**Tuck:** The Bistitchual Yarn Shop offers a wide range of beautiful queer and/or Canadian indie dyed yarn and handmade accessories. They ship internationally with free shipping on orders over $100, and they offer beginner and not-so-beginner knitting and crochet Zoom classes so you can join from anywhere in the world. Visit them in person on Annette Street in Toronto or online at bistitchual.ca.

[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, hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show, I am very excited to step out of the host seat and slide that metaphorical chair right on over to producer Jules for our second-ever guest-hosted Gender Reveal interview. I’m going to stay here and lead you through my usual This Week in Gender chaos, but then Jules is going to step in to interview this week’s guest, who is actor and comic D’lo. In their conversation, Jules and D’lo talk about vulnerability, divorce, something called the god-freak complex, making a whole show about the decision to go on T—

**D’lo [voice clip]:** None of us know why we’re really taking the hormones.

**Tuck:** —and resisting the need to have everything all figured out right away, or ever.

**D’lo [voice clip]:** Everybody keeps doing this subconscious thing, like, “Figure it out.” And it’s like, but why? Why do we have to figure this out?

**Tuck:** But before we get to that, we’ve got a teeny-tiny Theymail message for you this week, which is a little message from a listener that we read on the show. This one is from Peter Kahn, and it says, “May you remember what Jefferey Marsh said: you can’t be fixed because you aren’t broken.”

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

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

[Gentle instrumental music plays]

**Tuck:** We’ve got a list of transgender firsts for you this week. Trans firsts can be very exciting. Honestly, [sighs] they mostly just bum me out because they emphasize how many barriers trans people face everywhere we turn, to the point where it’s record-breaking news when one trans person does one incredibly normal thing in the year of our lord, Laverne Cox, 2022.

For example, 65-year-old optometrist Dion Manley was recently elected to his local school board, making him the first openly trans public official in the entire state of Ohio. Mr. Manley is also somehow only the fifth openly trans man in the country to win a political election ever, and I cannot emphasize enough that his name is Mr. Manley. Absolutely incredible.

But before we go any further, let me get this one overtly bleak first out of the way: in the first week of 2022, Republican lawmakers in seven states and counting introduced measures that target trans youth and their ability to do things like play sports, receive healthcare, and pee. As friend of the show Gillian Branstetter said, “Unfortunately I think we’re getting ready to watch a race to the bottom among legislators, who are in a competition to see who can do the most harm to trans kids.” Fun.

But it’s not all bad news today. For example, you may remember that Minneapolis city council member Andrea Jenkins became the first openly trans Black woman ever elected to public office in the country when she was elected in 2017. She recently was appointed president of the Minneapolis Council, and now is also the first out trans official to ever lead a city council in the United States.

Meanwhile, in entertainment news, Mj Rodriguez won Best Actress in a TV Drama for her role on Pose, becoming the first out trans actor to win a Golden Globe of any kind. It’s also the first time that Pose won a Golden Globe for anything. It is genuinely unfortunate and possibly transphobic that she happened to win the one year the Golden Globes were not televised or an event, and instead just a series of awards that were chaotically tweeted out. I don’t know if you saw that; it was…somethin’.

Finally, over in sports news, 31-year-old American figure skater Timothy LeDuc is set to become the first openly nonbinary athlete to compete at an Olympic Winter Games. Hilariously, when I was reading about this, the first quote I saw from Timothy was them saying, “My hope is that when people see my story, it isn’t focused on me and saying, ‘Oh, Timothy is the first out nonbinary person to achieve this level of success in sport.’” So…oops! But Timothy went on to say, “We have always been here; we’ve always been a part of sports; we just haven’t always been able to be open.” And to that point, the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee has said that Timothy is the first openly gay athlete to win gold at a US pairs figure skating event, and that happened two years ago. You’re telling me figure skaters weren’t allowed to be gay until 2019? I need to lie down.

But, side note, apparently there’s another Olympics next month? We’re just going to, like, do that? In this economy?

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:** D’lo is a queer, transgender, Tamil-Sri Lankan-American actor, writer, and comic. He has toured his solo shows and stand-up internationally, and his work has been published and/or written about in academic journals, literary anthologies, and print and online literary sources, such as The Guardian, NBC, CNN, and The Advocate. His acting credits include Looking, Transparent, Sense8, and Mr. Robot, and Billy Eichner’s movie Bros.

[Gender Reveal theme music excerpt fades out]

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

**D’lo:** I say that I’m trans and queer and that’s about it. Trans masc…but, you know, I’m a performer, so I play with gender a lot when I’m in performance mode.

**Jules:** I’ve heard you talk about being gender nonconforming from a pretty young age, even to the extent that you felt like you transitioned into being a girl at a certain point. I definitely relate to that experience of being allowed to be way more gender nonconforming until puberty, and then these social pressures coming in and becoming a lot more intense. What do you think allowed you to overcome that pressure, and at what point were you able to retransition to masculinity?

**D’lo:** If I’m talking about overcoming the pressures, that happened in college. In college, I felt like I was meeting more queer people, and even though I was one of a handful of out people on campus, it made a difference that I was still one of a handful, versus being the *only* queer person I knew for a long time, right? So by that point I had been, you know, donning long hair and I was still dressing masculine, but back then you could sort of disguise yourself as a b-girl. And then finally, I was like, my hair, all this hair is under a cap and it’s there for my family, and I just wanted to go shorter and shorter with it. I just didn’t want to have long hair or anything that was a feminine marking on me.

**Jules:** Yeah, that totally makes sense. I definitely relate to the short hair-to-transmasc pipeline. [laughs]

**D’lo:** Yeah, of course! So many people, right! Like, it’s like, hair is such a big, big deal in our queer communities. You know, it’s like, having hair and not having hair, having body hair, not having body hair. Like the whole thing is like, we’re just constantly trying to push back against, as you said, the pressures, the expectations of what our bodies are supposed to look like.

**Jules:** Yeah, definitely. I think, thinking about those different pressures that you experienced growing up—I know you grew up in Lancaster, California, which is not too far from LA where I grew up. And I’m wondering if you had this experience also, because I grew up with a lot of immigrant family members and getting these kind of specific messages about gender from that cultural context, but then also getting messages about more American kind of like, West Coast hippie gender roles from other family members or kids at school. Did you ever get those kind of conflicting messages about gender or what the possibilities were for your gender?

**D’lo:** I never did. It was always the status quo, [laughs] which is why I was the pushback. I was the messaging to myself. Yeah, everything fell in line with the traditional male-female roles. And if you deviated from that—of course, like when I was younger it didn’t make a difference because I wasn’t expected to do or be anything. But later, you understand that your mere existence is a pushback to so much.

**Jules:** Yeah, totally. You know, a lot of people do have that experience of even from a very young age getting these really intense messages like, “Oh, you’re a boy, you can’t wear a dress” or like, “You’re a girl, you have to learn to set the table” or whatever those things may be. Do you have any ideas about why your family was more open to younger kids, at least, being gender nonconforming?

**D’lo:** I think that when I was younger, they noticed that I wasn’t into anything, quote unquote, “feminine” or, slash, “girly,” I think because they didn’t associate it with queerness. Had they associated it with queerness, then I’m sure there would have been a lot of pushback. Like, for example, if I was assigned male at birth and was exhibiting feminine behavior, then there would have been an, immediately, pushback towards whatever I was doing, whether that was me wanting to play with dolls or being interested in feminine things of my mother’s or my sister’s, you know. At that age, being a tomboy, you know, there was a word for it, “tomboy”—it was fine. And I never felt like I was wrong for it.

As I started getting older, I would hear mildly like, “Oh, D is going to grow out of this. It’s not going to last that long. There’s plenty of people who started off as tomboys and they turned into pretty girls.” So I knew that there was some sort of expectation for me to change. And when that would happen, nobody was hard-pressed about it. And again, this association with queerness wasn’t there. Like, my parents, when I came out to them, they were like, “We didn’t know.” My mother was like, “There’s no gays in Sri Lanka,” you know, like, they just had no damn idea. Now meanwhile, their friends told me later, like these other uncles and aunties, they were like, “Oh, yeah, we knew you were gay from when you were little.” So I think it was just that my parents didn’t have that kind of open conversation with their friends or their friends didn’t feel like they could have that kind of conversation because it was so taboo.

**Jules:** Well, I know you wanted to talk about art and spirituality, and I want to get to that, but first, I wanted to ask about what your relationship has been like with religion more generally. I know you grew up in a Hindu family; you went to a Baptist school. Did those religious experiences influence how you thought about your queerness or transness at all?

**D’lo:** You know, it’s so interesting because for my queerness and Hindu-ness, there wasn’t like—I never got any messaging that queerness was wrong. The messaging was through a cultural lens. Like I would hear my dad saying homophobic jokes or people making fun of gay people, but from my immigrant community. My mother, on the other hand, was very drawn to queer figures because she’s an artist, and she appreciated, for lack of a better way of talking about it, a queer eye, or a queer aesthetic in art. But again, she didn’t associate their queerness with her own child’s behavior or queerness or whatever.

So it was mostly through the Baptist school that I went to, I think it was like in the fourth grade where I heard the word “homosexual” for the first time. And I think it was also around that same time that I saw a Maury Povich show where there was a trans guy on there and the whole audience was clowning him, you know. That kind of messaging fell in line with what I felt like the Baptist Christians were doing because Baptists—this is mostly like, Southern white Baptist school, right—and they were very much like fire and brimstone, like, “If you sin you’re gonna go to hell, unless you ask Jesus as your Lord, to come into your heart as your Lord and Savior.” So, I kind of was trying to cover my bases by accepting Jesus into my heart, and also being Hindu, and my family and like, feeling guilt, a little bit. Like, the Hindu gods were cool with it, but Jesus and God the Father were a little bit more rigid.

And so I just tried, like, I prayed to Jesus every night to be turned into a boy, because when I heard that word “homosexual,” I was like “Oh, shit, that’s what they’re gonna think that I am. But that’s not me. I’m a boy.” That was my understanding at that time, at that young age, is like, “No, but I’m a boy, like, nobody knows I’m really a boy.” So I prayed and prayed and I don’t know what it was in me, but I was like, “This is not my fault. This is somebody else’s fault.” So I think that that made it easier for me to actually navigate and not feel like a horrible terrible sinner all the time. I almost was like, “This town and this mentality is too small to understand that I’m special. And I don’t belong here.” I ran away at 11 because I was like, so clear that nothing was wrong with me. I just didn’t want to be a burden on the people who thought and felt a certain way.

So to religion, it’s not like—yes, I felt like Baptist Christians didn’t have a place for queer people. But I also wasn’t so locked in step with Baptist dogma, ideology to believe in it that hardcore. Like Jesus was my friend, but I was like, “Y’all got this all twisted. I think Jesus might be okay with me.” You know what I’m saying? [laughs]

**Jules:** Yeah! [laughs] I love that. I mean, it almost sounds like your transness or your understanding that there was something different about your gender kind of allowed you to, like, escape or not be fully held in by the anti-queer messages that you were getting. What’s your relationship like with religion today?

**D’lo:** Some people are like, “Are you religious?” And I’m like, “I think I am.” Some people say, “Well, I’m more spiritual,” but like there are some things about how I was raised religiously that I still practice and hold on to. And then I was initiated into another practice, a Hindu practice, but that is more divine feminine focused, and I still carry some of those practices in me. There are some things that I definitely questioned as I’ve gotten more educated around, like, casteist shit in Hinduism and the patriarchy and etc., etc. But I guess you can say I am a certain sort of practicing Hindu. But what I’ve done is I’ve taken the essence of some of these rituals and sort of simplified them for myself in my practice.

And then on the spiritual tip, I have incorporated things that I have always believed in, that are very Hindu as well, but have been sort of melded in my brain and in my heart through conversations in queer spiritual community, which is about—and I see this as in relation to a politic as well—but how our walk on this planet as queer people, and as politicized and social justice-loving queer people, is in accordance with what our queer ancestors were doing, to allow us to stay alive for this long and to be and to have freedoms. And so in that way, some of my spiritual practice looks, you know, very much like being in queer community and having deeper conversations that are rooted in love and justice and care. But then on the other hand, too, it could be in practices like mentorship and sitting with both people who are older and younger to me, and creating connections between different generations. So that is my spiritual practice versus the religious practice. But I feel like these days, I lean towards what I’m calling my spiritual practice as more of my religious experience.

**Jules:** I love that. You have this quote on your website that reads, “I know that art can heal us. It can suture the chasm between generations, and it excavates Gods from religions and places the marginalized as holy.”

**D’lo:** Wow, that’s a great quote! [laughs]

**Jules:** Right? [laughs] Yeah.

**D’lo:** Damn, I’m amazing!

**Jules:** Yeah, I really love that idea that art is this practice of centering marginalized experiences as sacred. I was wondering if you could talk more about what that concept means to you and how it shows up in your artistic work.

**D’lo:** I think that because traditionally, in media and, actually in everything, there’s been this upholding of the people who believe in the status quo and who are trying to keep everything in line because it serves them. It doesn’t serve the marginalized. Traditionally we’ve had people in power that have been white cis men, and there’s a deep desire to stay within a lane because we can’t have cis men not have their cake and eat it too, right? So art for queer people and for immigrants and people of color, Black folks, has been always like, a beautiful form of resistance to that. And it might just be that the stage or different mediums provide freedom to just be, but it is also life-giving. And so when you’ve given life to someone who doesn’t get given life every day, those communities just sort of elevate together. And when you elevate together, or even as individuals in community, your holy is undeniable.

So if me, as a mostly gender nonconforming person for, if we’re talking about when I came out, saying like maybe two decades’ worth, right. If I’m mostly gender nonconforming, and the world has been calling me a freak and saying that I don’t belong, and I shouldn’t be here, and my existence isn’t worth anything. And then within queer community, whether that’s in performance space, or art space, or even in the club, if I am deemed as a god and somebody who is worthy of life, there’s like this tripped-up thing that happens in your brain. I call it the “god-freak complex,” like you’re just constantly toggling between whether you’re a freak or you’re a god. And so it doesn’t allow you to internalize the love that is there for you. Because you’re constantly like, “Well, *they* love me, but *these* people hate me. And those people have a stronger voice, so it must be that I’m not really loved.” You know? Like you’re constantly wavering between like thinking about, “Well, I feel this love, but am I really loved?” You can’t really lock it in your heart, right?

And when in these spaces, queer spaces, QTBIPOC spaces, where people are allowed to be and they don’t—like I think that for me, the stage—and I talk about this a lot—the stage to me is such a sacred place. It is sanctuary, but it is also a temple. It is a church. It is the holiest place on this planet because nothing can happen to me there. Even if something did happen to me there, it’s where I have put in all my reverence, respect for not just my community, but into myself. I have worked hard on my craft. I’ve worked hard on connecting with people. So I get to take up space there, right? Those queer spaces are, for lack of a better word, religious spaces. It is like a religious communal place, like a church or a temple or mosque or whatever, where just by merely gathering to reflect life back to the people in your community, and you’re receiving it as well—to have all of this stuff reflected to you is raising the vibration.

And I hate to sound like a hippie here, but basically what you’re doing is you’re remembering that not only do you belong, that every time you’re pushed from the table, whether that’s religion, politics, whatever—every time there’s cis people pushing you from the table, they’re actually doing a disservice to themselves. Because that’s not only where you belong, but you need to be there. And so, in these queer spaces, you’re basically getting like a surge of this messaging to you, so that it does actually remind our community that not only do we belong, but we’re needed, and we’re not needed for just our communities; we’re needed in the world. And that the more time and space that we’re allowed to know this and sit within that, the world outside of us changes. And so that is the work of gods.

**Jules:** I think on that note of our having some power to change the rest of the world, obviously, there’s been a lot more trans representation on television in the last few years, and you’ve been in several of those shows with trans characters like Sense8 and Transparent. I’m curious if you intentionally tried to take roles in shows with queer and trans characters, or was it more that that was what you were getting cast in? And how did you approach those roles knowing that there was so little representation at the time, and thinking about what you’ve been talking about, about sort of art’s power to change?

**D’lo:** Yeah. The shows came by way of me having been in the world as a solo-based performer for decades, right. So I’ve been touring and doing all of this stuff. And so there were certain people who I had met along the way who ended up getting director positions or casting positions that had offered me auditions for those shows. And they were already queer shows, but there has been more trans representation, nonbinary representation, over the past couple years. But prior to that, there wasn’t. And then there was a wave of representation and how important it was, which I feel like I contributed to in getting more awareness around these things, right.

But there’s also a demographic change too, because I’m older and then there’s younger people who are playing roles that talk about the importance of what’s happening with our young people and how they’re approaching their gender journeys and their queer journeys, you know? And so, for me, even though I wanted to be that representation and take on roles that would make my community proud and make me proud, they haven’t happened as much as I would like them to. But that’s not to say that I don’t appreciate how the lay of the land has changed. And with every single role that I do, I think about the fact that not too long ago, I wouldn’t have been even given this opportunity.

With my own work, like with my producing and my writing and my creating of my own content, I am way more intentional because I have more power. I have more influence in the way that the characters or the stories are created. But if you’re just asking strictly off of my experience as an actor, I think that I just try to do the best I can, you know what I’m saying? Like it’s not even like I’m keeping the fact that I’m trans in my mind. It’s just like, whatever role I’m given, I’m just gonna try and do the best that I can.

**Jules:** Yeah. Well, when it comes to your own work, sort of work that you’re writing and have more control over—you have performed in front of all of these different types of audiences all over the world. I guess I’m wondering, when you’re writing and creating your work, do you have an idea in mind of the ideal audience that you’re speaking to? Does that change depending on the specific show or work? Or how do you approach that?

**D’lo:** Yeah, I mean, it depends. Like when I’m doing my solo-based work, I have my audience in mind, which is just QTBIPOC folks, first and foremost. And then there’s, you know, the larger queer, and also BIPOC folks, and then there’s whoever else is the next, and…. I mean, anybody who comes to my show is going to have a good time. But when it comes to the content stuff, I actually don’t know how my audience from solo-based work and standup transfers over to my work as a content creator, like as a filmmaker or whatever you want to call it. I’m less worried about my work in that arena having as much of an appeal. Like I want it to have an impact and appeal, of course, and be entertaining. But if somebody doesn’t like it, I’m not too tripped out about it. Whereas my solo work, if somebody doesn’t like it, I’m like, “No, but I worked so hard at making this so great,” that if somebody were to walk away and go that they hated the show… actually, I wouldn’t believe them. [laughs] I just wouldn’t believe them. But if somebody who I respected and loved was like, “Man, D…” I would be like, “Whoa, okay, let me look at that.” Because I do spend a lot of time honing in on the story and what impact it’s going to have on the communities that I love and represent.

**Jules:** I mean, that sounds tough too, because I feel like that that can be such a broad audience—like you described queer and trans people of color as the main audience, but then also maybe queer and trans people who aren’t people of color, people of color who aren’t queer or trans—like, I feel like it could be difficult maybe to make something that would resonate equally with all of those people, but that does seem to be something that you do. So that just seems like a challenge.

**D’lo:** It is a challenge, but I think that what works for me is that my story, like Cherríe Moraga, who’s a feminist Chicana scholar and playwright—and she’s not the only person who says this, but I always give it to her because I was one of her students—kept talking about, the more specific and detailed that you get in your storytelling, the more universal it becomes. That equation has been there with me for fucking ever. And my only responsibility that I placed on myself is to tell my story very well, to leave no rock unturned. And part of that is about approaching the work with an integrity that is rooted in pushing through the fears around your own vulnerability and what you’re willing to share.

So if my queer mentors and elders and teachers have been like “D, you’re gonna die if you don’t really understand how your vulnerability is your strength,” then that same truth that I want to walk with in my everyday life is challenged by the truth that I put into my work on stage, right? Like, I’m so intentional when it comes to my artwork that if I lived my life with that same sort of intention, which I do try to do, that’s where my freedom’s gonna be, right? So, I mean, we always think about, like, “Oh, well, if I really let my whole story out, then somebody can take advantage of me,” or, “If I really tell my friends these parts of myself, they could take advantage of me.” And that’s not actually the truth.

Like, you know when you let your truth go and if somebody doesn’t know how to hold it gingerly, that that’s not your homie. That’s not your community, you know? And it’s actually better because you get to weed those people out. No one can touch us, the more vulnerable we are. And that takes some discerning from our own personal reflection work, but nobody can touch us. And so that’s why I keep pushing people in their own arts practices, you know, with students that I have and workshops that I teach, like, “Don’t be afraid. Because you’re going to see, you’re going to be witness to the amount of power you have, when you show up for yourself and show up for this art.” And because it’s ultimately a healing journey. It’s a healing process. It’s not—you think it’s just to express yourself, but truly this process that you’re going through with me is about your overall healing.

**Jules:** You mentioned some of your own mentors and students that you’re working with now. I guess I’m curious if you wanted to talk more about how mentorship was important to you when you were starting this work? And how have you been able to use the experiences you’ve had to mentor this new wave of trans talent who might be younger, or newer to coming out?

**D’lo:** The mentorship that I got was kind of haphazard. It wasn’t like somebody was like, “I want to be your mentor.” It was sort of like me doing theater with a bunch of queer dykes and learning the ropes and learning what made a great play. The other sort of mentorship and teaching that I got was usually in workshop settings for queer people, which I’m so grateful for, because it’s another hit to be taught by queer, feminist elders of color. So whenever I am—I do two things; I do teach, and sometimes those people are younger to me, and sometimes they’re older to me. When it comes to young people and their process of coming out or their gender journeys, I think that sometimes just having a safe space in the form of one individual allows for people to just feel like, “I feel comfortable exploring and being curious about my own process, but through writing,” you know? So sometimes it’s just something as simple as caring for young people and allowing them to feel like they’re got.

And then on the other side, as somebody who brings people through a facilitated process that is creative, I feel like what I carry in my heart is a combination of the best of what I got, and also the *worst* of what I got. Because I think that we’re all traumatized, and there were some lessons that I got that I didn’t need to get in the way that I got it. And I’m grateful for those lessons. But, like, if you think generationally, the people who I was learning from were looking for their own healing, and didn’t have even conversations around self-care or therapy or anything like this. You know what I’m saying? I come from a generation that is the tail end of the AIDS epidemic, and also the generation that didn’t have any support in place, government or community-wise, and there was a lot of self-medication. And so I know that I have my—the parts of me that I’m not so proud of, but I have parts of me that I am proud of, because I’m intentional in making sure that none of those parts enter, or enter less, into the space. We’re always coming in with our shit. But I’m intentional that nothing of my traumas are going to fuck up somebody.

**Jules:** Yeah, I’ve heard you talk also about that idea that you can’t just throw your trauma onto the stage and a piece of art without working through it at all. You have to do some processing and get to a place that you can present it in a way that’s not going to retraumatize yourself or even other audience members.

**D’lo:** That’s my personal belief. People still do it, but that’s my personal belief. [Both laugh]

**Jules:** Yeah, I mean, I really like that and I think that’s a good philosophy. I guess, I think that also means that there are things people don’t see in your comedy about how difficult some of these experiences can be in the moment that they’re happening. And I know you mentioned wanting to talk about mental health, so I’m just wondering if there’s anything you wanted to share about what that processing offstage has looked like for you, what centering your needs has looked like for you, and how you’ve been able to do that work.

**D’lo:** Therapy, I think, is like the best thing ever. But one of the things that I like to touch upon is that we have the ability to rewrite our narratives, and I think that that’s what a lot of young people don’t know. You know, one of my mentors always says, like, “What of your old narrative doesn’t serve you anymore?” And sometimes we box ourselves in with these ideas around our survival. Like, “If I don’t behave this way, then I’m going to be fucked up because this happened to me.” Or, “If I don’t respond in this way, then I leave myself susceptible,” or, “If I don’t….” You know, just really defense mechanisms more than actual coping mechanisms, you know. So I try my best to take people on a process of doing exercises where we’re transforming traumatic experiences into not just a new narrative, but into a comedic narrative, because I think that comedy is so powerful and such an amazing tool to do this transformative magic.

And I remember for myself that like, I could come and kick it with my different queer chosen fam, and be bawling about some shit that went down. And then pretty soon we’re all laughing about it and talking about the absurd things that cis and straight people, or the world, has placed in our laps. And how do you want us to navigate this? And we’re laughing, you know. And that is power that is almost spiritual power. When we transform our narratives, we have shown ourselves that we don’t need to be the person that we think that we are. We can change, we can expand, we can challenge ourselves to be the people who we really want to be, the people who we know we are on the inside. The most freest parts of ourselves.

And, you know, it’s a lesson even for me, like, “How do I bust this open and see what’s on the other side of this? Because I don’t even know if this box serves me anymore, or this understanding of self serves me anymore.” You know? I’m recently going through a divorce, and as painful as it is, I know that I made good decisions in exploring who I was in this 11-year relationship and who I am now. And we all change and we all grow, and ultimately, it’s neither my or my ex partner’s fault. Like, we can get down to these little nitty-gritty details, but I’m changing. And I’m changing so much that the relationship doesn’t serve me. And I wish it could have, but I needed to really break from this understanding because it wasn’t serving me. It wasn’t. It was making me small. And I know that that’s just an example. But I feel like that’s generally how I see people approach their own notions of self and the desire to break from these notions of self.

**Jules:** Yeah, I really—I love that idea that we can change our own narratives and that art can be part of the process of doing that. In your own work, I guess I wanted to ask about, you made this entire show about your decision to start HRT called To T Or Not To T, which is an amazing title, by the way. I’m curious how you decided to turn that thought process into a piece of theater, and did making that show then sort of reverse back and influence your thinking about your life and your transition?

**D’lo:** So all of my shows are personal narrative shows, right? To T Or Not To T is the second in a trilogy, and the first one was D’FunQT, and D’FunQT was sort of my journey into queer adulthood. And To T Or Not To T is my journey into becoming a version of myself that I *liked*. It involved a decision to take testosterone. But the story is also about me questioning, “What does beautiful masculinity look like in a toxic masculine world?” And having been taught by feminist elders and being a feminist myself. Then the third show is called Queer Noise, which is about, “How do we show up in this world, when the world is telling us that we don’t belong”—so like the noise that we hear every single day as queer people that I was talking about earlier. This show is about my relationship to the spirit world, and really honing in, like, “What kind of spiritual being do I want to be?” So we go from, you know, queer adulthood, to being the person that you can live with, to being the best version of self ever, right?

The testosterone bit about it is that none of us know, if you really break it down, none of us know why we’re really taking the hormones. We might know that it will give us some sort of different understanding of ourselves and our bodies, but it’s more of a spiritual thing to sort of desire something that makes us feel more aligned with ourselves. And I wanted to, in To T Or Not To T, show how even the decision to take T wasn’t like…. Yes, I came to an ultimate yes, that I want to have celebrated, but that journey to get to that yes was not like a, “Fuck you. Imma do what I need to do.” It was a, “What is the right thing to do? Do I even feel like a man? Do I even feel like this particular type of masculine?” Do you get what I’m saying? Like all these questions, and to have those questions and be like, it’s okay to have these questions. I can be whoever I need to be. Just as long as I am acting in alignment with my values, you know? That was the story about that show.

And then in Queer Noise, you’re gonna hear what all these decisions ended up manifesting. Because like, we’re all just doing the best that we can, and if I were to end To T Or Not To T on a note that was like, “I have it all figured out,” that’s almost like doing a disservice to a lot of people’s gender and trans journeys, right. But I am trying to leave on this note which is like, “This is where I’m at right now.” That sort of allowing is what I am more curious, artistically, about. Because I know that a lot of people, like—how many people I know have queer cousins, queer siblings, queer children, people who are questioning their gender, questioning their identities in general, you know? And everybody keeps doing this subconscious thing, like, “Figure it out.” And it’s like, but why? Why do we have to figure this out? Like, I think that trans and queer people, we’re not trying to hurt nobody, right? We’re just trying to live. And so let us figure this out. We’re doing the work. Everybody’s just doing the best they can for their bodies, their psyche, their heart, their minds.

And so, to place this unnecessary pressure on people to get to a journey, and to get to the end, like a final journey, is rude and unfair, especially with kids. Like these kids are so young, and they’re like, “I need these freedoms for myself.” And people are worried that they’re going to go back or that if they make any decisions that they’re just, you know—and it’s sort of like, I have the faith that regardless of what happens, people are going to be okay. You know, even with regrets, you’re going to be okay. Even if—I know so many people who have been on testosterone, they were like, “You know, and then it wasn’t for me,” and they’re fine with whatever their bodies are. Like, I had to go through that.

**Jules:** Yeah, I mean, that’s one of the things that I think is powerful about To T Or Not To T,is that in the past, and even still now, I feel like we don’t see a lot of stories about people working through these questions. Or there is kind of that impulse of, like, “You have to have it figured out before you can make a story about it.” And obviously there are all these reasons why we have to act like we’re very sure about our gender to get access to medical care and all these things. But I also think it’s really important for especially younger people to see that like, that is not the only way, and maybe not even the way most trans people think about their gender. It is more of this process of trying different things out. Yeah, I love that.

Obviously, there’s a lot of discussion right now around certain cis standup comics making transphobic jokes. I guess I’m just wondering for people who are tired of thinking about that and giving attention to those comedians, are there things you feel like we should be paying attention to instead? Are there theaters or outlets or individual people who you think are doing a good job of uplifting trans stories in comedy?

**D’lo:** Yeah, I personally didn’t see the Chappelle special. I didn’t want to, and I had been asked to comment, and do all this stuff, and I was like, “I don’t want to do this work. I want to do *my* work.” And I remember when this amazing teacher of South Indian classical dance, she was like, “There’s gonna be people out there doing horrible things in their art, and it’s up to me to keep coming out and being the best.” And that’s kind of the lane that I’ve taken when it comes to things of deep controversy. And people who I really looked up to. Like I loved Dave Chappelle, you know, he was like one of my favorites for fucking ever. So yeah, there are a lot of trans comics that I love to uplift. Robin Tran is one of them; Jeffrey Jay is one of them; Jaye McBride is one of them; Jes Tom is another one. I love these comics.

**Jules:** Well, we have one last question, but before I ask that, is there anything else that you want to talk about that we didn’t get to talk about yet? Either about your work, your gender, anything you want to plug that you’re working on?

**D’lo:** No, I mean, To T or Not To T is coming to the Kirk Douglas next year. So I’m really excited and very nervous. But you know, it’s probably the biggest opportunity I’ve had as a solo artist in my career. So that’s it. Go ahead and shoot your last question. Make it a good one.

**Jules:** It’s the way that we always end the show, and it’s by asking, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

**D’lo:** The future of gender would be that either there’s no big emphasis on your gender identity. And/or there are just, like, *so* many genders that are being acknowledged and celebrated.

**Jules:** I love that. Just so many genders. That sounds great.

**D’lo:** Yeah. So many.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. You can find D’lo at dlocokid.com. We are at genderpodcast.com and on Twitter and Instagram @gendereveal, and you can sign up for our weekly newsletter at patreon.com/gender. Our newsletter is getting bigger and better, because I am now doing the classic newsletter thing where I just send some links to things that I like. People seem to be into it for some reason. There’s also always at least one photo of my cat. Very important. Anyway, that’s at patreon.com/gender. You’ll be supporting the show at the same time you sign up for that.

This episode was produced and edited by Julia Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh; our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]