lot of times,” is we don’t actually know—we as targets don’t actually know a lot of times how people’s ideas and their bigotry is impacting us.

So it was a reminder that that applies to me too, and did apply to me. And it was also helpful because I always felt my whole life when I was little that everybody was staring at me everywhere I went, and then then there was times where it became obvious that they were, like people would ask, “Are you a boy or a girl?” All that kind of stuff. But I was always like, “Am I being crazy? Are people really that obsessed with me and my secret vagina or my vagina that I want everybody to know about but that they seem to not know about, depending on where I was in life?” And it was like, “No, they really do. They really actually are obsessed with you and your pants, and they were staring at you.” And I was like, “Thank you! I knew it!” [laughs]

They didn’t put that on the show at all. [laughs]

**Tuck:** It’s not 101. Gosh. Speaking of yourself when you were younger, I was actually really surprised...hm. What I *wasn’t* surprised by was that TLC wanted to show photos of y’all when you were younger, but what I was surprised by was that you actually gave them photos to show from when you were younger. And *also*, Ari, also, just deadnamed yourself! Wha—why did you make those choices?! I sound mad, I’m not mad, I’m just very surprised!

**Ari:** You’re shocked.

**Tuck:** I was!

**Ari:** That, for me, it feels good to me to challenge some of the thinking and to sort of be in people’s faces a little bit. That feels good for me sometimes. I feel like I am comfortable and safe to do that, and that there are so many people who aren’t. And that I’m in a position where my neighbors, like Brendan and Jill, aren’t going to come over and set my house on fire. Or, I have a house! How about that! That I live in and own! That’s actually super crazy, [laughs] and really a good position to be in. So I do kind of feel like being a little in your face. That feels good to me and what I’m supposed to do.

And it doesn’t hurt me that much. That’s not something that upsets me. I think that has to do with my specific journey, I guess, and my experience as a gender diverse person, is that that part of my life, when I went by a different name, I feel like that’s the same journey that I’m on now. I don’t feel like there was a clear transition for me. And in fact that’s part of why I don’t really use that language; that’s just not a thing for me. I just sort of slid into Ari. And so it feels authentic to me to have my old name be used when I’m talking about myself when I was younger. You know, I also like using Ari when I talk about myself when I was younger, but that is just how I roll.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I think it’s just interesting to me as someone whose job it is to tell people in the media how to make content that’s less transphobic, because for you as a human being, in your day-to-day as an individual, I can totally make sense of the fact that that would feel fine and good to you. But I sort of think as setting a precedent, for, “Oh, when we make content about trans people, we see what they looked like when they were younger, and then we find out what their birth name was,” I think that’s kind of what was more surprising to me than the fact that it could be comfortable to you, because that actually does make sense to me.

**Ari:** It was really important to me to be exactly me and to do the exact things that felt right to me, and I was almost intentionally unconcerned with representation because I just—I reject that it’s possible.

**Tuck:** Yeah, so you alluded to earlier that one of the reasons you wanted to go on something like this was because you discovered so many secrets of, you know, trans pregnancy that you wanted to share. So here you are, you’re talking to a podcast about and for and by trans people.

**Ari:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** What secrets can you tell us?

**Ari:** Oh my goodness. My biggest takeaway is that there’s nothing special that a trans person who’s taken testosterone needs to worry about or think about in regards to their ability to reproduce, biologically speaking. There was a lot of—not my doctors, but adjacent medical professionals, so other people I talked to about—“Oh, you need to do IUI. You need to probably look into IVF”—these are unrelated entirely. And everybody was shocked that I got sperm from my acquaintance and just put it in my body, and I was like, “What do you think people *do?*” [laughs]

No one’s out here confused about anybody else doing pretty much just that! And no, penises don’t need to put it in closer. Like, no! There’s just so much misunderstanding there. And, you know, there’s not a lot of data, when I talking to my doctor originally, there was just not a lot of data about how long you need to be off T or whatever, or on T, and I hear now that there’s people trying to find out if you can get pregnant on T, which is their prerogative, whatever, I don’t think I would ever want to try to do that because it worked fine for me to go off. It’s annoying and hard to be off T, but if we know that works, I’m cool with it. But there wasn’t a lot of information about what to expect. So I’ll be another data point and say I went off T, it took a month, I got my period back, and I got pregnant the next cycle. I got pregnant immediately. I got pregnant the first time I put sperm in my body. My period came back, it was just like it was before. I hated being off T; it was the worst part for all of this.

I will say also that the lack of testosterone made my brain sharper, which was interesting. Also, funny. Fun thing to note and anecdote for people out there. For anybody out there. [Tuck laughs] It’s so much more simple than it was made out to be. And I have a contract with my donor, which I think is wise. And anybody can do that, and it’s probably a good idea if you can to get an attorney. But you can get one for free at most legal clinics in major cities who can review a contract for you; there’s contracts out there on the internet; it shouldn’t really cost you an arm and a leg to get a contract to get a known donor.

Sperm banks are insanely expensive, and I really would encourage anybody who has the option to reject them entirely. There’s nothing special about washing sperm, which is what they do and they say there’s something special about it. It’s just not necessary. Again, people put sperm right in the body! We know that works, to put sperm straight into the body. It was a really good experience to have a known donor and to get to operate outside of a sperm bank, because it got to be an intimate, personal experience instead of one more thing that was clinical. So I think that a lot of people that I’ve talked to don’t even know that you can do that. They think it’s dangerous. And it’s like, well, you can go get an STI test and, you know, be as safe as you could be.

**Tuck:** Oh! I want to ask this quickly because I know people will be asking it in their heads. Why do you say “non-trans” instead of “cis”?

**Ari:** Oh, I think that “cis” centers non-trans people as the norm, and I like to re-center trans people as the norm as one. So I add an extra word when I say it, and it makes people go, “What?!”

And my understanding is that cis means sort of “stuck in place” in a biological sense, that term means “stuck” and “finalized,” and I know a lot of non-trans people where their gender expression certainly evolves and changes over time. And just because they’re only allowed to talk about gender in very simple terms, it doesn’t mean that that’s accurate and that that reflects their feelings and experience about their gender. So I like to say “non-trans” just because “trans” to me has more of a meaning as an identity and less of, you know, in the biological sense, but “cis”—I don’t believe there are many cis people where their gender expression is absolutely stuck. That’s odd to me; I don’t know hardly anybody like that, so I don’t like that term because I don’t think it’s very accurate. But I totally understand that it conveys a meaning to people that is totally great and fine. We use it to describe something and it’s not an offensive term to me; I just don’t use it.

**Tuck:** Yeah. That makes sense. I appreciate you explaining that.

Obviously this show’s name is a joke about the concept of baby gender reveals, and I know that you did not have a genital reveal for your baby. Can you talk about how you and Caitlin have chosen to raise your kids with regard to gender?

**Ari:** I would love to talk about genital reveal. [Tuck laughs] ‘Cause we kept joking, when I was pregnant—’cause people, it’s so funny! Even when you’re a transmasculine person, you’re like, “Hey, I have to talk to you.” ‘Cause this happened to me! I had to be like, “I’m trans.” And people are like, “What?” and I’m like, “I have a uterus.” They’re like, “Oh my god! I had no idea!” And I’m like, “I don’t care. Anyways, I’m *pregnant!*” And they’d be like—’cause I only told them I was trans to tell them I’m pregnant. And I’d be like, “Oh, I’m pregnant.” And they’d be like, “*What?!* How do you do that?!” And I was like, “*With sperm*.” [Ari and Tuck laugh]

And then they go, “Oh my god. Um...wait, uh, congratulations! Um...are you having a boy or a girl?” [Tuck laughs] Without fail. Almost 90% of the time. It’s a *huge* issue. I don’t know *why* people are *so*—it just, it says a lot about what people—where people—their thinking is, because they actually don’t believe in trans people. They’re telling you that when they ask you that question.

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Ari:** So if they’re asking you that question, it’s because they don’t believe in trans people. If they’re insisting that you say, “But come on, really,” they’re telling me they don’t believe in me. They don’t believe I exist; they think I’m full of shit. And so it’s the worst question I got my whole pregnancy. It was the biggest slap in the face about this whole process, was that question. Caitlin and I would joke about how we were going to have—invite everyone over and do a , you know, where you open the diaper, and it was going to be a giant hairy vagina or a huge porn cock with, like, veiny...because they’re being disgusting! I don’t believe they’re asking any question other than “What are those genitals?” Because if they don’t say anything about who we are and even what gender we’re expressing later or what our personalities are like, and then people are like, “Oh, but it doesn’t mean that you’re going to like pink or blue or cars,” well, if it doesn’t mean that, then it doesn’t mean anything! If it’s not going to tell you any information at all, then *why* do you need to know it *so* very badly?

So there’s a lot of ways that we deal with it. I think a lot of ways that you deal with a lot of different things that are uncomfortable and we just don’t have the tools for this one yet, or haven’t really sharpened them. So we’re working on sharpening those tools, but it’s similar to a lot of things. And honestly it makes me feel grosser to be like, “Oh, it’s a boy.” That makes me feel a lot worse than being like, when a stranger asks if it’s a boy or girl and being like, “We don’t do that” and having them be confused for a minute. To me, it works better to be honest about what I actually think about my baby than not. But there’s certainly people who were so good to Caitlin and I. At my doctor’s office, they used certain pronouns for Zadie, like binary pronouns for Zadie, and I don’t correct them. Our approach is that we’re gender inclusive, because people use all kinds of pronouns for Zadie, and we want Zadie to be comfortable with all of those. There’s nothing wrong with being called she/her or being called a boy or being called a girl. Gender’s awesome. [Ari laughs] I want them all available to my child! So when people use a binary pronoun, we go with it. We don’t change. There’s nothing to correct. But when *we* talk about Zadie and Nova now, who’s our new baby, we use they/them pronouns and let people get a little confused.

And when people ask if it’s a girl or a boy, we just fuckin’ walk away, ‘cause it’s annoying.

**Tuck:** I love that! I love that attitude about it not being an exclusive thing, but an inclusive thing where all the answers are correct at the same time. I really love that mentality of it.

**Ari:** Because I think that—yeah, I think that should be true. And so yeah, that’s sort of how we do things. And when it’s family members, or it gets complicated and people are like, “But is it a boy or a girl?” we really try to explain why that’s not the way that we frame our lives. That’s not the framing we use. Are you asking about the baby’s genitals? And if they want to say that they are, they might get an answer. But they have to admit that that’s what they’re talking about.

**Tuck:** And hopefully tell you why. [laughs]

**Ari:** And be like yeah! Be like, do you see why that’s gross? I had that interaction with my dad, and it was great. He definitely wanted to know, and he knew that he wanted to know because he thought it meant something, and he answered those questions honestly, and I said, “How does that feel, knowing that, and how does it feel wanting to know that?” And he was like, “It was pretty gross.” It’s like yeah. Okay. Cool! Then you get to know! Have fun!

I don’t know. I want that world that has this uncomplicated, light years behind view about sex and gender and all that stuff. I want my babies to have the context for having a very sophisticated view and a very sophisticated understanding, and at the same time be able to have compassion for the context that we all live in and the culture that we all live in. We’re all subject to our environment, and that doesn’t mean that my dad’s a bad person, or someone who asks, “Are you a boy or girl?” is a bad person. But we owe it to each other, I think, a little bit to be honest about how that’s fucked up.

**Tuck:** Last few things. One: you said at the end of your TLC special that you want to have four children. Are you going to do this all over again?

**Ari:** Yes. Yes.

**Tuck:** Hell yeah. Great.

**Ari:** I wasn’t at first, but I am now. And Caitlin is too.

**Tuck:** Wow! What changed?

**Ari:** If we can.

**Tuck:** Yeah, if you can. What changed?

**Ari:** I just love them! I just love them so much. I just love them. They’re so weird and funny and they’re just inspiring. I don’t know. I love building my little family. I totally get where Mormons are coming from. [chuckles]

**Tuck:** Ari! [laughs hysterically] \_\_[uncertain word @ 56:59]\_\_. [Ari laughs] All right. Well, wish I could leave it there, but we always end the show with the same question, which is in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

 **Ari:** Oh my god! [laughs] Just one where we’re all very comfortable and able to talk about it, and when we’re asking people what they’re gender is, it’s an honest question, as opposed to that question that I got when I was young, where there was two options. It was are you a boy or are you a girl, and it was, the question was asked in this, like, disgust. There was this air of disgust. And I just want that to be completely, complete 180.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time, please consider sharing the show on social media or wherever you tell people about things that you like. You can find us on social media @gendereveal and I’m @tuckwoodstock. Ari’s TV special is called My Pregnant Husband. It’s available on TLC or on the Jeff Bezos website. And speaking of websites, our website is genderpodcast.com, our non-profit merch shop is bit.ly/gendermerch, and our online community lives at bit.ly/genderslack2. All of those are also in the show notes.

Today’s show was produced by Isaura Aceves and edited by Babette Thomas. You can help us continue to work with them by joining us at patreon.com/gender. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh; our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

**Ari [voice clip]:** [bro-y voice] Represent, like, trans people! [singsong voice] Captain Trans! Super Trans Man! This trans man had a baby!