## Gender Reveal Episode 133B: Dakota Hommes

**Tuck**: Queer Candle Co is a queer and trans-owned business making small-batch, botanical-topped soy wax candles. Choose between scents like the best-selling redwoods, seasonal mulled cider, or fresh peppermint eucalyptus. Best of all, Queer Candle Co. contributes 10% of monthly profits to the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. And you can use code Gender10 at checkout to get 10% off your first order. Learn more at queercandleco.com or on Instagram and Tiktok @QueerCandleCo.

[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.

[theme music ends]

**Tuck**: Hey everyone, hope you’re all hanging in there. In case you haven’t heard, we’re doing things a little bit differently. This week, we have declared it Labor Week, and we’re putting out a special two-part episode. On Monday, we spoke with Spencer of Starbucks Workers United, and today we’re chatting with organizer, Tiktoker, and library worker, Dakota. Dakota is someone that I’ve wanted to talk to on the show for years, so I was really excited to finally get an excuse to talk to her on the show. In this episode, we talked about school book bans, Harry Potter fanfic, growing up Catholic, and of course, the power of trans organizing.

**Dakota:** A small group of trans people decided to start a union, and nine months later we had the first library union in the state of Missouri.

**Tuck:** But before we get to that, just a reminder, I did fully restock the merch store for all of your holiday shopping needs, and the way that Teespring works is kind of weird, and sometimes they don’t send out your order until the end of the month. So if you want something before the holiday season, you’ll probably want to order it before November 30th. We’ve got five kinds of stickers, four mugs, a poster, and clothing in sizes up to 5XL. Plus all proceeds are split between trans artists and trans organizations. You can find all of that at bit.ly/gendermerch.

I also wanted to issue an update/minor correction from the other week when I talked about the U.S. Trans Survey. When I was speaking about that earlier, I believe that I said it was only open to adults. It is actually open to anyone who is 16 or older. And so if you are 16 or older, you are living in the United States, and you are trans or nonbinary or otherwise not cis, please go to ustranssurvey.org and take the survey there. They just extended the deadline, so now it is available through December 5th. Again, that’s ustranssurvey.org. Thank you so much for doing that.

We are once again skipping our This Week in Gender segment, since we’ve got a double interview this week instead. But I do have two more Theymail messages for you, and in fact, they are both about other podcasts that you can check out. The first Theymail is from Al, and it says: Got a strange TV commercial that lives in your head? Boy, do I. Have you ever watched an ad and said, “That’s gender to me”? Then you might enjoy Ad Creeps, the trans-hosted, pro-labor, anti-capitalist podcast about the ads that raised us, fazed us, and amazed us. Head to [www.adcreeps.gay](http://www.adcreeps.gay) or @adcreeps on Twitter. The second Theymail is from Brian, and it says: Teaching While Queer is a safe space for LGBTQIA educators, administrators, and school staff to share their stories working in academia. We dive into our experiences as students and how that informed our work in academia as adults.

[theme music plays]

Dakota Hommes is a labor organizer, library worker, and video creator. She’s best known for being weird and trans on TikTok.

[theme music ends]

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

**Dakota:** Uh, trans woman.

**Tuck:** You said in the bio that you gave us that you’re best known for being weird and trans on Tiktok, and I’m just curious if people recognize you from TikTok, is there like a specific video that they might recognize you from?

**Dakota:** I think it’s a handful. I did a week where I just did narwhal facts, and that was pretty big.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I had on my list of questions, hey what’s the deal with narwhals?

**Dakota:** They’re just really cool. They’re the unicorns of the sea. They’re really weird. People think they have a horn, but it’s a tooth.

**Tuck:** It’s a tooth?!

**Dakota:** Because it’s connected to their jaw.

**Tuck:** Whaat.

**Dakota:**  It grows like a tooth, but the soft part of the tooth is on the outside. So they think that it’s like, they use it to like, sense water temperature and stuff.

**Tuck:** That’s wild.

**Dakota:** And I think I’m just fascinated by them, partly because like, they don’t do well in zoos or aquariums, so they’re on of the only animals I feel like I’ve never seen. Like, I’ll never get to see one in person unless I go swim in the cold waters of the north.

**Tuck:** Isn’t there also a fact you shared about how 15% of the girls have tusks or something, like some sort of good trans fact?

**Dakota:** Something like that.

[record scratch sound effect]

**Tuck:** Popping in from the future—this is the video I was thinking of:

**Dakota in TikTok video:** Oh did you think I was done talking about narwhal tusks? I’m not. I’m not done. This is a narwhal video. So, the tusk, they think it’s a sensory tool, because it has a lot of nerves on the outside of it, and sometimes they rub them together to communicate about the water temperatures, but it’s mostly a sexual characteristic, because males have them, but only 15% of females do. Do you hear what I’m saying? 15% of female narwhals have a tusk. Like the males. It’s natural for female narwhals to have a tusk. It’s just basic biology.

[record scratch sound effect]

**Tuck:** I’ll circle back to TikTok probably at some point, but I wanted to talk to you about your work. You work in a library in Missouri. Missouri just passed a book ban for all schools. Can you talk more about that? I think for me, like there’s so many bad laws passing or going through courts, that it’s had to focus on any individual one, and it’s easier to just be like, seems like bad things are happening. I simply will not investigate. But I’m interested in what it’s been like to actually be impacted by one, like more directly.

**Dakota:** Yeah, I feel like, at least for me and my trans coworkers in Missouri, we’re all on edge because it is a red state, but it’s not as bad as some of the other red states. But that book ban, they snuck it into a bill that was to protect survivors of sexual assault, and no one raised any like, red flags about it beforehand. I didn’t know about it until like, it had passed, and then it was going into effect like two days later. Basically, it banned gay comics from schools. And it’s incredibly vague, and they’ve already pulled a bunch of books from schools, but you can still get all the good gay comics at your local public library, but not in school, apparently.

**Tuck:** Yeah, so sometimes when these laws are vague, it is helpful because it lets you get away with things, and sometimes when it’s vague, people are really erring on the side of like, maybe we should just not have books anymore. So like, when it’s vague, what impact does it have?

**Dakota:** I think, yeah, people err on the side of caution, because the punishment is like, I think it’s like a $1,000 fine—

**Tuck:** What?!

**Dakota:**  And jail time, for a teacher. And so they just err on the side of caution and probably remove more than might actually be like, punishable under the law. It’s like, it bans graphic depictions of sex, and then the person who wrote the bill was saying that like, *Fun Home* and *Genderqueer* are hardcore pornography or something.

**Tuck:** Okay, interesting that those books are both gay. Huh!

**Dakota:** So random! But what you said about like teachers erring on the side of caution, and maybe pulling more books than they have to. There is like, self-censorship that happens at our library. Like there hasn’t been a book ban for public libraries. But as long as I’ve worked there, they have the young adult nonfiction section interfiled with adult nonfiction, which means it’s on the second floor instead of the first floor. And if they did have young adult nonfiction with the rest of young adult on the first floor, there would be a cute little LGBTQ nonfiction section. But by moving it, you can just avoid a challenge altogether, because people won’t see it, and they won’t ask about it.

**Tuck:** Interesting. Has there been any change that you and your coworkers have noticed in like the rates that those type of books are being read and checked out? Like do you think this is having literally any impact?

**Dakota:** I don’t know that I’ve noticed a change since the Missouri book ban happened. But definitely with like, the wave of book bans over the last year, like *Genderqueer* and *Maus* have had like, much more frequent checkouts and like, holds lists and stuff.

**Tuck:** Well good for Maia!

**Dakota:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** Oh, I just, this is just an aside, this isn’t a question, but it is just so funny that, and terrible that this is all happening around Maia’s book. Maia is like one of the sweetest, least offensive people I’ve ever met in my life, and this happening around eir’s book is just so bananas to me.

**Dakota:** Yeah. And there’s like, so many queer graphic memoirs, I’m not really sure why that’s the one they decided to be the poster for book bans.

**Tuck:** I know, poor baby. Well, you were part of this successful union drive earlier this year. Your workplace became the first unionized library in Missouri. And my understanding is that you were personally really involved with that campaign, so I would love to hear like, how you first became involved with that unionization effort.

**Dakota:** Right, so I have to put a caveat here at the beginning, which is that our union is built on the strength of every person who is a member—

**Tuck:** Mmhmm.

**Dakota:** And it belongs to all of us. And we couldn’t have done it without every single person who has put in so much effort along the way. But the story I’m here to tell on Gender Reveal [Tuck laughs] is that a small group of trans people decided to start a union, and nine months later we had the first library union in the state of Missouri.

**Tuck:** Yeah, so one of the reasons why we really wanted to talk to union organizers in this season is because union organizers seem to be disproportionately trans, or trans people seem disproportionately likely to unionize your workplace, which like, I probably shouldn’t say too loud, because I think we face enough hiring discrimination already. But why do you think that is?

**Dakota:** Well, like you kind of said, I think the first thing is we’re not making enough money.

**Tuck:** Mmhmm.

**Dakota:** There was that study earlier this year that showed that on average, trans people make 70 cents for every dollar that their cis peers make, and for trans women, it’s 60 cents. And another thing, is that while all these states are trying to ban access to trans healthcare, a lot of people just don’t have access to trans healthcare to begin with. So I think those are issues that we’re being faced with. And then I think trans people have the skills for union organizing. We already talk to each other a lot and generally understand if we have like, similar politics. And then building a union is like community building. Like, you’re talking to coworkers who maybe you haven’t talked to before and trying to find how you have a common interest, which is that you all need to be making more money, even if you come from a different background.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Well, I was curious, I would imagine that it could feel easier to talk to people when you’re like, okay, we’re all trans here, we’re probably all in like, some amount of solidarity, we all want more money, we all, we all want more rights. And then part of unionizing is going to all of your other coworkers and being like, I would also love to tell you about a union and why you should support it. I’m curious like what that process was like, getting people on board versus maybe like how you imagined it, because I think that can be a really intimidating part of organizing is going up to people and trying to talk them into doing something that they might perceive as scary or bad in some way.

**Dakota:** Yeah. When it started, our first thought was like, okay, let’s talk to anyone who has a pronoun pin or an alternative haircut. [Tucks laughs] And then it’s sort of built out from there. You bring in more people and you get them to talk to the people that they know, and you can get into different departments and spread out. But then it does get to a point where you’re just talking to every coworker, every employee, and there are people you don’t know, there are people who live in a different county than you, and I—everyone brings different skill sets. So like, one thing I did was I did a lot of cold phone calls and house calls, just like knocking on people’s doors because I didn’t know a whole lot of people to begin with anyway, so I was like, I might as well introduce myself to someone new, and that was really intimidating. It’s scary to knock on a coworker’s door—

**Tuck:** Yeah!

**Dakota:** On like a Sunday, and none of them went as bad as like, the worst-case scenario I imagined. And some of them went pretty good!

**Tuck:** That’s great. That’s all you can ask. What was the reception like from your employer? Did they do any like, classic union-busting tactics?

**Dakota:** So we were organizing secretly, like in the shadows, for months. We were being very discreet, and when the administration finally acknowledged it and said something, they sent out an all-staff email saying like, hey some people are trying to form a union, but like, just ignore it. We’ve taken care of it. And then meanwhile, they sent us a cease and desist for our logo, which incorporates part of the library logo. So that was the first thing they said to us, was a threat of legal action.

**Tuck:** Incredible.

**Dakota:** Then we, we went public, we were organizing out in the open, and they said that it was not allowed on work time to recruit for the union. So if someone talked to you, or if you heard someone else talking, you should report it, because otherwise you could both get in trouble. So, they basically encouraged us to snitch on each other, and that made things very hard for us. That was the biggest obstacle probably, was not being able to talk about it at work.

**Tuck:** Yeah, because then you have to go knock on everyone’s doors at home.

**Dakota:** Exactly.

**Tuck:** Oh no. Were there like core grievances that were winning most people over? Was it mostly money, or other things?

**Dakota:** Yeah, I mean, wages are the big thing. Health insurance. They, a couple years ago had restructured the PTO system, and that was a big thing for a lot of people. I would say those are the three biggest things.

**Tuck:** I know that unionizing is a group effort, and every single person is important, but that said, like your name and face are on a lot of campaign materials and articles, so you are very present in it, and we know that, that your employer was threatening legal action, was obviously not happy that you were doing this. Was there ever a moment when you were like, maybe I don’t want to be a public face of this, or were you always just like, yeah, absolutely. Put my full name on there. Put my smiling face on there. I’m gonna go hard.

**Dakota:** It is definitely scary having my name and face out there so much. But like, I was talking about people bring different skills, and that was something I knew that I could do, was like, doing interviews with journalists and stuff. So it was scary. I don’t think I was really afraid of it. Maybe I should have been more afraid, but no regrets.

**Tuck:** Well, the folks who are listening, if they’re like, wow, my workplace is pretty bad, but unionizing sounds really intimidating. Other than none of the conversations went as bad as possible, and some of them went good, do you have any like, lessons learned, advice, words of wisdom for people who are like, on the fence about getting something going?

**Dakota:** If I could give advice to myself back when we started this, it would be, clear your schedule.

**Tuck:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Dakota:**  Because I have some other commitments, I’m still in grad school, and I do other things, and it’s kind of a lot. But the whole process has been really rewarding, because it’s so empowering. It was wild to have it start as a conversation among a small group of us, and then nine months later be talking about it on the news. It was like, oh wow, we really did something.

**Tuck:** You really did it. That rules. What are you studying in grad school?

**Dakota:** Library science.

**Tuck:** Oh amazing, okay, great. So it’s not like, I unionized the library, but I’m about to go leave and do something else, you’re like, no, I’m in it, and I’m studying to do more of it.

**Dakota:** Yeah, I think so. I don’t know that I will want to work at a public library again, at least not in such a public-facing position. But yeah, I love libraries and so do my coworkers. I think we formed a union out of a love for the library and wanting it to be better for us and for patrons. And well, I think sort of like the central problem that public libraries and library workers are dealing with is like, a public library is an information and entertainment center. Like you can get stuff for free, and it’s one of the only places in most communities where you can spend the whole day inside without the expectation of spending any money. Where else can you get things for free? And the reality is that libraries function a lot like a community center, because we welcome everyone. And then we’re also first contact for a lot of community health issues, like drug abuse, homelessness, mental health issues, domestic disputes—all these things come through our doors, because we’re welcome to everyone. But then library workers aren’t given the training to deal with all those things.

And none of my library science classes are about how to deal with someone who’s having a mental health episode.We don’t have a social worker on staff. So if we can’t handle it, it gets passed off to our security, who is a police officer who’s stationed at our library every day. So we interact with and witness a fair amount of traumatic shit, and then we’re not given the resources to deal with it, and we’re underpaid, and we don’t have health insurance. To give a specific example, like last summer we witnessed police carry away like, a 15-year-old boy from the lobby, and everyone like, we all saw it. It was very hard to watch. And then afterwards, they don’t have any resources for us. My friend bought us all cookies to help with the adrenaline crash. [Tuck laughs] And like, that was the most helpful thing anyone did.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Well, I’m just gonna make a hard pivot, I don’t have a transition for this, and we’re going to shift from sort of library union topics to just things I’ve learned about you from TikTok. I don’t know. But I mean, you’ve talked on TikTok like, quite a number of times about how you tried to come out when you were in middle school, and this therapist convinced you that you weren’t trans, you just like wanted to be trans, ell oh ell. And eventually circled back, and you’re like, okay, that doesn’t make sense. But we get a lot of advice questions that are like, “How do I know if I’m trans, or I just want to be trans? How do I know if I’m trans or I’m just a girl who hates being a girl?” What got you from the point of being like, I’m not trans, I just want to be a girl, to the part where you could be like, oh, I’m trans?

**Dakota:** One big thing was, there’s a harmful concept of autogynephilia, which is that most trans women, if you didn’t start as a gay man, then you are just a fetishist. And that was sort of the last thing, someone on Twitter was just like, “Oh you know this is fake,” or whatever, like explaining that. And then I was like oh, I’m out of excuses. [Tuck laughs] But like you were saying, I think wanting to be trans is the same thing. Like if you do any field, or if you do anything, like, if you’re a dancer, you wanted to be a dancer first. So if you want to be a girl, you can just be a girl. That’s the only requirement. That was, I think, what did it for me eventually.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Something that I bring up, because I’ve also heard you mention it on TikTok, is just that you grew up Catholic, and I’m curious like how you feel like that affected the way your whole gender journey panned out, if it had an influence on that?

**Dakota:** Yeah, huge. I went to a Catholic elementary school. So, and I have a memory of being like four or five years old before school, and like, telling a friend that I wanted to be a girl, but then in a Catholic school, boys and girls wear different uniforms, and I think that was just a very rigid binary taught to me. And then after a therapist told me that I wasn’t really trans, that’s when I got really into Catholic faith. Yeah, it messed me up, it gave me a lot of shame and guilt, and in my mind I was like okay, God, I have one prayer, make me a girl or make me stop wanting to be a girl. And neither of those things happened.

**Tuck:** Aww.

**Dakota:** Well, but except though I did eventually become a girl! So God did actually answer my prayer, God made me trans, and that’s it.

**Tuck:** Yeah, you have merch by our friend Atlas Easton about it, I think, right?

**Dakota:** I do. Once I finally did actually transition, it was a very spiritual experience. But I was not interested in going back to the church and trying to explain it to people who had already stopped talking to me. But like, it is not unlike the way they described the holy spirit. Like it is something that moves you, and you can’t really explain why, but you know that you need to do it, and you do it out of love. It is a very spiritual experience, and it was a bummer that they just can’t understand that about trans people, I guess.

**Tuck:** I love that. Well, again, I don’t have a good transition for this, but I was clicking around seeing what else to talk to you about—you have Harry Potter fan fiction in your linktree, do you want to talk about that?

**Dakota:** [laughs] I didn’t think you were going to do this deep of a dive on my social media.

**Tuck:** Got em!

**Dakota:** Yeah, it was a few years ago. I think it was when she finally like, came out as a TERF. I was a big fan of Harry Potter. I grew up reading them. I also like to write fiction, and she was an inspiration, and I was betrayed. So I wrote a short story where Harry Potter is a trans woman, and she transforms herself using magic. And I think it’s a pretty good short story, and anyone can read it on my linktree if you want. And yeah, all of us at the library dunk on Joanne all the time.

**Tuck:** Mmhmm. You simply have to, to get through it.

**Dakota:** You have to. That’s the other thing is, she hates trans people, and she writes under a man’s name.

**Tuck:** I am also obsessed with that! Like, I, do you think that trans people are sneaky because you have like, sneaky gender feelings? Like I don’t want to do the normal thing of like, oh you know if you hate gay people that means you’re gay. But she does write under a man’s name, and she’s *obsessed* with trans people. And I just think we have to think about it.

**Dakota:** It’s the hypocrisy. I don’t know. I don’t know.

**Tuck:** It’s so funny to think about time traveling to the past, and just being like, oh, what should I know about the future? Oh, you know J.K. Rowling? She hates you personally because of the way you are. Like that would be so wild. And then you have to go, what do you mean the way I am, and you’re like, oh, transsexual. [both laugh] And I don’t know. I think about it a lot. Well, is there anything else that we haven’t talked about that you would like to talk about, anything I didn’t unearth?

**Dakota:** I can talk a little bit more about our union.

**Tuck:** Do it.

**Dakota:** And what’s going on right now. So, in May we won our union election, and that means we have a union, and they can’t take it from us.

**Tuck:** Yeah!

**Dakota:** Yeah. But now we have to negotiate a contract, which is like, the big thing. And we’ve just started that, and we have a lot of proposals which are all very reasonable, and it’s very exciting. But one of the things that we are asking for is that they choose an insurance plan that includes trans healthcare, because they don’t. And I was reading that there are 15 states where state employees are prohibited from accessing gender-affirming healthcare through their health benefits, or something like that. But Missouri’s not one of them, so that’s something we’re asking for.

**Tuck:** That’s great. And it’s useful for trans people to know that you can organize for that. The way we always end the show is by asking in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

**Dakota:** The future of gender, is everyone has free healthcare, and trans people can get as many surgeries as they want, and no one can ever take it away from us. And also, in my ideal future, every story time is a drag story time.

[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 whoever you think might like it. You can find Dakota on Instagram @dakotahommes or on TikTok @dakota.danger. We are on Instagram and Twitter @gendereveal and genderpodcast.com, where we’ve got transcripts of every episode and so much more. We’ve also got merch at bit.ly/gendermerch, which remember you want to check out before the end of the month. And if you’d like even more Gender Reveal in your life, we’ve got a weekly newsletter and a monthly bonus podcast available exclusively for patrons at patreon.com/gender. This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Linas Goodman, and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[theme music ends]

**Tuck:** When Gender Reveal started, people said that I was doing archival work, and I didn’t like that, because I didn’t know what it meant, and it sounded intense. But now I think it actually sounds the least intense of any of the options, because if it’s archival work, it doesn’t really have to be like, good. It just has to be on archive, and I’m like, hell yeah. [both laugh]