[Gender Reveal intro 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, Molly Woodstock.

[Gender Reveal intro music ends]

Hey everyone. Hope you’re all still hanging in there. Thank you for listening and hanging out with us for a little bit. It means a lot. This week on the show, I speak with Daniel M. Lavery, who you may know as Dear Prudence, or as the cofounder of the Toast, or as the author of several books, including the newly published [*Something That May Shock and Discredit You*](https://www.indiebound.org/book/9781982105211). I really enjoyed this conversation with Danny. We talk about Mulan and other forced-masc content, transitioning in a different direction than your trans partner, and what we’ll do if society collapses and we can’t get T anymore. And speaking of T, we also talk about, to paraphrase friend of the show Rose Eveleth, possible futures of taking testosterone.

**Daniel:** Before I tried T, all that I knew was the things I was worried I would lose. I hadn’t yet experienced the things that I didn’t yet realize that I would love.

**Tuck:** And not so possible futures.

**Daniel:** I also really value and, like, long for the day that, like, we can come up with interesting combinations of sex hormones that people can inject that can give you a mix of like, a soprano voice, a chiseled jaw, and, like, wings. Like I want to go full designer hormone.

**Tuck:** By the way, the audio on this interview is wild at times. The original plan was to hire someone to record this interview with Danny, and now obviously we absolutely cannot do that. And so, Danny recorded himself. I am very grateful to him for doing that. There are some hiccups. You’ll hear it. I feel like the hiccups never last that long, so I’m really hoping you’ll push through it. It’s a really great interview. I really think you’ll enjoy it. Honestly one trick, if it’s getting to you, is to listen on worse headphones or without headphones, because the better your headphones are, the more you will hear – it’s fine. It’s – you know what? It’s fine. You’re gonna love it. Don’t worry about it.

If you’ve never heard our podcast before, and you want to check out some other episodes, I would recommend our season opener with Cyrus Dunham, our live show with Alyssa Pariah, or last season’s finale with Lewis Raven Wallace. But before we get to this week’s interview, I just want to take a moment to thank all of the incredible people who have joined the Patreon in the last week, or who have upped their pledges. I am continually in awe of your generosity. Especially because other people have had to cancel their pledges for very, very obvious reasons, and also because I just found out that I’m losing my contract gig in May, which means that my only source of income is Patreon. That can’t be right, but I think it’s maybe right? So anyway, thank you so much to James, Martha, Alison, Billy, Jas, Casey, Alan, Yaro, Jacob, everyone else. You’re all amazing. We are currently I think 20 patrons away from 500, so if you would like to help us get to 500 patrons – that’s so incredible, 500 patrons – you can do so at [Patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender), and you’ll get cool rewards like a newsletter, stickers, pins, all that good stuff.

And with that, it’s time for “This Week in Gender.”

[“This Week in Gender” intro music, a newsyfanfare, plays]

[marimba and piano music plays]

**Tuck:** Hey, so this week in gender, I am not going to talk about trans news, because all the news is very bad, and we don’t need to add fuel to our depression fires this week. Instead, I want to let you know about two big projects that are taking up a lot of my time over the next couple weeks, so that if you don’t hear from me, you’ll know what’s going on. The first, briefly, is that I am hosting an episode of NPR’s Life Kit podcast, which is slated to come out in June for Pride Month, AKA the only month that queer and trans people exist, but which I need to make over the next couple weeks. So this is a really exciting opportunity, I’m so grateful that they didn’t cancel the contract given the state of the entire world, but it might mean that this podcast gets less attention and falls a little bit more behind.

Secondly, and much more importantly, we have canceled the spring 2020 Gender Reveal grant cycle, and in its place we have created a massive mutual aid program called the Gender Reveal Trans Survival Fund. If you haven’t heard of a mutual aid fund before, it’s literally the concept of people giving the resources that they can give to people who need those resources. So there are mutual aid funds springing up all around the country and around the world right now, for different demographics of people in different places. The idea is you offer in some cases just money, in other cases you offer food or transportation or physical labor or care – there’s really all sorts of ways to use a mutual aid fund. And so what we’re doing here at Gender Reveal is offering financial assistance to any trans or two-spirit or otherwise not cis person anywhere in the world. And the concept behind the fund is that if you need immediate financial assistance – say that you are behind on rent, you’re behind on bills, you need food, you need medication, basic supplies like that – if you need something, you can reach out to us. We have a form we have created, which is at <bit.ly/GRsurvivalfund>. That’s all one word. There will be a link in the show notes.

Anyway, you reach out to us on that link, you fill out a form with your name, your email address, the absolute minimum amount of money that you need right now, and how we can get money to you, and we will do our best to send it your way. Like I said, this is open to all trans people. We are prioritizing Black, Indigenous, and people of color. We’re prioritizing sex workers, disabled and immunocompromised folks, undocumented people and family members of undocumented people. So if that sounds like you, and you need something, please don’t hesitate to reach out. Again, that’s <bit.ly/GRsurvivalfund>, all one word. And if you would like to contribute to the fund, you can do so via my PayPal or my Cash App, which is <PayPal.me/mollywoodstock> or Cash App mollywoodstock. And I can distribute those funds. You know, what is actually even cooler is that I can match you to someone who needs funds, and you can send them funds directly. And so if you want to reach out to me via email or via DM, I can connect you to a person who needs aid, you can give them that aid. And everyone will hopefully feel a little bit better.

But if you can’t donate, don’t worry about it. I know this is a really precarious time for many, many people. Instead, maybe just try to reach out to someone and say ‘hi’, see how they’re doing. I know a lot of people are struggling right now, emotionally as well as financially. If you are in a mental health emergency, please consider reaching out to [Trans Lifeline](https://translifeline.org/). And by the way, Trans Lifeline is still operating. They are also taking donations. They are also virtually training volunteers right now, so if you are doing okay and you can’t offer financial aid, but you can offer your time and support for trans people who are struggling, you can become a volunteer through Trans Lifeline. No matter what you choose to do, whether that’s reach out for funds, donate funds, support Trans Lifeline, call Trans Lifeline, I just want to thank you for keeping trans people alive. Because that’s what we’re all doing right now, and it’s really, really fucking important. So thank you so much.

This has been “This Week in Gender.”

[“This Week in Gender” outro music plays]

**Tuck:** Daniel M. Lavery is the cofounder of the Toast, the author of Something That May Shock and Discredit You, and the current host of the Dear Prudence advice column and podcast at Slate.

[transition music plays]

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

**Daniel:** Trans man.

**Tuck:** Perfect. In the first chapter of your book, you write, “I often desired [sic] my sudden shift in self-awareness as feeling as if a demon had entered my room in the middle of the night, and startled me awake by whispering ‘What if you were a man, sort of?’” And then you repeat that “What if you were a man, sort of?” several times. So, where does the “sort of” come from?

**Daniel:** A demon. I – you know, as I said, it was a fucking demon.

**Tuck:** Do you feel like that “sort of” is gone? Do you feel like that was a way for you to give yourself permission to sort of explore the concept of a man, like it had to be qualified with “sort of”? Or –

**Daniel:** Yeah – I mean I think a lot of that can certainly have to do with anyone who’s coming into an understanding of something that they’ve wanted. And I think there’s also often – again, not always, not constantly, but I think when it comes to transmasculine stuff particularly, there’s a lot of hedging. A lot of “What’s the least possible amount I can do this?” And I think – again, there’s lots of different reasons that may go into why that is, that’s definitely not the case for everybody. But I do think it does seem to tend to be either a moment or a fear or an experience that seems common, as a group. And I think very much that was something that I was going through as well, which was just like, “Obviously it would be better not to be this. We all know that it’s the worst thing. And so what’s the smallest version of it that I can do? What’s the least amount? How could I do this while already walking it back, while also apologizing for it?” You know, because I worry the risk of being shut down, I want to forestall that by saying, like, “Obviously I know I’m not really doing this. Don’t worry, don’t worry. Nobody worry about that.” So I think that was very much what that sort of is gesturing towards.

**Tuck:** Yeah. How did you get to the point where you gave yourself permission to stop hedging? Or have you given yourself permission to stop hedging?

**Daniel:** I would not say that that’s something that I feel like I have the answer to or I’ve mastered. I think it’s something that I share with a lot of my transmasculine friends. We go through various ways of relating to that problem or to that question. I would say it’s something that I continue to hedge. I continue to go back and forth on that one. I know, certainly, a lot of the, like, right answers to that question. But I don’t wanna – I don’t wanna make any claims to, like – you know, give yourself permission six weeks in a row, and eventually you will feel relaxed about this.

**Tuck:** Yeah. So a theme in many of the chapters of your book is wishing that someone would either forbid you to transition or force you to transition. Like at one point you write that you couldn’t take responsibility for annihilating your own life. And so you wanted someone not to assist you, but to force or forbid you to transition. And every time you say this, I think, “Well, it sounds like a forced-masc fantasy.”

**Daniel:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** So I kept reading, and you said something about how forced-masc content doesn’t really exist, and I was like, “That can’t be right.” And so I googled “forced-masc,” like the phrase, and I was like, “Look at all these results." And they were all, like, your tweets and your newsletter.

**Daniel:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** So I’m curious, like, if you want to talk about why forced-masc or forbidden-masc scenarios appeal to you. Although you may have answered that question in the quote. But also why do you think that there isn’t more forced-masc content, ‘cause there’s so much forced-femme content.

**Daniel:** I mean, a couple of things. Like, certainly there’s like a lovely rich visual tradition of forced-femme content of the last so many years. But it’s not like, oh, for hundreds and hundreds of years that’s been, like, out there and promoted. Any kind of, like trans-adjacent, like, pornography, sexual fantasia, erotica, what have you, I would put all in like a similar category of either, like – it’s repressed, or it’s downgraded or devalued. Like I definitely don’t want to make any claims of, like, “For too long, trans women have had it so easy—”

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Daniel:** “—with their vast access to this incredibly, like, complicated pornographic genre that many people experience as totally alienating or unlike their own experience or degrading. And so – I’m not trying to do some version of, like, “Is it the fault of trans women that transmasculine invisibility is a thing?” No—

**Tuck:** No—

**Daniel:** That’s – exactly. That said, there does seem to be more of a result for that under that title. I do think, like, the stuff that I’ve written about the forced-masc fantasies – I also think that it’s erotically motivated. I also think that it exists. I think it has tended to have been presented with a certain degree of plausible deniability. I think it hasn’t usually shown up in pornography as often. It has shown up more often in, say, like romance fiction, like Georgette Heyer. Or middlebrow literature like Daphne du Maurier. And it tends to be buried under what I have referred to as the great chaste lie of the plucky heroine. And I can’t remember, by the way, if a friend of mine said that and then I quoted it, or if I said it, so I just – I know that that’s a phrase that I use. I can’t remember whether or not it’s original to me, and I apologize for that. But this whole, like, “Sure, sure, sure, we’re just binding our breasts and being kind of berated by impatient cis men who want us to man up, just because it helps move the plot forward, or because I hate sexism. Definitely no part of me is getting, like, a thrill out of it. I would hate that, and this is totally – you know, no one’s getting any sexual intrigue or pleasure out of this.”

So I think part of the work that I have enjoyed doing is pointing it out where I do see it, and trying to draw attention to it as a particular way of relating to the possibility of forced transmasculinization. And again, that’s not to say it’s all like great and straightforward and unproblematic, and like – much like in the way that, like, a lot of the transfeminine writing around forced-femme erotica and pornography is, like, nuanced, complicated, thoughtful. Not just like, “Isn’t this fun for us?” It’s many, many different things. But it is for sure out there, and I think once you kind of are like “Oh, that’s what that thing is,” you see a lot of it, and you’re like, “Oh, right, like there is that weird awkward pleasure of the seen in like, She’s the Man or whatever. Of like the scene where, like, the really butch guy is like giving our proto-trans guy a lesson in, like, fucking here’s how you do it, you fucking worm. And it’s just always like, “Is this erotic?”

**Tuck:** Yeah, I mean even – not to sexualize a children’s film, but like Mulan is clearly trans, and sometimes I’ll say that, and someone’s like, “What, Mulan’s trans?” And I’m like, “What are you talking about? Are we watching the same movie?”

**Daniel:** It’s such an overblown transmasculine cliché at this point. Like I’m amazed that you’re still running into people who haven’t picked up on that. ‘Cause like all I’m hearing is like, “Oh boy, another trans guy is talking about Mulan. Jeez. Knock it off.”

**Tuck:** My favorite song, as a child, was the Mulan, “When will my reflection show who I am inside?” And I’m sure that was not subtext at all. I’m sure it was just a coincidence. [laughs]

**Daniel:** Definitely a 90s queer anthem, I think. It’s very – oh, looking in a mirror, touching my face, looking – I mean, man, RIP touching your face. Remember that?

**Tuck:** I was gonna say, touching your face is kink now. I have to catch myself often making trans-related jokes in front of straight cis folks, because they often don’t have enough comfort or familiarity with the subject matter to really know when I’m joking or not. And I was thinking about this, because your chapters and interludes often have titles like “If You Can’t Parallel Park, You Have to Get a Sex Change” and “Duckie from Pretty in Pink is also a Beautiful Lesbian and I Can Prove it with the Intensity of My Feelings.” And I was listening to you getting interviewed by a cis person, and I started to worry that they were maybe taking it a little bit too seriously?

**Daniel:** Oh yeah?

**Tuck:** So my question is, like, when you write pieces like that, what has the reaction been from your readers?

**Daniel:** I’m trying to think. I luckily have not heard from anyone yet who was like, “Are you fucking serious? Like, I can’t parallel park, and I don’t want to transition. So please don’t make me.” I don’t think that that would come across. I think mostly the people that I’ve heard from tend to be trans people, just because I think they have tended to be the people who have the most kind of – like the kind of person who would already be inclined to talk to an author of the book that they read would maybe be somebody who already felt pretty, like, lined up with it or pretty identified with it, or something. So maybe there’s a sort of, like, natural self-selecting there.

But certainly – I think this was also my experience with the last book, but more so this time – you hope you get more trans interviewers than otherwise, because – not at all that there aren’t cis people who can’t think interestingly and thoughtfully about transition, but just your kind of average book reviewer might not necessarily have given a lot of thought to transition, so sometimes you get the kind of like reflexive or like knee-jerk questions that somebody gets when they haven’t really thought a lot yet. Your heart sinks a little bit, and you’re like, “Okay, we’re gonna dial this conversation way, way, way, way back.” And that’s fine. And I can do it. But I have to start by explaining that, like, “No, I didn’t give up feminism.” Like, I’ll have that conversation, but it’s a real fuckin’ bummer.

**Tuck:** How often do you get interviewed by trans people for this book?

**Daniel:** Well, for this book I would say maybe about a quarter or a third of the interviewers—

**Tuck:** Nice—

**Daniel:** Have been trans, which has been really, really fantastic and has just like, fucking made my day every time that it happens. Although I will say, one of my favorite interviews that I’ve gotten to do was with Chris Randle for Hazlitt, and that was a fuckin’ just fantastic interview by a cis person, so anything’s possible. Certainly I think the questions that I get from trans interviewers have tended to be just a little bit more – you know, your writing about this made me reflect on something in my own life, and then let’s take it a little further, what do you think about this and this offshoot of that? So they tend to bring a little bit more to the conversation in terms of “I have also given some thought to this idea,” or “I have also experienced this thing, and here’s part of what I think about it.” As opposed to, I think a cis person – again, meaning as best as they possibly can – is much more likely to just sort of take me at my word and say, like, “I assume you’re right about this.”

And so it tends to be a little bit more of a conversation where it’s sort of like I’m both trying to represent my own perspective and also, like, fill in the gaps of the trans people who aren’t there in that conversation. Of like, “I didn’t invent this,” or like, “Not everyone agrees with me on this,” or “Other people have written about this previously and here’s been their take.” As opposed to another trans person might be more familiar with that, and kind of have that mental and emotional context.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Now that you say that, that makes a ton of sense. That like, I wouldn’t want a cis interviewer to really push back on anything you say. But I would want a trans interviewer to be able to do that. So that makes a ton of sense. Well, speaking of the interviewer relating, you write about gender euphoria at one point: “Is this euphoria? How will I know, if transition has been founded in large part by the realization that I often can’t trust my own sense of self, because I used to think I was a cis woman and only belatedly realized I might have been in error?” And that really resonated with me, as someone who, yes, did listen to that one song from Mulan, but who didn’t, like, spend my entire childhood thinking about gender or thinking I was the wrong gender, and I can definitely look back and sort of retcon a lot of signs. But I’m sure many people could do that, and so I have a difficult time giving myself permission to be confident about my gender when it has changed over time. And it sounds like you have a similar feeling? Or somewhat related feelings. So yeah, do you feel like you have learned to trust your own sense of self enough? Did you feel like there’s some sort of wisdom you can impart onto me about this issue of being able to trust your own felt sense of gender when it’s so radically different from what you were confident was true for most of your life?

**Daniel:** Yeah. I mean certainly a lot of that I think just came from actually asking myself questions and paying attention. A lot of it was really just the initial abrupt sense of, “I’ve been trying not to think about this all the time. I fear, resist, and resent any attempts to think about it.” And then the shift to, “I’m going to spend a lot of time thinking about it. I’m going to spend a lot of time talking about it with other people. I’m going to spend a lot of time examining my own feelings and kind of taking responsibility for the fact that no one is going to force-masc me. Ever. Just as no one is going to stop me.” I mean, people can exert various forms of pressure, or I can experience various forms of pressure.

But no one is either going to, you know, run by me, stab me in the thigh, and say, like, “Ha ha, you just got, you know, your first T injection.” Nor is anyone going to say, like, “I forbid you. I gave every informed consent clinic in the country your name and picture, and they know never to serve you.” And again, that’s not to say that anyone who experiences any version of that fear or fantasy is like, hoping that someone will do those things to them. But I just mean one of the things that I think fixating for a long time on those particular fantasies did for me was to continue to, like, maintain the illusion that this wasn’t my choice to make, when the reality was, like, no one was ever going to make me transition. And transition was never going to happen to me if I didn’t take steps to make it happen. And it was really just a question of, “Do I want this more than I don’t want this?”

And that was really hard. I didn’t want that to be the thing. I didn’t want that to be what reality was. I wanted it to be someone’s gonna either make me do it or tell me I can’t do it, so that I either know to rebel and struggle against something or throw up my hands in resignation and, you know, secretly express relief that I didn’t have to make a decision about myself. And so I think really just coming to the realization of, like, if I never take steps toward transition, I will never transition. My voice will sound the same for the rest of my life. My face will continue to look like some version of this face for the rest of my life. And that will be the story of me. And do I want that? And that felt really clarifying. I think especially when I thought of, like, “Well, gee whiz, when I think about myself at the age of like 75, and I’m like, this is me, and I’ve never transitioned, that sounds really weird.” And maybe wasn’t ready to say something like, “I know what I am and I can, like, move from a place of identity and have my actions follow up with it.” Or certainty. I might not have those things. But I can at least, when I say out loud, “Here’s a picture of me at 75 and I’ve never transitioned,” I’m like, “No, that one fuckin’ sucks. That’s not happening.”

**Tuck:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Something else that you wrote that resonated with me is that you said, “It was only when I was able to relinquish the fantasy of nothing irreversible, of uninterrupted cis-ness, that I could begin to—”

**Daniel:** Yeah—

**Tuck:** “—Imagine a livable future for myself.” And yeah, that makes a lot of sense to me, I think so many of us do feel like transition is irreversible in some way – which, there are elements of it that are irreversible if you take certain measures, but that’s true about so many things in life. That are irreversible in some way, like tattoos are irreversible more or less, in some way. And we don’t gatekeep people from them the way we gatekeep them from hormones, so – anyway, I just appreciated this sentiment that to me, and you can tell me if I’m wrong, sounded like you weren’t ready to be like, “Yes, 100%, this is definitely the right thing for me forever,” but it was like, “Well, trying it is the right thing for me.” Is that what you were going for?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I – well, and I just think so much of us have to reckon with that level of transphobia that we’re just afraid of – and it can be so hard I think even to recognize how thoroughly that transphobia can take root in all of us, but it was just like – the premise of that thought or that fear was obviously, “I shouldn’t try to take any steps towards transition unless I absolutely know I’d be miserable for the rest of my life without it, ‘cause the best thing to do is not transition.” As opposed to trying to think through other ways of thinking about how do you make informed decisions with reasonable care. It was just like, “Do anything you can to avoid it.”

And I think too, like, learning more about, like, “Here’s what hormones are available, here are the doses that are available, here’s the scheduling that’s available, here’s the amount that various people take, here’s the effects that they can generally guarantee pretty much everyone will have versus effects that are much more up in the air or unpredictable.” Like, just like gaining actual knowledge as opposed to like, “Well, I heard it does this,” I think made a really, really big difference. As well as just, like, familiarizing myself with, like, what the lives and the bodies of people who had made some of these choices look like. What elements of that felt appealing and interesting to me, what elements felt scary to me? What did I feel like I could live with? What did it look like when I saw people who were like, “Well, I gave it a try for a while, I really liked it, and then later I decided to knock it off, and here’s what I did with that”? I think especially like that fear of, like, detransitioning, like – even before I had started, like, “Well, what if I start, realize it’s not for me, and then I have to stop, and then everyone’s mad at me?”

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Daniel:** Or – or I like, let down the team, or I’m proof that we shouldn’t be allowed to do this. Or, you know, I just feel terrible and I was like, you know, not trans enough to be trans but not cis enough to be happy and cis, and then I just exist in this miserable state. And so again, because those fears can be so big, but also so vague, it was really helpful to, like, seek out – not the kind of people who, like, detransition and then kind of go on to oppose trans autonomy, but people who are like, “I did X Y and Z for a while, it felt helpful in the following ways, it felt less than helpful in other ways. Here’s what I’ve done since then. Some parts of my life feel easy to access, other parts have changed a lot. Here’s how I make peace with the fact that I live in a body in an imperfect world.” It was just like, “Oh, right, they continue to find ways to make peace with their own bodies, just as they had done before.” It was just helpful to see, like, that’s an example of how a person can live.

And I think that feeling like I’m not about to set sail for the moon and then realize halfway to the moon I can’t live on the moon – like I will be making choices, some of which will have more permanent effects than others. But generally speaking, very rarely am I going to be put in a situation where within 24 hours, something about my life changes permanently, radically, irreversibly, in a way that no one can ever retrieve. And so I think realizing that there was not an overnight boy switch that I both longed for and feared – I think that’s a big thing too, I don’t know if this is something that you’ve talked about with other guests, but like – certainly I think my fear before hormones was like, “What if it happens too quickly and I wake up tomorrow and I’m just like a 50-year-old man named, like, Don? And I realize that’s not what I wanted, and, like, I need to paddle back home.”

My experience has been much more, like, “God, I’ve been doing this for three years and I’m getting ma’amed constantly, like…” Again, that’s not to say that somebody else might not genuinely have that experience, but it was just funny that I was so worried about, like, “Well, obviously I’m just gonna start passing so fast, and it’s just gonna be too much too soon,” and then it was just like, “Oh yeah, that’s not been my experience.” I in fact have had to develop different kinds of relationships to things like change and patience and figuring out things that I can and that I can’t control. But yeah, the overnight boy switch that I was so afraid of did not come.

**Tuck:** Yeah, what’s interesting is we actually talked about that on just the previous episode, but from the lens of a partner. There’s a cis woman whose partner, she’s a trans woman.

**Daniel:** Uh-huh.

**Tuck:** And the cis woman was really fearful that she wouldn’t be able to handle the transition, or more that she wouldn’t be attracted to her partner when she had transitioned. And our answer was in part, like, this is going to be really gradual. It’s not like you’re gonna wake up one day and there’s gonna be a completely different person laying next to you. Like, you’re going to watch this happen. And hopefully you’ll be able to, like, show up and be supportive of this person. But yeah, I think that’s also really real for ourselves as well, and I was thinking about – I think at one point in the book you mention worrying about your hair receding on T, which is like a really real fear.

And so when you were talking about sort of comparing what would it feel like to be 75 and have never transitioned, that’s actually really helpful for me, because I think a lot about things like that, about “Oh, but I wouldn’t want my hair to recede,” and it’s like, okay, let’s compare. Being a person on T whose hair receded versus being a person who’s never on T? Which one feels better? It could be scary to think about your hair receding, but maybe it’s more scary to think about never being on T. You know, so that’s like a really useful framework that I think I don’t always think about. So – there’s no question here. I’m just, like, thanks. [laughs]

**Daniel:** Oh, thank you. Yeah. No, and that is helpful too, because I think – again, I don’t know if this is something that will sound at all familiar to you, but like I can think about a number of things that I expressed concerns about when I was contemplating starting T. And I go back and forth on like – some of them I think were like legitimate concerns and worries, that made sense, that were things that I either wanted to think about, like, “Well, how would I deal with this, or how would I want to prevent this, or how would I mourn this?” That were real and they mattered. And sometimes it also felt a little bit like part of what I wanted when I would say, like, “Oh, I’m really worried about, like, my singing voice,” or “I’m worried about my hairline,” it was sort of like I wanted someone to say, like, “Oh, well then you fuckin’ better not do it then.”

**Tuck:** Yeah, totally—

**Daniel:** You know, “Better hang onto that goddamn singing voice forever.” Again, I’m not trying to dismiss that fear of mine, it was a real fear. But I think sometimes I really clung to it in the hopes that somebody was going to be like, “You’re right. We listened, and we heard you, and we came up with a version of T that actually gives you more hair on your head and makes you a wonderful soprano.” Which again, like, I also really value and, like, long for the day that we can come up with, like, interesting combinations of sex hormones that people can inject that can do all of that, and can give you a mix of, like, a soprano voice, a chiseled jaw, and, like, wings. Like I want to go full designer hormones. I don’t mean to downgrade that at all. But in terms of my real life, where I was at, the things that were standing in front of me, I think a lot of what those fears were for me was “I’m afraid that I won’t be perfectly cis anymore. And that’s scary. And so I want that to be a reason not to do it, but I still want to do it.” And so it was finally important to just say, like, “My voice will change. There will never be a day where I go from a soprano to a” – I wasn’t even a soprano before, sorry, I say that like – I was a fucking alto.

But like, “I’m not going to become a bass overnight. If I genuinely experience a point where my voice is changing too much too fast, I can pause. I can stop. I can do voice training, which is something a lot of trans women do. Like, I have multiple options available to me.” And what I was instead doing previously with that fear was pretending I only have two options, and one of them is unacceptable because I’ve already decided I like my singing voice, so somebody needs to come up with another solution fast. And it was just like, no, what happened was my voice changed. Sometimes it changed in ways that, like – I think before I started – sorry, I realize we weren’t gonna, like, talk quite so much about, like, the fears that you experience before starting hormones—

**Tuck:** No, I like it—

**Daniel:** But one of those fears was just like – I, before I tried T, all that I knew was the things I was worried I would lose. I hadn’t yet experienced the things that I didn’t yet realize that I would love. So like, when my voice did start to drop – I knew I wanted that for my speaking voice, I was scared for my singing voice. Which again, it’s not like I was in the fuckin’, like, Philadelphia Boys’ Choir or whatever. I just had a nice voice for singing in the shower. But like the first time that I felt my voice falter on a high note, I thought, “Oh, I’ll be really sad.” And I actually found that moment really moving and poignant.

Parts of it were bittersweet, but it was overall much, much more lovely and exciting, thrilling, and frankly a little bit erotic, than I’d ever anticipated. And I could not have known that until it happened. And then the first time that I was singing along to something and then I realized, like, I could drop down an octave where previously I hadn’t been able to, I felt – I felt like a caver who had just, like, broken into a new unexplored cave system underneath my own lungs. Like, I just felt thrilled and moved beyond belief. And that was not something that I would have known to look forward to before it happened. But I think too, like, that language that was in my own fear of, like, “I’ll ruin it.” There’s the legitimate concern of what will my voice sound like. I like elements of my voice now. That’s real, that matters, that deserved care and attention. And then there’s the voice of transphobia, which is “I’ll ruin the good cis thing I have.” And it’s like, “Well, the good cis thing you have isn’t bringing you lots and lots of joy. So maybe let’s worry a little bit less about what qualifies as ruining it and what doesn’t.”

**Tuck:** Switching gears a little bit from fears – maybe, I don’t know, maybe this whole thing is about fears – your wife Grace is also trans, and my understanding is that you had been very close pre-transition and then—

**Daniel:** Yes—

**Tuck:** —she started transitioning at roughly the same time you did? Is that correct?

**Daniel:** Yes. Technically I got the jump on her hormones-wise for like three months. And she had also been thinking about it for much, much, much longer than I had.

**Tuck:** Yeah. So, my question is what that experience has been like, going through transitions where you may be hitting milestones at the same time but in different directions?

**Daniel:** Yeah, absolutely. So I think different, definitely, is the word. Like there were moments when it would feel like there was a real sense of shared experience or shared sweetness. There would be moments where it would feel a little bit of a sense of, like, “How do you like this? This is the thing that sucks!” Which was generally balanced with a real sense of, like, “I’m aware this is not the thing that sucks, this is the thing that caused me pain.” And then other times a real sense of, like, “Oh, this hat looks so much better on you. You should have been wearing this hat.” So a real – I know I say this a lot, but a genuinely really rich tapestry—

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Daniel:** —and there’s been times when I’ve felt like it’s made my own relationship to womanhood feel, like, healed or restored, getting to see, like, her relationship to womanhood as it’s mediated through, like, her own transfemininity, that’s just really powerful and exciting. There’s times when we have to hold one another or be careful or tender with one another, when it’s kind of like, “This thing that produces joy in you activates fear or loss or, like, past pain in me, and that’s hard, and I want to be able to find language to talk about it that’s not just, like, one thing’s bad, one thing’s good.” And then there’s also times when it just feels like there’s more in common than otherwise. Like the transness sometimes feels like it’s foregrounded over the rest of the things, and then there’s other times when it feels like that’s not the case. So it’s enriching, it’s sometimes challenging. Especially earlier on, I think there was more of a sense of, like, struggling to find shared perspectives or shared experiences, and then eventually I think a real, real sense of shared need, shared experience, solidarity. Not necessarily rooted in an identical experience, but rooted in something really powerful.

**Tuck:** So, there’s a subsection in your book called “You and Me and Our First Years on T,” which is a very good section, and the “You” section is full of things like “effortlessly made the switch from bravely disregarding female beauty standards to bravely disregarding male beauty standards at the two-month mark” and “passes 100 percent of the time but still gets the butch head nod on the street somehow” and “never uses judgmental language like ‘passing,’ even as a convenient shorthand.” And then the “Me” section says, “Me, on T for the exact same amount of time: regularly ma’amed by birds” – which I love—

**Daniel:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** — “simultaneously an embarrassment to feminism and transmasculinity” – also very resonant – and then later down the page you say “constantly writing directionless personal essays about early that I’ll regret in eight minutes.” And so that’s a long way to ask, how does it feel to have written so many personal essays about transitioning, both in your newsletter and in your book, and have this public and, like, more or less permanent document about such a transitional time in your life?

**Daniel:** I think it was something that I was well aware of moving into it, that it was very much a book written about and during relatively early transition. That that is often a very volatile time. That there may very well come a time not too far in the future when I would look back and feel very differently, or a real sense of – this wasn’t the groundbreaking milestone that you maybe thought it was. And feeling relative comfort with that. Like I’m very aware that there are other types of books written by people much later in transition, that can contain a lot more wisdom or a lot more insight. And maybe one day I’ll write one of those books, and I love those types of books, but this felt very much like – I think it’s worthwhile and meaningful, sometimes, to write a book about this particular stage.

I feel okay knowing the types of mistakes that I am likely to make at this stage of my own transition. I will do my best to write a book as thoughtfully as I can. But I’m not going to get too hung up on the idea that I should wait until I know I won’t have to worry about being slightly messy or embarrassing, or have an idea be half thought out. Sorry, I’m trying to like hedge my bets here, I’m not trying to say, like, “Just write whatever you feel. Go full xoJane.”

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Daniel:** “Don’t edit anything.” So it’s not to say just, like, “As long as you’re feeling it, write it, nothing else matters.” But I do think a real sense of – you don’t have to wait. I did not feel like I wanted to wait and write a different type of book later. I was like, “I want to write this type of book now. With all the problems that can come with that.”

**Tuck:** Yeah. And it also reminds me, I talked to Cyrus Dunham a couple months ago. And I think both of your books are in my mind – I don’t want to say exclusively written for trans people, but written in a way that it really challenges me, and a lot of things really resonate with me. Whereas I think a lot of trans memoirs and books that are adjacent to trans memoir, they do come from a place that’s really trying to justify to cis people that trans people are okay and should be members of society. You know? And so it is much more helpful to me as a trans person to read books like yours and books like Cyrus’, where you do explore doubt, and you explore themes that really come up in trans lives. And I understand the impulse to not have those conversations in front of cis people. But I think they’re really, really important. And I also think that – I think Carta Monir and I talked about this on the show, but also the concept that, like, cis people want to hear that if you were trans, you would already know that you’re trans, because they want to be reassured that they’re never gonna be trans. But like, the reality is any of us could turn out to be trans at any time, and I think that those kind of books are more challenging and frightening but also, like, more rewarding to everyone’s exploration of gender.

**Daniel:** Interesting. Yeah, I haven’t read Cyrus’s book, so I can’t speak to that. But there’s so many different ways to be trans, and to talk about being trans, it’s just so useful to have many, many different stories. I worry sometimes, because I write a story about a lot of doubt and uncertainty and arriving late to an idea – I don’t ever want to come across as, like, you know, those people who know from a young age have it really easy, they just know everything and their lives are straightforward and simple. That’s not true at all. It’s simply that it’s really important and useful to have lots of stories about lots of different ways people arrive at their own understanding of themselves as trans, because as you and I both know, there’s a lot of ways for it to happen, and it really helps to see some version of your own experience, and to realize, like, that could be the way in for me. It’s not any kind of a, like, “Oh, this one’s more complicated than the other,” or “This one’s more nuanced,” or “This one’s more interesting.” It’s truly just there are so many fuckin’ ways to be trans, and oftentimes we can convince ourselves that the way that we’re doing it isn’t the one, and so we must not be trans. And I think it can be really lovely and exciting and terrifying to realize, like, “Oh my god, I’m allowed to be trans.”

**Tuck:** Yeah. Absolutely. For your book specifically, to get every possible morsel out of this book, I think it would be helpful for someone to have a deep knowledge of transmasculinity, and of Christianity, and of ancient myths, and of the Golden Girls, and of Mean Girls. And I do feel a lot of times when I’m reading your work that I am getting a lot out of it, but that I would be getting more out of it if I had any sort of familiarity with all of the references and allusions that you’re making. And so I’m curious who your intended audience is, and also how you balance accessibility with writing in a way that challenges and delights you.

**Daniel:** Yeah. Yeah, I – you know, I don’t always have in front of me this idea of who my audience is. I often can have various groups that I kind of hope will find it appealing. But it’s not just like, “Oh man, this is only for trans men who spent nine years religious in the Midwest and then also, like, watched The OC a lot.” Like, I want it to be open and available regardless of how many of the references or the allusions that you might yourself individually be familiar with. So there’s always a balance there of, like, I want those allusions to be really useful and practical, and to add to what I’m talking about, but I don’t want them to feel impenetrable, so that you wouldn’t pick up the book and be like, “Well, I haven’t seen Star Trek, should I even fucking bother?”

But yeah, I think I often am thinking about a trans audience. Not necessarily transmasculine, but like I’m often thinking about – not in the sense of, like, “Oh, they’ll all feel the same way, they’ll all intuitively understand me and will have, like, a fuckin’ flower crown making circle,” so much as just – I like listening to us talk about ourselves, even when I disagree strenuously with what someone else has concluded, or even if I don’t share an experience, I really often like the way that trans people think about lives and choices and bodies and possibilities and the future and the past, and connection, and relatability. I often find the ways that we think about that really, really fascinating, so I wanted to kind of add my own voice to that collection, that archive.

**Tuck:** You write in your book about how people would ask you things like, “What if you start to transition and then society collapses, and you’re artificially dependent on something society provides for you, like hormones?” So I like the way that you answer that question in the book. Have your feelings changed at all now that we are teetering very close to societal collapse?

**Daniel:** Yeah, I mean I think my approach to that is kind of the same thing, which is that, like, I am a creature that requires some version of society to survive. Through whatever various collapses of, like, empire we may be living through at present, we are a far, far, far cry from the collapse of society in the sense of, like, human beings living in groups larger than the immediate family, periodically talking to and attempting to help or provide services for one another. I think we’re very, very far from living in a place where it is impossible for everyone to access any kind of, like, medication. I mean we already like – sorry, we already live in a place, like – healthcare is, like, unequally distributed, and lots of people don’t have access to what they need. We’re seeing more of that now. All of that’s huge and real and awful. But I can’t make that situation better by saying, like, “Well, I won’t take such-and-such medication, I won’t get fitted for contacts because someday the people who make contacts might go away.” Like, I have to make decisions that are rooted in some version of trust that we will either figure out a way to make things work or, if and when the situation calls for it, you know, I’ll adapt or I’ll die. But basically like if we are ever in a position where, like, I’m living in a society where it’s impossible for a trans person to get access to hormones, I’m probably already dead, on account of, like, I really need electricity and running water, and I don’t know how to hunt, and I don’t really know how to grow things, and I sunburn easily. You know? Like there’s just – yeah.

**Tuck:** Totally.

**Daniel:** Yeah. I guess basically what I mean is not that that’s not a real concern. Not that a breakdown of, like, healthcare or medicine or pharmaceutical supply isn’t a very real concern that we should all be, like, collectively trying to, like, find solutions to. But that the fear of that possibility should not stop me from making choices that I believe are necessary to, like, my autonomy and my happiness. That is, I think, the difference between treating that as a valid concern that I want to, like, try to – try to make change – sorry, I feel very incoherent. I apologize— [crosstalk]

**Tuck:** No, it makes sense – what you’re saying makes a lot of sense to me. It’s another instance, I think, of us treating the stakes of transitioning so differently than the stakes of doing anything else on earth. Because, like, I need my antidepressants, and if I go off them I’m gonna have wild withdrawal symptoms, and that doesn’t mean that I don’t ever take antidepressants in case society collapses and I have to go through withdrawal. You know? So it’s the same thing with many, many, many things, not just—

**Daniel:** Yeah—

**Tuck:** —pharmaceutical. But it’s just like a cost-benefit analysis, and I think the benefit for being on T is often much greater than “But what if society collapses?”

**Daniel:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** So—

**Daniel:** Yeah. So often, like, the answer to those fears is not, “Better not do something you think might really work for you.” The answer to that is, like, mutual aid.

**Tuck:** Absolutely.

**Daniel:** And I think it especially helps, ‘cause like my thought, like when it comes to that kind of fear, is never, like, “Well, what would I say to other trans people who were maybe, like, you know, dependent upon hormones in the sense of like – have gone ahead with a hysto or something.” And it’s like, oh, Jesus, I wouldn’t be like, “Don’t have done that. Like, travel back in time.” I would’ve been like, “Well, we gotta fuckin’ figure out a way to make sure that we get them the medicine they need.” And it’s like, “Great. Now think about that for yourself.”

**Tuck:** Yeah—

**Daniel:** ‘Cause you are also a member of society.

**Tuck:** That’s always the answer, and it’s always the hardest one. To be like, “Oh, I would never tell anyone else on earth that they weren’t actually trans, but will I tell myself that I’m not trans enough, constantly? Absolutely I will.” So—

**Daniel:** Yeah.

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

**Daniel:** I – I can’t begin to imagine. I think mostly I would say lots and lots of opportunity and freedom, and lots and lots of trans people.

[Gender Reveal outro music, a rockin guitar and synth track, plays]

**Tuck:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. Thank you so much for powering through the sometimes lackluster audio quality to hear all of Danny’s rad thoughts. I hope you had a good time. If you did enjoy the show, or if you learned something, please share the episode with friends, family, and your community. Please also share the news about our Trans Survival Fund. Folks can apply to receive funds at <bit.ly/GRsurvivalfund>. Link is in the show notes. You can find [*Something That May Shock and Discredit You*](https://www.indiebound.org/book/9781982105211) wherever books are sold. Please consider ordering through a non-Amazon source if you choose to order it and can swing that. You can find more of Danny’s writing at [ShatnerChatner.com](http://shatnerchatner.com/). You can find us on Twitter and on Instagram and at [GenderPodcast.com](http://genderpodcast.com/). If you have the means to do so, please consider supporting the Survival Fund or the podcast. You can support both at <PayPal.me/mollywoodstock> and on Cash App I’m mollywoodstock. If you are supporting the Survival Fund, please put that in the subject line so I know where to put your money. You can also support our work at [Patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender), and thank you so, so, so much for doing that.

If you’re looking for trans community and support during quarantine, you are welcome to join our Slack community at <bit.ly/genderslack2>. If you are bored and trans and vaguely good at art, have you considered designing merch for our store? We would love to put some new designs in the shop, it is currently completely empty. So reach out if you have an idea and we will try to make it happen. As a reminder, you will get half the proceeds. The other half will go to an LGBTQ organization of your choice.

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. Hang in there, and we’ll be back as soon as we can with more feelings about gender.

[Gender reveal outro music plays]