[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

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.

[Music ends]

Tuck: Hey everyone. Hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show I’m excited to share my chat with Ev’Yan Whitney. Ev’Yan is a sex educator, a sensualist, and a sexuality doula. And in this episode, we’re gonna talk about what those terms mean and how they’re relevant to Ev’Yan and me and all y’all out there. For example, what does it look like to try to be present in your body if you have chronic pain or gender dysphoria? And what does it look like to be a sensualist and a sex educator when you’re also asexual?

Ev’Yan: I now see it as a superpower. And I’m really proud to be ace.

Tuck: But first, just a heads up in case you missed it last week—this is our last episode of this season of Gender Reveal. If you’re new to the show, you’re just finding it the season break, welcome! We’ve got all sorts of great episodes in our back catalog for you, including earlier chats with people like Chase Strangio, Da’Shaun Harrison, and K Agbebiyi. And then earlier conversations in other seasons with people like Torrey Peters, Kai Cheng Thom, Mauree Turner, Tre’vell Anderson, and Carmen Maria Machado.

I could go on and on and on and on, but instead I will point you to genderpodcast.com/starterpacks, where we have listed a bunch of our favorite episodes sorted by interest. So you can look at just the interviews about parenting, or just the guests who are indigenous, or just the authors whose books you’ve read, or whatever. That’s genderpodcast.com/starterpacks. And speaking of website URLs, here’s another one for you: patreon.com/gender. That’s where you can send us as little as $1, and in return you’ll be signed up for our weekly newsletter where we will be posting behind-the-scenes updates on next season throughout the entire break. Plus, you’ll be actively helping Jules and I stay employed and helping fund our grant program. And now it’s time for This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender music plays]

Tuck: I have been sitting here for way too long, staring at the screen, trying to decide whether to write a This Week in Gender segment for y’all. This is our news segment, and the problem with the news is that it continues to be mostly bad for trans people. I will say this instead. I watched Framing Agnes last week, back when it was streaming on the Sundance website. If you haven’t heard of it, Framing Agnes is a documentary about trans people, I don’t know how to explain it better but you can google it. I’m also not sure when it will be available to stream again, but whenever that happens, I really encourage you to see it.

It’s great for many reasons, but something that struck me while I was watching it is not only does the film give us a tiny peek into the lives that a handful of specific trans people were living in the 50’s and 60’s, but many of the actors and talking heads we’re seeing in this film are also trans people who have been in trans community for many years, if not decades. So in that way, it reminds the audience that, oh yeah, not only were there people transitioning 60 or 70 years ago who could theoretically maybe still be alive today, somewhere, but there are these people who are our peers today who transitioned in the 90’s and early aughts. They’re definitely still around and we can be learning from them. And I say this now, not because I just invented the concept of trans elder in this moment, but because we as trans people, and I extremely am not immune to this, we as trans people love to act as if we are just now, for the first time, inventing transsexuality or gender nonconformity or whatever. And then I talk to my friends who transitioned 10 or 15 or 20 years ago, and I’m like, “Oh right, we’ve been doing this forever.” And in some ways, it’s quite different, but in many ways, it’s very much the same.

I think all the time about my friend who is 15 years older than me, and I think even older than that in trans years, and he was talking about how when he first transitioned, he got in a fight with Buck Angel on the internet. And then I was like, “Oh yeah, I also got in a fight with Buck Angel on the internet.” It’s just like a rite of passage, I don’t know how many years apart, that at some point when you transition you have to get in a fight with Buck Angel on the internet. Anyway, all that is to say, is that this isn’t new. People of all different ages and backgrounds have gone through this and come out the other side. So if you feel like you are all alone in the trans salt mines, I think it’s worth taking another look around and trying to figure out, who else is down here with you? And maybe even who else knows a way out? Not out of being trans, just out of the metaphorical salt mines.

This looking around can look like reading books, watching documentaries, listening to podcasts—not just this one, but there are multiple podcasts specifically focused on trans elders. It can also look like just going on the internet or maybe into the real world and making real friends and having human relationships. And of course, maybe you already have trans peers and elders and have read Susan Stryker and Black on Both Sides and We Both Laughed in Pleasure and you’re like, “Tuck, stop explaining baby trans things to me! I know all of this, I’m so old.” And to that I’m like, “Yes, I know, I’m sorry.” I just feel moderately responsible for all of the transes whose eggs cracked by listening to this podcast. And also, if we keep having the same intracommunity discourse every three weeks, I’m going to lose what is left of my smooth little brain. This has been This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender music plays]

Tuck: We’ve got two Theymail messages for you today. The first one is from Jaye, and it says, “I am raising money for my top surgery so I can start to feel at home in my body and be authentically me. Even just a little bit helps. Please donate at gofund.me/39980A71. Thank you, and I appreciate you all.”

I just made a donation. I’m going to put a link in the show notes so that you can easily donate. I do feel bad cause you have to pay at least a little bit of money for Theymail, and I want Jaye to make that money back. So if you could donate, that would be great.

And while you’re doing that, I will read you the second Theymail message which is from our friends at Niko \_\_\_\_\_ Works. And it says, “The Dimlit Tarot deck is a weird and queer tarot deck steeped in *the aesthetic*. And it’s crowdfunding again, now with pictures of actual copies. If you are in the market for a deck with a uniquely queer take on tarot, or just want to see how spot gloss on black looks, check it out at ulule.com/the-dimlit-tarot.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

Tuck: Ev’Yan Whitney is a sexuality doula, sex educator, and sensualist. Their work focuses on decolonizing, un-shaming, and liberating sexuality at the intersection of identity, pleasure, and embodiment. Ev’Yan is the author of Sensual Self, a self-guided journal that will help you reclaim your unique sensuality. She also hosts a podcast of the same name.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

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

Ev’Yan: I describe myself as a nonbinary person.

Tuck: And what pronouns would you like people to use for you?

Ev’Yan: I like they and she. And I want to say that the reason I put “they” before “she” is because I really want for folks to prioritize using the pronoun “they” for me, because “she” feels like, you know that favorite sweater you have that you’ve worn for like 12 years. It’s got holes in it, it’s so warm and cozy and comfortable, and it’s great. But also “they” feels like a really snazzy pair of shoes that you never wear because you’re like, I want to wear these with the right moment or the right outfit. So I’m trying to make “they” as worn out as “she”.

Tuck: So you have a podcast as well, and in December 2020, you made an episode that was about coming out as nonbinary. And you said, “I want 2021 to be the year that I’m fully expressed.” So how did that go?

Ev’Yan: Hmmm. Man, 2021 was a good year for me in the realm of like, nonbinary-ness and identity, you know. It was a really big leap for me to make that big shift from my podcast, which was called The Sexually Liberated Woman, to now being called Sensual Self, and you know, I was a little concerned. But it’s been so well received, people have given me so much positivity. And I’ve gotten a lot of community actually, because a lot of the people that follow my work are also nonbinary and trans. Yeah, 2021 was a good year. I just felt really warm and welcomed, and really excited to feel out this space of being unapologetically in my nonbinary-ness.

Tuck: Mmmm. I love that. You came out, as I said, December 2020-ish, which was in quarantine, which makes you in the quaran-trans class, cohort.

Ev’Yan: Oh, yay! Do we have buttons?

Tuck: Someone should make them, if they haven’t already.

Ev’Yan: Please!

Tuck: I’m curious if you feel like pandemic or quarantine played any sort of role in this. Yeah, you’re nodding. Tell me more.

Ev’Yan: Yes! Oh my gosh, I mean one thing that I’ve been thinking about a lot, is even though the pandemic has been horrendous, I’ve been really grateful for the time that it has given me to really examine who I really am. And I remember these moments where I would be in my apartment—this was actually in 2020, when the pandemic was starting—I felt like I got so much clarity about my gender identity, because all I had at the time was my body and myself. And I was really focusing in 2020 on gender euphoria, because for me, my experience of being trans, or being outside of the gender binary, has been like, oh you gotta feel dysphoric in your body, you have to hate your body. And there are moments where I feel dysphoria, but a lot of the times I’m feeling really good in my body.

So 2020 had me really exploring what are the things that make me feel good in my body, what are the things that make me feel good in my gender. I think that’s why I kind of came up with this feeling of the pronoun “they” being like a nice pair of shoes that you fucking love, that you spent lots of money on but you never get to wear. I feel like the pandemic has allowed me to get really clear on the things that feel good for me and my body both sexually, sensually, and also when it comes to my gender, which has been really nice. And also, hard, at the same time.

Tuck: Yeah, it can’t be too easy. But you’re already talking a lot about what we want to talk about today, right, which is sensuality, sexuality, being in your body. On a more recent episode of your podcast, which was called “Decolonize Your Gender,” you said the depth of knowledge you have about your sensuality wouldn’t exist without the depth of knowledge you have about your gender, and I want to talk about that. But I think first we should just make sure we’re all on the same page. Can you talk about what you mean when you talk about sensuality, since that’s really the crux of what you do?

Ev’Yan: Yeah, so I want to say that at first, a lot of people think that sexuality is synonymous with sensuality, or that to be sensual means that you’re being sexual. That’s not necessarily wrong, but I want to create a little bit more expansion of that word and have us explore our sensual selves outside of the confines of sexuality, especially for those who, sex isn’t at the center of their world. I identify as asexual, so for me sensuality is not necessarily an extension of my sexuality. The way that I define sensuality is that it is the process of being fully in your body and in your senses.

For me, when I grew up, when I heard the word “sensual,” it was designated toward a certain image or mannerism that someone had as a performance so that the folks gazing upon it feel a sense of inspiration or desire. And again, I think that sensuality can have a performative effect, if that’s what you’re going for, but the flip for me has been seeing my sensuality as not something that’s meant to be consumed or gazed upon, not something that I’m doing for other people’s pleasure, but for my own. I see sensuality as a really personal experience, something that’s really private and oftentimes something that people wouldn’t even be able to tell that I’m doing or engaging in, because it is so subtle and it is this process of me paying attention with my senses. And also, working to stay in union with myself in the midst of a world that is telling me, and constantly trying to dissociate me out of my body.

So sensuality really is about paying attention with the senses. It’s about having a really deep connection with your body and not just your physical body, but your emotional body, your pleasure body, as I like to call it. What happens in that space, what sort of sensations come up in your body, what thoughts come up in your mind, what emotions flood through your experience as you’re in that process of connection with yourself.

Tuck: Yeah, so I generally feel like I’m pretty good at being in my body as far as, I’m good at reading hunger cues, and energy cues, and knowing when I need to stretch. And like I grew up as a dancer, so I feel grounded in that way. But when I hear words that are at the core of what you do, like “sensuality,” but also “pleasure,” “birthright,” “desire”—maybe this is a function of being raised by two Capricorns, but my brain doesn’t know how to make a personal connection to those concepts. So I guess I’m curious, if you’re working with someone who’s like, “I really just on a core level cannot understand what it means to connect to those concepts or embody those concepts,” what do you think are the first steps to getting more familiar and comfortable with that kind of language for yourself?

Ev’Yan: I think about like, okay, let’s take out the word “pleasure”. What are some things that you can do to make your body feel *good*? Because that’s what pleasure is, it’s about making yourself feel good. So what are things that make you feel good? When it comes to desire, we can totally take that word out of the picture and focus on, what are you hungry for? What are you craving? What are the things that you sort of feel like a full-body yes, that you just want to go in the direction to.

Tuck: Yeah. So you said you’ve been exploring the phenomenon of the sensuality of being trans. [Ev’Yan laughs] That’s a quote. But I am curious how you approach embodiment work and sensuality work differently for trans people and other people who might have specific reasons for not wanting to be present in their body, because it causes them either physical or emotional pain.

Ev’Yan: Yeah, for me, my sensuality, as I said before, is so interwoven with my gender, because my gender is so interwoven with my body, and then my body is interwoven with my sensuality. It’s one beautiful circle. So I can’t think about my sensuality or my sensual self without considering my body or my gender. And so I’ve been thinking about the ways that my body can be sort of like an oracle for me that shows me where to go, or shows me what is missing, or shows me what I need, and how my ability to connect to my body even when it’s hard to connect to.... Cause that’s another thing that I want to say, is that I don’t feel that sensuality is all chocolate-covered strawberries and bubble baths and things like that, I think that sensuality is a practice that is also about honoring what’s hard about our bodies. Because the truth is that it can be really difficult to connect to our bodies, it can be really difficult to be with ourselves and our emotions.

When it comes to working with clients who are trans or nonbinary or even just black folks, there are so many reasons why we shouldn’t be in our bodies, that we shouldn’t be prioritizing the things that make us feel good. We’re living in a world that is constantly dissociating us from not just our physical selves, but our spiritual selves, our emotional selves. And so, yes, there is going to be fuckery in the world, yes, there is going to be all of these forces and systems of oppression that are trying to take you out of your body, but can you feel into this moment *one* part of yourself that you feel good about connecting to? Even if it is just your pinky finger. This is something that I talk about with clients who are disabled, who have chronic pain, where they’re like, “It is really difficult for me to be in my body, because my body is in pain all the time.”

And one of the things that I say is that we’re not experiencing one thing at one time. We’re also experiencing a multitude of emotions, feelings, sensations, information, and so, is it possible for you to feel like, “Yes, I feel pain, but also I can feel a sense of delight as I look through my window and I’m looking at the sky, and that makes me feel happy.” Or, “Yes, my back is killing me, but also I love the feeling and the sensation of my feet being on the ground and feeling that sort of support there.” Or, “Yes, my fucking boss is getting on my goddamn nerves, but I’m eating something really delicious that is making me feel really good.” Is it possible for us to hold the pleasure potential and the potentiality of connection with ourselves in the face of discomfort and fear and dissociation. And I think starting small is a really great way to try to access that.

Tuck: I’ve had a much harder time during pandemic being in my body than ever before, because so many of the ways that I normally am present within myself are not available to me, and also, so many of the ways that I’m engaging with other people and with the world are all virtual. I feel like I’m dissociating more because I’m like, what’s the point of being present in this house that I’ve been in for two years? I said something to my girlfriend about how I’d been dissociating, and she was like, “Oh no!” And I’m like, “I don’t feel like it’s been bad, I’m just like, I don’t need to be here.” But on another level, I feel like it is bad. I should be here.

Ev’Yan: Yeah. I want to say first that I think it’s okay to dissociate sometimes. I think that sometimes, like I was saying before, being in our body can be hard. Being present to the world can be challenging. I feel like it’s okay for us to have moments where we disconnect, because it might be easier for us than trying to force ourselves or connect to ourselves when we don’t want to. So I just want that to be said. I’m thinking for someone like you, who’s like, the way that I connect to my body is by being around other people, and like actually moving my body in public spaces, maybe it doesn’t have to be an hour-long climbing session. Maybe it’s just five minutes where you’re checking in with your body and your breath. And again, that’s hard to do.

One of the simplest but also the most difficult assignments that I give clients who are wanting to connect to their bodies is to lay flat on your back or sit on the ground or sit on a chair and just close your eyes and breath. And just feel what it feels like to have breath in your body. Feel what it feels like to have a body. Notice the sensations of your body being held up by the chair or the floor or your back being supported by the ground, or whatever. And just notice, notice what’s coming up. Also, after you do this practice, whether it’s for three minutes where you’re just breathing and paying attention and noticing what’s coming up in your body, take out a journal or a notebook and just jot down what came up for you. Thoughts, images, bodily sensations. And just track your progress.

Tuck: Yeah, a journal, a notebook, the book Sensual Self by Ev’Yan Whitney. Any of these things are good. [laughs]

Ev’Yan: Oh yeah, my book. [laughs] My book as well, that’s a great resource too.

Tuck: It is, it has all sorts of great prompts. It’s funny, when you were talking, I was thinking about how the most intentionally grounding thing I do in my house is when I’m feeling really, really out of it, I’ll just go shove my whole face in my cat, and just like feel the sensations. And one of those sensations is, I’m allergic to her, but it’s worth it, because of all the other sensations. [Both laugh]

Ev’Yan: Yes! It’s interesting to watch animals too, because they are the epitome of being sensual to me, because they’re just so in the moment. And they’re just moving based on their urges and their instincts and what they want and what they love and what they don’t like. So yeah, I feel like our little animal friends, they can really help us and mirror for us the ways of being present and connecting to ourselves and really listening to what we want at any given moment.

Tuck: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I want to talk about the other facets of your work as well. You are a sexuality doula. I would love to hear more about what that looks like. I’m curious about who you work with, sort of demographically, and what are the most common issues are that people are seeking help and guidance with in that work?

 Ev’Yan: Yeah. As a sexuality doula, essentially—I think a lot of folks are familiar with doulas in the birth realm or the death realm, and one of the things I noticed about doulas is they really work with people through some period of transition, whether that’s life to death, or pregnancy to birth. And so the way that I work as a sexuality doula is I help people release any sort of shame or confusion or fear around who they are as sexual beings, who they are when it comes to their body, their sensual selves, their gender, even. And I hold them by the hand, I guide them, I give them tools and resources to help them come into the full expression of their authentic sexual and sensual selves, whatever that looks like. The things that people come to me for, like not just in the sexual realm—folks are so hungry for different versions of what a sexual person looks like.

I think we’ve all been fed this particular archetype or image of a liberated sexuality, and when I came out as asexual, that’s when a lot of people started flooding to me being like, “Holy shit, I’m ace too, I had no idea, and I’m so happy that there’s someone out there that can model the different ways that sexuality can look.” I think a lot of people hear my work, and they think, “Oh you’re just helping people have amazing orgasms and giving people sex education,” which is part of what I do. But the other part is I want to meet people where they’re at and ask them, who do you want to be as a sexual being? Who do you want to be as a sensual being, if it wasn’t attached to the shoulds that our culture is giving us about what that needs to look like?

Tuck: Mmm. Yeah, you mentioned that you’re ace, and I was reading this article you were interviewed in for The Atlantic written by Angela Chen, who also wrote the book Ace. And Angela wrote that early in you sort of coming into your asexuality, you questioned whether being asexual was compatible with being a sex educator. And I totally understand that feeling. But then I also feel sometimes being ace, ace spectrum, is almost like a superpower of that, because we’re sometimes coming to sex from a different maybe more observational, anthropological lens, I feel. Which I think can lead to a lot of really rich and interesting conversations about sex and sexuality. So I’m just wondering about what that journey was like for you, from coming into that and being like, is this compatible with my work, to where you are now, where you’re empowering other people to come out as ace as well.

Ev’Yan: Yeah, it’s taken me a long time to get here. I’ll be very honest and say that I’ve been a sex educator for almost 11 years, and I’ve only just started to understand what it means to be on the ace spectrum. I didn’t realize that asexuality was on a spectrum until I read Angela Chen’s book. And that’s what really opened so many doors for me about my own understanding of my sexuality. Because I was taught that if you’re asexual, it just means that you don’t have sex, you hate having sex, you’re basically sex-repulsed. And there are definitely ace folks out there who are like that. And that is valid, and sex isn’t everything, and that’s okay. But there are a lot of folks who fall on the ace spectrum where it’s like, yeah, sex is cool. It’s not my center or my focus of my mind, like there are other things that I would rather do.

I think the reason why I was so, I had this sort of conflict of, can I be an asexual sex educator, was because of that misinformation that I got. That well, “How can you be a sex educator if you’re asexual, because you don’t like sex, or you hate having sex?” Which I think is possible—there are a lot of amazing, incredible sex educators out there who might be sex-repulsed, and they can offer up a different perspective because of that. I think also, this is coming to my mind too, I think it just speaks to the hyper-sexualization that we have as a culture, like in order for me to be a reputable sex educator, I need to be having lots of sex. I need to be having multiple partners.

I remember actually when I came out as ace last year, I got so many comments, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of comments from people that were like, “Wow, thank you so much. I think that I’m ace too. I’m getting Angel Chen’s book.” And then there were a handful of comments that were like, “This makes no sense. How can you be a sex educator when you’re asexual?” And I think that’s the thing that is frustrating, and I sort of get afraid of, is that there’s still so much misinformation about ace-ness. People still think that sexuality is this black or white, very binary understanding of what it is, and so yeah. I wasn’t planning on making my asexuality a big part of my work, because I don’t really want to box myself in, but what I’m finding is that my perspective, because I’m ace, around sex, has created even more experiences and different ways for me to think about and connect to sexuality.

And I think that I can offer that to other people too, who, maybe they don’t identify as ace, but they just want different ways to explore pleasure and sensuality and intimacy with their partners. So I now see it as a superpower, and I really, I’m really proud to be ace. I’m happy to talk about it anytime, and there’s a lot more out there than that little statistic says. I think the statistic that I came up into this work thinking was like, only 1% of the population is asexual. I’m like bitch, please. There’s no way. Because if we think about asexuality as being on a spectrum, there’s so many of us that fall in multiple places on that line. Sometimes depending on the day.

Tuck: Yeah, just a fun fact for listeners, which is that, frequent guest of the show Mckenzie Griffler is interviewed in that book Ace.

Ev’Yan: Ohhh, really?

Tuck: Yeah, cause she’s a star. But yeah, I resonate a lot with what you’re saying. I was thinking about how I also remember talking to a family member of mine who was describing her experience in life, and I was like, “Oh, that’s asexuality. You’re just an ace person.” And she’s I think in her 50’s, and she’s like, “No, that would mean I’m having sex with myself.” And I’m like, “Mmmm... no. But, okay. [both laugh] I’ll just let you figure this out.”

Ev’Yan: Yeah, I feel that. I mean one of the reasons why I think it took me so long to come to terms with my own ace identity is because of that misinformation. And also it takes a lot of labor to teach other people, and sometimes it’s just hard to do. So I understand why folks might not want to talk about it or come out about it. I guess for me I didn’t really realize how much of a big deal it was until I came out. I thought people would just be like, “Yeah, okay, cool. So anyway...” I mean, it just created a lot of conversation, which I’m happy about. I think it’s really good.

Tuck: Yeah, something else that I also have thought about a lot, and actually I think we talked about it a little bit, sort of tangentially on a recent episode with K Agbebiyi, is how queerness is so explicitly tied to who you’re having sex with, that I think there are special pressures for queer people to be having sex in order to prove their sexuality, so it can be challenging for ace spectrum queer people to feel queer enough. But, I’m saying that as a queer person, and maybe that’s not true and I’m just guessing. So I’m curious as you, someone who has experience in talking to queer and straight people about this, do you feel like queer ace people have a sort of a different relationship in any way than straight folks to sort of, the pressures of having to prove your sexuality?

Ev’Yan: Oh my god, I think about this *so much*. I think about this so much, especially because I’m in an open relationship, and it was, the whole point of us opening our relationship was for me to have these sexual experiences with other people. And what I was finding while I was dating people, and they just wanted to fuck me, I was like, I don’t really want that. Like, that’d be cool, but what I really want is to take a bath with you and have you braid my hair. That to me is what sex feels like. That’s what I want.

And what I was realizing is there’s a lot of people who I guess, to be queer means to have lots of sex. I was like, “Wow, damn. Am I queer then...? Because I don’t…that’s cool, but that’s not my first choice.” So yeah, I think about that a lot, I think about how limiting our language can be, and the thing that I’ve been trying to do for myself is expand the definition of sex. And to see it not as something that results in an orgasm, and involves genitalia, but what is going to make my pleasure body light up and make me feel good. Or what’s gonna feel like emotional intimacy, what’s gonna make me feel like me and my partner are really connected on a soul level? And we don’t have to always have sex to do that.

Tuck: Mmmm. Privacy for me and my personal life is really important to me, just by making a show where I talk to everyone every week. And it feels like it would be perhaps even more challenging for you as someone who is explicitly talking about sex and relationships and who posts about your relationships and your relationship to sexuality. I’m just curious if that affects your relationships, or your relationship with yourself or your idea of your own sexuality or sensuality, the fact that it is also your job to share that with the world.

Ev’Yan: Yeah, that’s a great question. When it comes to my relationship with my partner, we have really, really good boundaries. And I make sure that anything that I’m talking about when it comes to our sex life, I’m making sure to protect him and get his consent. I also want to say too, that I think a lot of folks will listen to my podcast or look on my Instagram and see the things that I share, and I just want to say that that is like one sixteenth of what actually goes on, you know? I think that sometimes we think that like, oh they’re sharing their entire relationship, but y’all have no idea what my relationship looks like or what kind of sex we’re having, how many times we’re having sex. So I just want to make that really clear that I share what I want to share, and you know about me what I want you to know about me. I just don’t want people to get it twisted like I’m divulging so much information. People barely know anything about my relationship, which is great.

But they do know a lot about my sexuality and my sex life, and my gender, because I’m very public about that. I’m very public about the things that I’m feeling into, the ways that I’m growing, the ways that I’m learning, I do it very publicly. And I think that something I’ve been trying to feel out, especially this year in 2022, is what does it look like for me to hold some of that processing back a little bit? Because I’ve always been a public processer, and I don’t see anything wrong with that—if I could toot my own horn, I think I’m very good at it. I think I’m really good at creating community while I am in this process of growth, because I think it helps other people grow as well and think about themselves.

But I’m really curious to see what would happen if I keep some things hidden to myself and to prioritize this private relationship that I have with my sexuality, my process, the relationship I have with my body and my gender. And also just, you know, not putting things on the internet all that much. Just keeping some things sacred. And that’s been a challenge for me, it’s been an area of growth, because like I said I’m so used to going on the internet and talking all kinds of stuff. But I feel like that’s just another piece of what the pandemic has given me, which is, all you really have at the end of the day is yourself. So what sort of relationship are you building with yourself?

Tuck: I hate it when strangers ask me what I do for a living, because I’m like, “Oh, I make a podcast,” or “I’m a teacher,” and they’re like, “What do you make a podcast about?” And I’m like, “No. No, don’t ask me.” They’re like, “What’s your podcast called?” and I’m like, “No.” [Ev’Yan laughs] What do you do when people ask what you do, do you just tell them?

Ev’Yan: Most of the interactions I’ve had, funnily enough, have been people recognizing me at the farmer’s market or the grocery store, so they already kind of know who I am. But if I’m at the grocery store and the cashier is checking me out and is like, “Hey what do you do?”, I just tell people that I’m an educator. I used to, back in the day when I was very radical about my politics with sexuality, I’d be like, “I’m a *sex* educator!” And of course that would make people clutch their pearls, like, “[gasps], she said the word ‘sex’!” And then I would be like, “Yes, that’s right, I’m a *sex educator*.” But these days I’m just like, “I’m an educator.”

I remember one time I was in New York a couple of years ago, and I was taking an Uber, and as usually happens in an Uber, they’re like, “Oh what are you here for? You came from the airport, where are you from? Blah, blah, blah.” And I was like, “Yeah, I’m here for work.” And he was like, “Oh what do you do?” And I was just, I couldn’t be bothered, I did not want to have a conversation with this person, but I particularly didn’t want to have a conversation about the work that I did. So I said that I was an educator, and he was like, “Oh, do you educate children?” And I just said yes! [laughs] I was just like, “Yes, I do.” And he was like, “Thank you so much for your work.” And I just felt like that compliment was kind of misplaced, because he was thinking that I was teaching the little ones in school, but.... Yeah, I’m very selective about what I tell people as well, because oftentimes I just don’t want to get into it, you know.

Tuck: Mmhmm. Yeah, well you were just talking about how your approach to talking about your work has changed, but I imagine you’ve been doing this work for so long that your approach to the *work* has changed. And I was listening to an episode of your podcast, I think it’s the “Decolonize Your Gender” one, where you were saying something like, “Oh I have this episode, Episode 5, and it has some really problematic ideas about gender, but I was thinking about taking it down, but I haven’t taken it down, but I don’t like it anymore.” And I relate to that, as someone who over and over again on this show is like, “Why are you listening to earlier episodes of my podcast, please stop doing it.” And everyone’s like, “Haha, I love to be a completionist,” and I’m like “Aghhhh!” Yeah, I guess I’m just curious how your approach has changed, and also how you reckon with this experience that so many of us have where these things that we no longer really believe are still artifacts on the internet that people are still accessing today?

Ev’Yan: Agghhhhh! Tuck, you’re asking such incredible questions, you’re getting to the pit of my brain. I think about this shit all the time. And yeah, almost every episode that I come out with my podcast now, I’m like, “So by the way, I know that I said this back in 2015, but my feelings have changed.” And I’m still sort of grappling with that, because I want for there to be a record of my growth. I think that that is really healthy. I think this vision that we have of people just changing overnight is really, that’s not how it goes, you know. And I’m okay with there being accountability in the ways that I’ve grown and the things that I’ve said that were problematic that I’ve now changed my narratives or my beliefs around.

But also, I’m thinking about a couple episodes on my podcast, like the one about, yeah Episode 5 about masculine/feminine polarity—I don’t want anyone to stumble across that podcast and think that that’s who I am now. Because I think a lot of people think that, they’ll think, “Oh, that podcast episode I listened to where Ev’Yan was talking about masculinity and femininity in 2015, that’s exactly how they feel about it today,” which is not the case.

So, I’m trying to grapple with how do I hold myself accountable to the ways that I have changed and the ways that I have grown, and how do I also protect other people and even protect the work that I do? Because I don’t want people to get it twisted about… I’m trying to find a way to sort of bridge that gap, and the thing that I’ve been thinking about doing is going into those past episodes and just recording a little clip at the beginning being like, “Hey, this is Ev’Yan from the future. [laughs] My feelings have changed about this. You can listen to podcast Episode 67, which can give you an idea of whatever.” Just as a way to direct people into okay, this is who I was before, and this is who I am now.

But I wonder also if other people feel this too, people who maybe don’t have podcasts, or public-facing, people, if they also feel weighed down by how much they’ve changed. Because we now have archives of who we were five years ago, and the things we were saying, and the tweets we tweeted. I think it’s why I come back to this place of, I need to hold some of this stuff back for myself, because there’s some beauty of living in public, and then there’s also this rub of, I think that we’re talking about right now, of how complicated and misleading that could be, you know?

Tuck: Yes. So, we’ve done like a dozen advice episodes on this show, and we have a 30-page and counting google doc of questions that people submitted that we haven’t gotten to yet. So I was scrolling just to see what questions there were around sexuality and sexual orientation people have asked us, and I think that the two most common questions that we’re getting is either, “My partner is scared that they’ll stop being attracted to me if I transition,” or, “*I’m* scared that they’ll stop being attracted to me if I transition. Is it worth transitioning if it’s going to make my partner perhaps less attracted to me?” And we just get that all of the time.

So I’m just curious if that’s a thing you ever run into, or if you have any thoughts for that general concept. Obviously every situation is different, and we don’t necessarily have the details on any of them. But just sort of broadly, that tension where people feel like by being their self, they’re jeopardizing this sort of romantic or sexual happiness that they have. “Happiness” in quotes.

Ev’Yan: [Big sigh] Yeah, that is so fucking tough, and for me as a sexuality doula, I have a million questions I would want to ask these people about what is the state of your relationship, and how long have y’all been together, and is there transparency already and honesty, are y’all, what kind of conversations are y’all having? These are things that would help me to better answer this question. But if I were to just give a general answer to this general question, I would say: choose yourself. I know how difficult that is, because we live in a world that is constantly telling us we need to couple up and we need to get married and we need to have kids, whatever it is, and there’s a high price that is put on our ability to be in a romantic relationship with someone else or multiple people.

On the other hand, I want for that same energy to be directed to the relationship that you have with yourself. One of the things that I say all the time in my work is: the most important sexual relationship you will ever have is the one that you have with yourself. And I think a lot of us are not putting as much emphasis, importance, exploration onto that relationship, because we’re being told constantly, no it’s about the sex that you have with your partner! It’s about trying to rock their world in the bedroom! But what about rocking *your* *own* world? You know? What sort of desires do you have?

And then coming back to this piece around identity, the question I would ask back is: are you comfortable not being the truth of who you are as a way to stay in this relationship? I know for me, the idea of me not being the truth of who I am in any capacity, whether that’s in a romantic relationship, or relationship with me and my mom, or relationship with my friends, literally makes my skin crawl. I cannot be in a relationship with anybody if I cannot be the full expression of who I am.

So for me it’s not even a question. It’s like, if I want to transition, if I want to be the person I know that I am, that I feel so strongly in my bones, that this is the way that I want to express myself and be myself, I say fuck it. I’m gonna do it. And I know that that’s difficult, that maybe other folks would give advice about, “Here, this is how to walk your partner by the hand and educate them about what it means to be trans or nonbinary, and here are the….” You can do that, and also I hope that you will stay in union with yourself, because the relationship that you have with yourself is so important. You’re all you’ve got at the end of the day. And I would encourage folks to, come hell or high water, stay in union with themselves. And to do what they really want and how they feel.

Tuck: That’s such as great answer, and I really hope that people listen to it and that it is helpful to them. I do think that the answer is, if not always, then 99.9% of the time, do what is best for your long-term happiness, which I think is being yourself, not making compromises for what you think another person might need, cause sometimes it’s not even true. You know, sometimes we do all of this fretting, and then it’s actually fine.

Ev’Yan: Yeah! Oh my god, when I was thinking about coming out to my partner as nonbinary, I was fucking scared shitless. I was so afraid. I was afraid that it was going to be the end of our relationship. And I was ready, I was really read to be like, “Okay. If you don’t want to be with me because I’m nonbinary and that is too difficult for your brain to wrap itself around, that’s okay. I’m gonna have to be okay with that, because I’m gonna not shrink myself in order to make you feel more comfortable.”

And it was perfect! My partner was just like, cool. [laughs] It was not a big deal. So it’s very possible that you tell your partner, “I am trans,” or, “I want to transition,” or, “These are the different ways that I want to adorn or express myself,” and they’ll be like, “Sweet! I want to do the same. That’ll give me permission to also play around with my identity.” So yeah, I think we often, we can catastrophize a lot. I know I can as someone who has general anxiety disorder. So it doesn’t always have to be so horrible.

Tuck: Mmhmm. Well, this is the part of the show where we ask if there’s anything else you want to talk about that we haven’t talked about yet.

Ev’Yan: I just want to mention my book, I really do, as a really great resource. We’ve been talking so much about sensuality today, and connecting with your body, and I wrote my book Sensual Self, which is a guided journal actually, it’s not something that you’re meant to read and put on a bookshelf. It’s something that you’re supposed to interact with, and there’s lots of questions and exercises for you to do, that gets you to understanding who you are as a sexual person, who you are as a sensual person, the things that make you feel good, and also what is going on in the landscape of your body, in some really interesting ways. I know that body talk and thinking about being in your body can be really difficult, but I made it so that these prompts are really approachable and fun and light-hearted, and I’m really proud of it. So if folks are interested in learning more about how to get into their sensuality and connect to their body more, I definitely recommend that as a resource.

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

Ev’Yan: Mmmm. You know, I knew that you were going to ask me this question, so I’ve been thinking about it, the Virgo that I am. My answer to that is gender would be everything, and it would be nothing. Yeah.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

Tuck: That’s gonna do it for this season of Gender Reveal. If you had a good time or learned something from this episode, please share it with a friend, and if you haven’t yet, I would love it if you subscribed, maybe left us a little review, maybe scroll back through the archives to see what other episodes you might enjoy. Ev’Yan’s book/self-guided journal is called Sensual Self, it’s available in all the book places. Their podcast is also called Sensual Self, it’s available in the podcast places. You can also find Ev’Yan at evyanwhitney.com and on Instagram @evyan.whitney.

We are of course on Twitter and Instagram at @gendereveal and at genderpodcast.com where we have transcripts of every episode, starter packs for new listeners, and contact forms if you need to yell at me about something. If you want to support the next season of the show existing, please consider joining us at patreon.com/gender, which will also automatically sign you up for our weekly newsletter and other fun perks. If you are looking for trans community, we’ve got our own very wholesome listener hangout internet space at bit.ly/genderslack2. And if you have a question about gender that you would like us to tackle on a future episode of this show, there is a link in the show notes for you to submit those questions anonymously as well.

And one more thing, you may not know that my other job is also teaching people about trans stuff in a completely different context, so if you’re looking for a trans consultant or a workshop facilitator for your company, organization, creative project, please feel free to reach out at sylveon.co, that’s sylveon.co.

This week’s episode was produced 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. Hang in there, and we’ll be back as soon as we can with more feelings about gender.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

Tuck: My producer caught that on your website you have a fun facts section where you write, “I’m non-binary, left-handed, and I never eat the first bite of the apple.” [Ev’Yan laughs] Please tell us how this apple works. What happens? You just ask someone else to take a bite of it? You only take someone else’s apple?

Ev’Yan: I have literally never been asked this question before, so well done. Thank you for being the first. So I take the first bite of the apple, but I don’t eat it. I don’t know, I’ve always done this ever since I was 3 years old. It felt like taking the first bite of an apple is like popping open a bottle. It’s just sort of like you take the cork off and then you throw the other part of it. So that’s what I did, I’m breaking the seal of the apple, and I throw it away. But when I finally got with my partner, I actually give him the bite, because he’s like you shouldn’t waste food, which, but I’m like, you don’t eat the first bite of the apple, that’s weird. So, he eats it now.

Tuck: Wow. That’s so funny, thank you so much for explaining this, we were both like, what’s going on?

Ev’Yan: Thank you for asking.

Tuck: We should really end it there, because how can you beat that?