# Gender Reveal Episode 132: Howie Echo-Hawk

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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.

Hey everyone. I hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show, I’m really excited to share my chat with comedian, performer, event producer, general multi-hyphenate, Howie Echo-Hawk. I had so much fun speaking with Howie about finding your gender alone in the wood, discovering better way to build community, and dealing with the ways that white people respond to honest indigenous comedy.

**Howie:** I get all these smiling white people thanking me for being mean to them. And I was like, you know, this is like, I’m not consenting to this weird kink that you have.

**Tuck:** But before we get to that, I just wanted to let you know I have fully restocked the merch store, and I kept all of your holiday shopping needs in mind. So we’ve got five kinds of stickers, four different mugs, a poster, and some clothing in sizes up to 5XL, as always. Plus of course, all proceeds are split between trans artists and trans organizations. You can find all of that at bit.ly/gendermerch. And now it’s time for This Week in Gender. This week, as promised, I wanted to talk for a little bit about the 2022 U.S. Trans Survey. You may have heard about this already. In fact, you may have heard about it from me, but I wanted to take a few minutes to talk about what it is, and why it feels important to do this.

We have to back up several years to when the National Center for Transgender Equality released the 2015 U.S. Trans Survey. That survey had nearly 28,000 respondents, which made it the largest survey ever dedicated to the experiences of trans people in the United States. The data from that survey was compiled into a 300-page report. And this is how this becomes personally relevant to me. Journalists and advocates and policymakers and educators—they all this cite the data from that 2015 survey to this day because even though 2015 was literally 7 years ago and figuratively 107 years ago for trans people, this is still the best data we have on a lot of these key issues. So last month, for example, I used the 2015 trans survey data to explain to a client that one-third of trans people actually limit the amount they eat or drink in order to avoid using a public restroom. And as a result, 8% had a UTI or kidney infection in the last year. Of course, by the last year, I guess we mean like 2014, but you know we’re pretending it still applies now because we don’t have any way to prove whether it does or doesn’t. So, it’s kind of really specific data that most places wouldn’t think to track that makes the trans survey such as valuable resource.

In fact, as I was scrolling through the 2015 report looking for just interesting examples to pull out, I ran into something in the disability section that I had never noticed before. The survey found that, for example, 4% of respondents were deaf, which is the same as the U.S. population, and 3% were blind, which is the same as the U.S. population. But then there was this one point when those two numbers really diverged, and that’s when they asked if people had “difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition.” A 30% of trans people surveyed said that they experienced this, which is a rate six times higher than the general population. And on one hand, that makes so much sense to me, because of depression and ADHD and trauma. But on the other hand, shouldn’t someone be talking about this? Or maybe they do talk about it, and I just, you know, have difficulty remembering and concentrating, so who can say. Now, of course, trans people are not a monolith, and transgender is hardly a coherent category, so it’s really nice that a lot of the survey findings are broken down into still broad but smaller demographic categories as well. So, for example, when they’re talking about this aversion to using a public restroom, they don’t just say like trans people avoid using the restroom, they say transgender men are more likely to avoid using a public restroom than trans women and nonbinary people. Undocumented residents are also more likely to avoid using a public restroom. And then people who say that people can usually tell they’re trans, so like clockable people, I’m sorry, were more likely to avoid using the restroom than people who think they’re not clockable. And you know, all these findings make sense. But this is just one example of the ways that this data gets broken down into all these different dimensions.

The study also gets more granular with regards to why trans people make the choices that they do. So, for example, among people who have ever de-transitioned, the survey found the most common reasons were familial pressure, harassment, and discrimination. And then, in fact only 5% of people who had ever de-transitioned said that they did so because they realized that they didn’t want to transition. And of course, granted, this was in a survey specifically only for trans people. So it’s a very skewed sample size, but it still gives us valuable insights into not just what trans people are doing, but why.

So that was the 2015 survey. And my understanding is that a new survey was planned for a few years ago, but then in 2019, the majority of the staff at the National Center for Transgender equality resigned from that organization. And that was a problem because you’ll remember that that’s the group that organizes the survey. I can link t the statement that the staff put out when they resigned, but you will be shocked to learn that diversity failures were involved. So the NCT took a few years to regroup, and now they’re back. They are running the 2022 U.S. Trans Survey in partnership with the Black Trans Advocacy Coalition, the Trans Latino/Latina Coalition, and the National Queer Asian and Pacific Islander Alliance. Now do I trust the NCT? No, I don’t trust anyone. However, I still strongly suggest that you take the 2022 U.S. Trans Survey, you know, granted that you’re a trans or nonbinary adult in the United States. The reason I suggest this is because people are going to be using this data to write stories about us and make policy decisions that affect us for years and years and years to come.

And of course, I’m not suggesting that if we all just fill out a survey correctly, transphobic law makers will leave us alone. But I do think that this data can help well-intentioned organizations, particularly like queer and trans-led ones, to do more informed work to support our communities. I think it’s valuable for all of us to have data to back up things that we all know are true, such as the high rates of discrimination that trans people face, particularly specifically multi-marginalized groups of trans people. And I also think it’s valuable for us to be able to learn new things about each other and to compare this moment we’re in now with what was going on back in 2015. If it sounds like I’m trying to convince you of something, there’s two reasons why I feel like I need to do that. One, is that because the survey covers so much material, you’ll need to set aside quite a bit of time to fill it out. It took me 50 minutes, and I was moving somewhat quickly through it. The other reason is because I have seen exactly one post trying to persuade people to not take the survey. That post says that they, and I’ll tell you who “they” is in a second, the post says that they “find the language used in the survey to be harmful, the questions misleading, and the depth of data collection to be invasive.” And they go on to say, “you don’t need to forfeit your data to folks who don’t speak to you with dignity.” And I wouldn’t bring this up except for that that was written by the Euphoria app company. I don’t know if you remember Euphoria from Episode 88 in which special guest Nina Medvedeva wrote an entire This Week In Gender segment about it, but if you don’t, Euphoria is a suite of apps that describes itself as technologies for transgender souls. And it includes a health tracking app called Solace, and a fitness/budgeting app called Bliss. And me being me, I did leave a comment on their post that said something like, I love it when a venture capital-funded health and finance app for transgender souls tries to tell us about forfeiting our data and dignity. And their actual reply was “Technically, we don’t have any VCs backing us. Our last round was a group of individual angel investors and angel syndicates.”

So anyway, don’t listen to Euphoria Inc and its Angel Syndicates. Listen to the trans people in the comments saying, hey, I took the survey, I literally don’t know what you’re talking about. The 2022 U.S. Trans Survey is available in English and Spanish at ustranssurvey.org. It closes on November 21st, which is in two weeks from when this episode comes out. Please take it. Again, that is ustranssurvey.org. This has been, This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender music]

**Tuck**: We’ve got two Theymail messages for you this week. Theymails are little messages from listeners, anyone can buy one. There’s a link in the show notes if you would like to buy one. But for now, this first message is from Steven, and it says: The Trans Advice Column is a blog for questions about trans a gender-diverse identities. Both authors are nonbinary trans people with strong opinions which we share for free with anyone who asks. Read posts and submit questions anonymously at [www.transadvicecolumn.com](http://www.transadvicecolumn.com) Alternately, email transadvicecolumn@gmail.com or find us on Tumblr @transadvicecolumn. Our second Theymail is from Max, and it says: Max Burns is a queer, trans, nonbinary website designer and user experience consultant who offers discounts to the LGBTQIA community. Max can make you a new, user-friendly site. They can also help clients gain autonomy by teaching them how to make edits and perform site maintenance. Contact them at maxjackburns@gmail.com and find their work at maxburnsux.com.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

**Tuck:** Howie Echo-Hawk, also known as There’s Moore, is a queer, trans, nonbinary comedian, musician, DJ, burlesque performer, writer, event producer, visual artist, hot demisexual slut, and all-around Native person. After years and years of being a self-identified sad cynic, they are now quite happy to be alive, congrats! They have gone moderately viral for yelling on the internet occasionally and were once called by the Juneau Empire as standup adjacent. Howie is the founding member of Indigenize Productions and is starting a podcast called Every Native Episode. The way we always start the show is by asking, in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

**Howie**: Hot. I describe myself as a hot person.

**Tuck:** Sick.

**Howie**: Thank you. It’s new, just trying it on. That’s actually a big part of it right now, but that just like I guess technically aesthetics or whatever, but it is like a big part of myself right now. I didn’t like the way I looked for a very long time, and though I have not done much to change how I look besides like grow my hair out and like throw on some makeup every now and again and wear some cute clothes, I just feel a lot more into myself as like a person, you know. I’m AMAB, and like that used to cause me a lot of internal pain, but I’ve been able to really find a lot of peace with my body and also just be really into it. So that’s definitely part of it. And then also, you know, I’m a trans, nonbinary woman, Native person, member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, and also upper Ahtna Athabaskans from Mentasta Village, and yeah, I’m constantly figuring out new things about my gender all the time. And also as an Indigenous person, as a Native person, I’m constantly trying to remember, I guess, what I would have been called in my tribe beforehand, or what I would have, like, my place would have been.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Is that knowledge that you’ve been able to access? Like, this history of gender?

**Howie:** To some degree, a very, very small degree. Unfortunately, on both of my tribes, both of the people I’m, you know, a part of, there’s not a lot of remaining knowledge currently. And a lot of that knowledge is stored in academia or whatever, and it’s stored through the filter of white fucking anthropologist dudes who had no idea what they were even looking at. And so, you know, I see glimpses of it here and there, and it’s become more of a journey for me to like figure that out more intently. But I also feel like I believe and know that it lives inside me too. So that the more I get to places where I’m in like a state of just being, rather than observing, the more I figure out like, oh like actually this correlates with the story that I know, this thing that I’m inherently doing has something to do with the way that we do this thing. And so it’s still an ongoing journey.

**Tuck:** I have this vague memory of seeing you talk on Instagram about how people have been misusing and overusing the word “decolonizing” places that don’t make any sense, and that mostly we can just decolonize land. I’m curious, do you think we can decolonize gender?

**Howie:** You know, if you’d asked me this like before the pandemic, I would have been a very hard line no, that’s not what decolonization is for. Just because like as a political thing, the decolonization, like movement, became coopted very quickly, where every white woman with a yoga studio was like decolonizing her fucking storefront at the mall. And, you know, it’s a fuckin problem. And there’s these academics called Tuck and Yang at the University of Vancouver British Columbia, they wrote this piece called Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor, basically as a way to be like, hey, stop using this for everything. It's actually just supposed to be about land. You know, and I was a lot more hard line about it, but I have softened quite a bit during the pandemic. And also, I’m just like a lot more, I have less desire to teach. And so when I hear people use it now, I’m like, you know what, if you want to decolonize your gender, that’s actually perfectly fine. I understand what you’re saying, like that you want to get rid of the colonial structures in gender, the colonization of gender. And that, I understand that perfectly fine. I do think as a technicality, decolonization should only be used for land. But I also don’t think that matters that much, as long as we’re all on the same kind of road, and you know, the Land Back movement has kind of solved a little bit of that problem too. It’s like delineated from decolonization to be like, we want our land back, specifically, which is decolonization.

It's funny, I don’t really think of my journey, though, as like decolonizing gender. I really do think of it in terms of remembering. And that’s just kind of the way that I personally phrase it, but I’m never gonna comment anybody—unless, I will say, unless it’s a white person who says they want to decolonize their gender or decolonize themself. I had this, I had this white girl in a class that I was in ages ago in UW—she was saying that she was trying to decolonize her mind, and I just said like, what, are you going to disappear? Like, what’s happening? Are you gonna like poof out of existence, you know, because for me it’s like, that’s, that’s different. Like, when people who are the beneficiaries of colonization talk about decolonizing, I’m like, unless you’re moving, I don’t want to hear it. You know, unless you’re going back to Europe, you know.

**Tuck:** Yeah, it’s the energy of like, white people saging, and it’s just like, bitch you’re the one…

**Howie:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** Well, you live in Seattle, I was thinking, I know it’s not the same, but I have said before that I can’t tell if my work is good because Gender Reveal doesn’t get put on lists of podcasts that are good, just podcasts that are LGBTQ+, and you know, as a nonbinary Indigenous person in Seattle, I’m curious how you evaluate for yourself the success of your art or comedy, because you’re not necessarily going to be able to be like, oh I didn’t get any laughs, so that means I’m not funny, or like you could be doing really good work and just like having it land weird because you’re in Seattle [Howie chuckles]. So yeah, just curious how that works for you.

**Howie:** Yeah, it’s an interesting question. I will say one thing that I am on the list of the top 26 Native American comedians—

**Tuck:** Yes.

**Howie:** As listed by UPROXX, which is all of them, you know.

**Tuck:** Yes, exactly.

**Howie:** You know, and like, everybody on that list is hilarious and is wonderful people, as far as I know. I will not stereotype all Native American comedians as being good people because, you know, we don’t like being stereotyped

**Tuck**: Mmhmm.

**Howie**: You know, leave room for me to be awful. But yeah, I-- it used to drive me crazy. It used to drive me crazy because my comedy has been called in an article as punishment comedy, which is the thing that I said about myself and my whole missions when I first started doing comedy, was just to be mean to white people on a stage and talk about the genocide, and see what happens. Because I’m from a very small town in Alaska called Delta Junction, and I was raised around this village called Mentasta, and Alaska is a very Native place, and people did not like us very openly. And so when I moved to Seattle, I had heard about white liberals, and I was really excited to meet these white liberals [Tuck laughs]. And then I was wrong. I was fuckin tricked just as bad, if not worse. And just like the only thing is that they just don’t have much of a backbone to actually tell me they don’t like me, you know? And so, cut to many years and disappointments later, I start doing comedy and I’m just like what if I just go out there and say exactly the truth. Because you know, not that I haven’t done that in life before, but there was always a little bit of like, oh I’m in like a business setting, so I gotta somewhat couch my terminology, or I’m like speaking at an event and I can’t necessarily cuss out the whole audience, blah, blah, blah. And so I’m like you know, what if I just get up there and say it, and to my surprise and chagrin, I was very successful very quickly. And it was like I know that I’m a good comedian, I don’t know how to explain this without sounding egotistical, but I always knew that I could do comedy, and I think that’s because of growing up-- Native people are hilarious, and I was always one of the ones that loved making people laugh.

I also recently, during the pandemic, have like self-diagnosed as autistic, and I realized that part of my superpower is like understanding people, like just as a mass. Like talking, I used to think that anybody could go up in front of an audience without notes or whatever, and just talk for 30 minutes to an hour, and not only can the people not do that, you don’t want to. Like, that’s, my brain is doing a whole thing, and it’s exhausting sometimes. But I could go out there, I literally made a white girl cry at an open mic one time with my jokes, and then people, like it made me infamous, and more—and I was like dang, it really exasperated some of the things I was already dealing with, which was like, being Native is popular in theory, but in practice we are not doing well. Like you know, shit is going really difficultly for us, like we are on the opposite end of all the statistics that you’d rather not be one. And I know what it’s like to live as a Native person in this world. I know the truth, and so going out there being mean to these people, and watching them laugh, and like thank me, or you know they also, you’d get, like I would also get death threats occasionally, I would get people saying all sorts of racist shit to me. And then on the other side I get all these like smiling white people thanking me for being mean to them, and I was like, you know, this is like—I’m not consenting to this weird kink that you have. You know, I didn’t come here to make you feel like that. The main thing that I get to walk away with every time is that the brown and black people and the Native people in the room almost always love it, and that all I really need, and I think at the end of the day, I know that I’m good. I have the validation of like some of my peers, people that I think are very talented and who wouldn’t lie to me.

I have also my family, I come from a big family. And one of our primary gifts as a family is that we do not lie to each other about this kind of stuff, and so they would tell me if I was not like, good. And so yeah, I don’t know, that’s a very long way to say that, how do I know, I guess I just accept that I am good and don’t try to question as much anymore.

**Tuck:** Yeah, no that’s great. And like, to what you were saying a little bit earlier, I got this from another former guest, Salimatu Amabebe, but like they said something that once you say it once, shows up constantly, which is white people love to be dragged. And so it’s like exactly what you’re saying, where they’re like please tell us how we’re like naughty little boys and girls doing colonization. It’s just like oh my gosh, again, I did not consent to this.

**Howie:** There are those people for sure, and like, you know, I just, I cannot attach myself to what they’re feeling or what they’re going to do, but occasionally, like somebody—so I just did a show, I went back to Alaska, I did these two shows with my friend Dan Hurwitz, who is a disabled black and Jewish comedian, who is hilarious, I love him so much, and my friend Mel B, who’s a queer comedian, but then afterwards there’s like this lady that came up to me and she said, a little bit older lady, white lady, and she’s like, hey thank you so much, that’s super funny, and also I just want you to know that you can insult me anytime. And then I said, oh well good, fuck you! [Tuck laughs] In front of like eight people who all just started hysterically laughing, and I’m just like, you know, I couldn’t stop laughing, and then she’s like trying to take her, and she’s like well you know, you say all these things with a smile though, and that’s, you know, you gotta—she’s basically saying that like, I don’t really mean it. And then I was like, no, no, no, no, that’s how I lull you into a sense of security, and now you’re so close to me, anything could happen right now. And then she got all uncomfortable, you know. So I’m not afraid to get up there and just be trans and Native and say, like one of my big jokes when I was in Alaska was like, you know, hey, I’m a trans person, and how many of you are okay with that, and how many do I have to fight in the parking lot afterwards?

**Tuck:** Yeah. Yeah, maybe this is also another overlap, and maybe it’s not, but something that I found, because I’ve been consulting on a bunch of pieces about trans stuff lately, and all of the pieces are only talking about the really hard parts of being trans, and the part where people are like really sad, and I keep being like, can we bring in either some kind of joy and some sort of nice things about being trans, or some sort of levity, because I think that like the people you’re talking to actually have a lot of fun and joy in their lives at some point, and we’re not really like, including those things. And so because all the stories are like that, like when I’m going in to teach or whatever, people will be like, oh wow, that was so much funnier and more fun than I thought. And I’m just like, yeah, we’re fun We have to be fun and funny, or we’ll lose it. And I feel like that’s got to be similar to how people experience Native comedy where I just have to assume because of the stereotypes of Native people that they’re just like, oh I didn’t know that you could do comedy about that, I thought you were just like being sad on a reservation somewhere. I would assume.

**Howie:** Yeah, no no, so there’s this Native comedian that is, he’s passed away now, Charlie Hill, and he has this joke where he says, like a lot of people tell me, you know, I never, I didn’t know that you Native American people could be that funny, and he says, well yeah, well we didn’t think you were too funny either [both laugh]. And like there is a lot of dialogue out there, with anybody who’s oppressed, but in the Native community, that like yeah, we’re hilarious as a coping mechanism. We are funny because of these things. But I’ve actually been thinking a lot recently about how I think we were probably funnier before. And we’re still funny because we’re still here. Certainly humor can be a coping mechanism, has been for me for a long time, but also culturally, Native people, our cultures are amazing. We are wonderful people with rich traditions of hilarious jokes that are thousands of years old, and I think the same is true for probably everybody. If you think about it, it’s like your humor is not, shouldn’t, cannot only come from a place of suffering, because I’ll tell you like as a comedian, lots of comedians are suffering. Lots of comedians have lots of trauma. But when it gets to the point where it’s only that, it’s not really funny anymore. And I actually was experiencing that a little bit, like I was getting so cynical and so sad before the pandemic, and so angry, that nobody who left the show that I was on would really ever be like that was hilarious. They would go like, ouch, that was difficult, and it wasn’t really that fun for kind of anybody.

**Tuck**: Yeah, I was curious—I go back and forth on this question, because there are some people that I’m like, tell me how you think that the people you grew around influence what you thought about gender. And there are a lot of people that I don’t ask, and like I do ask some white people, but I mostly don’t ask white people. And I’m like, is that like fucked up and exoticizing, and I’m like no, it’s just that we all know about white people, and they’re boring. So you don’t have to talk about this. But I am curious, like growing up in Alaska is so different than growing up here, and I am curious just how you feel like that influenced your concept of like, your identities in general.

**Howie:** Yeah, you know, I’ve been thinking a lot more these past couple of years just about my experience in growing up there, because really what I, you know, I got traumatized early on and I just spent the rest of my, especially my teenage years just fantasizing about getting the fuck out of Alaska, and I don’t think I really thought much about gender or sexuality at all. Like I would think, I think in those times, I didn’t want anything to do with my own body, which obviously is like trans feels, but I didn’t understand at the time, and you know, and I’m a survivor. I had these experiences of being abused, and I also grew up in the, in a very fundamentalist Christian church, and obviously being trans was not okay there, and being queer was not okay. And so I just like, had only this desire to get the fuck out of Alaska. And I didn’t see any other queer/trans people hardly at all. There was one person in the village around where I was that I knew of, who was an uncle who passed away not too long ago, but it was not really talked about. Nobody ostracized him at all in the village, and I will say that the experiences of villages in Alaska versus, culturally, versus the experiences of like a little town or city are extremely, extremely different because the villages I think are still largely not colonized in the mentality, especially back then. And so there was just like a, you know, Athabaskan people are amazing, and they don’t do a lot of discussion about what they think about things, they just kind of do those things, you know? And so, looking back, I can see that oh, like there was an acceptance that I didn’t really understand because it wasn’t said out loud. And the only thing I was hearing was negative things, and then I also was thinking about this, I didn’t have internet for a long, long time, but when I could get to internet, which was like 14, 15, something like that, and it was dial-up and all this stuff, I remember getting into like, yahoo game chats. Like playing chess and pretending to be a woman and not thinking anything about it, but now I’m like, ohhh yeah, that’s, that makes a lot of sense. I wanted to be a smart, hot lady playing chess, you know. Like I had no idea, no idea that that’s—and so there were these things like that where being a boy or whatever was obviously accepted, but I just don’t ever remember identifying with it like ever. I just don’t remember ever identifying with it at all.

But I also just didn’t think about it because I had all this trauma, and because I wanted to get out of there. It wasn’t until just like creating own life that I started to do, I think the classic thing of like being a very strong ally, you know. Super strong ally, but not for me. But also, you know, and it’s taken, again, it’s been this continuous journey. I stopped calling myself straight I think when I was like 22, but I didn’t like, you know, my whole thing was like, who doesn’t like Idris Elba, you know what I’m saying? [laughs] Like, yeah.

But I think that, now that I’ve been going back more and finding that I actually really, really like Alaska a lot. Like I love Alaska, it’s a beautiful place, and it’s a, it’s a special place. And I figured out by going out into the woods and going on hikes where I would be alone a lot, or like with my friends, I’m like, oh this is actually where my gender was kind of made. I just didn’t really realize it. Like when I was alone in the woods, I didn’t have anybody’s perceptions of what my body was or who I was, and I was very much just there, and doing that has really kind of re-awoken a lot of stuff, which is, it’s also allowed me to figure out that yeah, like I was very autistic and like alone in the woods, and being like this weird little gender queer kid with a gun, like just hunting and enjoying my life. And, I don’t know, I’ve been thinking a lot about it. I don’t think I have a lot of, I don’t know, I keep on remembering new things is the big thing. Like every time I go back I remember something else. I’m like, oh yeah, this is what I was doing. This is how I was experiencing gender, it just was through this like lens of trauma and pain.

**Tuck:** Mmhmm. Yeah.Well you’ve mentioned being a sort of recently self-diagnosed autistic person a couple of times, and I feel like we should bring that in, because as I mentioned on the show, I just think that many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, trans people are artistic, or many, many, many, many, many, many, many, autistic people are trans. Both. And I was just wondering if those things feel connected to you.

**Howie:** Yeah. Yeah, big time. It explains a lot of why I didn’t identify with being a boy, and because it just like seemed made up.

**Tuck:** Mmhmm. Exactly!

**Howie:** I was like this all just seems fake. That’s why even though I like to say, you know, even though I do identify as like a trans, nonbinary woman, I also, I’m kind of disappointed with those terms because they don’t really mean anything, you know. They have their associated meaning with like society, but again, I’m trying to figure out, I’m trying to remember what I would have been before colonization. But I’m also like, what I try to do now is rather than think about who I am now and what my—I try to think about what I would be like if I was free. I think about that all the time, which I don’t think a lot of people do, or at least I know I never did. But by changing the reference point to what would I be like if I was free, I just by leaps and bounds have found new things out about me, you know? And I definitely think that like, you can look up the statistics, like obviously there’s a really high percentage of autistic people who are trans or gender nonconforming. And you know it’s because of the whole like, we can’t be socialized thing.

**Tuck:** Yes, exactly! [laughs]

**Howie:** It’s just like, sorry, stop faking, you know? And then also, I think that like as I also, just as a brief aside on autism in general, or just all labels, what I’ve figured out as I’ve studied them more and figured out more about these things, it’s the same path that I’ve been on when I, when I’ve learned about anything about equity and social justice and colonization and queerness and transness and now autism and ADHD and neurodivergence, is that like actually, these definitions that we’ve come up with are really not that useful. They are good as a starting point, because of where we’re at, because we’re in this colonized world, but they are simply a reaction to oppression. They’re simply a reaction to like cis heteronormativity to impose norms of like, neurotypicality or whatever. And those things don’t, straight up don’t exist anyway. And so I’m constantly trying to get away from like defining myself by a term that was invented as a reaction to oppression. Because as I’ve looked more into autism and stuff, and certainly parts of it were helpful, it was nice to find like some online community and things like that to help me understand like, oh I’m not alone in these things.

 But what I’ve also come to understand is like oh no, like the limitations of the definition are ridiculous. Like the way that my brain works can only be defined in community and by myself, they’re not something that can be written in a DSM 5, you know like they’re in the diagnostic manual. And again, spending time in the woods, spending time alone and doing that stuff, I started to understand my brain a lot more and realized that like, I think in geographies, I think in like ecologies, you know, like my—and it’s helped me understand too that like the idea that there’s a neurotypical and then there’s not neurotypical is crazy [Tuck laughs], because we are, as people, we are much more like plant life and animal life than we are anything else. And like of course, like the tree is different than the fucking blade of grass, and they’re never gonna be mad at each other for being different. Like they need each other actually. And that gets rid of even of the idea, to me, of even the idea of disability itself. Because it’s not like, oh, you cannot function as the tree does, no, the tree needs me because I provide, you know, something to its roots, probably, you know we all require each other. And if we can operate in an ecology that actually functions well, then there is no disability, there is no, these things. Or the converse is everybody is. You know, like the tree can’t do what the fuckin shrub does. So it needs, like, whatever way you want to look at it, it’s just like, you know, I use the labels because they help people see me, they help people find community with me. But I also refuse to be limited by them.

**Tuck:** Yeah, no absolutely. There’s like this part of me that’s like, hearing you talk about the social model of disability and being like, don’t at me if you don’t agree with the social model of disability, I’m truly not interested. [Howie laughs]

**Howie:** You guys can at me, but I don’t care. I will not give a shit.

**Tuck**: But I think, I think it’s useful because like there are obviously a lot of different ways to think about all of this, including gender. And we’ve talked about this a lot on this show, but a lot of people write in and be like, I’m trying to figure out if I’m nonbinary, genderqueer, or agender, and also there are all these pronoun options, but all of them feel bad—what should I do? And the answer that we keep giving is just being like, you know, sometimes we can’t rely on words to fit ourselves perfectly because we’re experiencing something that’s like beyond language, and the language is going to be inherently limiting, but we’re not saying it in a beautiful way that you’re saying, so I really appreciate you saying beautiful things about trees, so I can just point to that in the future [both laugh]. And be like, it’s this obviously.

**Howie:** Obviously. Obviously, where have you guys been—look at a tree, okay. I will say, like I think that I’m also going to wrap polyamory into this too, because I’m a polyamorous person, and I think that that is so much more, the idea of monogamy, first of all, is almost brand new, and it’s so imposed. Of course, like, I don’t think anybody’s actually monogamous, because that’s not how communities work. You know, or at least how they should work. Like I’m much more a fan of like Kim TallBear writes about like the Indigenous kinship model, which is, I think, speaks a lot better than how I could ever speak about it. But also I’m in a wonderful relationship with a lovely, nonbinary person who listens to the podcast, just by the way, so shout out to the—

**Tuck:** Hellooo! [laughs]

**Howie:** And so, you know, as we’ve been like, figuring out our polyamory together, what that looks like, and like I’ve been polyamorous for a long time, but you know, like always, again, is redefining itself and figuring out, I’ve learned the same lesson again that I’ve learned with autism, with transness, with queerness, with disability, with whatever you want to think about, that like the answers are not in books. The answers are not in discussion, even. Often, they are in you getting into your body, getting into a state of being rather than a sate of observing your state of being, rather, getting out of that double consciousness, and getting out into the woods, getting out into a community space, or whatever, and observing each other and seeing how you might be if you were free in that environment. That, I think, is a lot more, a lot more of our answers come from than from reading anything. Not to say that reading or whatever is not good, or like, I’m not anti-reading, okay, don’t at me. I’m not anti, but I have figured out that as an autistic kid, I didn’t even talk until I was two, or you know, I didn’t really talk much. And then I started talking in full sentences, and I’ve come to realize that like the way that I use language is an acquired skill. It is not my most natural one. And nonverbal communication and non-written communication and learning is, I think, way more valuable than our intellectual readings or anything like that, than anybody could ever know. But we don’t ever really think about that. We don’t ever think about how we learn outside of like intellectualizing it, because we live in this bullshit world that tells us that intellectual reality is the end all be all for learning. But it just really isn’t. There is so much more, like, get a garden, I don’t know, like make a new friend and like, rather than define your relationship to them in like, monogamy or friendship or polyamory or I’m autistic and your autistic or we’re both trans or whatever—how do you interact with each other in a free way, and then how is that defining you? How’s that defining your relationship to yourself, because that’s, it’s all about, these things for me are just an expression of finding my own joy and freedom, you know, and self-acceptance, and that, I think, is the beauty of the whole journey of all these things, is like, finding freedom, self-acceptance, and joy, because what else is there? You know, like that’s what we have to do. We live in a tough place in a tough world, and if we cannot center those things, we will never find them, you know, and the hard things are always going to be there, so please try and find some joy, you know, try and find some self-acceptance, try and find out who you are, and who you might be if you were free.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I love that we sort of went down this naturally, because I was listening to you on the Deep End Friends podcast, which I just will point out that anyone who likes this interview , which is hopefully everyone, should go listen to your, your second episode on that Season 4 Episode 4, because it is beautiful and you talk about totally different things that I really think everyone should hear that we’re not gonna have time for. But I wrote down a quote from that, it says, “We relate to each other very badly. We recognize that. But the ways we’re trying to rectify that are some of the whitest, dumbest things I’ve ever seen.” [both laugh] And I was like yeahhh.

**Howie:** Yeah. That is the--when I get frustrated with this community that I am a part of or these communities, it is because I’m like, yes, we want to be human, so why have you made a categorized list for us to be human? Why have you made a series of checklists and like an Excel spreadsheet for us to become human? That’s the least human thing I’ve ever seen. That’s really white fucking nonsense bullshit. Not that like organization, or like being deliberate, or whatever, is a bad thing. It is obviously like, of course, we, everybody throughout the entire history of humankind has done those things, but like that is not the primary way of being, and that is not a good way to self-explore in my opinion.

**Tuck:** Well, I think speaking of making this intentional community and relating to each other in this free way, do you want to talk about your work with Indigenize Productions?

**Howie:** Yeah, I would love to. So Indigenize Productions, we started in I think 2017, I always forget because time isn’t real.

**Tuck:** Mmhm.

**Howie:** I was a baby, like performer in Seattle. I was doing comedy, and I was a part of this really cool show called Dear White People, not the TV show, but like a burlesque/variety show put on by this amazing person called Boom Boom L’Roux. As a performer, I was very anti, like making my stuff palatable, specifically for white audiences, and I felt like I was alone in that, and Boom Boom made a whole show that was that. You know, like the performers got to do whatever they want, and I was like damn, I would love to do a thing with all Native people like this, and Boom Boom was like let’s do it, let’s do it in a month. And I was like okay. And so I founded Indigenize Productions with some other folks, Hailey Tayathy, the drag queen, a drag queen who’s an amazing performer, and Delia Gomez, who is a poet, and Fabian Romero, who is a longtime performer, poet, and a trans, awesome, just human being. Our first show was called You Don’t Have To Go Home But You Can’t Stay Here.

**Tuck:** Oh, uh-huh, I saw that, that was incredible.

**Howie:** Thank you. So yeah, we had these shows that were really, really, trying to put these like, get a message out there, you know, like You Don’t Have To Go Home But You Can’t Stay Here was obviously very deliberate, and we were doing these things, but like the pandemic happens, the Native community in particular was hit extremely hard, and you know it’s just been, this whole time has just been so hard. And as I found peace with myself and the desire to find joy, I’ve had a really strong shift in like what we do, and so now pretty much Indigenize Productions throws dance parties. We throw this thing called Indigiqueer, which is like, I DJ, and I have some other friends that DJ, and we have like go-go dancers, and it’s obviously very queer and trans, and we just all get together in different venues in Seattle, and we just party our asses off and like have a good time, because I think that to me is like the continuation of trying to build community, but trying to build community around joy. We’re always going to be like a performing arts collective, like that’s what Indigenize is, but like taking this shift to taking up space in the queer neighborhood of Seattle on Pride and like throwing an Indigiqueer, I think that one was on June 25th, which is the anniversary that Custer died.

**Tuck:** Oh hell yeah, yeah!

**Howie:** And so I had a poster made up that, with a dead Custer on the back, and he’s bleeding, but the blood turns into rainbows, and then there’s two queer Natives on the front that use the rainbows as war paint, and it’s the best thing I’ve ever done.

**Tuck:** It really is so good. Yeah, it’s beautiful.

**Howie:** Yeah, and you know, like it’s been really nice to find other people who are also interested in just wanting to get together and have a good time, and then like remain connected, because I don’t think that the healing space for us right now is like truly a word-based place. It is like a place where we’re going to get in our bodies and have good times with friends and people, and make connections that are about joy, and then the other things will come, you know. I’ve been thinking about Indigenize Productions a lot, because there’s a lot of room for growth with it, and I love it so much. I don’t think I would be the person I am without it, without my little collective there, Delia, Hailey, and Fabian, in particular, like I found so much freedom by performing, and I found so much acceptance by doing these events, and finding a queer Native community, that I never had anything like it, you know. It’s what I’ve always wanted, and my hope is not to keep doing this forever.

My hope is that I provide a space where also other queer Native people, and other queer people in general, can see what we’re doing and do their own thing. And that’s happening in Seattle, for sure, there’s lots of amazing like, queer spaces that are out there right now, but I have to keep doing this until some other Native people want to take over, because it is such a city thing to like, create a leader out of somebody who’s just trying to have a good time, or somebody who’s just trying to fulfill a need that they have. Like, you’re a leader now, and we look to you for all of our things, and I think that’s really not good. Like, I don’t think that that’s a good thing, and for a long time, I hid my name with Indigenize Productions. I didn’t let people know that I was the founder, I didn’t let people know those things because I didn’t want that, and now I’m like more, more open to be public about it because one, I want to have a lot more trust for myself now, but also I want people to know that there’s a real person out there doing these things, and that I’m just a regular person with my own struggles and a lot of , you know, I’m not some superhero that can just put on an event, or, and also that there’s not a conglomerate of Native people behind the scenes, like making this happen. It’s just me, and it’s a lot of work, and I’m tired, but I love it so much. It is a great joy, and I’ll do it as long as I can.

**Tuck:** So I have one more question for you, because I think it’s getting to me personally. There’s something about land acknowledgments now [Howie laughs] that are always so annoying, even when I can’t put my finger on why this—it shouldn’t be annoying, but it is. And it actually feels like somehow related, not directly, but somehow related to how pronoun sharing has become incredibly annoying, and how like, a lot of trans people are actually, please care less about pronouns. We thought we wanted you to care about this, but it’s too much now. It feels like somehow like a similar energy of just like, I know you’re trying, but I actually need you to go back to when you weren’t trying. I know you’ve written two articles that say like fuck your land acknowledgements, so I just need to know, like, why do I feel this way? Do you feel this way? [laughs] Like what’s going on?

**Howie:** No, I think, I had not thought of it in terms of the pronoun thing consciously, but that’s, I think that’s actually a fair comparison in terms of like, just function, not necessarily like of what was trying to be done, you know. Like you try, because I remember the push for pronouns for people, like everybody wear pronoun pins, even if you’re cis, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and then yeah, it gets exhausting, and I’m just like jesus, I don’t care about this much anymore. Please stop, like, because nothing has changed for them. They slap this thing on, and then they feel good, which is exactly like land acknowledgements. I was a big proponent of like, I thought that was a great idea. I did them. And then I started to notice that I was doing them on not my land, you know. I’m not from here. And nothing was changing hands, nobody was signing over a deed or anything. People were just paying me money to show up, or not paying people money, or like getting people who are like Indigenous Mexican to do a land acknowledgment here, or getting people, you know, like or just doing their own, and I’m like, you know what, this is gross. This is stupid. And yeah, I wrote Fuck Your Land Acknowledgment, not as an attack to anybody in particular, but as like, hey, this is a failed experiment, and we actually need to reevaluate what we’re doing, because it’s not doing what we think we’re doing. And when I wrote that it was deeply unpopular. Like it went pretty viral, and then, especially in the Native community.

**Tuck:** Oh no.

**Howie:** Yeah, I mean, this is my, the story of my life. I say something, or I do something that pushes all the wrong buttons for a bunch of people, and then it goes viral. That happened not too long ago with our first burlesque show called Sweat Lodge, which is, I think it was partially transphobia and stuff like that, because the picture is a very hot picture of me—

**Tuck:** Yes.

**Howie:** Thank you. Being very clearly Native, and also very clearly trans, and but you know, like this is not a discussion necessary for this podcast, but like in the Native community, there’s a lot of people that really hold on to what they know of tradition very strongly because it’s been taken away from us. And so a lot of people made a lot of assumptions about me, and thinking that I was just like trying to make money or whatever and, but I’m also, I grew up doing these things, and I was being very clear about why I was doing it. But like I have accepted my role in this life as like a trickster kind of person. Like I push the wrong buttons sometimes, and I don’t mean to, it’s just because I’m trying to exist, you know? And like I have a thought on things, and so yeah, I wrote Fuck Your Land Acknowledgment, and people were really upset, but like I have been vindicated largely. Because you’re not like—the Native community—a lot of people do not like land acknowledgments anymore. They’re pretty pissed about them, because they have seen that like, oh it is just become another checklist item for colonizers to feel good about themselves. And you know, like again, going back to that white lady that owns a yoga studio, and is decolonizing and has a land acknowledgment now, and it’s just like fuck, like this is not helpful at all. And so one of the last land acknowledgments I ever did is on my Instagram. I got invited by this white environmentalist organization.

**Tuck:** Yes, mhmm, mhmm.

**Howie:** In Seattle, and I told them they didn’t want to have me, but they were like no, do it! Okay.

**Tuck:** [laughs] It’s their fault.

**Howie:** It is. And so, I went up on stage, and I did what now is my favorite version of land acknowledgment, which is like, I’d be like, it’s good to be here in the land of the Coast Salish people, right? And they were like, whoooo! 2,000 white environmentalists are like yay! And then I’m like, yeah, they used to enjoy it too. And I just watched like, they’re like, aghh. And then I said, how many Seattle Natives are there in the house? And people are like whoo! And I was like, what tribe are you? And people left. People left in the middle of my talk, because I just was mean to them for six minutes. And it was one of my favorite things I’ve ever done. I felt like I could have quit comedy that day.

**Tuck:** [laughs] Yeah, come out on top.

**Howie:** I did it guys. And that’s the thing, is like when a white environmentalist organization can ask me to talk about land, like something has gone wrong with our message.

**Tuck:** Exactly.

**Howie:** Like something has gone wrong with our messaging. And it is like, how often are we asking people who are our oppressor or whatever, how often are we trying to get them to understand us by little initiatives that like, make them feel better about themselves. That’s the story of trans people. That’s the story of queer people. That’s the story of—and what we’re looking for is acceptance by an oppressor. And I was actually just thinking about this yesterday, and you know, this may be another controversial thing that I say that gets me, you know, whatever, but like I think that acceptance by oppressors is bad. I think that what that does is creates a place for you to become the oppressor. Like it creates a place, because like now in the queer community, there’s so much division between where we’re like mad at cis gays and cis lesbians, because they act like white people oppressing us, because that’s what they’ve become. Because they have found measures of acceptance inside of an oppressive society. And when you find acceptance in an oppressive society, I’m sorry to tell you it’s still an oppressive society. And so I don’t think that that’s where our freedom comes from. I don’t think by getting like the land acknowledgment, like written into the base of the White House, I don’t think that’s going to do anything for us, you know? And I have a friend, my friend Dan Hurwitz who I Just mentioned earlier, he’s a very funny guy, and he was telling me this joke. So Dan is again, Jewish and Black and disabled, and he says the way land acknowledgments are going, it’s not gonna be too long before the state of Israel has a land acknowledgment for the Palestinian people.

**Tuck:** Right, yes! My voice just cracked like 50 times. That’s a great joke, we love this.

**Howie:** It’s a great joke, and it’s also so true. That is where it’s going. And things that can be done without material change in possession, land possession changing or whatever, then that to me, I’m just not interested. I’m just not interested.

**Tuck:** Is there anything else that we haven’t talked about that you specifically want to talk about today?

**Howie:** I don’t know, I just want to reinforce like, this world is so difficult to deal with right now, and has been for a long time, and I don’t know what’s gonna happen, but I can say that something that I used to think was absolute bullshit, the idea of like finding peace with yourself, I used to think that was such bullshit, because like the material conditions that I lived in every day did not provide that—I have been so surprised to find that like it is true. You can cultivate your own peace. You can cultivate your own version of abundance, and life can continue to come at you, but like if you choose to find spaces for self-acceptance and joy, like I’ve been shouting, or find out what you might be like if you were free, there is something there that like has changed my whole life. I went from being a very sad cynical person, a very suicidal person, to somebody who is so happy to be alive in this stupid little world. Like I’m so happy to be paying 1350 for my fucking rent, you know, just because I just get to be here. And like, I love it. I love talking to people, I love being around myself and figuring out who I am, and I don’t know, I just want to encourage people I guess. Why am I a motivational speak? I just wanna encourage you to look inside yourself…[Tuck laughs] I don’t know. I just, I just want people to be happy, and I just hope that everybody out there finds it. You know, I don’t know if this is the time, but I have something that I want to plug.

**Tuck:** Yes, please. Go for it.

**Howie:** I am starting a podcast called Every Native Episode. It’s a podcast where me and another Native guest—that’s right, there are more than one of us [Tuck laughs]—we get, we watch old episodes of like Seinfeld and Star Trek, and watch the Native episodes of them, and we talk shit about them, or, and we pitch our own episodes where we talk about why often, more often than not, we’re talking about why we secretly kind of like it. Like this is fucked up, but also like we’re just happy to be mentioned. And also you can follow me @howieechohawk. I’m the only one, because of the genocide. [both laugh] That’s a classic joke right there. That’s the one.

**Tuck:** Classic. The classic— genocide always gets a laugh.

**Howie:** Oh man, they love it. They love it. God I wish you could be there, there was one time when I, because sometimes I’ll say these things and it does not land, and it’s my favorite thing in the world. [Tuck laughs] Because I’m like that’s the correct response, actually.

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

**Howie:** In my ideal world, it’s a decolonized world, right. It is a world where Indigenous peoples, Native peoples have control of their lands again and full autonomy to practice who they are, and to take care of the land of the world. And so in that case, I think that like the future of gender for me is that act of remembering that I’ve been talking about. Which may be vague for a lot of people, but it is, I really do believe that in our bodies, we have ancestral memory to these ways of being that we’ve had for thousands and thousands of years. I think that’s why trans people still exist. That’s why, because like, you cannot erase what has always been there, you know? And so I think that like rather than this place where we’re at, where we’re struggling for identities to be known and understood like, it’s a place where we are in a constant state of remembering and relearning how our genders, and how our identity, our sexual identities and stuff complement each other, and how they teach us to take care of each other, and the earth, and how to restore connection, because I think that, you know, in all the old stories, I know from my tribes and other tribes, when I hear about the special people in the stories, when you hear about like the people that were the healers or the whatever, that had the special ways of being, I honestly almost always assume that they were trans or queer. I honestly almost always assume that. And so I think that what we will remember is this magical way of existing in the world where we are able to find healing and peace and love and joy and all those—you know, every time I say these things, I think about me five years ago, I would have hated the things I was saying.

**Tuck:** [laughs] Totally.

**Howie:** So cynical. Shut up, with your peace and your love. But no, I—that’s what I hope for. I hope for a decolonized world where we’re remembering and relearning and then, eventually, spending enough time by the lake or by the tree, that you actually do remember. And it’s no longer a question, it is just that state of being. It is that identity.

[theme music plays]

**Tuck:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with someone, somewhere. You can find Howie on Instagram @howieechohawk and @indigenizeproductions and @\_theresmore\_ and @everynativeepisode. Howie is also working on two websites, howieechohawk.com and everynativeepisode.com, and working on releasing the first episode of their podcast, Every Native Episode. I am told those things will all exist by the time you’re hearing this. You can go try, check it out. You can find us at Twitter and Instagram @gendereveal and at genderpodcast.com, where we’ve got starter packs for new listeners and transcripts of every episode. You can also find us at patreon.com/gender, where we post a new newsletter every week and a new bonus episode every month. This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder and additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

**Howie:** I’m happy. I am hot. I am having a good time.