[*Gender Reveal* theme music plays]

**Tuck:** Welcome to *Gender Reveal*, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to what the hell gender is. I’m your host and resident gender detective, Molly Woodstock.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music fades out]

**Tuck:** Hey everyone, hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show, I speak with writer and activist Niko Stratis about protesting the Toronto Public Library, making a podcast about trans voices, coming out and accessing healthcare in a remote Canadian Territory—

**Niko** [quoted]: “I never met another transfeminine person the entire time I lived in the Yukon. I was the only one.”

**Tuck:** —and eating a pizza shaped like Garfield’s face.

But first, we have new merch in the store by Niko Stratis in an iconic collaboration with Portland’s only fashion editor, Eden Dawn. Eden is a cis person who sent me a DM that said “Look, I know it’s early, but I need you to know that I had a dream last night that I was part of a surfing community, and many of us wore shirts we’d made that had the phrase ‘Surf, don’t TERF’.”

So I tweeted that, and Niko made the shirt, and it has a shark on it, and it’s very extremely good. It’s available in three colors of shirt, three colors of tank top. They’re all now available in our newly revamped merch store for only $19.69 (nice), at <bit.ly/gendermerch>. Half of proceeds go to Niko, the other half go to Girls Rock Camp Toronto. And Eden gets a good cis ally sticker. So again, that’s <bit.ly/gendermerch>.

And by the way, the store works a little bit differently now. For logistical reasons, basically everything’s going up for two weeks, and then it will disappear, and then some stuff will come back and some stuff won’t. So if there’s anything that you like, go pick it up in the next two weeks. Bit.ly/gendermerch.

A quick thank you to all of our new Patrons this week, with a special shoutout to Brenna, who just donated on top of doing a lot of really crucial volunteer work to help us get all of our transcripts up on our website. By the way, if you are looking for transcripts, they are at genderpodcasts.com/listen, which is not a really intuitive URL, but there it is.   
  
Special shoutouts also to fellow Sagittarius, Miranda, and also to rad radio friends James and Dylan. Hey Dylan. Come on the show.

Last week on Twitter, when I wasn’t yelling at Pete Buttigieg (RIP) or running for gay president, I mentioned that I’m having to buy a whole new workspace setup due to carpal tunnel and related maladies, which can get really expensive really fast. And lots of new folks stepped up to help defray those costs. I am so blown away by the kindness and support that so, so many of you have shown and continue to show. And whenever I think I don’t deserve it, which is all of the time, I just remind myself that Chapo Trap House makes $165,000 a month on Patreon.

Anyway, if you’d like to join us on Patreon, you can do so at patreon.com/gender. One dollar gets you access to our weekly newsletter. More than that gets you stickers, pins, all sorts of other good stuff. That’s patreon.com/gender. Okay. Enough of that. It’s time for *This Week in Gender*.

[*This Week in Gender* intro plays]

[Slow, crunchy music plays]

**Tuck:** This week in gender, I want to give you some context for a conversation that Niko and I will have later in the show. So, remember the other week when I said that people sometimes use TERF to use any transphobic person? Well, one case where the word TERF definitely does apply is Meghan Murphy. If you are blessed enough to not know who Meghan Murphy is already, she founded a website called the Feminist Current. She’s publicly against trigger warnings, sex positivity, the sex and porn industries, and trans people. She has repeatedly testified to national governing bodies, including the Canadian Senate and Scottish parliament, that the trans rights movement is hurting women’s rights, as if trans women don’t exist or need rights. And in 2016 she left a job at a magazine after being told to stop using transphobic language. And in 2018 she was banned permanently from Twitter dot com from using transphobic language.

I give you all of this context because in the last year or so, she has been doing an international speaking tour with the anti-trans group, The Women’s Liberation Front, in which they give talks called things like, “Fighting the New Misogyny: A Feminist Critique of Gender Identity”. These talks are largely held at public libraries because libraries are some of the most inclusive spaces in North America. And in the US at least, speech at public spaces like the library is protected under the first amendment. And that is beautiful and perfect and good except when TERFs come to town on their speaking circuit.

So, Meghan’s talks have been in many major cities in recent months. Good friend of the show, Jery from Stick to Resist, organized this really incredible protest in Seattle—I am so proud of them. The New York Public Library ended up cancelling Meghan and the Women’s Liberation Front’s events entirely. And in Toronto, our friend Niko, who you’ll hear from today, became one of the very rad, brave trans folks speaking out against the event in Toronto.   
  
Unfortunately, it appears that Meghan and these other folks can be very litigious. So for that reason, I just want to say that 1. Niko didn’t hear or approve anything in this segment, these are my thoughts, they are not her thoughts at all. And 2. Everything I said is on Wikipedia, more or less, but I could have gotten something wrong. So allegedly, allegedly, allegedly, allegedly.

Anyway, that’s all the context you need in this episode. This has been *This Week in Gender.*

[Slow, crunchy music ends]

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

**Tuck:** We have a piece of Theymail this week. This message is from Eliot at B.UR.SLF LLC and it says:   
  
“Here at B.UR.SLF LLC, we’re creating a more comfortable binding experience. We’ve combined a soft smooth front, a powerful mesh back to eliminate sweat, silicone tape to prevent ride-up, and side clips for adjusting. If you want to find out why our customers say ‘Oh my god, I can finally breathe,’ use the code FGENDER at checkout to get 30% off plus free shipping, at burslfllc.com.”

Okay, this is Molly again. I just wanted to add that these binders run in sizes XX-Small to 3XL. They are designed and sold by a trans man and his mom, which I think is very cute. But I do want to warn you. You know when they say there are side clips. [Counts] There are 27 different hooks? And these look like bra fasteners. And so if you are someone for whom having to fasten nine of these little bra hooks would be dysphoric—they were not called bra hooks, but I don’t know what else to call them—anyway, if that feels dysphoric to you, it might not be a good fit. But for people who don’t want to have to pull a binder over their head, this could be a great fit. Just so you know, before you order. [burslfllc.com](http://burslfllc.com/).

[Main theme plays]

**Tuck:** Niko Stratis is a writer, trans activist, and consultant currently working on a project building a trans health resource website for the Yukon. You can find her work at nikostratis.com.

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

**Niko:** I would say nonbinary trans woman. It’s funny, my gender feels like a rock in a can that’s just been rattling around, and I’ve been trying to locate it so I can finally figure out what it is exactly. But right now that’s how it feels. Nonbinary trans woman.

**Tuck:** So do you feel like you’re still in exploration, looking for the rock in the can? [Laughs]

**Niko:** [Laughs] Kinda sorta. I feel like maybe that was a poor analogy. But I definitely feel like I’m still sorta figuring it out. I was strictly nonbinary for a while, and I was strictly a trans woman for a while. Saying nonbinary trans woman feels more complete to me. But you never know. That’s the interesting thing about this is like, maybe I’ll never really know. Maybe I’ll always be sort of rediscovering or rethinking or what have you.

**Tuck:** Yeah, and the words that we have available to describe our genders could change, which could lead to us identifying as different things as well. What pronouns do you use?

**Niko:** I use she/her primarily, and I also accept they/them.

**Tuck:** I’m curious as someone who has had a multi-step gender journey, which are always my favorites, have the folks in your life been accepting and chill with you changing your pronouns around, or changing your name around, or changing your gender identification around multiple times?

**Niko:** For the most part. I mean like, my partner has been really good about it, and she’s always the person that I talk to. ‘Cause I used they/them for almost two years, and then I talked to her and said, “You know, I think I might start using she/her.” And we talked about how that might make me feel. And then we just started doing it. And she’s great in that she just immediately made the switch, and then it just sort of became easier from there.   
  
The name thing—it’s funny, because Niko is my second name post-transition—I just legally changed it again, and they asked me if I wanted to get a punch card at the Dekalb Vital Statistics. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** [Cackles]

**Niko:** So I hope, it’s like a Subway sandwich. Like eventually my eleventh name change will be free.

**Tuck:** That’s so funny. I do know multiple people who have changed their names multiple times, and it was almost soothing to me because I’m in the middle of a name change journey where I don’t know what I want my name to be. And it was a little bit soothing to be like, well, I can always change it again. So yeah, I’ll get my punch card and I’ll start punching away at it.

**Niko:** You know, the nice thing, at least in Canada, and where I used to live, is it’s also, like in terms of changing your legal documents, is relatively affordable. Like it’s fifty bucks to change your name. I can just sort of afford to take that journey. But when I changed my name a second time, a lot of people had an issue with that. And then name one has been harder.

But pronouns, it was really surprising to me how many people—especially cis straight people who don’t really exist in queer communities—when I was like, “Hey, I’d actually prefer if you would just call me she/her,” and a lot of them were just like, “Okay.” It just sort of happened. And when they falter, they’re just like “Oh, I’m sorry, I mean she/her.” You know? It’s been really nice. Surprisingly nice.

**Tuck:** I love that. I love surprisingly nice. I’m curious if it would have been as surprisingly nice if you were going the other way, if you were going from she to they. Because I think a lot of cis people are just like “Ah, finally, a binary pronoun.” [Laughs]

**Niko:** Yeah, I know, I feel like part of it was just like “Oh my god, we could not handle that they/them thing, that was so hard, thank you for making it easier.” [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Changing topics a little bit, I live in a major city, a fairly trans-friendly city, and it’s still just really difficult to access healthcare that is 1. trans-affirming and 2. not a provider that I know personally. Because I feel like if they are a trans provider, then I’m in community with them.

My understanding is that you grew up in a space that was small and had very few resources, and I was wondering if you could talk about what that experience was like, and what projects that has led you to now?

**Niko:** Well, I grew up in White Horse, Yukon, which is like, if you’re in Portland, and you go as North as you want to go, and then you go six hours past that point, you’re up in the Yukon.

**Tuck:** [Laughs]

**Niko:** My girlfriend and I were just back there visiting my family and it was -30 the day we showed up.

**Tuck:** Ugh, oh my god.

**Niko:** And it’s a small place. The closest real city, which is Vancouver, British Columbia, is a two and a half hour plane flight. If you wanted to drive there, it would take two days. So, like, you’re really, really isolated.  
  
I know, when I talk to a lot of people—because I live in Toronto now, which is like the biggest city in Canada—but when I talk to people here, they’re like “Oh yeah, we grew up in small towns.” But when they consider a small town, they consider a town that’s two hours out of Toronto. Or two hours out of Edmonton, or what have you. But like, I grow up so isolated away from everything else, that you really get to know a lot of people around you.

So, A. publicly transitioning the way that I did, which is, in hindsight, a foolish way, wherein I decided I was gonna publicly transition, and then I did immediately. I never gave myself time to figure out what it meant for myself. I just went public. And, you know, that’s a really stressful thing in a small town where you know everybody. But the one nice thing is I walked into my doctor’s office and said, “Hey I’m trans”, and he looked to me and said, “Okay, well I don’t know anything about that.”

So we had to scrabble together resources from elsewhere in Canada, you know, some places in British Columbia, some places in Ontario, and we found various health documents. But there was nothing in Yukon that was like, you know, proper, up to date, affirming care. It’s, in terms of my healthcare, fairly simple. I take two different medications right now. I take estrogen, and I take spironolactone, which is the drug they push the most to suppress your testosterone, even though it’s not the greatest.

And even just finding that information was difficult. And I thought, this can’t be that hard. But because we’re in such isolation, I couldn’t just go to a different town. I couldn’t engage in other communities that same way. So this all sort of leads up to a project that I am just wrapping up, where I wrote a grant and I got the government to agree to fund a website where—it sounds so basic—it’s just basic healthcare information. So like, basic HRT. It’s fairly binary, because unfortunately I’m also limited by what the government really wants to do. But it’s like, you know, are you taking masculinizing therapy? Well, this is the direction you want to go. Are you taking feminizing, etc? And I don’t really like that language, because it makes transition seem very binary, which I know it’s not. But even that information, you couldn’t get it from a local healthcare provider. You really had to scrimp and find and dig. You couldn’t just do a quick Google search and say “Hey, I live in the Yukon and I’m trans, what do I do?”

And that was what I wanted to fix. Like, that Google search *should* lead you to some answers. You shouldn’t feel isolated in that way. You shouldn’t feel isolated in your identity while you’re also isolated from any sort of affirming community. Like, I never met another transfeminine person the entire time I lived in the Yukon. I was the only one. Which is like, in and of itself, super isolating.

I live in Toronto now, and when I go out into the world, I see trans women everywhere I go. Because there’s more trans women and trans men and nonbinary people than stats want to admit. But I see them a lot, and it makes you feel like you’re part of a community. You know how you feel when you see somebody else, you’re like, “You’re like me.” But I never really saw that. I never really had that in the same way. So I just thought, well, if I don’t see it, why don’t I make it.

**Tuck:** Yeah! So what’s the website?

**Niko:** The website is transresourceyukon.com.

**Tuck:** Are these guides Yukon-specific, or are they applicable to anyone living in a rural space and is looking for information?

**Niko:** They’re basically that. They’re not Yukon-specific. They’re the same information you’d find almost anywhere, but it’s branded as—there’s a funny thing, as soon as you put the word “Yukon” on a document, and say this is from you, it somehow feels more legitimate. It feels more affirming. Like, I’ve talked to other people and said like, it goes a long way to make us feel like there’s something for us here. Because now our territory’s name is on it. So it’s less Yukon-specific, it’s really general information. But you know, it’s from where you live. It’s presented by your government, which is a very surprising thing.

And I’m very lucky, because it’s a small town, and I know—now, this is getting into Canadian goverment speak—I know the Premier of the territory on like a first name basis. And I had run into him on the street. And then his assistant basically texted me and said “Hey, the Premier really wants to support what you do.” And I said, “Well the Premier should get me some money.”

Well, that’s what happened. After I wrote about fifteen different grant proposals and finally got a project through.

But yeah, it’s not like-- the HRT information that I present isn’t any different than you’d find anywhere else. It’s a basic guideline of, if you’re going through a feminizing procedure—which again, this is all binary language, and it’s unfortunate that’s where healthcare lives—but if this is your intention, then these are your options, and these are the medications, and these are the starting dosages that you’ll likely start on. And this is their side effects, and all that sort of stuff. ‘Cause I never had any of that when I started transitioning.

**Tuck:** Right, so I wanted to ask you about that, because I am googling and it looks like the population of the entire Yukon is like thirty-five thousand, and there’s one city. You’re totally right that like, my concept of a small town is not accurate when compared to this level of isolation, especially when you’re growing up. And I’m sure the Internet was not robust, if it existed at all. And I’m curious how you first learned that trans people literally exist.

**Niko:** I’m trying to think, because... I think I probably discovered it honestly through porn, if I’m being really honest. I remember discovering trans porn. Unfortunately it wasn’t branded as such at the time. But I remember discovering that and for some reason, that just clicked. But you know, it would also be the thing when I would watch TV, and I would watch an episode of Law & Order SVU, and I remember there specifically being a CSI episode where they were in Vegas—I think it was the original CSI—where a trans woman had been murdered. Because of course, if a trans woman is in a story, she’s a victim of some kind, because heaven forbid she has agency and a proper story line.

But I would always really gravitate to all those things, and I remember whenever I would see a trans character on TV or in a movie, I would look them up to see, are they really a trans person in real life? And I didn’t necessarily have the right language for that. Just because—and I also grew up kind of in an age without the Internet, too. I mean, I’m turning 38 pretty soon, and I didn’t get my first email address until I was in my late teens. So it was probably through that, just through media, and like media representation was awful. But I was also lucky that there was a somewhat notable trans author named Ivan Coyote.

**Tuck:** Mm, mhm.

**Niko:** And Ivan grew up in the Yukon, and writes a lot about their time in the Yukon. So I also knew Ivan, and knew of Ivan, and knew their work. And that sort of helped give a little bit broader context for me.

**Tuck:** I was in Toronto back in September and so I was hanging out in the Toronto Public Library a lot to get Wi-Fi. And I couldn’t pee there. There was not a bathroom. But I nevertheless was like, “ah yes, the Toronto Public Library, a place where I can hang out.” And then right after I left, Meghan Murphy wanted to speak at the Toronto Public Library, and the library was like “Sure, sure, sure, yeah whatever, that seems cool.”

So [laughs] you got involved in sort of the controversy around that. Is there anything part of that that you could speak to, sort of what happened from your perspective?

**Niko:** I’ll be very careful with my language around this—

**Tuck:** Totally.

**Niko:** —for specific reasons. But I had sort of seen it pop up that she was doing this talk. And I thought, well, I don’t really agree with this being put on at a public institution. Like, you know, in all fairness to free speech, she’s, I guess, welcome to go spreading her specific brand of, let’s say, “disagreeing with trans rights,” to be really, really, really extra too-nice about it.

**Tuck:** Mhm.

**Niko:** She’s more than welcome to do that wherever she wants, but it’s obviously chosen to exist in libraries because, you know, she’s trying to take these public institutions away from us in terms of being safe spaces.

I had seen that she was doing this talk, and thought, “Well I don’t really agree with this,” and just sort of started tweeting about it. And a lot of us starting doing that, and it just sort of got more and more heated, but in a way where trans people were being ignored.

My crux of the issue always was that trans people were ignored throughout almost that entire protest, until the day of the protest. and even then, we were still sort of relegated to the back pages. I had been interviewed for an hour and a half by somebody, and then they’d include one line I said in the back of an article.

Like, had they spoken and actually engaged with trans people and listened to us properly, or had the library ever done that—which, to date, they really haven’t—we could have provided some context, and we could have provided a little bit more information about what it was, why it was we were speaking so passionately about it.

Yeah, it just became this thing where we were just, all of a sudden, talking about it every day. And then I was talking to media about it, like I said, the day of the protest. And afterwards I wrote a couple articles. One for HuffPo Canada, and another one sort of about that, and just about, again, like, the media framing about it. Because the media did such a poor job of covering it, from start to finish. I mean, this was a thing that was trending on Twitter for a couple of days in a row.

There were thousands of people talking about it. And they were only talking to cis people about it. They just weren’t talking to trans women. Especially trans women. We were just ignored. And we were the ones who kept saying, “This directly affects us, please listen to us when we explain why.” We went to their board meeting, and did depositions to their board. And that wasn’t even covered by the news.

**Tuck:** Yeah. So I actually think that’s why I brought this up in the first place, because we were just talking about media representation, and I saw that you wrote this article for Huffington Post Canada that ran with the title, “Someone Tell the Media that Trans Folks were at the Meghan Murphy Protest.”

And I know Meghan Murphy solely as someone who speaks against trans rights, and I can’t fathom how there can be a discourse about Meghan Murphy that doesn’t include trans folks. So like, what was even being said? Was it just cis people talking about trans people? Or were trans people not being talked about?

**Niko:** It was cis people talking about trans people, and it was all allies that I trust, and people that I like, and people whose work and voices I appreciate and admire. But even then, there’s a fundamental difference between allies and well-meaning people talking about an underserved community, and that underserved community being given a voice. And it’s not like we were hard to find. There was lots of us who were online talking about it. And it’s just... we can articulate ourselves in a way that other people just can’t. Because when you’re giving something like that from a learned experience, and saying “Well, this is my lived experience. This is what I’ve specifically lived through and gone through, this is what I’ve had to face as a trans person, and these are the reasons why this sort of thing is harmful to us.”

That conversation could have happened in a really interesting way, where we could have had this out-loud discussion of like, yes, this person we’re talking about is very good at doing these talks because she has found a way to do it wherein she doesn’t get charged with hate speech. Because the things she says specifically aren’t hate speech. That’s not what she does. That’s what she lets everybody that listens to her do. But she is smart enough to keep herself at arm’s length from being charged with that. And that is the bar for not being banned to speak at the library.

But you know, like, we could have had a much more interesting and nuanced conversation about it. But we didn’t, because nobody ever spoke to us. They would see our tweets, and then they would find the nearest cis person that was also talking about it, and talk to them. Especially, you know, because we had a couple of notable authors who had started a petition to stop her from speaking at the library. So then they would go to them [the authors].

It’s like, well, why wouldn’t you go from them to this affected community? We’re not afraid to talk about it. Why wouldn’t you just come to us, why wouldn’t you come get this information straight from the source, because it’s just so much more—oh what’s the word I’m looking for—interesting. Not even interesting. Interesting makes it sound like it’s an anecdotal joke we’re telling, but do you know what I mean? It’s so much more valid when it comes directly from that learned experience as opposed to people that have our best interests at heart talking about it. Like, we’re not going to get anywhere by letting other people do the talking for us. We can speak for ourselves, if people would give us the opportunity.

**Tuck:** That’s something that I find myself stressing a lot when I’m talking to cis reporters who want to tell stories about trans people. It’s like, we all just have different beats, and we have different expertises, and it’s not an insult to you to say that you a cis person are not as qualified to write about the experience of being trans as a trans person. Like, that’s not rude, it’s just factual. But cis people really don’t like being told that they aren’t the absolute experts on something.

**Niko:** Well, that, and also it’s almost like—I got into an argument with somebody about this. Because they keep saying like, well, what prevents a cis person from being able to talk about it, or write a book about it, or what have you? ‘Cause, you know, there’s famous authors who have written about trans people. And they will write the same story that a trans person would write. And then the trans person’s story will get half the attention of what the cis person’s will. Because ultimately, we’re almost like things in a zoo, or something like that.

They want to be able to look at it, and say well, like, here’s this minority community that we care a lot about. Let’s put them on display. But we’ll do the talking for them, and we’ll write their stories, and we’ll tell their tales because we couldn’t possibly get them to do that. You know, it’s all well and good to want to, like, put us on display as a thing you care about. But it’s another thing entirely to step out of the way and say, “You know what, you tell your story.”

It’s like the *American Dirt* thing. [Tuck laughs] That’s to a totally different degree, because that’s systemic racism at play. But it’s that idea of, like, why are you letting some white woman tell this story? Like, this isn’t her story to tell. She doesn’t have that lived experience.

**Tuck:** Yeah. I [laughs].

[Interview pauses, narration interjects]

**Tuck:** Hi it’s me, breaking into the show to talk about this even though it has nothing much to do with gender. *American Dirt* is a book published this year. It’s about a Mexican woman and her son escaping cartel-related violence by fleeing the United States. But it’s written by a white woman who hasn’t really spent much time in Mexico, and has a fairly poor grasp on the Spanish language. And even poorer grasp on Mexican culture. It basically reads like a romance-thriller about a white woman, except it’s not supposed to be that. So I will spare you my longer rant on that. Go read Myriam Gurba’s book on this if you’d like to know more. Or go listen to Maria Hinojosa’s interview of a bunch of folks on Latino USA on this. Just trust I have a lot of feelings.

[Interview resumes]

**Tuck:** Anyway, so you’ve been sort of embroiled in this controversy around Meghan Murphy and the Toronto Public Library probably a lot more than you intended to or want to. And I know that it’s been really draining at times, of course. And I was wondering what you’ve been doing to take care of yourself, and what advice you might have for other trans folks who are thinking about speaking against or organizing against people who don’t seem to be [laughs] pro trans-rights, uh, particularly fancy people who have lawyers.

**Niko:** Yeah. I mean, I learned pretty quickly to be careful of what you say. Be, you know, mindful of your words online. Be careful of talking about TERFs in specific. I never write that word on Twitter anymore because I know they search it.

It gets you nothing. But I use a blockchain now just because it was the only way to stem the tide of people tweeting off all things at me. So I just had to use a blockchain. And that actually made my experience in Twitter so, so much easier. I just don’t see that stuff nearly as often.

Like I said, I’m very mindful of what I write. I’m very careful to not use specific peoples’ names. I’d just be very careful of those things, because I know they’re being searched all the time. And I would just rather that stuff not happen. And also, I don’t speak about this one person specifically anymore. I’m just sort of, when I talk about that stuff, I always sort of talk about it in generalities.

And I also allow myself—the most important thing i do—is allow myself to take a break from it. Even though it’s a fight I’m always fighting, I don’t have to always be publicly fighting it. The only thing that kept me feeling like a sane, normal person was talking and writing about other stuff. So I would get people who would be annoyed with me because I would be talking about these things, and then one day I would be talking about, you know, a skate punk band. Or I’m writing an article about *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. Because I needed to something that was outside of that fight, because I couldn’t only focus on a fight. I needed to also remember that I’m living for a million different things. And I’m not living just a fight. That’s not living. That’s just surviving. And I understand we’re all just trying to survive. But it was really important for me to remember to take the time to do stuff for myself that makes me happy, or allows me to be fun again. Because I sorta lost that for a spell, a time. For a good couple weeks. I was not a fun person at all.

**Tuck:** Which is understandable, but, yeah. [Laughs] It reminds me of that, like, you know, “If we don’t go outside the terrorists win” kind of thing.

**Niko:** Oh god, yeah. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** But it’s like, yeah, trans joy is this really really powerful force. And not dwelling on the fact that we all live in hell 24/7 is actually a victory, and like finding a way to have a good time sometimes is actually a victory.

**Niko:** It was detrimental on my end to focus solely on one person acting poorly. Like, for me to focus all my energy on one person going around doing talks about trans people? That was detrimental to my overall mental health. And ultimately, you’re not actually solving anything. Like, did I get anywhere with that fight? No, like this person, she spoke in Seattle two nights ago. She’s always gonna be out there doing her thing. And she’s covered by the law. And that’s a long-term fight to change that.

So I had to sort of think about what was really reasonably feasible in my life. And that was a thing that a couple people, and especially artists, would talk to me a lot about. What are you doing that’s creating joy? What are you doing that’s helping somebody, or making somebody’s life better? And I would really honestly think about that a lot.

And like you said, trans joy is so... we don’t get it a lot! I’m now trying to refocus my brain, where I’m like, what am I doing where I celebrate the joy and the successes and what are we doing to create a longer battle on things that will actually impact change, as opposed to focusing all my energy on one person? ‘Cause that was just so negative to my overall mental health, was that I was just so inherently focused on this one person. But like, you know, Jesse Singal still out there. All these other people are still out there being awful.

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Niko:** A lot of trans people were saying when we were all yelling about this library stuff, is what are we actually doing education-wise moving forward? What are we actually doing to change anything? And I sort of lost that narrative in the frame of like, being angry online, which is like, such an easy thing to get lost it. And it’s true, like, what are the demands? What would we like them to do? How can we go to them and say, “This is what you need to do in the future. This is what we want. This is what we’re looking for.” Which is a hard thing to do when you’re in a dogfight like that. But it is imperative for moving forward. Is like, well, what do you actually want? What do you hope to achieve?

**Tuck:** So you’re working on a podcast about trans people. And in fact, I got to be the first guest on that podcast, which was very exciting for me. So can you tell everyone about your show and how they can listen to it?

**Niko:** Yeah, sure! I started a new podcast, it’s called *You Don’t Sound Like a Girlfriend*. The name of it stems from my partner and I had dinner in Vancouver, British Columbia with a woman who had a young trans daughter. And we were sitting at the dinner table, and her daughter kept looking at me, and then at one point she came over to me and said “Who are you again?” And I said “Oh, I’m Lysh’s girlfriend.” And then she looked at me, and looked at her mom, and looked back at me, and said to me very matter of factly, “You don’t sound like a girlfriend.” And that phrase just made me laugh so much. So I started a podcast that’s about trans people and our voices, and our relationship to our voices. Speaking voice, singing voice, all those sort of things. Actually, my voice is something that I think about constantly. And it annoys me to be gendered correctly, I have to actually do vocal training. But why can’t I just have my normal voice? Why does a voice have to have a gendered tied to it? That seems foolish. People’s voices are just their voices. Some women have deep voices, some women don’t. There are a million different varieties in women. Vocal qualities is just one of those. Same as for men, or for nonbinary people. Voices should nost have a gender tied to them. That seems foolish.

So I just want to explore voices with people, and their relationship to their voice. Have they worked on it? Do they sing? Do they do public speaking? Are they, you know, all those things. So I just wanted to talk to other trans people about their voice, and I thought, who’s a trans person that I know that uses their voice professionally?

**Tuck:** Yeah, it’s so funny because we did that interview in, what, December maybe? And at the time, I was like, “I don’t really have voice dysphoria, I never think about my voice ever.” And then in the last like, two weeks I’ve been having so many thoughts about my voice all the time, and I’m like, “oh nooo-ooooo!” [Laughs]

**Niko:** [Laughs] I opened up a can of worms that now you can’t close! See, and it’s funny, ‘cause like, I like your voice a lot.

**Tuck:** Thank you.

**Niko:** You have a great speaking voice.

**Tuck:** I think I’m just coming up against something that I talked about a lot in the interview on your show that people can listen to if they want. But the general stance that I’ve taken is that I am a trans person and everyone needs to see me as trans, regardless of what my name is, or regardless of what my voice sounds like, or regardless of what I dress like, and fuck you if you don’t do that. And then just in the last month or so, I’ve just gotten worn down on my soapbox of fuck you that I’m like, well, what if someone did gender me correctly one time? [Laughs] So I don’t know, I’m thinking more about whether there’s any sort of concessions I’m willing to make in the way that I present myself in order to be ever seen as the gender that I am, or if I want to continue to be like nope, fuck you, and I—I don’t know. I don’t know yet. It turns out that even when you’re a professional trans person you don’t necessarily know what gender is... [Laughs]

**Niko:** It’s such a hard thing. I mean, the thing that I’ve been seeing today—‘cause I just posted so you can listen to the first episode on Spotify right now, if you google *You Don’t Sound Like a Girlfriend*—but yeah, the thing that I’ve been sort of thinking about, and a lot of people have been saying, is a lot of people have really complicated feelings about their voice, and surprisingly not just trans folks. Like, I’ve heard from a couple of cis folks, friends of mine who’ve messaged me today, privately especially, like “I have a weird relationship with my voice,” or what have you. So I think it’s a thing that we all think about that—I don’t know—I never really saw a lot of media about it necessarily, so I thought, well, why not me, you know?

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Niko:** Why don’t I try to refocus my energy on something that I’m excited to do, as opposed to something I’m doing because I feel like I have to.

**Tuck:** Yeah. I’m really excited about it. Okay, so, [laughs] I have my two wrap-up questions, but before that, I want to ask you about something that has nothing to do with gender, which is not what this show is about, but I am willing to take a detour to the mission of this show—

**Niko:** Okay.

**Tuck:** —because there’s something incredibly important that I need to talk to you about, which is: Garfield Eats!

**Niko:** Oh my god [laughs].

**Tuck:** When I was in Toronto, I many times walked by the flagship brick-and-mortar location of Garfield Eats—

**Niko:** [chuckles]

**Tuck:** —a [laughs] business in which there’s no seating, but you can go in and use in iPad to order different foods, many of which are shaped like Garfield the cat’s head. The time that we went in—when we were in Toronto—we caught the owner, and he went on this big rant about how he wanted to be bigger than Domino’s ‘cause he hates Domino’s.

**Niko:** [Laughs]

**Tuck:** And how everything is farm-to-table, and like locally sourced. [laughs] It was just the wildest thing I had ever heard. And you actually ate Garfield Eats’ food. And I just, please, tell me about it.

**Niko:** [Laughs] Thank you so much for asking me—this will be my lasting legacy. It’s funny, I wrote a Twitter thread about this that was like, maybe one of the biggest things I’ve ever written on Twitter, which is really surprising to me. But like yeah, my girlfriend and I and a friend of ours decided to order food from there. It’s interesting to me that he says it’s farm-to-table, because I’d imagine what he does is get compost from the farm, get it back to his restaurant, and press it into something that looks like food. It is the worst food I’ve ever—I’m using the word food, because legally I think it’s defined as food, but it does not taste like it.

**Tuck:** [Laughs]

**Niko:** It’s pizza. And we ordered the pizza, which, a lot of people admonished me for not getting the lasagna, but they are more than welcome to eat the lasagna if they want. I will never order—fool me once, shame on me.

**Tuck:** [Laughs]

**Niko:** But we ordered two different pizzas that are shaped like Garfield’s head, and the three of us, we all ate one piece each and decided that this was—my girlfriend got sick immediately. She was sick for a day and a half afterward.

**Tuck:** Oh my god.

**Niko:** We ended up throwing the food away, which is not a thing I will ever advocate for. But it was like you were intentionally trying to make pizza as awful as possible to ensure that, like, if you hated Domino’s so much and your plan was to make people just hate pizza in general.

**Tuck:** [Laughs]

**Niko:** I think that might have been his plan.

**Tuck:** I will pull up our combined tweets because I also did a Garfield Eats thread and I will put them in the show notes so that when people are like, “Wow, everything is hell,” be like, “No. Think about Garfield Eats.”

So, this is the part of the show where I say, “Hey, what else do you want to talk about that we haven’t talked about yet?”

**Niko:** You know, the thing that I will say about all the protesting that I’ve done and everything else. We’re seeing right now that everybody who speaks for their rights is just branded as “activist”. I get called an activist a lot now. And I never chose to be an activist, I just stood up for my rights like everybody else. And that gets you branded as an activist in today’s culture, which—whatever, that’s fine. But you know, the thing that really changed for me, and it’s a thing that I actually really appreciate, is it unlocked something in me where—I always wanted to write.

This is what started me writing. This is what started me doing a lot of different things because I just got activated to such a degree where I thought, well, what do I have to lose? I’ve been constantly worried about being judged, being attacked, being all these things, what if I just went for it? And that’s been the positive side of a lot of—the last six months of my life have been stressful as hell. but a lot of good stuff has come of it, and I’ve really, really tried to focus on that. Like, this has afforded me opportunities. Huffington Post asked me to write that article for them. They liked it, and it’s a piece of writing that I’m happy with. It unlocked a lot of things for me moving forward.

You know, when we were talking about earlier like, what do you do for yourself in those times? The thing that I try to focus on is, there are these opportunities that come out of these things. And I’ve been extremely lucky and extremely privileged in that scenario to have gotten some opportunities out of it, in terms of people listening to me when I speak, or asking me to write and appreciating what I have to say. And that’s the thing—I never really thought my voice was valid. And now, it really helped me feel like I belong, and it renewed an interest.

**Tuck:** Mmmmm! I love that so much. I’m so glad to hear that.

I just recalled that on your podcast, I mentioned being a full-time professional trans, and you were like “Oh yeah, that’s like me too!” So what do you do when you’re not recording podcasts or, uh, you know, finding a library?

**Niko:** Ummm... We’re working on—my partner runs Girls Rock Camp in Toronto—we’re working on a queer and trans-specific offshoot of that right now.

**Tuck:** Oh! Hell yeah!

**Niko:** We have a podcast where we talk about Sleater-Kinney. I work with some bands. I have a record label, so I do some artist management, and I do some consulting in the industry. So I’m working on that stuff. I live a really quiet, like—if you were to see a snapshot of my life, it was funny when all this stuff around the library was happening. ‘Cause I think, you know, when people were attacking me, they made it sound like I was living this sordid life. Oh no—I’m boring as all hell. Like, I’m asleep by 9:30 or 10 every night. I’m a 38-year old sober person, I don’t do anything cool anymore. Like, that part of my life is over.

**Tuck:** [Laughs] Well, I [laughs] relate to that. But also, I love the queer and trans section of Girls Rock Camp! That’s awesome!

**Niko:** It’s a hard one because like—and we would hear this from a lot of kids that would attend Girls Rock Camp—that like, for trans men or for nonbinary kids, they would worry that the name sort of excludes them. And it’s like, no you’re more than welcome, but it’s a true key thing. It’s really hard to name something that’s like really inclusive but also catchy.

**Tuck:** Oh, totally.

**Niko:** I’ve been writing a lot of angry emails to organizations that call themselves “women” with an x or a y. Because I find it exclusionary. And I understand where the x and the y replacing the o and the e comes from, but I still think that it’s maybe a bit more problematic than they wanted to be. But it is a hard thing of like, well how do you ensure that people know that you’re an inclusive organization, but also have your name be catchy?

**Tuck:** Yeah.

The way we always end the show is by asking “In your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?”

**Niko:** Honestly, total abolishment. Or at least, like, the idea that the binary exists, as we have. Like, you know, I’ve only been out for a few years, but when I started transitioning, people weren’t even talking about nonbinary individuals as much as we do now. It has become such a bigger part of the conversation, and such a super valid part of the conversation. Because, you know, when I wanted to transition, I understood it as a two-way street—you’re going one direction on a street that goes two ways. And now, like, let’s just blow that whole fuckin’ road up.

**Tuck:** Mmm!

**Niko:** We’re trying to fit people into boxes that we can easily understand instead of trying to understand people. We’re trying to force them into ways we can understand them, as opposed to telling us \*how\* to understand them. And I think the more of these systems we can dismantle, the more—like, that’s why I’m annoyed at my own website that I built. Because it is built under the auspices of working under a really binary system, even though I don’t agree with a binary system. I’d rather see the whole idea just be sort of, like, what if we just burn the whole building down, and we just started building it from scratch, and we involve everybody, and we see what we can actually do with this whole gender thing? Because thinking of it as boy or girl is just so problematic in a million different ways.

[Inhales] So my answer is to blow up gender. I don’t know if that [laughs] I don’t know if that sounded like the right way to answer that or not.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music plays]

**Tuck:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. If you learned anything, or had a good time, Please send the show to a friend, a family member, all of Twitter dot com, whatever works for you. this is the main way we get the word out about the show, so your help means a whole heck of a lot.

You can find Niko at @NikoStratis on Twitter and Instagram, and at nikostratis.com. Listen to *You Don’t Sound Like a Girlfriend* wherever you get your podcasts, and maybe send transresourceyukon.com to someone in a rural area who might need it.

You can find us on Twitter and Instagram, or at [genderpodcast.com](http://genderpodcast.com/). Donate a dollar or more at patreon.com/gender to get access to our weekly newsletter, and to help a bitch out. Our merch store is at <bit.ly/gendermerch>, where you can find all sorts of fun stuff including “Surf Don’t TERF” shirts and tank tops in a bunch of different colors for $19.69 for the next two weeks only. Don’t miss out. Also, Teespring, the website we use, thinks “TERF” is hate speech, so LOL. Just order a million of them and just don’t report us, I guess.

This week’s episode was produced and edited by me, Molly Woodstock. Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions.

We’ll be back so soon with more feelings about gender.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

**Niko:** He opened the first one in Dubai. And then was like, “What’s the next logical step after opening the first in my planned series of Garfield-themed restaurants, Dubai to Toronto?” Mal Blum posted that one of the members of their band got kicked out of there because they were playing music on the iPad that you order from.

**Tuck:** [Laughs] Yeah. I’m trying to pull up my Garfield Eats thread to see if I have any other talking points, but I don’t.