[*Gender Reveal* theme plays]

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

**Molly:** Welcome to season 2 of Gender Reveal! I’m so excited you’re here, I really appreciate you sticking with us over the break, and I know you are going to LOVE the interviews we have lined up for this season.I don’t want to spoil the surprise by listing exactly who we’ll be speaking to, but I just want to say that I’m so excited, so honored, so grateful for all the folks I was able to speak to this season, including our first guest, which is YouTube star Riley J. Dennis. But before we get to that, I need to tell you that as always, our show is sponsored by our 75 generous Patreon donors. Thank you so much for your support, even over the break when we weren’t putting out new content every week. If YOU want to support the show, you can do so at Paypal.me/mollywoodstock or patreon.com/gender. If you donate $5 a month or more, I’ll send you a bunch of stickers that you can use to like, vandalize your town or adorn your belongings or whatever you want to do. And with that, it’s time for a segment called This Week in Gender.

[trumpeting news music]

**Molly:** This week in gender, it’s Pride Month! That month every year where corporations put rainbows on everything, and everyone argues about whether cops should be invited to the Pride Parade! Don’t get me wrong, I LOVE queer pride, I love trans pride; what I don’t exactly love is capital “P” pride, “™.” There’s a really good New York Times editorial by Krista Burton about this, but my main complaint is that many Pride events have lost sight of their original goal and original meaning. As you probably know if you listen to this podcast, Pride is timed to the anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riots. There are MANY resources if you want to learn more, but the very, very short version is that back in the 1960s, being gay or trans was essentially illegal. Being gay or trans was in the DSM as a mental disorder, cross-dressing was outlawed, and the FBI literally kept lists of known homosexuals. So the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village was one of the very few places where LGBTQ folks, and specifically extra-marginalized groups like drag queens, trans folks, butch lesbians, sex workers, and homeless youth could go and dance and have a good time, but even so cops would often come and harrass folks, as they do, so in July of 1969, cops came to raid the place, and this young black trans woman named Marcia P. Johnson is basically like “fuck it” and threw a brick at the cops. Another young trans woman of color, Sylvia Rivera, she joined in and this whole riot broke out, and pretty much the whole LGBTQ rights movement like evolved from there. GLAD came out of that, P Flag came out of that, Pride came out of that. It sort of started everything, or at least symbolized a new wave. I bring this up because a common complaint about contemporary pride events is that they’ve stopped focusing on this violent, radical riot led by these trans women of color, and drag queens butch dykes, sex workers, homeless youth, and instead have shifted the focus to like corporations and drinking and allies and being family-friendly. And I have a lot of feelings about this, but I think I’m gonna save it for next week, so for now this has been This Week In Gender, although really it was like, 1969 in Gender.

[trumpeting news music]

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**Molly:** Riley J. Dennis is a queer, polyamorous, non-binary lesbian who makes videos about politics and justice from an intersectional feminist perspective, as well as videos about her life and whatever else is on her mind. I recorded this interview a couple of months ago, and since then she’s moved to Sydney, Australia with her partner, Fiona.

[background music continues for a few seconds and then stops]

**Molly:** The way we always start this show is by asking, with regards to gender, how do you identify?

**Riley:** Um, I identify as a non-binary woman.

**Molly:** Yeah, and can you talk about what that means?

**Riley:** Totally. So, sometimes I’ll use different words to talk about it, sometimes I’ll say like, “I’m trans-feminine” or just like a femme non-binary person, and basically what it means for me is that, uh, I feel like my gender isn’t like strictly non-binary or strictly woman, it kind of feels like right in the middle, like it overlaps with both of them. To me it’s like, I don’t feel like a binary woman, I don’t feel like that encapsulates everything, um, about my gender, but I also don’t feel like completely detached from that, um, so I just kind of rest in the middle and I’m comfortable with both words, so when people ask if I’m non-binary OR a woman I’m just kind of like “yeah, both,” um, yeah, and I think that’s perfectly fine, I think that trying to move from a binary to, there are three distinct categories seems just like, a very slight progression. I think a more realistic way of looking at it is that they all overlap. Um, and that people can feel connections to more than one at once, um, so yeah, that’s basically how I feel! [laughs]

**Molly:** Yeah, that makes sense. Thank you for explaining that. And what pronouns do you use?

**Riley:** Um, so I use she/her or they/them pronouns

**Molly:** Great. So you have a youtube channel..

**Riley:** I do!

**Molly:** With, thousands and thousands and thousands of subscribers

**Riley: [laughs]**

**Molly:** it’s like 50 thousand, that’s many thousand! [laughs]

**Riley:** [laughs] That’s a few thou--okay.

**Molly:** And when you first started, um I believe that you were reviewing books? Is that right?

**Riley:** Yep! [laughs] I think that was like my first few videos!

**Molly:** Yeah! And now, among other things, you make educational videos about queer and trans topics like “what is non-binary gender?” or “what is having sex as a trans lesbian like?” so I’m wondering how you decided to shift to making that kind of content

**Riley:** Ooh, that’s a good question. Um, it wasn’t really like intentional, like that was never what I made my youtube channel for, cause I think when I made my channel I was not fully out, like I had started telling a few of my friends, but like, wasn’t completely out, so I just like hadn’t even thought of that, as like, a way to talk about trans stuff, but then, it started, like I think I came out to *everyone* like, a few months into my channel existing, and so it just, like, it became a very prominent thing in my life, and so in talking about my life, I ended up talking about that stuff a lot, and then I would get questions from people, and I was like “holy shit, there’s so much that people don’t understand that I’ve had to figure out because I’m experiencing it, so I might as well like, share this with everyone and help put a resource out there that’s useful to people out there that might be going through the same thing that I went through. Because I remember trying to figure this all out and looking up youtubers, and there’s like a few trans youtubers but not a WHOLE lot, and I try to talk about things that they don’t talk about, so yeah! I just kind of fell into it because it was my life and I didn’t see that resource existing anywhere else.

**Molly:** Yeah so you said that you were transitioning like as you were building your youtube channel. What was it like going through such a private exploration, but like, publicly?

**Riley:** Oh my god that is also a good question. Umm, sooo.. It was really tough for me because I felt a huge pressure to document my whole transition online, because that’s what I see every other trans person on the internet doing. And I know that that’s not true, I know that there are trans people who aren’t on the internet, but it *feels* like search for trans people on youtube, all you find is, transition timelines, and all of that stuff, and like.. That’s great, and I think I’ve watched all of them, and I really appreciate them, and like, I love those youtubers, but also, it felt.. It felt like I HAD to do that, it felt like, if you’re trans on youtube, you do transition stuff. And I really didn’t want to because it felt very personal to me, um, it didn’t feel like a thing I wanted to share publicly, so I just… didn’t talk about it. I still don’t. But it was weird that there was that pressure on me and that everyone felt entitled to that information, I think because they saw the same thing that I did. They saw every other trans person talking about this, and so even well intentioned people would constantly be like, “what are you doing? What procedures are you undergoing? Are you on hormones?” blah blah blah, like asking, at least what I considered very invasive questions, and I just had to keep being like no, no, I’m not talking about that. You don't’ get access to that information. Some things I’m allowed to keep private.

**Molly:** Mmhmm.

**Riley:** So it was just stressful. Because a lot of people on the internet felt entitled to information about me that I didn’t want to share. Which I think happens to anyone who has any sort of audience, but it felt particularly like grating because it was trans stuff.

**Molly:** Yeah.

**Riley:** And in addition to that, there’s a whole, like, huge shitty youtubers made videos saying that’ I’m not on hormones, and I’m faking being trans, and blah blah blah, so there’s like, in addition to just the general shittiness of the internet there was like, a organized effort by large youtubers, to like, trash me and to make up lies about me, and so that was just stressful because everyone then believed these lies, like, I was gaslit to the point that I was like, “am I not transitioning? Like did I say this at some point?”

**Molly:** [laughs]

**Riley:** Genuinely, like I remember, just being like, “did I say something to put these people off? Like I don’t.. What did I do??” and the answer is, I didn’t do anything, I went back and looked through everything I ever said, and so I ended up making ONE video about transition stuff, I think, like last summer, and it was just like, putting it out for everyone to be like, “Look, I am transitioning, this is the truth, here are all the times I’ve said that I am on the internet and there are literally no times where I’ve said that I’m NOT transitioning, so like, you all can go fuck yourself [laughs]

**Molly:** [laughs]

**Riley:** Um, that was pretty much like the one time I talked about transition stuff, because it just felt like, since I *hadn’t* addressed it, people still felt entitled to it, and people believed things that weren’t true about me, so I just wanted to do like, ONE time, here’s what the truth is. Now leave me alone.

**Molly:** Totally.

**Riley:** Um, and since then I haven’t really talked about it.

**Molly:** Yeah! So I did want to ask you, like in that video that you DID make about transitioning, you made it very clear that medically transitioning, with hormones, or with surgeries or whatever, doesn’t suddenly make someone like a “real” trans person or like “more” trans, or an “official trans person!”

**Riley:**  [laughs]

**Molly:** I was wondering if you could talk about that more because that’s a really important point to me.

**Riley:** Yeah! Absolutely. I was you’re right, that was the main thing I was trying to drive home with that video. It’s fucking 30-minute video, because I was like, y’all are gonna sit through 25 minutes of education before you get any information about me. Like, you have to learn this stuff. And because the thing was, I didn’t want it to seem like I was saying, “look I’m a ‘real trans,’ I’m doing this thing, so I can be in the “cool trans” club now. I didn’t want to feed into that. Into the like, “I’m transitioning therefore I’m a real trans person” thing. Because.. Trans people DON’T have to transition, or take hormones, or anything. And so many trans people don’t have access to that stuff. And it just seems so cruel and like gate-keepy to be like, “you’re not trans” even though everything you think is trans just because you can’t access these expensive and hard-to-get services, Or don’t want to. So I went on for a long time about how I’m doing this, and this is the path for me, it’s not the path for every trans person, because it makes me really sad when I see trans people invalidating themselves have to put other trans people down. They’re like, “don’t worry, i’m not like one of those ‘trans-trenders’ or whatever” like they wanna act like they’re better than everyone, and the truth is, we’re all trans! And it’s all fine! However you experience that! Yeah, so I really want people to get that through their heads, like it doesn't matter what stage you’re at, if you transition, if you take hormones or change your name or whatever, if you feel like you’re trans, you’re trans. Like, that’s the only requirement for it.

**Molly:** Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much for talking about that. Do you want to talk about, I heard you say trans-trender...

**Riley:** [laughs]

**Molly:** And, do you want to talk about like, defining that for people who aren't aware of.. I mean, obviously it’s not a real thing so it’s kind of weird to ask you to define it…but you know what I mean.

**Riley:** I get you. Yeah, so… trans-trender is basically like, I don’t know if it’s like a slur, it’s like a shitty word that people say to trans people, it’s insinuating that you’re faking being transgender because it’s a cool trend. Which is just ridiculous because trans people have been around forever. And there are like, old trans people, like it’s not a thing that millennials have just invented or whatever. So the whole idea of it depends on this like, hypothetical fact that there are TONS of trans people, or like, tons of cis people out there faking being trans and that that needs to be addressed, like that’s what the insult relies on, and that’s just not a thing? Like, there *isn’t* a pandemic of cis people calling themselves trans and like faking it. It’s really just a way of putting down trans people and invalidating them, and being like, you’re not actually trans, you think you are, but I know better than you about… how you feel!

**Molly:** Gosh, so you experience like a really staggering level of hate and trolling on the internet. Like you have an intro video where you literally tell people like, not to look at the comments on your videos, and like, to ignore the fact that everything has like four times as many down-votes as up-votes, and it makes me feel like really sick and upset. Like I don’t have to engage with it, and you know? I experience it like one one-millionth as much as you do. So I’m just wondering how you take care of yourself, in the face of all that really pointed hatred.

**Riley:** Yeah! Um, I don’t look at it. That’s like, that’s my main thing, is I just ignore it all completely. Because.. As it started to ramp up, like, when I first got started on YouTube, like, it was fine. Like, no one gave a shit who I was, so like, I could read all my comments, and everything was cool, and that harrassment stuff started to build and it kind of came in waves. At first it was like, okay, there are a few assholoes, this is manageable, and I took a few hours out of my day to like, respond to comments but it’s fine, and then it would just build to the point where I would be in arguments with people all day, like in the middle of what I was doing all day, I’d be responding to comments and messages and whatever, and it just.. Consumed me? Because it’s not just the time you spend reading all that shit, and responding to it if you want, but the time you spend thinking about it afterwards, because I would just be like, how are these people not getting this? Like, I would become determined that I would convince people if I just argued enough. And I would argue and argue and argue all day, and it’s just like, emotionally so draining, like at the end of the day I’d be like, “I’ve been arguing why I deserve to be treated as a human, like, all day.” For weeks. And it’s just exhausting. And so the ONLY thing I found that can help is just to not do that. And like, I don’t see a reason to. It’s never been productive. I’ve had so many conversations. And it just seems like, the people who are willing to engage in these things to leave the shitty comments and to bate me into stuff, don’t actually give a shit about changing their minds, they just want to make me feel bad. And so, they can just keep moving the goalposts, and bringing up new topics, and ignoring my points, and just keep me going in a conversation, and that’s all they want. And so I realized that the only way I can even come close to winning is to not engage at all. And it makes me feel so much better; I have so much more free time, my brain isn’t bogged down, with just like, being told that I’m a shitty person all day every day, which I think psychologically could fuck anyone up, and I just knew it wasn’t good for me, and I knew I couldn’t continue to do that all of the time.

**Molly:** Do you feel like you’re able to access, I mean, there are also thousands of people that love your videos. Do you feel like you miss out on positive feedback because you can’t engage?

**Riley:** Yeah. No I definitely do, and that makes me really sad, because I know that there IS a lot of positive stuff, but looking at it at all, means looking at a lot of the bad stuff. And it’s hard to know which is which. Like every once in a while I’ll look at the comments on a video, and it depends on the video. Like some, for the first few hours before there’s any response videos, there will just be like, the nicest people being sweet. Um, and other times, like, a thousand trolls are just waiting the second I upload my video, how much they hate me. So it’s like a gamble if I want to look at the stuff, like, maybe I’ll get to see a hundred really nice comments from like, adorable like trans people who found this really helpful. And maybe I’ll just be told a hundred ways how I should die. So it’s like, it sucks that I have to miss out on all of that good stuff, and I think that it would help me mentally to know that that good stuff is out there and to see it, but I don’t know of any good way to filter all of that, like the only thing I can think of would be like to pay someone to go through my comments and messages, but like, I ain’t got money for that. So..

**Molly: [laughs]** I feel like Youtube should be able to do something about that, which reminded me of the fact that instead youtube is like, demonetizing queer and trans content. Has that happened to you? Have you had to deal with that with Youtube?

**Riley:** Um, so, my videos mostly aren’t demonetized. It depends, like some of them are. The annoying thing is that a lot of them get demonetized like in the beginning, like as soon as I upload it it’s demonetized, and then I like appeal it, and like, 2 days later it’s approved. Which is annoying because the majority of the views come in the first 24-48 hours.

**Molly:** Right

**Riley:** But the other thing is, from what I’ve looked into, like, you can calculate the ad rates that you’re getting, and even my videos that show ads, I just get a lot less money for those than people who have like, more like, “quote unquote” family friendly content.

**Molly:** Oh yikes.

**Riley:** I don’t know. So much of that ad stuff is behind the scenes and stuff that I don't know about, so I don’t know how badly I’m getting screwed over by it, or if I am at all, but it does feel like the scales are tilted against us?

**Molly:** Yeah. Has there ever been a point where you considered not making videos anymore in the face of all this garbage you have to deal with?

**Riley:** Oh! Absolutely, absolutely. Um many many times. But it feels like stopping would be letting them win.

**Molly:** Totally.

**Riley:** And… I just can’t let that happen? I so badly don’t want to let them be like, “hah, we like, ran Riley Dennis off the internet!” I feel like that would just be so satisfying to these awful, awful people, and I don’t want to give them that. And I know that the stuff I put out there is helpful to people, because every once in a while I DO see the positive messages, or I get messages from people being like, “this really helped me, this helped me to come out” or like “this helped me to accept my friend” or whatever, and os like I know that it’s helping people, I know that it’s pissing off really bad people, and I feel like I have a responsibility to keep doing it, especially as a trans person who’s like, relatively privileged? Like I’m white, and thin, and like, upper-middle class. And just like, I have all these privileges afforded to me that other trans people don’t have, and I feel like I have a duty to stand up for other trans people who don’t have those privileges?

**Molly:** That makes a lot of sense. I mean, I’M glad you’re still doing it, but I also would understand if you were to not subject yourself to that.

**Riley:** Yeah! Yeah, I get that.

**Molly:** Cool. Um, so you identify as a lesbian, right? Is that right?

**Riley:** Yeah!

**Molly:** And I’ve heard a lot of complaints that many people, many cis people assume that all trans people are straight, which is really funny to me because I don’t think I know a single straight trans person?

**Riley:** [laughs]

**Molly:** Um, but I just was wondering if that’s something that you experience?

**Riley:** Oh no, absolutely. So when I was trying to figure out if i was trans or not, I thought for the longest time, I can’t BE a girl, because I like girls. Like when I was growing up I got like, people teased me or bullied me or whatever for like, being a gay guy, and I was like, that’s… I’m NOT, like I don’t like guys, I dont get why everyone is saying this thing about me that’s clearly not true. Like I feel like something is off, and I feel like, I SHOULD be gay or something, but like, I don’t like guys. And any time I would try to entertain that thought of like, “maybe I’m trans,” it would be like “no, trans girls like guys” like that’s just how it works. And that myth was so pervasive that for years I just never questioned that that was a possibility for me. And so when I realized that actually, trans people can be gay too, I was like, holy shit, I can be a girl AND like girls. Um, and it was a huge moment for me. And that continues to exist for other people. They think that, the stereotypical trans people that they see in the media or whatever, um, are like the only trans people who exist. Like there aren’t a lot of trans lesbians in popular media. Some people just don’t know that it’s a thing, and that just perpetuates the cycle of like, trans lesbians not coming out, because they don’t know that it’s a possibility.

**Molly:** Yeah.

**Riley:** So yeah, it really sucks, and especially since like, lesbian in particular has a connotation to it that people assume is like, very cisgender. Like I feel like people are more okay when I call myself gay, but the second it’s lesbian it’s like “whoa, whoa, ‘lesbian’ means like, *cis* gay women.

**Molly:** Yikes.

**Riley:** Which is just weird, because like, it’s not, like it just means a girl who likes girls; it has nothing to do with cis-genderness. It sucks, but it’s who I am, so…

**Molly:** Yeah. Um, you have said that you would like to see more queer and trans people just like doin’ stuff that’s not being queer and trans, and like, you talked about not *only* making transition videos but like, just doing other shit. Um, so obviously my show is NOT that, my show is very much just talking about gender, but um, more broadly, is that something that you feel like we’re moving towards? Is there any like, examples of content of queer and trans people that just get to like talk about other things, or do you feel like we’re still really stuck on focusing on that?

**Riley:** Oh, um, I’m trying to think. I don’t know… I can’t think of any trans youtubers off the top of my head who don’t talk about being trans on the internet, but it’s also possible that like lots of trans people just live stealth, like they just don’t tell people that they’re trans, so I’m sure that there are trans people out there doing stuff and I just don’t know who they are… but, yeah, I’m struggling to think of examples, and that’s why I’d love to see people doing it, because I’d love to know that there are like, out and proud trans people doing stuff that just isn’t related to being trans, because yeah, it’s exactly like what you said, I feel like trans people always have to do transition stuff, and if there’s a trans movie it’s like, about the person being trans, and it would just be so great to see a movie where like, one of the characters happens to be trans, and it’s not like a plot point, it’s not about their coming out, it’s not about their transition, it’s just like, that’s who the character is. Or to see like, beauty bloggers who never talk about being trans and just talk about beauty stuff, or like fucking gaming youtubers who just happen to be trans, like, I think we ARE moving towards that but it’s just very slow, because it just it requires like, not only like tolerance and acceptance but like, normalization, like, it just has to be so accepted that everyone is like “oh okay that’s a thing? Okay, moving on” and to not get so worked up about it. But at the moment like, as soon as you tell people that you’re trans, everyone wants to focus on that thing, which sucks, but I mean, we’re getting there. Just slowly.

**Molly:** Yeah. If you weren’t making educational videos about this stuff because it had all been solved, what do you think you’d be doing?

**Riley:** Shit! Oh my god, I don’t know!

**Molly:** I just feel like I think about that a lot, like if I didn’t have to spend ALL that time on educating folks, what would I do with my free time?!

**Riley:** [laughs] that’s such a great question. Um, well, so before I made videos, I wrote a lot. Like, I’ve written three young adult fantasy books, and that was like, the thing that consumed all of my free time was like, writing, and I really wanted to be a writer, and so I think if I wasn't doing this, I probably would have continued writing, like, Youtube basically took over all of the time that I had previously been writing. Um, and so I’d probably be just, just writing more stuff. I have no idea what other industries I could get into, like writing and videos are like, the things that I know. [laughs]

**Molly:** Yeah, totally. Are you moving to Australia?!

**Riley:** I am, yeah!

**Molly:** Do you have any concept of what the experience of being a trans nonbinary woman in Australia might be, compared to what you’ve experienced so far?

**Riley:** [laughs] [sighs] I have no idea!

**Molly:** Great! We’ll find out! [both laugh]

**Riley:** Yeah, we’ll find out! Like, I’ve tried to do some looking on the internet and like, I know that there are trans people in Australia, and there are LGBT centers, and like, people are able to get access to transition-related care and whatnot, and acceptance seems to be like, kind of similar to how it is in the US, like in regards to all LGBT stuff, like, Australia just legalized same-sex marriage, or marriage equality like, I think a few months ago.

**Molly:** Oh wow.

**Riley:** Um, yeah, so Australia is like, getting there [laughs]

**Molly:** Wow. What else do you feel like it’s really important for us to talk about?

**Riley:** Do you want to talk about the trans dating preference thing?

**Molly:** Sure! Go for it.

**Riley:** I feel like that’s the big… controversial thing that keeps getting brought up. Um, it’s annoying because like, I feel like I’ve said my bit on like, preferences and people keep bringing it up and I’m like, I don’t have anything more to tell y’all. Um, but, basically so what it is is, I think over a year ago or something, I made a video being like, “dating preferences can be socially influenced and aren’t like, 100% completely innate” and it just, like, set off this whole internet shit storm of like, “Riley Dennis thinks you have to date a trans person or you’re a bigot...meeeh.”

**Molly:** [giggles]

**Riley:** Um, and it’s just… it’s so wild to me because it’s just like, not what i’ve ever said? Like, people just make up these things that I say and then it kind of becomes like, internet fact, like, so many people believe that that’s a thing that I've said, and I’m just like… it’s not? Like it’s very widely accepted in like scientific communities that like attraction has a social element? Like that your, basically that the whole ‘nature versus nurture’ thing has like, *some* of your attraction comes from nurture. Like, how you were raised in the world, like what you’re shown is attractive, etc. etc. and like, that’s not to say that like, attraction is ONLY learned. Like there’s definitely some innate stuff. But like, if you’re shown for your entire life that a certain group of people is attractive, and a certain group of people is unattractive, you’re more likely to think those things. Even if like, “innately” you would think that like, the UNattractive group was attractive or whatever, and.. Yeah, I don’t know, it’s just mind-blowing to me that people don’t understand what I feel like is a very simple concept, and want to just, harp on this, “trans women are forcing you to date them” thing, because it seems like such an obvious like, anti-trans trope, like it just seems like, um, like, in the 80s when cis gay people were getting fired from like, being teachers because everyone was like, ‘Oh my god, they’re going to like, infect our students with gayness.” Everyone now… not everyone. LOTS of people now consider, like can see how that was WAY overblown, and just like, NOT a thing… and then we go through the same stuff with trans people. Like, these myths about trans people just pop up, and everyone just kind of accepts it. And we’re all like, “no, that’s not happening.” You’re… you’re just on the next anti-LGBT myth, you know?

**Molly:** Yeah. I think that that’s so wild for folks that are like, “I don’t want you to call me transphobic, just because I would never date any trans person under any specific circumstances.”

**Riley:** [both laugh] Yeah. It’s… hilarious. I mean it’s just like, they have SUCH misconceptions about what trans people are, because, they’ll literally be talking about how attractive a person is, and then they find out they’re trans, and then they’re like, “ohhh, no no no, now it’s gross.” And I’m like, but… nothing has changed. Like, you were literally attracted to them 2 seconds ago. And like, I just find it hard to believe that anyone’s attracted to chromosomes.

**Molly:** Right.. Yeah, exactly!

**Riley:** Like, these invisible tiny things that you can’t see.

**Molly:** And also like, people get really hung up on genital preferences, and it’s like, you don’t even know, like, trans people have ALL different configurations of genitals, and you don’t know in any specific person, so like, you can’t use that as an excuse either. Like, you don’t...You don’t even know. [laughs]

**Riley:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, and everyone conflates it with, um, sexual orientation, they’ll be like, if you’re not a fan of penises, like, I don’t give a shit, like, don’t have sex with someone who has a penis. But to be like, “I AM a lesbian BECAUSE I don’t like penis, like, connecting those two is what seems problematic to me. Like, because… there ARE women who have penises. Or like, um, I’m a gay man, BECAUSE I hate vagina, it’s like, there are trans men who have vaginas. Like, you can be like, “I’m gay, and I don’t really want to touch a penis,” or a vagina, or whatever, like, I don’t give a shit! But don’t pretend like, that it’s connected inherently. Like that you ARE gay because you are repulsed by those things. Like, the flip side of that is that it makes gay people who ARE attracted to those things feel bad. Like, I’ve seen so many cis lesbians on the internet who are dating trans women who are like, so what, you’re saying that I’m not a lesbian, because I’m dating a trans woman? Because I have sex with women who have penises? Like, and vice versa for cis gay men who have sex with trans men. Like, as soon as you’re connecting those things, and saying that like, they’re inherently the same, you make all gay people who DO date or have sex with trans people like, feel awful about themselves. It’s just so easy to give people room to feel how they feel and identify how they identify without being like, “I feel like these things are connected, therefore they’re connected for EVERYONE.” Like, a woman will be like, “I’m gay, so I can’t like trans women,” but it’s like, I don’t know, like, there are so many women you don’t like, and you don’t have to be like, “I’m short girl sexual.” Like, if you don’t like tall girls in general, like, MAYBE you’ll find a tall woman you like. Like, maybe at some point. I don’t know!

**Molly:** Exactly. Um, you talk in a video about how being trans is different than having gender dysphoria, like, they don’t mean exactly the same thing. And I think that's something we don’t talk about that often, so I was wondering if you could talk about that for a sec.

**Riley:** Ooh, yeah, sure. So, gender dysphoria is like, um, it’s specifically the discomfort that feels like your gender doesn’t align with the one you were assigned at birth. Um, and so like, trans people can feel that to varying degrees. Like, there are trans people who feel gender dysphoria SO strongly that like, if they don’t get access to transition-related services, that they might self harm. And there are other people who feel it much less intensely, who are just like, made uncomfortable by it, but can live with it. And then there are people who like, feel this disconnect, but aren’t that discomforted by it. Like they know that, “I feel this way and everyone sees me *this* way,” but like, it just doesn’t bother them that much. And that’s a thing too! Like, having dysphoria means having a certain level of discomfort, it’s like a medical term. Like, psychologists have determined how to judge discomfort in a person, and at what point that constitutes dysphoria. But if you’re trans, and you just… aren’t that discomforted by it, then you can still be that. Like, you don’t HAVE to feel this like, intense pain about it, to be trans. Like it just seems like a weird thing to base...being trans on? Like, you’re only trans if you hate yourself to this degree. You know? I feel like that would be a really fucked up thing to base our genders on. I think it’s totally valid if you feel like a strong connection to this thing, and it just… doesn’t hurt you that much or give you that much discomfort, then like, you can be trans without gender dysphoria. So it’s just separating like, the identity aspect from the like, medical diagnosis of discomfort.

**Molly:** Yeah, absolutely. I love that. Because like, there are… so many..as we talked about earlier, there are so many trans folks who don’t feel the need to medically transition or physically transition, because gender isn’t 100% presentation. Gender is about like internal identity.

**Riley:** Oh yeah! One of the things that always gets me is like, um, cis people like to talk about trans people as if we’re confusing gender for gender expression. Like, they’ll be like, “Oh, that’s clearly just… a boy who likes to dress up as a girl. Like it’s not actually a girl,” but then, as soon as trans people try to do that, like as soon as they’re like “look, I don’t actually care about my expression, like, I can be a trans girl who looks masculine or whatever,” they’re like “no no no no no. You HAVE to care about gender expression a lot.” And like, express yourself to a certain degree, or it doesn’t count. Yeah, and so it forces trans people into… kind of performative stereotypes of what cis people think they *should* be. Like, I feel a pressure to be like, hyper-feminine, because all trans women I’ve seen, like, to BE accepted as trans, have to like, do huge makeup,, and like, have false eyelashes and long hair, and like, push up bras, and you have to really be like, “acting” trans enough, which is bullshit because a cis girl can like, not wear any makeup and like, be in sweats and stuff, and look masculine, and look masculine, like have broad shoulders and stuff and a flat chest and no one is like “Sorry, you’re a dude now.” [laughs]

**Molly:** Yes. 100%.

**Riley:** So it’s just like, a ridiculous double-standard for trans people, and like, I’m not the femme-est person, like, I’m pretty comforatble being androgynous or butch or whatever, um, and I’m fine with that, but it seems to be like everyone else who’s like, “I’m sorry but you’re not...performing femininity well enough for us.” And I’m just like...that seems like a very like, patriarchal idea that feminists have been trying to get away from for a long time, that like, women don’t have to look super feminine all of the time, but then as soon as it’s trans people it’s like “no no no no no, YOU still have to keep doing that, it’s only cis women who break that. Right, you know?

[35:35 show time, 59:00 my time]

**Molly:** Yeah, I’m SO glad you brought that up, because it’s so true; it’s such a huge double standard. Um, and then, I wanted to say something when you were talking about gender dysphoria, because I ran a poll on Twitter, um, for nonbinary people about whether you consider yourself trans, and um, there were a lot of folks who said no, and I asked why you didn’t consider yourself trans, because in my mind, nonbinary means not strictly identifying as the gender you were assigned at birth, which is… what trans means. But likeeveryone is entitled to feel their own way, I was just genuinely curious what they felt. And a lot of people said that they didn’t feel like they could claim “trans” because they didn’t feel like they experienced gender dysphoria or body dysphoria, like, they didn’t hate their body enough to claim “trans,” so it comes back to exactly what you were talking about, defining transness AS hating your body, and it’s like, no, that’s not, that’s not how it is. Like, I don’t want to invalidate how anyone identifies or doesn’t identify, but I really do want to break down the idea that you can’t claim “trans” unless you, like, want to change your body.

**Riley:** Yes, absolutely. I’ve talked to Ash, Ash Hardell about this, a few times, because they identify as nonbinary, and didn’t feel like for a long time that they could claim being trans, um, and so at some point, they had like a second coming out video where they were like, “I’m trans!” and to some people it was like, “Oh my god, you’re like, also trans?” but to other people it was like, “Yeah, we know… you’ve been nonbinary,” like you’ve identified as nonbinary for a while. But yeah, I think it’s important to create the space for nonbinary people to identify as trans, because I really like trans as an umbrella term for someone who doesn’t identify as the gender they were assigned at birth, just like you were saying, so I think it’s important to create that space, so that nonbinary people feel like they CAN identify as trans. The sad thing is that there’s a lot of binary trans people who are very gate-keepy about it, because, um… to me it seems like there are a lot of binary trans people, usually older trans people, but not always, who feel like they had to go through all of this shit, like things were so hard for them, they had to like, have these surgeries in like, a time when it was very unaccepted and expensive, and they had to go through all of this stuff just to be accepted as trans, and NOW, like, people can identify as trans just by calling themselves nonbinary. And to them, it can seem like kind of a kick in the gut, like you had to go through all this, and no people don’t. Like, they don’t have to go through the same, like, initiation, and like, hazing, basically that you did, um, and like, I can see why that hurts, but at the same time, I really want to be able to say that we made things better for people. Like, I don’t want trans people to constantly have to suffer to prove themselves trans enough, like, I want us to get to a point, where people can just come out, and it’s fine. And I think if you’re stuck in that mindset where like, instead of like, I suffered, therefore everyone else has to suffer, then you never let us advance, like you never let anyone feel better. So yeah, I think it’s really important that we let nonbinary people identify as trans. But at the same time, it’s like, you can’t *make* anyone identify as trans. Like, if you’re nonbinary and you don’t feel like that word works for you, then like, you don’t have to!

**Molly:** Totally. And also, I think that it can change over time. Like, I think that for me, for all of my identities it’s been like, years of easing in, and like, originally being very uncomfortable. Anyway, is there anything else you would like to make sure we say before we wrap up?

**Riley:** Can we just like, briefly talk about being trans as like a kid, or a teen or whatever?

**Molly:** Yeah, go for it!

**Riley:** Cool. So, um, I’ve seen a lot of people um, be like, acting like trans stuff is like adult stuff. Like, I know this happens with ALL LGBT+ identities, um, people act like, anything queer isn’t like, suitable for children, but like, because trans people often specifically have, like, surgeries and go on hormones that are irreversible, it seems to have like, a bigger impact to people once you start talking about it for like, kids or teens, and it’s just weird to me because like, these really pervasive myths get in there like, there will be some like, viral article that's like “8 year old transitions! Like, oh my god, they like, did surgery on an 8 year old, blah blah blah blah,” and it’s like, if anyone actually pay attention, it’s just like, they let the kid use a different name and like, pronouns, and like, wear a dress. And it’s like, no one actually has surgery until they’re like 18. It’s so wild to me how those myths get into society and everyone’s like, they’re trying to turn our kids trans, blah blah blah, when it’s really just like, we’re letting your kid express themselves and like, tell you how they feel. So yeah, I, it makes me really sad to see people like, shitting on trans kids and teens like that, because so many people know from a really young age that they’re trans, and forcing them to go through like, years and years of strong dysphoria and like watching their body change in ways they don’t want to, just so they can like go back and have the expensive surgeries and stuff, once they turn 18, just seems really awful to me.

**Molly:** Yeah. And I think a lot of parents hesitate becdause they don’t wanna let their kid change their dress or change their names or change their pronouns, until they’re really really really sure, and it’s like, what is the harm if your kid is six, and your kid changes their name and pronoun for a while and then changes their name and pronoun again, it’s like, who cares AT ALL? Like, no one’s telling you that you have to legally change it on day one, but like, let them try it out. Like that’s what we all need to do. I think that’s one of the reasons why so many queer and trans folks end up going through like, a second adolescence, like after they transition, because they never got to have all those experiences. So it’s like, what if you just got to try them out in real time? That would be rad.

**Riley:** Yeah, right? [laughs]

**Molly:** Well, um, the way we always end the show is by asking, either, what do you THINK the future of gender will look like, or in your ideal world, what will the future of gender look like?

**Riley:** [laughs] Oh man. I… have no idea what it will actually look like. I wonder about this all the time, especially because like the words we have for sexual orientation like, reflect your own gender. Like, how do we talk about gay and straight stuff in a world where nonbinary people exist? Um, but like, genuinely, like I don’t know. Like, language has to evolve, and like, I have no idea how that’s going to happen. Like, it’s going to be a slow process. Language just does that, like, people make up words when we need them. Um, and so I don’t know how it’s going to look, but I’m really excited for it. Um, I don’t even know how I WANT it to look. Because I don’t know if there’s an ideal world for all of this stuff. Like, I don’t have like a genderless utopia where like, we’re all one gender, like, the human gender, like, I just, uhh… I really don’t know how it’s going to end up. And I don’t think I would force it in any particular way. Like, I’m happy to just see where it goes, and to let people continue to like, define themselves and use the words that they need.

[theme music begins and continues in background]

**Molly:** All right, that’s going to do it for this week’s show, but before you go, if you want to support the show, and you don’t really have money to donate, but maybe you have an employer or a school that has money, one thing you can do is try to talk them into hiring me. I do educational work around gender and queerness and asexuality, and I also do gender reveal live shows! And by “I do it” I mean I haven’t yet, but I would, and wouldn’t it be great if you helped me do the first one? I’m just putting that out there into the world. Another really useful thing you can do is recommend the show to folks in your life, or post about it on social media, that really is the only way that we spread the word about this show, and so it’s so important and so helpful and it just means SO much to us! And of course, I’d love it if you left us a review on itunes or the apple podcast app. And if you have questions, or comments, or maybe feelings about Pride that you want to share, you can always reach us at [gendereveal@gmail.com](mailto:gendereveal@gmail.com) or on Twitter @gendereveal. And of course, that’s all [spelled out] g-e-n-d-e-r-e-v-e-a-l, gender reveal with one r, because gender reveal with 2 r’s, is like, the normal way, the normal way those words are spelled, was taken by the gender reveal industry, booo. This show is edited by me, Molly Woodstock. Our editor Liza actually left to work at Radiolab, because she’s a fucking rock star. I love her so much, and I wish her the best, and I hope she comes back one day. Our logo is by the talented Michelle Leigh and our theme song is by the legendary Breakmaster Cylinder. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.