[*music 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 am your host and resident gender detective, Molly Woodstock.

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**Molly:** Hey everyone! Y'all really blew me away this week! On last week’s episode, I casually mentioned that we could maybe use a couple more folks to help us transcribe the Gender Reveal episodes, and I expected maybe one or two folks to respond, and like *everyone* responded! There were so many of you, and you’re all so kind, and I’m just so grateful for each and every one of you! And so, we’re all set on transcriptions for now, but if you messaged me and offered to transcribe before July 30th, let’s say, feel free to message me again with your mailing address, and I will send you some Gender Reveal swag as a “thank you” for your very kind offer, because I really appreciate you. This is such a nice community!

**Molly:** Right now, our plan is to pay friend-of-the-show Camille to transcribe all of the episodes. This is basically their full-time job right now, so we’re very committed to paying them a fair rate, and if I did my math right, that’s gonna end up being like one thousand dollars. And so, if you would like to help us make the show more accessible by paying a queer, non-binary person for their labor, please consider donating to the show at Patreon.com/gender, or Paypal.me/MollyWoodstock. I also have CashApp. My CashApp handle, or whatever you call it, is Molly Woodstock. If you want to send me some money via CashApp, I’ll take that, I’ll take your money however. Thank you so much to everyone who has donated to the show! You are the folks who make this possible, and I appreciate you more than I could put into words!

**Molly:** Finally, I have an exciting announcement: I’m going to be *very* offline for a while, because I am going to try to hike a hundred and fifty miles on the Pacific Crest Trail! Before I go, I’m gonna try to get y’all set up with a bunch of bonus content, so you won’t even notice that I’m gone. But I just wanted to let you know to expect something fun and different in your feed for the next couple weeks. And with that, it’s time for the next This Week In Gender.

[*music plays*]

**Molly:** This Week In Gender, I want to do something a little bit different. Instead of focusing on the news, I want to follow up on last week’s episode Gender 201. First of all, I want to re-address the question about what butch means. I had said that butch is a word used to describe masculine-of-center folks who don’t identify as men. But a listener pointed out that gay men also use the term “butch,” which I didn’t know. And then I found out that a friend of mine who’s a trans man actually has a big huge sign that says “butch” that he hung on the outside of his house. So, I’m revisiting my definition and revising it to be “a masculine-of-center person who does not identify as a cis straight man.” If you know cis straight men who identify as butch, hit me up again, I’m fine being wrong about this! Maybe it just means any masculine-of-center person. Who can say? What are words?

**Molly:** Secondly, I wanted to answer one last advice question. This question was sent in by Ari, who is one of the many folks who volunteered to transcribe. So, thank you, Ari! Ari says, “I had a personal question about pronouns. My partner and I don’t identify with binary genders. Personally, I use ‘they/them’ and ‘non-binary’ for lack of a better term. As my partner is undecided, they tell people they don’t care what pronouns others use for them. Do you think it’s fine just using gender neutral ‘they’ for them? I struggle to know the right pronouns to use, because I don’t want to erase my partner’s femininity. They seem to use ‘they’ and ‘she’ interchangeably, but I’ve never seen them use ‘he’ or ‘ze,’ *et cetera*. That, and they like referring to themselves as my girlfriend. My own gender journey is still fresh, so I consider myself a newbie in this space. I’m just hoping to best use the language that respects everyone.”

**Molly:** OK, so honestly I feel like this question isn’t so much about gender, as it is about boundaries and communication and asking for what you want and need. It’s not your responsibility to try to read your partner’s mind, so if they say they don’t care what pronouns folks use, you can definitely use “they” for them, and if they don’t like it, it’s their responsibility to tell you that they prefer a specific pronoun, like “she.” If you want, you can check in every once in a while, and say “hey, I know you tell folks to use any pronoun, but is there one that you prefer that I use?” But if they say, “nope, use anything!” you’re definitely free to use whatever feels best to you until they tell you otherwise. That’s on them, that’s not on you.

**Molly:** But while we’re talking about it, I wanted to share my own personal practices for folks who use two or more pronouns. First, as you’ll hear in the interview in just a few minutes, I try to ask if the person prefers one pronoun over the other, if they prefer that I mix them up. If they don’t have a preference or if I can’t ask for whatever reason, I typically default to “they” if that is one of the pronouns that they use. And the reason is that almost always, when folks use “he and they” or “she and they,” 99% of people will default to “he” or “she” because it’s easier for them. In other words, when someone says “I use she and they pronouns,” they’re often only being called “she” 99% of the time, and so I try to counter-balance that by using “they” just so that facet of their identity is also being honored. I also try to pay attention to what pronouns folks use for themselves, which Ari also did. I have a non-binary friend who uses “she” and “they” pronouns, and everyone I know refers to them as “she” but they refer to themself as “they” and so to me that signals that they see themselves as a “they” and so I try to use “they” for them. And lastly, it’s always OK to check in with someone about their pronouns, even if you’ve asked before. Sometimes people have a certain set of pronouns they prefer in public and another one they prefer in private. And sometimes people change their minds because gender is fluid and the binary is fake! This has been This Week In Gender.

[*music plays*]

**Molly:** Meredith Talusan is the Executive Editor of *them*, and an award-winning journalist and author. They have written features, essays, and opinion pieces for many publications, including The Guardian, The Atlantic, The Nation, Mic, and Buzzfeed News. She received 2017 GLAAD Media and Deadline awards, and her debut memoir, *Fairest*, is forthcoming from Viking Books, a division of Penguin Randomhouse. Please stay tuned after the interview for an excerpt of Meredith’s work that I didn’t fit in to the interview.

[*music stops*]

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

**Meredith:** I am trans and non-binary, and I use she/her and they/them pronouns.

**Molly:** Do you have one that you prefer, or do you like if people mix them up?

**Meredith:** Um, yeah, I don’t really- I don’t have a specific preference, although I guess when people are too invested in “she,” I tend to be alienated.

**Molly:** Mmhmm, totally.

**Meredith:** So the only times I ask people to specifically say “them” are situations in which I feel they’re really hung up on “she/her.”

**Molly:** Yeah, that makes total sense. You want to make sure that people are actually seeing you.

**Meredith:** Right. Exactly.

**Molly:** So, you’re a Filipino-American immigrant, and I’m wondering how growing up in the Phillipines impacted your concept of gender and gender identity?

**Meredith:** Yeah, I mean the Philippine gender system is very different from the States. There is a really established third gender tradition there going back thousands of years to pre-colonial times. So I grew up in a place that I think is generally more gender-affirming than in the States. Um, and also, in the Philippines there’s this- which is also actually true for a lot of parts of Southeast Asia- there’s this way in which children do not really become gendered until they reach puberty. Right? So, the terms even, for children- like in Tagalog, you don’t say “son” or “daughter,” you just say “child.” And, a lot of those terms, like- “nephew” and “niece,” “brother” and “sister,” are all gender neutral.

**Meredith:** And also, because of the fact that there’s an established third gender tradition in the Philippines, there were a lot of third gender people around me. And, um, colonization, and like Spanish and Catholic influence have rendered third gender people in the Philippines, you know, stigmatized in a way that they weren’t in pre-colonial society. But at the same time, there’s still that trace of tolerance, and in certain cases respect, because third gender people in pre-colonial society were seen almost as shamans or, like, priest figures within their communities. Um, yeah, so it was just very different. I don’t even know how to describe it. Like I guess- it was really interesting, because when I moved to the States, and when I came out initially as a gay man, you know, I was labeled as “femme.” Because I was- I was identified as a feminine person. And it’s really interesting, because I don’t think that there’s really any particular difference between the way that I was as a feminine gay man and the way I was before I came to the States. But in the Philippines, I was just allowed to be me, and there wasn’t an assumption of femininity, I guess? And the way that I acted was within the norm of how a Filipino person who was male-assigned would act. But then as soon as I came to the States, I became feminine. So that was also a really interesting experience.

**Molly:** Yeah, that’s super interesting. Were you surprised, when you came to America, by how different it was in terms of gender? And in terms of gender stereotypes and roles and language?

**Meredith:** Yeah. And also, the really funny thing is also conversely, in the Philippines, when people come out as gay there’s a really strong association between being gay and being feminine. And it’s this really interesting thing where the indigenous word for third gender, which is “bakla,” is translated into English as “gay” but the two words aren’t exactly equivalent. Because, for Filipino people, “bakla” connotes that you’re automatically feminine. There isn’t – instead of two ideas of gender and sexuality are mixed. Which is really interesting, because in American context, people get very adamant that gender is distinct from sexuality. And a lot of people think of that as the sort of absolute, you know, this is how it is. But in fact, there are other parts of the world in which the two concepts are much more, you know, enmeshed with each other.

**Molly:** Totally. So you were brought on as the first openly trans staff writer at Buzzfeed in 2015, which feels like it wasn’t long enough ago. That was so recent!

**Meredith:** I know, right!

**Molly:** Can you talk about what that experience was like?

**Meredith:** What aspect of it? There were many things about that experience. I mean, I guess- I guess in certain ways, it didn’t feel unusual in the sense that I’m often the only trans person in a lot of settings. And it’s also kind of the case that for various reasons, you know, I’ve been kind of exceptionalized in different ways, right? Because of the fact that trans people are systematically discriminated against in various areas of society, the more rarefied the circles you run in, the greater the chance that you will be the only trans person in that circle, right? I definitely felt lonely at times, being the lone trans staff writer. And actually, I was really, as far as I know in the New York office, the only openly trans person period. Not just as a writer, but in terms of the entire company. There was another trans staff member at BuzzFeed Motion Pictures in L.A. while I was there, we overlapped. So there just like weren’t, you know, other trans people. And a really interesting thing about BuzzFeed is that it’s actually quite diverse in other ways, right? We actually did a company survey and it was something like nineteen percent of the people in the company actually identified as queer. And there was a really large contingent of minorities of various sorts in the company. So I think in a really odd way it felt even lonelier that, you know- obviously it’s amazing that there’s all these other minority groups in the company and I was really happy that they could all get together and support each other. Right? But at the same time it kind of sucked [*laughs*] that I didn’t have equivalent people with similar affinities. Which I think was part of the reason why I certainly really value having trans co-workers at Condé Nast.

**Molly:** Yeah! So you’re the Executive Director at *them.* now. Can you talk about what *them* is- which sounds like the wrong grammar, but it’s right- what *them* is, and how you got involved in it?

**Meredith:** Yeah**.** *them* is a new LGBTQ+ digital platform from Condé Nast, which is a company that publishes a lot of magazines and runs a bunch of sites including *Teen Vogue* and *Vogue* and *The New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair* and *Self* and *Allure* and, in short, and you know, *Wired* and various other publications. I got involved because Phillip Picardi, who is a chief content officer of *them* now who at the time was digital director of *Teen Vogue* was starting this project. And he contacted me I think in May of 2017. We have a mutual friend, Janet Mock, who sort of recommended me to Phil. And, you know, that’s a good recommendation to have. A good recommender!

[*Molly laughs*]

**Molly:** Yeah, for real!

**Meredith:** Yeah, and it was really funny, because like literally I happened to be at a dinner with Janet one night and then she mentioned to me, like, “Oh I told this guy Philip Picardi about you,” and then in the morning, like, Phil was calling me and was like “oh, I’m starting this new project, it’s in the proposal stage. Do you want to be involved?” And at the time, I was working on my book. I had planned to spend the summer working on my book, so I said, “you know, I don’t think- I’m working on a book, I’m not sure I can do it. But definitely keep in touch, I’d love to write for you, *et cetera*, *et cetera*.” And then a couple months later, in late August, Phil did something slightly manipulative-

[*both laugh*]

**Meredith:** which was, he sent me a Twitter DM which said something like, “oh, you know, the project has been approved. I’m looking for a Senior Editor- do you know somebody who is available? I know that you’re busy, but I’m looking for somebody who is, ideally, a trans person of color, who has strong editorial experience and is based in New York who can do this job.” And I went through the thought exercise of being like, what trans people of color journalists do I know who would potentially be qualified for this? And I really- I came up with Raquel Willis, who I knew was not available because she’d just taken a job at Transgender Law Center… and *me.*

[*both laugh*]

**Meredith:** So then after Phil just sort of like allowed me to go through that thought exercise, I was like, ugh. Like this field is just really- I keep complaining about gay white men dominating this industry, and I can’t you know, I can’t in good conscience not consider, you know, at least entertaining the idea of getting involved. And then Phil hired my good friend Tyler Ford, and I was just like, oh, OK, he’s serious about hiring trans people! So I feel like that was really the tipping point for me. I’m not going to be the only trans person on staff.

**Molly:** Right! I do want to talk more about your book that you mentioned, but before that, um, I’m curious if there are any articles so far from *them* that you feel particularly proud of or that you feel are particularly important or groundbreaking in some way?

**Meredith:** Hm! Articles from *them.* I mean, there are a number. There are a few that come to mind. One is this essay by Brandon Taylor, who is this amazing Black gay male writer. I think it was called “I’m happy being single, unless I’m not.” It’s basically a meditation on what it means to be single and not interested in dating, as a gay man. I think a lot of the pieces that I gravitate to are just ones that are simple and beautifully written. We also did a piece recently with Lara Americo where she talks about needing to go off hormones in order to try to have a baby with her wife, and just sort of dealing with figuring out how to reframe her gender dysphoria, knowing that she really wants to have a baby with her wife, right? Just sort of those two competing priorities for her was, you know, was a story that I was just really drawn to and really gravitated towards.

**Molly:** OK, could you tell us about the book that you’re working on?

**Meredith:** Yeah, I’m working on a memoir. It’s called *Fairest*. I mean, it’s a lot of things, right? Not only is it a memoir about my trans experience, but in a lot of ways- it’s really a memoir about the power of perception. Because it’s simultaneously about how I move in the world as a gendered being, but also it is deeply about race, right? Because in addition to being trans, I’m also albino. I had to learn, A, that people thought I was white as soon as I moved to the states, and B, what that meant. Because I didn’t grow up being aware- or, I was aware that white people existed in the Philippines. You know, it’s a former colony. But to Filipinos, white people are just Americans. Like, it’s just kind of a representation of America. And I was, I guess, thinking in the abstract, aware that Americans of other races existed in the States. But I wasn’t aware of all the meanings and what- obviously, the really really deep and contentious history of race in the U.S. is. Until I came to the States and had experiences like trying to hail a cab with my dad, and my dad directing me to do it by myself, because it was a lot more likely for cabs to stop for me than if the two of us were together. Or, for waiters in restaurants to automatically give the check to me instead of them, because my parents look like- automatically look like they’re poor because they’re Filipino and have an accent. And all of those dynamics. And I think growing up the way that I did, and then later transitioning- the experience of white passing, it really conditions the way that I move through the world as a trans person in a lot of ways that- well, A, I literally figured out that I was trans like eighteen months before I medically- before I had gender confirmation surgery. So like a process that usually takes people years, a bunch of contemplation, a bunch of, often, therapy, *et cetera et cetera*, especially when I transitioned which was in two thousand one- was something, for me, that was like OK, this is who I am. I’m going to transition. And a lot of that just has to do with the fact that I’ve always been different. Like, I grew up as the only fair-skinned blonde person four miles around, right? Like, I was not at all intimidated by the idea that I would stand out from other people. That-that also, that I am cis passing in a lot of contexts. Less so now, just because I don’t want to be cis passing anymore. I present more androgynously, my body language is not so binary gendered, *et cetera et cetera.* But in terms of the period that the book covers, I think that the power of being able to be a minority while being perceived as quote-unquote “normal” is something that the book really explores and taps into. Just because- it’s a very weird thing to say, but I was in a very kind of unusual position. I guess, not *very* unusual, there are a number of trans people in this position of being more normatively attractive. Not in my assigned gender, but in my post-transition gender. And sort of exploring the relationship between that pursuit of a certain kind of normative attractiveness and beauty as part of one’s transitioning process. Hence, the multiple meanings of “fairest.”

**Molly:** Of course, yeah. So you wrote an article for the Nasty Women Anthology. I was excited to see a trans person in there. Again, it always comes down to being the only one, but it was nice to see you in there. In it, you wrote that even among well-intentioned cis allies, trans women are seen- I’ll just quote you- “not as potential leaders with unique knowledge, but either as victims or as tokens to include as long as our opinions don’t strike too far from the majority” and, “while cisgender women who lead other women are lauded, transgender women are often accused of behaving like men, and folks who are feminine but don’t consider themselves women are often excluded altogether.” That was a weird paraphrased quote! But I was wondering if you could talk more about- because, that’s something that resonates really really strongly with me as a non-binary person who wants to be involved with womens’ rights but also feels like intentionally and unintentionally left out of them. I was wondering if you could talk about what changes you’d like to see in the American feminist movement to more meaningfully include trans women and non-binary folks?

**Meredith:** I feel like, you know like certainly a greater sense of trust. Like a greater sense that trans people are speaking from our experience and are not, you know, actively trying to in some way undermine other peoples’ experiences. I feel like I’ve been in feminist spaces where I feel like there isn’t a fundamental respect for difference. That people aren’t necessarily fully attuned- especially in this sort of very American in certain ways, democratic tradition- where the idea is, like, whoever is- let’s just all raise our hands, and whoever has the majority opinion is, like, the right opinion. Which doesn’t really work in a pluralistic environment, right? Because it automatically favors and biases towards people who come from the same background. So it’s one of the things that I bring to the table, in terms of having closely observed Filipino feminist politics, right? Is that in the Philippines there’s a lot more good will, I feel like, between the trans women and cis women activists. There’s a lot more of an assumption that if a trans person is being angry about something, it’s not because, like, they were assigned male at birth, it’s because they’re angry about something. And that obviously the way that we’ve been brought up and the ways that we’ve been gendered throughout our lives has an effect on the ways that we perceive the world and the way that we operate, *et cetera et cetera*. That’s not something that I question. They think that rather than leading with the assumption that, oh you do it this way because you’re a man, like let’s lead with the assumption that you do it this way because you have a valid concern. And let’s talk about that concern. And maybe possibly talk about the effects of all of our upbringings on the way that we operate in the world, and be honest about it. Right? Like those sort of types of conversations that I don’t see- and to be perfectly honest, not just in feminist spaces. You know, I do feel like it’s an issue with trans and social justice spaces as well. Right? You know, like there’s such a strong impetus towards defending our identities. And where a lot of my work is really about just sort of probing those identities and also not telling convenient stories. Not eliding all of these ways in which people are different because of those identities, right? Like I have- like when I publish things in which I talk about, like, having been gendered male and benefiting from a history of perceived male privilege, that’s something that a lot of trans people feel sensitive towards, understandably. I don’t question that there are reasons for other trans people to have sensitivities around, kind of like framing experience in that specific way. At the same time, it’s important for me to acknowledge *my* reality and to acknowledge how I move in the world. And so, you know, those are the kind of just- like a certain kind of specificity and a certain kind of complexity and nuance in the ways that we describe and account for experiences is really needed across not just mainstream feminist spaces, but social justice movements in general.

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

**Meredith:** Wow! Um, in my ideal world, um, the future of gender would look like: anybody can be whatever gender they are, regardless of regardless of how they’ve been previously assigned or perceived.

**Molly:** Perfect! So simple!

**Meredith:** Right?

**Molly:** Right!

[*music plays*]

**Molly:** OK, that’s going to do it for this week’s interview, because Meredith is very busy and needed to run. But I have a lot of questions that I didn’t get to ask, and I wanted to share just a couple of those topics with you. First of all, Meredith recently published an article titled “Twitter need to treat misgendering trans people as hate speech,” which is a great idea! And I’ll put that in the show notes. But another article that I really wanted to draw special attention to is called “How #MeToo stands to marginalize trans and gender non-conforming people.” In it, Meredith makes the argument that while advocating for oppressed cis women *is* necessary and vital work, the #MeToo movement needs to create more space for the experiences of trans and gender non-conforming folks. I want to read you an excerpt from that article now. I will link to the full article in the show notes, and you can also find it at them.us : “Trans and gender non-conforming folks are so much more vulnerable than cis women. We not only experiences unwanted sexual advances and provocations, but we are also at risk of being physically assaulted or murdered when those who approach us are unable to deal with their own attractions. Transmasculine people are at risk of assault themselves when they’re seen as ‘less than’ men or if they threaten the superiority of cis men. But because their hardships are not connected to powerful men, and because society considers them less important than cisgender women- especially ones who are famous and white- it’s not their plight that sparks news or widespread social media attention. It’s also vital to note that an often overlooked thread uniting LGBTQ+ victims of gender-based violence is the way they are often victimized for existing *between* genders. Though people across the spectrum of LGBTQ+ identity have experienced gender-based violence, what comes into play in dangerous situations is typically not how the victims themselves identify, but the fact that the people who attack them see them as not belonging to a binary gender or subscribing to binary gender norms. This is true whether it’s femme gay men, trans women, or non-binary trans femmes, or even transmasculine people who are seen as threats to cis men. Any dynamic that casts binary women as the most vulnerable victims of gender-based violence at a structural level ignores how those who fall outside of the binary are even more vulnerable to pervasive and severe attack.”

**Molly:** That’s something I’ve been thinking about a lot lately, ever since I read it. So I just wanted to share it with you to think about as well. It’s not taking anything away from cis women who’ve been assaulted. This isn’t the oppression Olympics. It’s just something to think about.

[*music plays*]

**Molly:** OK, that’s gonna do it for this week’s show. If it felt good, or fun, or valuable to you, please tell a friend! Tell all your friends! Leave a review on iTunes or become a patron at Patreon.com/gender . You can always send us your questions, corrections, ideas, feelings, hot takes at gendereveal@gmail.com – that’s Gender Reveal with one “r,” you know how to spell it, you’ve listened to this show before. Or on Twitter! I’m also on Twitter and Instagram under my own name. Please tag me in your Instagram posts about Gender Reveal, because I always miss them, and when I catch them they make me cry in a really nice way.

**Molly:** This episode was edited by me, Molly Woodstock. Our logo was by the talented Michelle Leigh, who you should definitely hire to do some art for you, by the way! And our theme song is by the legendary Breakmaster Cylinder. We’ll be back next week with really exciting bonus content about gender. Wish me luck in the wilderness!

[*music ends*]