**Tuck Woodstock:** Before we start the show, there’s another podcast I want to tell you about, although you may have heard about it already. If you listen to my show, you know that news and culture shows usually aren’t made with trans folks like us in mind. Trans voices are routinely left out of the conversation even though stories about us are everywhere. The TransLash podcast with Imara Jones is changing that. Imara is a Peabody and Emmy award winner. She is also a genius, tbh. You might remember that she was on the Gender Reveal podcast recently, episode one of the season, talking about how trans people telling our own stories will literally save trans lives. Imara just released a new episode of her show to help us process all of the wild political news that’s been happening since the start of the year. It features Sarah McBride, the first openly trans state senator in US history as well as the popular podcast host and political commentator Danielle Moodie. You can find that episode and more sharp insight from Imara by tuning in to the TransLash podcast every other Thursday. I listened to the episode last week. It’s great. Subscribe wherever you’re listening right now.

[*Gender Reveal* intro music]

**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* intro ends]

**Tuck:** Hey, everyone. I hope you’re hanging in there. Can you believe we’re already pretty much halfway through this season of Gender Reveal? Thank you so much for all of the wonderful feedback so far. It’s really meant a lot. This week on the show, I’m excited to share my chat with author and scholar, Hil Malatino. As an academic, Hil says a bunch of fancy smart things like this:

**Hil Malatino:** Those relationships are often characterized by greater or lesser degrees of alienation up to the point of outright estrangement and expulsion so it means you can’t rely on the locus of the traditional family to think about trans lives in the first place.

**Tuck:** But luckily for me, he also says stuff like this:

**Hil:** I now describe that work as primarily about being trans and feeling bad.

**Tuck:** In the episode, we talk about trans care, trans elders, dad as a gender, the entwinement of race and gender, Hil’s experience as a trans person with an intersex condition, and more.

But first, just a heads up that this is the last week to snag our January merch designs, which include a trans pirate ship pouch, “Trans folks are sacred” t-shirts, and “Gender is a boundless expanse” fanny packs for when we can go places again. You can find all of that and more at bit.ly/gendermerch. You can also support our show and the work we do here at patreon.com/gender.

Before we get to “This Week in Gender,” I want to talk about last week in gender. Depending on when you downloaded the episode, you may or may not have heard a couple of key corrections and additions so I’m going to repeat them here just in case.

We originally claimed that the Bell v Tavistock case restricts all youth in the United Kingdom from accessing puberty blockers. It actually only affects kids in England and Wales specifically and, even more specifically, activists think that it really only affects the National Health Service. Private and international services may keep prescribing blockers. It’s hard to tell because they don’t want to really publicize that they’re doing this because, then the full backlash of public scrutiny will be focused on them. But it is probably still possible for youth in the UK to access these services perhaps. Also, there is an appeal of the Bell v Tavistock case going through the court system but we probably won’t hear the results from that until next year.

Finally, this is not a correction but literally the day after this episode came out, I was on TikTok and I saw a youth trans TikToker talking about how happy they were that they got to go on puberty blockers and it just warmed my heart and really made me appreciate even more how important this is.

Ok, and with that, it’s time for “This Week in Gender.”

[*This Week in Gender,* chimes,intro theme]

**Tuck:** Well, here we are. This is the first ever episode of Gender Reveal not made during the Trump administration and, in my mind, we were simply switching from a political administration who was actively trying to kill us to one that was simply indifferent to us dying. And I’m sure, in many ways, that that is true but I have to say I have felt a little bit thrown off, in a good way, by just how many things the Biden administration has already done in the last few days that actively seem to have queer and trans people in mind. Some of these are small things. They don’t necessarily impact our daily lives.

For example, the Trump administration banned US embassies from flying Pride flags on the embassy flag pole and Biden’s State Department is going to let them fly rainbow flags on flagpoles. Sure, why not? The bar is in hell. Also, within the first few hours of the Biden administration, the official White House contact form added “Mx.” to its list of honorifics options and also created a new drop-down menu for folks to select their pronouns. Again, it’s not going to fix everything but I will take it. There have also been a few notable nominations or hints of nominations. For example, Biden’s Secretary of State nominee, Antony Blinken, has pledged to appoint a special envoy for the human rights of LGBTI persons, a position that the Trump administration left vacant. Per CNN, Blinken said Tuesday that appointing someone to the role is “a matter, I think, of some real urgency” and added that “we’ve seen, I believe the highest number of murders of transgender people, particularly women of color, that we’ve seen ever.” And, as you may have heard, Biden has nominated Dr. Rachel Levine to be the Assistant Secretary of Health. Dr. Levine was previously Pennsylvania’s Physician General and, if confirmed, she will be the first openly transgender federal official to be confirmed by the United States Senate.

It is so tempting for me and for many people to write all of this off as empty gestures that allow a political administration to claim to care about trans people while still doing nothing to help them. And frankly, that is what I expect from any political administration in the United States or probably anywhere. So, when I heard that Dr. Levine was nominated, I didn’t really put any stock in it. But then, I was doing research for this segment and I found a video where Dr. Levine was giving a televised update in Pennsylvania on COVID-19 and it starts with this.

**Dr. Rachel Levine:** Before I begin, however, with the daily updates, I feel that I must personally respond to the multiple incidents of LGBTQ harrassment and, specifically, transphobia directed at me that have been reported in the press.

**Tuck:** And that just got me because we know what it’s like to be just trying to do our jobs and mind our own business and live our lives and we have to stop what we’re doing and address the fact that some people don’t want us to have jobs or lives. Dr. Levine’s full four-minute statement on this is on YouTube. I’m going to play you one more clip from it.

**Dr. Levine:** I have no room in my heart for hatred and, frankly, I do not have time for intolerance. And, to all LGBTQ young people, it is okay to be you and it is okay to stand up for your rights and your freedoms.

**Tuck:** So, I don't know, y’all. I know this isn’t going to fix all transphobia. I also don’t think will to fix all transphobia is necessarily a reasonable benchmark for whether we are allowed to feel joy or relief or pleasant surprise about something. It’s wild that I’m actually worried that saying, “I think it’s cool we might have a trans assistant health secretary,” will get me canceled either because she milkshake ducks at some point or because it could be seen as a tacit endorsement of the entire Biden administration or of our political structures more broadly. To be clear, it’s not that at all and I don't know why I feel so defensive about this but if you’ve watched the documentary *Disclosure* or were born before the mid-1990s, you know that, for a long time, the only real representation of trans women in media were sex workers, particularly dead sex workers, and I think, in my mind, I still haven’t caught up from that.

Every iota of trans representation is a little bit delightful and, frankly, disorienting to me. I cannot imagine turning on the TV and seeing an openly trans doctor and political official talking to me about COVID safety protocols for the White House. That is cool to me in a way that is deeply embarrassing. So, I guess I am going to say, on the record, that having a health secretary who knows what it’s like to experience transphobia and transmisogyny and medical gatekeeping of trans-related care is actually extremely good to me. I don't know. It’s vaguely soothing compared to the alternative of continuing to not have that. And I’ll take one representation, not because I think it will fix everything but because I’ll take one representation on the way to having two and three and four representations in our system of power so long as the systems of power exist, which is hopefully not forever because they’re pretty bad. If your bar is higher than mine, that’s good. We need you to keep pushing and I will also keep pushing.

More on this next week, including how Biden has already pissed off a bunch of TERFs. But until then, this has been *This Week in Gender.*

[*This Week in Gender* closing theme]

**Tuck:** Hil Malatino is an Assistant Professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Philosophy and core faculty in the Rock Ethics Institute at Penn State. He is the author of two books, *Trans Care* and *Queer Embodiment: Monstrosity, Medical Violence, and Intersex Experience.*

With the understanding that language is limiting, the way we always start the show is by asking, in terms of gender, how do you identify?

**Hil:** I like the caveat that language is limiting. It definitely is. I’ve a weird relationship to gender, as I’m sure, I don't know, is not surprising to most people.

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Hil:** I use he pronouns and also they pronouns currently. I’ve used different pronouns in the past and I’ve had, for as long as I can remember, a very tendentious and complicated relationship to pronouns. I went through a long phase where I just was sort of agnostic about it and said, “You can call me whatever you want as long as it’s respectful,” etc. And now, I’m in this relatively recent phase of using, much more intensively, he/him pronouns, which is strange because I still find myself being confused when I’m hailed that way by certain people. With friends, it seems very normal but, when I’m in a professional context of like, “The university administrator uses he/him pronouns,” I’m like, “Are you talking to me? I’m confused.”

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Hil:** I’m still figuring it out but that’s where I’m at now.

**Tuck:** For me personally, I’ve almost felt like trying to put words on my gender is less effective than just never thinking about it. Beyond pronouns, are there words that you use to describe your gender or do you also prefer to just opt out of that part?

**Hil:** Yeah, that’s also complicated. I don’t think there are words beyond pronouns that I use to describe gender unless I were to just say that there are many, many, many. There are no adjectives I go to other than dad probably. I’ve been called Dad for many, many years and not without a certain degree of humor and irony in that. I have a fond attachment to that label that is also simultaneously ironic and really critical. But that’s the only one I can think of, which, says probably a ton more about me than I intended it to.

**Tuck:** [laughs] That’s so funny, though, because something I haven’t thought about in a while is I was on just a very small portion of the Pacific Crest Trail and my trail name given to me was Dad-

**Hil:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** ... and this was when I had transitioned not at all in a way that would be perceived by cis people. So everyone who’s just these normie cis white 60-year-olds on this trail were so confused and so stressed out to find out that my trail name was Dad.

**Hil:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** They were just like, “But why?”

**Hil:** Right! No, I love it. I mean, I have a really similar relationship to it where I… My partner and I were both christened dads at the same time and we were chaperoning a group of graduate and undergraduate students to Women’s and Gender Studies Conference and we were in a van for hours and hours. They both just started calling us their gay dads. This was way before I had hormonally transitioned. It was way before I have the weird big beard I have now.

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Hil:** I was delighted by it. But, yeah, it was also extremely confusing to most normie older men that encountered me. They did not get it. Dad energy sometimes precedes a lot of other decisions we make about gender stuff.

**Tuck:** [laughs] It’s somehow true.

I was looking at your contact card on the Penn State website and it says, in part, “Dr. Malatino’s current work places decolonial feminist thought, affect theory, and trans studies in dialogue to investigate the investment of popular and scholarly accounts of gender transition in neo-colonial understandings of gendered embodiment.” So, let’s pretend that you are talking to someone who only understood the words like “work, thought, studies, and gender” in that sentence. How would you explain what you study?

**Hil:** Totally. That sentence… I wrote that sentence probably four years ago as a way of gesturing that the book that I’m currently working on and it was before I really knew what direction it was going to take. I now describe that work as primarily about being trans and feeling bad.

[laughter]

That’s much easier to understand.

**Tuck:** There’s suddenly a universal relatable theme.

[laughter]

**Hil:** Right. Right. But I will say that my political investments in my academic background are, in some ways, squarely, in the realm of decolonial feminism... I did my PhD under… I hate that language, “under,’ but with Maria Lugones, who’s a pretty well-known decolonial feminist philosopher and have tended to approach my thinking about gender using her concept of what she calls the modern colonial gender system. So, I understand a lot of the gatekeeping and bureaucratic regulation that’s informed the history of trans medicine and also, the history of intersex medicine, which I wrote about pretty extensively in my first book. I understand that gatekeeping is invested in maintaining white gender normativity essentially. So, when I’m writing about being trans and feeling bad or being trans and feeling any kind of way, I bring that into it. I don't know if that’s necessarily clarifying but it certainly sounds less wild than that sentence you read to me, that I’m a little embarrassed by honestly. I’ll have to go back and change that some point soon.

**Tuck:** Yeah. I did notice, and appreciated very much, in your work that you specifically name white gender normativity, that you bring race into it a lot. Why does it feel important for you to name race when you’re talking about gender normativity?

**Hil:** I think because gender is only legible and in/through racial logics. If we’re talking about gender at all, it necessitates a conversation about race and, if we’re talking about gender norms, it necessitates a conversation about histories of coloniality, expropriation, dispossession that all used race as a sort of analytic to specifically dehumanize entire populations and gender normativity is consolidated in the lust and relationship to that legacy of that dehumanization and dispossession.

If you look at the consolidation of contemporary trans medicine in the 1950s and 60s, one of the things that becomes pretty quickly apparent if you’re looking in those medical archives, which I know not everybody does, most people don’t, but if you do look, you see that most of the people who are being greenlit for treatment that was gender affirming in that era of 50s, 60s, 70s, it was mostly white affluent people and that was for so, so many different reasons. One, they had to be able to afford the procedures. That actually intensified in the 70s and the 80s when the vast majority of trans-related medical procedures had to be paid for out-of-pocket and were definitively not covered by insurance policies. There was also the gendered logic that was used to diagnose trans people and to make a case for oneself as a good transexual and that gender logic was all about abiding by the norms of white masculinity... bourgeois white masculinity and bourgeois white femininity, being a good little lady, a good housewife, or a good and very macho provider, breadwinner, husband-material sort of person and definitively heterosexual, right? You also had to prove that post-transition, you would be deeply heterosexual.

When I think about that history and the legacy that granted us, I think, “Well, that’s really steeped in the logic of bourgeois white gender normativity.” It’s really steeped in white racialized gender norms. And that legacy has meant that access to medical technologies in transition has been deeply, deeply inaccessible for poor folks, lots of Black and Brown folks, Indigenous folks, etc. So, that’s part of what I’m thinking about when I make these claims about the entwinement of race and gender. Also, and I think Riley Snorton does a great job of discussing this history in *Black on Both Sides*, the legacy of the medical technologies that came to inform gender confirming surgical procedures today actually relied on fungible Black bodies as its raw material. Riley Snorton talks a lot about early research into VVF, which is vesicovaginal fistula, that was performed on enslaved women, Black enslaved women in the Southern United States. And that is an immediate medical technical precursor to vaginoplasty. So, in this very literal and technical way, the bodies of enslaved folks who were understood as less than or subhuman and therefore used in the context of medical experimentation have come to inform the very same technologies that we understand as part of the ensemble of gender affirming medical procedures today. So, these histories are all interwoven.

**Tuck:** You mentioned the archives, right? I know that you are a scholar who spent a lot of time digging through queer and trans archives and most trans people have not had that opportunity or that interest. One small thing that I pulled out of your most recent book, which we’ll talk about soon is that there’s this magazine called *Metamorphosis* that was this magazine for trans men in the 1980s. I read that and was like, “What do you mean there was a magazine for trans men in the 1980s?”

**Hil:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** Like, I’ve never heard of this. I guess I am wondering, are there ways that the rest of us non-PhDs of gender can learn more about this trans history and this rich history of trans gender and gender deviance?

**Hil:** Oh my gosh, yeah! I’m a total archival geek and one of the beautiful things that’s happened with the digitization of archives is that a lot of the archives that I used to have to travel to get to and spend a lot of time in reading rooms and digging through boxes to access are online. So the Digital Transgender Archives that K.J. Rawson runs has a ton of material and that’s actually where I encountered *Metamorphosis*. And there’s a new archive project that just launched this past week in Canada called The ArQuives but spelled A-R-Q-U-I-V-E-S?

**Tuck:** [laughs] Of course.

**Hil:** Yeah, of course. That’s a pretty large LGBTQIA archival digitization project. One of the folks involved is Elspeth Brown who’s a Canadian queer scholar. Elspeth actually alerted me to the fact that they’ve been doing oral histories with Canadian trans activists specifically and I write a lot about Rupert Raj. Rupert Raj is one of the people who did this newsletter magazine *Metamorphosis* and there are going to be deep historical interviews with Rupert Raj that are part of that new archive that’s coming up soon. That’s really exciting. There’s a ton of resources, if you’re a nerd about trans history, that are really, really easily accessible.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I wasn’t going to ask you about this but actually, do you want to tell the listeners a little about Rupert Raj?

**Hil:** One of the things that I found most compelling about him is I encountered him repeatedly in the archives is that he was doing so much care work with and within and for trans folks in Canada and the US for multiple decades. He was also extremely articulate about the impact of that work on his personal well-being, his health, his finances, etc. He began writing in the 80s about the phenomenon of burnout in relation to trans activism in both a personal way but also in this way where he was trying to point to all of these different trans activists and cultural workers who glimmered briefly and then burnt out entirely because there were no resources to support the work that they were doing. I think his attention to the radical commonality amongst trans activists and trans cultural workers, I just found incredibly compelling. And it seems so resonant today, right, in this moment because... I don't know. I think about all of the gender related or trans-specific related care work that basically every trans person I know does on a day-to-day basis, most of which is underappreciated, underemunerated, and also sometimes necessary for survival and I’m like, “Yeah. We’re all really burnt out today, too.”

[laugh]

Even the most privileged among us.

**Tuck:** Let’s talk about *Trans Care*, your most recent book. In it, you talk about, unsurprisingly, transing care.

**Hil:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** I’m curious, first of all, is “transing” said with a wink to the ironic colloquial uses of transing? But mostly, I’m hoping you can speak to what you’re talking about when you talk about transing care.

**Hil:** Yeah. I think I use it with a wink and a nod to the academic theorizations to this thing called “transing,” which would be, in some ways, similar to “queering” but distinct. But when I talk about transing care, I think I’m not embedded in that history of academic understandings of what it might mean to trans something. Mostly, I’m just trying to think about what it means to think about care in relationship to trans lives. To care work is a manifest in trans lives and to have, specifically, a trans understanding of care work and care labor.

**Tuck:** What are the differences that you see between trans practices of care versus white domestic hetero concept of care that some people may think of first?

**Hil:** One of the best places to start would be to think about how the fact that trans care practices don’t take the household as their primary locus. When I think about trans folks in my life, when I think about myself, I think about how common the practice of, for instance, traveling to engage in surgical aftercare is because folks don’t have people they can necessarily rely on in their intimate domestic everyday space to reliably do that care or understand the emotions that might be roiling in the context of the immediate aftermath of having a major gender confirming surgery. I also think about the fact that many trans folks have really complicated relationships to their bio families. Those relationships are often characterized by greater or lesser degrees of alienation up to the point of outright estrangement and expulsion so it means you can’t rely on the locus of the traditional family to think about trans lives in the first place, if people occupy this position of alienation or estrangement in relation to those families. But also, the kind of domestic situations that trans folks piece together in the aftermath of that experience often don’t look like a heteronormative bourgeois family household.

So, it just means that the main locus for thinking about care work, which has been understood synonymously with domestic labor or reproductive labor is inadequate to start to think about trans care. Also, and I’m rambling at this point, there’s a lot of care work that happens virtually and I think it’s important to dignify how imperative that work is for the day-to-day lives and survival of trans people, for our mental health, for our ability to get through the day, and our ability to feel like we have a community even as we’re surrounded, in most of the situations we find ourselves in, by cis folks who to greater or lesser degrees, don’t necessarily understand us very well.

**Tuck:** In the opening pages of *Trans Care*, you talk quite a bit about the importance of care webs, which... Is that term taken from *Care Work*, the book?

**Hil:** Yep.

**Tuck:** Anyway, I know many folks who listen to this show are either newly out as trans or not out as trans or in spaces where they don’t have trans community, either in real life or even online, and that was true maybe even before the pandemic. Do you have advice for folks on how to weave those care webs and create those connections?

**Hil:** This is a tricky question and I think it’s tricky for me on multiple levels. One is that I’m trying to remember what it was like to be in that position and, when I try to remember what it was like to be in that position... I’m kind of old, not old I guess, but I’m 37 so my memory of that is also a memory of a totally different digital landscape but I think there is some commonalities. One of the things that I did was, every time I encountered a person that I thought was at all remotely maybe trans in my day-to-day life, I was like, “Hello, you’re my person.” That can sometimes be creepy. That can sometimes backfire.

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Hil:** But I also think there’s something really important to that practice of trying to find whoever in your day-to-day life might be a real source of support, even if they’re not necessarily trans. The other thing is I think, relying on the fact that even though folks can really be quite catty sometimes online, I think , the vast majority of folks that I know and folks that I’ve reached out to historically for some form of support or just connection have been very, very happy to address that need in the ways that they’re able to. Even though it feels scary, I think… I guess what I'm saying is I think most trans folks are pretty friendly in relationship to other trans folk, esp in relationship to folks who are just taking baby steps out of whatever closet space they might understand themselves to be in. But this is all sounding a bit saccharine to me, too.

[laughter]

As I say it out loud because it’s so like, “Oh, you know. Just trust that people are going to be nice to you. Reach out. It’s not scary. Promise that trans elders are not scary people,” but I do think there’s a lot of truth to that honestly. And I think intergenerational trans connection is huge, right? Having folks that are older, whether that’s in years or in terms of their time since transitioning, etc is really crucial, especially because sometimes, people lose connections with other elders in their lives through the process of transition.

Transgenerational time is really strange to think about. In the coda of *Trans Care*, I talk about my relationship with my lifelong best friend who’s only about a year older than me but he transitioned when he was in his late teens and early 20s. It’s set in the early 2000s and that was a very… That was in the context of all these debates about the Michigan Women’s Music Festival and whether trans women were included. It was this very late 90s, early 2000s trans zeitgeist that, in some ways, we see these arguments repeating over and over again. But anyway, that was his context. It would be another probably 15 yrs before I at least hormonally transitioned, or chemically transitioned, I guess, if we want to say it that way. And what it meant was, even though we’re the same age and have known each other for over 30 years at this point, he is, in some respects, my trans dad.

[laughs]

He has this knowledge of intramural or intra political debates in trans communities that have been happening for decades before I was ever even necessarily aware of them. Or I was aware of them but only through his secondhand report backs to me about them. So, yeah. Trans time is so strange and you might find elders that are actually very much the same age as you but have this very different historical relationship to your position with respect to communities and trans knowledges and that’s wild to think about.

**Tuck:** What was the timeline like between you having thoughts about your gender and about not being cis and identifying them within yourself to chemically transitioning, as you say?

**Hil:** The place I want to start is maybe before I ever even thought anything about transness in relationship to my own person. It has to do with the fact that I actually have an intersex condition. I’m partially androgen insensitive, which I write about very extensively in my first book, which is called *Queer Embodiment*, which is all about intersex experiences of medical violence essentially so kind of a bummer to read. I was diagnosed with this intersex condition when I was 15 or 16 because I was assigned female at birth and, I guess, wasn’t necessarily visibly intersex at birth. But then I didn’t menstruate at puberty. And I was like, “Oh, this is strange. What’s going on?” I went to a whole battery of drs and they eventually figured out that I have partial androgen insensitivity syndrome, which means I have XY chromosomes but my body was not fully responsive to so-called masculinizing hormones. So, I developed along more or less female typical lines, although, at puberty, I began to get sort of a baby mustache and never really developed large breasts or large hips or any sort of overwhelmingly... any features we overwhelmingly associate with femininity, I guess.

I had this very interesting experience with puberty and then, shortly after that, I was diagnosed with this intersex condition and, when you’re 16 and you get this intersex diagnosis, or at least when I was 16 and got this intersex diagnosis, it just prompted me to be like, “What the fuck is gender anyway? Like, I don’t get it. If I have been taught all these linkages between chromosomes and hormones and the impact that those things have on embodiment and that’s not the full story?” Right? Because intersex conditions prove, or they disprove those naturalized linkages between hormones, chromosomes, and embodiment that we take for granted when we talk about cisness as a unit. I started thinking, “I don’t get this thing called gender anyway.” And it meant that any decisions I made about what I did with my body after that point always seemed like decisions that were made with this full knowledge that what people about gender, what folks understand about the relationship between gender and biological sex, was all kind of wrong.

[laughs]

I guess there’s no easy way to say it but I think, when I was 16, because I had been assigned female at birth and raised as female, the medical establishment was very keen to offer me estrogen to make sure that I adequately feminized because my body wasn’t producing a lot of estrogen naturally. And I took it and I realized in that moment that me taking estrogen, first of all, was not something I wanted to do. It was also making a deliberate choice about modifying my gender that felt, in some ways, very trans and, of course, it was happening under conditions of coercion. Drs weren’t like, “You could take testosterone or estrogen.” They were like, “You’ve been raised as a girl and you need to feminize to look like a typical girl so here’s estrogen.”

And I took it for a while and I hated it. I stopped taking it. But then, it would be many, many, many yrs before I started taking testosterone. But from this moment, when I was 15 or 16, I sort of understood any decision I made about how I modified my gender in order to appear in a certain way in the world as deliberate, agential, and, in some ways, autonomous decision.

I have a weird relationship to transition because of that. I started identifying as trans specifically, probably about 7 years ago, using they/them pronouns, understanding myself specifically as a nonbinary trans person with an intersex condition. Then, it was probably only in the last couple years that I started really seriously entertaining hormonal transition, that I had top surgery, etc. But that’s… Even saying it that way is not the whole truth because I had also considered this stuff when I was 20 or 21 but my graduate school insurance didn’t cover anything that was trans related. Then, I considered it again in my late 20s but the job I had, again, had a trans-specificic exclusion on its insurance policy and I wasn’t making enough money to pay for it out-of-pocket and I come from a low-income family, have no generational wealth to inherit, had no means to pay for anything so I put medical transition out of my mind for a long time.

**Tuck:** I would love to hear more about your experiences as a trans academic in a women’s, gender, and sexualities program specifically. As a scholar, as a human being, what has that been like?

**Hil:** Yeah. I want to start with an anecdote because it’s funny and it’s also telling about the state of actually existing trans people in the field of women’s, gender, and sexualities studies. I’m sure a lot of people listening to this know who Susan Stryker is because she’s the best. When I finished my PhD in 2010, I got a postdoc at Indiana University in the Department of Gender Studies and I accepted the post doc and I was super excited about it because, at the time, Susan taught at Indiana University.

**Tuck:** I just want to interrupt because there’s definitely people who don’t know who Susan Stryker is. She’s a very notable trans historian who wrote the book *Trans History*.

**Hil:** Yes, among many other things. The other reason Susan is important, in academic terms, is she left Indiana University, moved to the University of Arizona, and successfully worked out the first ever trans studies cluster hire in the history of higher education where she was able to hire, I think, something like seven different trans scholars across multiple departments and begin the trans studies initiative that resulted, at least in part, in the journal *Transgender Studies Quarterly* from her post in the University of Arizona. So she’s important in terms of the history of higher education for that reason, too.

But, rewind to 2011. I take this post-doctoral position at Indiana University of gender studies and I take it in large part because I think, “Oh, I’m going to get to work with Susan because she teaches there.” I didn’t know her but I loved her work. I take the job and it turns out that Susan was actually leaving Indiana University to go to the University of Arizona where she would successfully orchestrate this historic cluster hiring in trans studies. It meant that the very first class I taught after I finished my PhD… It was a class called Sex, Gender, and the Body that Susan had designed and it was 140C class and all of the students there were expecting to be taught by Susan Stryker and instead, it was just little old 27-year-old me that walked into the classroom to be the professor. So that was very nerve-wracking.

[laughter]

**Tuck:** And how did it go?

**Hil:** I think that I did an all right job. Those were extremely huge shoes to fill. The reason that I mention this anecdote is because… So, Susan, even though she had been already really intellectually prolific by this point in 2010 and 2011, the job at Indiana University was, I believe, the very first tenured track or tenured position Susan had held. She had always been forced, because she did trans-specific scholarship, to the outskirts of mainstream academia essentially, where trans knowledges weren’t necessarily seen as important in relationship to any discipline. It’s only within the last 10 years that we’ve seen any real significant inroads made in terms of trans inclusion within higher edu and most of those inroads have been made in the field of women’s, gender, and sexualities studies. That was the first area or interdisciplinary site where, I think, the majority of professors of academic knowledge, gatekeepers said, “Oh, what trans people have to say about trans history, trans experiences, and trans existence is actually really imperative to our knowledge of gender and sexuality.” It’s a very recent development.

**Tuck:** I’m curious, in the world of women and gender studies, if there is ever a friction between trans inclusive scholars and other academics whose ideologies are maybe less inclusive and might even date back to what we were talking about with the Michigan Women’s Festival and all.

**Hil:** [laugh] Yeah. There are definitely trans antagonistic folks in the academy, for sure. Many of them. I think in the field of women’s, gender, and sexualities studies, they tend to be a pretty small minority but they’ve also been, in certain moments, extremely vocal. What that means is that there’s been a disproportionate degree of attention paid to scholars in women’s, gender, and sexualities studies that are kind of shitty about trans people, unfortunately. And I think one of the things that really drove this point home for me was… I have a colleague at Penn State who was in the news quite a lot a couple of years ago because he was engaging in very, very specifically transphobic tactics in the classroom, mostly circling around his refusal to correctly gender his students. As a response to that practice, which was made… ended up making national news or at least news within the context of news about higher education, there was this very, very large open letter put out that was signed by all of the heavy hitters currently in the field of women’s, gender, and sexualities studies. It was a good representation of the fact that the vast majority of this field that I work in was very much united in opposition to trans antagonistic practices even though the small minority of people who specifically engage in transphobic relationships to their students and the production of transphobic knowledges tend to get a lot more media coverage than the folks who are simply not doing that and trying their best to be trans inclusive in the classroom and their research.

**Tuck:** Cool. I hope that is heartening for people to hear, that it’s a small but vocal minority, much like transphobes in general. Anyway, in your work, you write about how it’s not necessarily appropriate to project current gender labels, like transgender, onto the folks that we might see in trans and queer archives. Can you talk about the evolution of language, the English language, to refer to people who aren’t neatly cisgender?

**Hil:** I think the history of trans medicine and the history of trans community, especially as they navigate the medical industrial complex over the course of the last 70 years is shaped by debates about nomenclature. In the archives, you see over and over again these intense terminological debates about who counts as a transsexual, what kind of transsexual people might or might not be, who is merely a transvestite, and I say “merely” in scare quotes, right, but there were lots of very, very intense debates about what the line of demarcation was ideologically, in terms of diagnosis, between a transvestite and a transsexual. Those debates begin in the late 50s and early 60s and they extend throughout the next few decades and they informed debates about belonging in trans communities in really complicated and messy ways because there were, for instance, support groups that existed but they existed only for folks who filled the criteria for transsexual and not for folks who were interested in cross-dressing or who identified as a transvestite and then, in the 90s, we see a not unrelated set of debates about trans as an umbrella term or transgender versus transsexual. I think my job as a scholar and as somebody who’s interested in trans history is not to come down on any one side of these debates necessarily but to track how they evolved over the course of decades and one thing that seems very obvious to me is debates about nomenclature and about identity labels are also always debates about belonging. As such, they become extremely contentious in ways that are sort of predictable, right? It’s like every time there’s a debate about language in the context of trans communities or trans organizing, it just reminds me of this long history of debates about nomenclature, which are always debates about inclusion and exclusion and always debates about legitimacy and legibility. Who counts, who can be counted, who can access treatment, etc.

**Tuck:** You mentioned burnout earlier and writing about burnout, thinking about burnout. The question I really wanted to ask you was help!

**Hil:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** But what I’m going to ask you is completely different, which is you write, “If we’re serious about addressing the production of burnout, fatigue, exhaustion, disability within trans lives and communities, we cannot afford to internalize and operationalize a concept of care as debt.” And that reminded me of the discourse around emotional labor that I feel like started a few years ago, specifically whether it’s appropriate to refer to the work of providing care and support to your friend as emotional labor.

**Hil:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** I think there’s this trend of “Everyone should be Venmo-ing me for being their friend.” As someone who writes so much about being queer and trans care, what are your thoughts on this discourse about what counts as emotional labor and how we should treat it or weigh it?

**Hil:** When I say I don’t want to think about it on a debt model, what I mean is I don’t want us to all keep tallies of how much emotional labor we think we’ve done and then expect our friends to return that emotional labor tit for tat in the same quantities that we think we’ve given it because I think that’s an impossible calculation and I also think it doesn’t account for why it is that some people have much more intense reserves when it comes to doing emotional labor than other folks. And that has entirely to do with questions of privilege and the kinds of support networks that people do or don’t have access to. And understanding care labor on a model of debt doesn’t do justice to that. It would be the same thing as thinking about salary or the amount of money people make per hour without actually accounting for intergenerational wealth.

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm (affirmative). Totally. This is the part of the show where I ask if there’s anything else that we haven’t talked about yet that you want to talk about.

**Hil:** Ooh! I don’t think there is necessarily off the top of my head. But do you have any wild card questions for me that you didn’t have before you went into this?

**Tuck:** I guess my wild card question would be, you wrote that you felt that you had to be extra performing in grad school because the academy hadn’t yet begun to cannibalize junior trans scholars and I wanted to know what you meant by that.

**Hil:** [laugh] Yeah. Oh my god. It’s so true. Some folks might be familiar with this, what is referred to amongst gay men as the best little boy in the world syndrome.

**Tuck:** [laughs] Please expand.

**Hil:** There’s a book called *The Best Little Boy in the World*. I forget who wrote it but it sold pretty well when it first came out, which was quite a while ago now. But it named this phenomenon amongst gay men that had to do with compensatory over performance because of the kind of discrimination and marginalization they felt as gay men. It refers to this idea that they had to be very, very good, very high performing, very hyper competent boys to compensate for the fact that they were gay. And I think that, when I wrote that sentence about my relationship to academia in the context of graduate school, it’s related because I felt like there was never any way I would be taken seriously as a scholar if I wrote about all of the stuff relating to trans and intersex life that I’ve written about over the last lot of years. So, in order to get away with doing it, I had to know my shit, in some ways so much better than the cis white philosophy dude bros that I was in coursework with.

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Hil:** I had to really… I don't know. I had to over-perform. And that was specifically related to my anxiety about being trans and about being queer.

**Tuck:** And when you say they hadn’t begun to cannibalize junior trans scholars, what is the cannibalization?

**Hil:** Oh! Yeah. So there still are only a small handful of folks that are doing work in trans studies academically and that's, in large part, because of gatekeeping because of how inaccessible even entrance into PhD programs even is for a lot of trans people. And then, if we look at who’s actually getting jobs, who’s becoming a tenured track or tenured professor that is trans and that does work that is concerned with trans experience, it’s an even smaller number. So, what that’s meant is the folks who show up in these academic spaces are often hyper tokenized and tasked with a ton of service labor and then, also have enormous demands made on their time just because a lot of folks want the optics of having a trans scholar on a panel, in a conversation, part of a colloquium, etc. But there are only a small number of trans scholars that have the name recognition and notoriety that would enable them to appear in those spaces. So, when I talk about cannibalizing trans scholars and cannibalizing junior trans scholars, I’m thinking of that phenomenon, where there’s so few to begin with, that the ones who have gotten their foot in the door in academia are also overworked, essentially, brutally overworked. And also doing a ton of care labor in relationship to the students that they work with because when you’re the only trans faculty member at a college or university or one of a couple, it’s very much the case that trans students seek you out for that support. And that support often has nothing to do with their intellectual trajectories or their career goals, which is extensively the reason why they would seek out professors. It has more to do with wanting a more robust trans support system. I’m very happy to do that work and to be a resource for the students in that way and so are most of the trans academics I know but it also is… There’s no way to quantify that. There’s no way that matters in terms of your tenured dossier. It has to do with care labor, for sure.

**Tuck:** In your book… In *Trans Care*, you write, “There are genders and then, there is Gender (capital G) and I believe we can have the former without the latter,” and I just wrote ten exclamation points next to that. I was so excited.

**Hil:** [laugh]

**Tuck:** So you do go on in the book to explain what you mean by that. But can you explain for listeners who haven’t read the book yet what you’re talking about when you say there are genders and then, there is capital G Gender™ ™ ™ ™?

**Hil:** Yeah. So this is actually… It’s a good place to end because, in some ways, it goes back to the beginning of our conversation. When I use capital G Gender in that book, in that sentence, I'm actually referring to both gender as a binary but also a binary that belongs to what Maria Lugones called the light side of the colonial modern gender system. So that is to say that binary gender is always also ultimately a white bourgeois conception of gender norms, stereotypes, etc. When I say Gender with a capital G, that’s what I'm referring to. And I think many of us have different iterations of gender or different understandings of gender, different expressions of gender that are multiplicitous and weird and delightful that are in significant tension with Gender with a capital G. So the question for me then became, “Well, what if there wasn’t this Gender with a capital G? What if we worked to abolish that and the kinds of legibility that that system produces that really negatively impacts so many trans lives?” We can still have gender, I think. We can still have many, many multiplicitous iterations of gender that wouldn’t be evaluated in terms of their validity or legibility in relationship to this idea of Gender with a capital G.

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

**Hil:** Hmm. I’d say fun and hot.

**Tuck:** [laughs] Fun and hot.

**Hil:** Fun and hot. That’s just how I would like everything to be, honestly, ideally. Yeah, fun and hot.

[*Gender Reveal* closing theme]

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or you learned something... I’m sure you learned something... please, tell your friends and community about the show. We have links to Hil’s work in the show notes, including an open access copy of *Trans Care*, which is awesome. Hil is on Twitter @HiliMalatino. I am on Twitter @TuckWoodstock. And the show is on Twitter and Ig @gendereveal. We’re also at genderpodcast.com, where you can find transcripts of the show and other resources as well.

If you like the work that we do here on the show, you can support us at patreon.com/gender where $1 a month gets you access to our weekly newsletter. This is the last week to snag our January merch designs so go to bit.ly/gendermerch by January 31 if you’re into that and, if you’re looking for a place to start building those care webs that we talked about on the show, you might try our online community, which is at bit.ly/genderslack2.

Today’s episode was produced and edited by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our producer for the season is Isaura Aceves. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. And our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. Special thanks to Sharif Youssef and everyone else who jumped in on Twitter to troubleshoot my audio questions and special thanks also to Cass Adair for suggesting Hil as a guest and for answering my questions about what the academy is. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[*Gender Reveal* theme ends]

**Tuck:** Oh my god. My cat just climbed up my body into my arms.

Hello. I love this. I love this because the whole podcast was you saying extremely smart academic things and then, I’m like, “What’s your future gender?” And you’re like, “Fun and hot. Peace. Mic drop. Out.” And I’m like, “Yes! Perfect!”

**Hil:** [laugh]