[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

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

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

**Tuck:** Hey everyone. I hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show I am delighted to share my conversation with the one and only Diamond Stylz. Diamond is the creator of Marsha’s Plate and the executive director of Black Transwomen Inc., and in this episode we talk about all of that plus womanism, sea lions, whether trans representation actually helps trans people, and what happens when we let cis media control trans narratives.

**Diamond [voice clip]:** There’s so many things that are more dire to talk about in my experience than the bathroom. I can piss on a tree if it means I get healthcare!

**Tuck:** A couple quick disclaimers about this episode. First, the interview was first recorded in December of 2020, so please keep that in mind when we talk about politics, or things that happened “this year.” Secondly, just a heads up that this episode does contain discussion of abuse and death, including the death of Layleen Polanco. If you aren’t familiar with Layleen’s story, I recommend our episode entitled, “Dominique, Riah, Layleen, and Alyssa Pariah.”

Before we get to that, though, we have a quick Theymail message this week. Theymail is a program where a listener gives us a little bit of money and we read a little tiny ad. This message is from Sage Mitchell, who writes, “Songs of Ourselves offers virtual writing workshops to members of the LGBTQIA+ community, including a monthly drop-in workshop called Writing Through Transition, and a frequently-offered special event class called Gender Mapping. These are not your typical writing workshops. There’s no critique. The focus is on writing as a healing practice. Classes are sliding scale, and no one will be turned away for lack of funds. You can learn more at songsofourselves.com or @songsofourselves.

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

[Transition sound effect, with low metallic chimes and hi-hats plays briefly]

**Tuck:** So much has happened in the last week. As I record this, all of my social media feeds are filled with tributes to SOPHIE, the producer, DJ and pop star known for her groundbreaking music, who died very suddenly earlier this morning. I absolutely cannot do SOPHIE justice, so please go read some of the many glowing tributes to her that are circulating right now if you haven’t already. I will link to her wonderful interview in PAPER Magazine, in which her girlfriend asks, “Do you believe in God?” And she says, “Yes, God is Trans.”

In other trans news today alone, Philosophy Tube’s Abigail Thorn came out as a trans woman in her latest video and Doritos dropped a new tangy pickle-flavored tortilla chip. Why is that trans? If you know, you know.

[twangy mellow bass guitar begins playing]

But we are not going to talk about any of that today because we haven’t even gotten a chance to rehash the new military ban news yet. So, last Monday, January 25th, President Joe Biden signed an executive order repealing the Trump administration’s ban on transgender people serving openly in the military. We have had a lot of military ban discourse on the show and even *more* military ban *discourse* discourse, so there’s not much new to say, but when I saw my timeline flood with cis and trans liberals rejoicing on Monday, I did feel compelled to share some words from our friend Paige Kreisman. So for the rest of this segment, I’m going to let Paige take it away.

**Paige [voice clip]:** So pretty much the only way poor people get out of North Carolina is joining the military. So that’s what I did. I enlisted in the army at seventeen; around that time was when Obama lifted the ban on trans military service, so I was able to come out and get medical treatment of that for gender affirming healthcare while I was in the military. But that didn’t last very long, because Trump was elected in 2016 while I was still in the military, [guitar fades out] and that changed things overnight, before Trump was even inaugurated, everything changed very drastically. Over the next couple maybe six-eight months, there was kind of an escalating campaign of harassment and violence directed at me, culminating in when Trump tweeted that trans people would no longer be allowed to serve in the military under any capacity was his words, and then that was pretty much the end of it for me, which was fine, you know, if the US doesn’t want their imperialism to be intersectional then I’m not gonna argue with them. [Tuck laughs]

I think it’s incredibly important that we build alternative gateways for disadvantaged young people to get out of poverty and abusive home situations, that aren’t the military. Because that’s how the military recruits, is it preys on marginalized and disadvantaged young people. You know trans people serve in the military at twice the rate of cis people, and that’s not because we’re super patriotic, [Tuck laughs] not at all. It’s incredibly problematic on a couple of levels, because one, we’re not supporting the young people in our own communities, as a state, that are the most at risk, and two, we’re then taking those young people, and turning young people like myself when I was seventeen into a middle bully, because I was forced into the military by cisheteropatriarchy and poverty, but then I became part of a whole other power structure of imperialism and then I just went on to victimize other people, on the other side of the world, and that just perpetuates these power structures. It really shows that we can’t dismantle one of these power structures without dismantling all of them.

You can’t dismantle cisheteropatriarchy without also dismantling imperialism, and we can do that by providing these alternative pathways, like college for all, like Medicare for all, so people aren’t—I can’t tell you how many people I met in the army who joined because they had student loan debt that the army promised to pay off, or because they had a wife with cancer who couldn’t get health insurance. So those are really common narratives, and we address that by meeting the needs of working people in our communities, right here at home, by placing people above corporate profit.

[twangy mellow bass guitar melody fades back in]

I think that’s appropriate, to treat the military with disdain. We can recognize that trans people serving in the military is usually as a result of the material conditions that they face in their lives, while also recognizing that the military, the US military, is one of the most evil institutions on the face of the Earth, and needs to be dismantled, and that’s important for trans people as well, because the US military is key in propping up far-right wing governments across the world that are horribly abusive to trans people and don’t uphold the basic human rights of trans people. So I think both of those positions do go hand in hand, and I definitely don’t get angry or upset with other trans people when they have some visceral reaction or distrust for me because I served in the military, I think that is justified and it’s my responsibility to do the work to earn that trust from trans people.

Trans people not being able to serve in the military is by far not the most important issue trans people face, but it is the one that gets the most attention, and I think the reason for that is because trans people are so voiceless, and our political discourse that we have no control over what issues get platformed. It’s cis people that choose what trans voices to uplift, it’s cis people that choose what trans stories to uplift, and cis people will always choose the trans narratives that threaten them the least, and threaten the status quo the least, and trans narratives that don’t threaten US imperialism, like trans narratives that blend nationalism with some liberal version of trans equality, are the least threatening trans narratives to a lot of cis people, and when cis people have power to give platform to trans narratives, that’s what they’re going to do, and the way we get around that is by giving voices to trans people that are chosen by other trans people, that are uplifted by our own community.

[twangy mellow bass guitar melody ends]

**Tuck:** To hear the rest of Paige’s story, please check out her Gender Reveal interview from last season. This has been, This Week in Gender.

[Transition sound effect, with low metallic chimes and hi-hats plays briefly]

[Gender Reveal theme music excerpt fades in]

**Tuck:** Diamond Stylz is one of the premiere voices of the millennial Black trans community. Currently Diamond is the host and producer of Marsha’s Plate, a weekly podcast that archives and centers the trans social justice movements and pro-Black feminist culture. Also, she is the executive director of Black Transwomen Inc., a national non-profit that is led by Black trans women focused on social advocacy, economic equity, and building strong leadership among Black trans women.

[Gender Reveal theme music excerpt fades out]

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

**Diamond:** SoI identify as a Black queer trans woman. Sometimes people like to say “woman of trans experience.” I identify as a bad bitch, I identify—gosh, I identify as a rebel, I identify as all types of stuff! [laughs]

**Tuck:** I love that! That’s great! I want to start a little bit closer to the beginning because I’m so interested in the fact that, you know, you came out when you were in junior high in the early 1990s, and I was alive then, but it was never—ten or twenty years before I remember really hearing about trans people existing, so I’m curious—when you came out, to what extent did you know other trans people, or did you know of other trans people?

**Diamond:** I actually did. I grew up in a group home, right? So my mom got caught up in the prison industrial complex, and she was one of those what Hillary called the “super predators,” when people talk about Biden and the ‘94 crime bill, my mother and I were directly impacted by the ‘94 crime bill that was written by Biden and other people, that was co-signed by Black conservatives, [laughs] and that was co-signed by a—that was you know, presented during the Clinton era. My mother was one of the people that was directly impacted by that...bullshit. [laughs]

So, she went to prison, and I end up going into a group home. And in the group home, I met my best friend, Ty. And she was the same age as me—we were twelve, thirteen, laughs] and we started a friendship that even to this day, she lives like four blocks away from me. [laughs]

**Tuck:** I love that! That’s great.

**Diamond:** She’s like literally, we grew up in Indianapolis, and when I moved to Houston, she moved with me. She’s like, “I’m not staying in this place if you leavin’! No!” [laughs] Literally! Her and two of my other great friends moved with me. I’m like the mother hen, so if I go somewhere, they go. [laughs]

**Tuck:** I love that!

**Diamond:** So we grew up together and she was trans, I was trans, and, you know, we just blossomed in our transness together. So I was lucky in that way. But in regard to how we figured out how to do it, *no*. There was nothing. I’m—this is telling my age, but we had to find—I had to find my first hormone doctor in the White Pages! [Tuck and Diamond laugh] We didn’t have the Google, we didn’t have—the internet was around, but during that young age, no. We used—it started to be a little bit more accessible later on in the nineties. And so we could search a little bit, and there was a site called TSRoadmap, shoutout to Andrea James for creating that space. There’s some problematic stuff on there now when I look back on it—it didn’t age well. But it was a great resource to teach you how to change your name, they had the stuff, the print-off papers that you can print off for yourself to take down to the clerk yourself so you don’t have to pay a lawyer, it was so many, you know, nice resources amongst the, you know, the BS.

But that’s kind of the extent it was. I would hear people, I would sneak into the club, I was sneaking into the gay club where all the trans girls were, [laughs] at around fourteen, and listen to their conversations, and it just was a different space. I wouldn’t say—we definitely didn’t see anybody other than RuPaul or something, not that he’s trans, but the closest thing to, visually, that would be a trans person was RuPaul, that was kind of bending gender in that way. We had these, you know, crazy movies like Psycho and I remember when I was younger, even younger, like ‘83, there was a movie called Sleepaway Camp where—that my mother had—where the killer was trans, or found to be trans at the end. It wasn’t a lot of positive or affirming representation when I was younger, at all. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Right.

**Diamond:** But we had a community already. There were trans people in the city, and once I found the gay club I found them. [laughs] And then I had a friend that I was going to school with and we were in the group home surviving that together, so I was lucky in that regard.

**Tuck:** There’s this sort of narrative, I think, particularly in the minds of cisgender people that, “Oh, before there was no trans representation, and now trans people have so much representation! We see them on TV, and so everything must be better for trans people.” Do you think that, having watched trans people become more and more visible in mainstream media, do you think that visibility has helped trans people?

**Diamond:** Well, I think that cisgender people can be quite...silly [Tuck and Diamond laugh] when it comes to some of the assumptions that they make, but I think anybody that’s in a privileged position—sometimes when we think about men, how they think about women, we think about white people, how they think about Black people or other minorities. Gay folx and how they think about trans folx. You know, whatever privileged place that they could be positioned at, sometimes when they look at us, they look at us from a very silly, naive, and ignorant place. First of all, an amazing story that I found, there’s an archive called the Digital Transgender Archive.net, and I went on there, I was kind of fooling around, and I found a clipping from 1870.

**Tuck:** Mmmmm.

**Diamond:** And it was a newspaper clipping about a trans woman named Lizzie Montgomery, and in the clipping it says, “Dick Montgomery—her dead name—Dick Montgomery, when they found out about the year of Jublow—which is another word for Juneteenth, and Juneteenth is a holiday that Black people celebrate when Texas people—I’m from Texas—when Texas Black people found out that they were actually free. They got the news later than everybody else in the country because of how slow the postal service worked and all that kind of stuff. So when she found out that she was free from slavery, she actually transitioned and started to live her life as a girl named Lizzie Montgomery. And I never associated transness and slavery in my mind until I seen this clipping—I was like, “Oh, wow, of course we were here.” I’ve always said that we were here forever, but these were things that I didn’t even realize, that we were existing in these spaces that I didn’t associate with transness. And so we’ve been around for a long time. [laughs] So if you thinking just ‘cause you see us on poles and just ‘cause you see a Janet Mock or just ‘cause you see some type of representation on TV now, we have *been* here. We have *been* around. So I just wanted to say that.

But also, just because you see those people, you see the work and the fruits of the labor that we have done to make us be able to be able to be visible. The people who have laid the foundation like Marsha P. and any other trans woman that came in this time that led to a Janet Mock or a Laverne Cox or a Tiq Milan—you can see in people who have laid the foundation for us to be accepted enough to even be in these spaces—that was a lot of work. And it doesn’t mean that everything is solved. There are people still—look, this is one of the most deadliest years for Black trans women, you know, that we’ve seen. And so it’s still oppression, out here, it’s still disparities, it’s still disenfranchisement. Just because you see some advancement doesn’t mean that that particular group of any minority is not experiencing that same level of discrimination, that same level of whatever problems that they had before. It’s still, it is getting better, it’s undeniable that it’s getting better, but it’s getting better for certain privileged people.

**Tuck:** So to that point, you’re, as I mentioned, the Executive Director of Black Transwomen Inc. Obviously also as you mentioned, Black trans women are experiencing and have experienced disproportionately high levels of violence. What are you hoping to achieve or what have you achieved with Black Transwomen as an organization?

Oh, wow. So I have been with the organization for about ten years. Me and the amazing Monica Roberts, rest in peace, me and her was called on to be a part of the steering committee. The founder, Carmarion Anderson, she called on us to help her get it going. And so we started gettin’ it going, and at the time I was actually working and so I didn’t have time to invest every single thing that I got into it, but once Carmarion stepped down ten years later, they asked me if I could do it. And so this whole ten years, we have created a space where Black trans women can be put on pedestals, can be loved, can be honored for the work that they’re doing that’s usually ignored even in LGBT spaces.

So we created a conference, and this conference does everything from testing to educating parents on how to adjust to your trans child coming out. We have an awards gala that gives awards out to people who are doing great work in community. We have a talent show. We have the awards gotta also—let me just gotta say this, too—if you didn’t go to your prom in an affirming way, we use this as, this is how you come to the prom. It’s formal, it’s exactly like a prom would be where, except we’re giving awards out. So you come, if you didn’t get to go to high school as your affirmed gender, you can come here and show up and show out and be dressed down to the nines and just be beautiful. So we use that for that.

We have Trans Manifest, which is a talent show, and you know, workshops throughout the week, that we are just teaching whatever somebody wants to come and teach that’s related to moving our culture forward. Recently we have started a program, our anti-violence program, where if there’s an incident of violence where we can step in and relocate or rehouse a person that is going through violence, whether it be domestic or any other type of violence, we can actually put them up and keep them safe. We actually, now, we are actually having to put them in either hotels or a network of homes we have a partnership with, but we actually now are raising funds to be able to build our own locations so that we can house trans people who are in domestic violence or in intimate partner violence or any kind of violence that they’re in, if they need to get out of that situation, that we’re able to house them.

You know, back in maybe two years ago, Malaysia Booker was in a situation like that where she got jumped—and the video went viral—by a bunch of cis guys. And she needed to get out of that neighborhood that she was living so she could keep herself safe so that she can press charges, or, you know, people find her and try to get her together. We weren’t able to find her, but someone else put her up and a month later she was found dead because some, you know, she had to go back and survive on the hoe stroll, and blah, blah, blah—however. So we didn’t want that to happen again. So we created our program and we wanted to be able to house, create a house that we can actually have them come.

Also, we have the Star Farmer Grace initiative where, here in Texas, if you go to jail for non-violence crime, we actually can bail you out so you’re not sitting up in jail, dealing with the transphobic rules of the carceral system. We know, based on multiple accounts, but definitely the most recent is Layleen Polanco in New York, who was left to die because she was having seizures in solitary confinement and she wasn’t even supposed to be in solitary confinement. And her bail was $500.

**Tuck:** Right.

**Diamond:** You see what I’m sayin’? Only $500. And so if somebody here in Texas is out, you know, is in because, this, if you look in the place that has the most concentration of trans death, it’s actually Texas. And so we want to make sure that if trans women get locked up for whatever reason that’s non-violent, we want to get them out so they’re not just sitting in jail. So that’s a program that we have started and we’re just trying to grow. We are a very small organization that is trying to do great work, that is just now getting to the point where we have a little bit of money to do something, but we don’t have a lot. So that’s what we’re kind of trying to do. We’re trying to get funding, more funds, so we can do the work that’s been needed to be done.

**Tuck:** Yeah, how can people support you and the organization?

**Diamond:** Oh, you can go to blacktranswomen.org and donate.

**Tuck:** All right, well, while everyone does that, you mentioned that Black trans women are being ignored even by mainstream LGBTQ spaces. How could the mainstream LGBTQ movement better speak to the needs of Black trans people, Black trans women specifically?

**Diamond:** Gosh, so, be a real ally. Now, so, for me, what I associate with real allyship is being a comrade. We are co-conspirators. We are accomplices. You’re not just saying you’re an ally. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Right.

**Diamond:** It’s not from afar. We are locked arm in arm, fighting, both throwing punches, throwing battles at what this oppression is. So for me that’s what it looks like. And also, don’t speak for trans people unless you don’t have any other way to bring a trans person in the room. There’s been a lot of incidents where, recently, I’ve seen on the NAACP website, they had a gay man take over their Instagram to talk about TDoR. *What?* Why would you have a gay man on your platform talking about TDoR? You couldn’t find one Black trans woman? You’re NAACP! [laughs] You couldn’t find…?!

**Tuck:** Yeah. I want to clarify just in case someone doesn’t know that TDoR is Trans Day of Remembrance, but yeah, that’s wild.

**Diamond:** Yeah, it’s Trans Day of Remembrance, specifically for trans folks, where Black trans women are predominantly the people—not the *only,* but *predominantly*, like drastically—we’re talking about like 80 to 90%, are Black trans women, particularly dark-skinned Black trans women. And so you couldn’t find a trans woman to take over and talk about TDoR? You got a gay man? That doesn’t make sense. So not only this organization, you made the wrong decision, but the gay man! You took up this space when you could have said, “Mmmm, I appreciate the opportunity, but I think this should be a trans woman.” That should be common sense! [laughs] Right?

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Diamond:** It should be totally common sense, but for some reason it’s not common sense. But this particular person, I have called him out many times.

**Tuck:** Ooh.

**Diamond:** For doing this because he has done this in other occasions, so he can’t pretend he doesn’t know, because I’m always going to be on his neck teaching him how to be an ally, because this is not right. When there’s a space that is more suited for a trans person to be in, to speak to our issues, to speak to our solutions, to speak to our problems, then give them that space! That’s what you do! That’s what allies do. You don’t speak for us. You let them speak.

Look at when we think about PREP—PREP is HIV medication, so if you are a negative, you can stay negative and be in a sexual relationship with somebody who is positive and not be exposed. At Marsha’s Plate, they tried to contact us to be able to do—the people was doing research behind it, they tried to contact us, our podcast, to be able to kind of promote and see if we can get some people to participate in the research, and we like, “We’re looking at the literature that you’re sending us, and it doesn’t not include trans men. It only is talking about cisgender men and trans women a little bit. But trans men, some of them are gay, some of them are engaging in sex with men. And it puts them at high risk, and if you’re not including them in this research, then your research is inadequate.” It was our place as somebody who wants to have a more robust kind of healthcare when it comes to this particular issue, we have to say, “No, you need to include trans men in this research, or it’s not going to be efficient. And we’re trying to be efficient because HIV is not for a specific group, it’s for everybody, everybody can be a victim of this, so you need to change this.” And they changed it. And so for me, that’s me as a trans woman being a good ally to trans men. And so that’s what you have to do. If you are in a space of privilege and you have these opportunities, you look around and see who is not in the room. You see who is not being represented. And you speak up for them. Now if you don’t have a choice, then yes, you speak for us. But if you have a choice to bring us in the room, get us included, then that’s what you’re supposed to do as an ally. I think that will make some of the biggest differences. Like, give up the privilege. Give up the resources for somebody else who is not being heard.

**Tuck:** Yeah, absolutely. I did these trainings for businesses about this kind of thing, and it’s so funny because I spend, like, two hours being like, “Here’s what you should know about trans people and here’s how you should know about how to speak about gender in a way that’s inclusive to trans people, but also, please just hire trans people?” You know?

**Diamond:** Yeah, you can’t train people in equity.

**Tuck:** Right!

**Diamond:** It feels good and looks good from an optics standpoint for organizations to, you know, train people, duh-duh-duh-duh-duh. And now it’s become a hustle for trans people to do the trainings and I get it, but you can listen to me all day teach you about some facts and some statistics and duh-duh-duh-duh-duh, but if you’re not practicing it in your home, if you’re not practicing it outside of work, in work, where you hang out, practicing including trans people or treating trans people with respect, if you’re not doing that, that training isn’t working. And it’s not going to work. You have to really have to do this on your own, and really practice it. It’s not just knowing the information.

**Tuck:** Right. Absolutely, 100%. I want to talk a little bit about your YouTube channel, because you started this channel in the early days of YouTube, and it was focused on trans topics but from a different lens than most trans YouTubers at the time and arguably most trans YouTubers still today. Can you talk about what made your content unique?

**Diamond:** Oh, wow. So when I first got on YouTube, it seemed like everybody was doing, “Three months on T!” “Three months on E!” “Two days post-op!” [laughs] It seemed like it was really, really focused on the effects of estrogen or testosterone. It was really focused on, you know, surgeries and the physicality of trans, the medical transition. I started in ‘08, but during this time in ‘08 because I transitioned so early, I had already done that shit ten years ago! [laughs] What, no, no, no, *more* than ten years ago! It had been years. Like, fifteen. And so I couldn’t talk about how long I had been on T ‘cause it had been so, so long. Or, not T. Estrogen for so long. I couldn’t talk about it in that kind of way. Only thing that I could bring to the table is my actual lived experience. What was happening in my relationships, in my love life. What was happening in my family life. How they were adjusting. You know, it’s different when we’re talking about, “I just came out last year to my family and dealing with pronouns.” But ten years later, what’s happening then? [laughs] How did I come to the point where now they accept my pronouns and are calling me...? What was the battle that that entailed? So I was coming from a different vantage point by being in transition for so long and willing to share it.

And as a Black person, because there wasn’t a lot of Black YouTubers at the time who was kind of just sharing their stories that how the intersection of race and trans issues. So I just was sharing all those experiences and being really, really upfront and honest about every aspect of it. I wasn’t trying to put on airs. I wasn’t trying to put my best face forward. [laughs] Trying to be the prettiest, trying to be the most glamazon. I wasn’t trying to be that. So I adjust being real, and being vulnerable, sharing the downside of it and the great side of it. And so I figure that resonated with a lot of people, and every day somebody is commenting on my channel saying, "You know, I started listening to you when I was thirteen and now I’m twenty-eight, [laughs] so you’re like an auntie in my head.” So I think just my realness and my vantage point is what made it unique.

**Tuck:** Yeah, you have been a public figure for a long time, and something that I experience that I assume you also experience is these folx who do come to us and say, “Oh, you know, I didn't even realize I was trans until I started listening to your videos, your podcast, whatever, and now I realize I’m trans.” As someone who has been out and trans for fifteen years, more, more than that? Twenty-five now?

**Diamond:** Yeah, now, it’s like twenty-five, now.

**Tuck:** Yeah, twenty-five! Wow. So what advice do you have for people who are just coming into their transness in the first few years?

**Diamond:** God, utilize all the tools that you guys are blessed with now. [laughs] I think community building is important; get in a community. I think that that this is for anybody—trans or cisgender, whatever. People who go through different traumas, one of the most important parts about healing from your trauma or surviving something is the community that you are in, so build a great community. And we’re not talking about, “Oh, I need to be friends with a thousand people.” I’m talking about just a core group that is supportive of you, that loves you, that cares about you. Don’t hold onto people that are not aligned with that. I spent a lot of time waiting for people, particularly family members, to come around, and they just had no intention of coming around, and once I let them go, it was—my life started to be better. Less drama. [laughs] Less sadness. Less depression. And so make sure you’re not trying to hold onto people who don’t want to be held onto. Don’t let relationship stuff, romantic stuff, get you down, ‘cause that can be a hard pill to swallow, that love for us is kind of elusive—well, for me, I don’t know about other people, but [Tuck laughs] for me and other people I know, love has been elusive. But it’s possible. And so don’t necessarily focus on that, really focus on creating the best you, being independent, and being a great person and healthy person, dealing with your traumas, going to therapy, de-de-de-de-de, so that when you do meet somebody great the potential is even stronger for you to flourish [laughs] a love in a healthy way. I think it’s so many—so many things. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Yeah. yeah, I was listening to your podcast the other day—I wish I could remember which episode it was—and something that you said that really, really stuck with me is that when people will go into a conversation being like, “Oh, I’m just asking questions, I’m just wanting to get your perspective on something,” they’re really trying to teach *you* a lesson, like they’re really trying to teach you that you’re not trans rather than ask you questions from a point of good faith. And I think your words about letting those conversations go and drawing lines when people are being disrespectful and saying, “Okay, there is no space for us to have a relationship if you’re going to continue to disrespect me on a basic level.” Like, yeah. I really appreciate that permission to end those conversations and to walk away from those relationships because I think so many people, especially early in their transition, are clinging so hard to relationships that aren’t serving them because they want their current community to come around rather than just finding community that accepts them.

**Diamond:** [sighs] It’s actually called something. That’s called “sea lioning.”

**Tuck:** Oh, yeah! I’ve heard of that. Tell me more about that.

**Diamond:** Yeah, it’s called sea lioning. It’s a type of trolling, or harassment that consists of a person pursuing people and asking for questions and asking for evidence and repeating questions and stuff just to maintain a pretense of civility and sincerity when it’s really not there. You just trying to be an ass. Dudes do it a lot. You know. They’re trolling you. Basically! [laughs] They’re really just trolling you. And a lot of times, because we represent a small community, we take it upon ourselves to be the savior of these uneducated, ignorant people who *just don’t know any better!* No. [Tuck and Diamond laugh] No. We feel like, “Oh, we have to educate them, *they just don’t know! Well, how will they know if I don’t tell them?*” No, at this point, you can tell when somebody is genuinely, “I am trying to learn, I’m not being combative,” you can tell the energy. And so if it’s somebody who is just really open and doesn’t feel combative and the energy feels lovely, like you are getting through and you’re teaching them, then continue that. If you want to continue that, great. But if that energy feels like they’re really just being combative and you’re knocking on a brick wall and you can tell that they don’t really want to accept what you’re telling them, they have all these weird rebuttals, then you’re not teaching them anything. They are trying to teach *you*, they’re trying to tell you, “You don’t exist, that you don’t make sense and I don’t believe you. And no matter what you say, no matter how far it makes sense, I’m never going to believe you because you’re a man, or you’re a woman, or that non-binary stuff doesn’t make sense.” No, no, no, no, no. Don’t let them take you down that rabbit hole. Don’t be Alice. [Tuck and Diamond laugh] Don’t do it. Don’t let them take you down the rabbit hole. They are wasting your time and wasting your energy and they don’t deserve you, they don’t deserve that care, they don’t deserve that patience, they don’t deserve that energy.

**Tuck:** I hope people take that to heart! [Diamond laughs] So I’ve mentioned Marsha’s Plate a few times now. I am hoping that if people listen to this show, that they listen to your show—if they don’t, they need to go listen to that show! [Diamond laughs] But can you tell us more about how the podcast came to be and what your goals are, what your target audience is?

**Diamond:** So how it started, let’s start there. So in 2016, you know, we had a traumatic political moment [laughs] that we are just now healing from.

**Tuck:** Mmmm. [in agreement]

**Diamond:** So [laughs] Trump was elected, but during that campaign, it was quite hard. This was one of the first campaigns that we actually were not front and center, but we were being mentioned on the trail and being considered in these political discussions seriously. And so when I would watch people talk about trans issues, they kind of reduced us to the bathroom bill. If they were talking to a trans person, more than likely it was going to be a white trans person. If they were talking to the white trans person, more than likely it was going to be about the bathroom bill. So me, as a Black trans woman, there’s so many things that are more dire to talk about in my experience than the bathroom. I can piss on a tree! [Tuck laughs] I don’t—not that the bathroom is not important, but I can piss on a tree if it means I get healthcare! I can piss on a tree if I have housing! I can piss on a tree if you can make sure that I’m not being murdered and not being attacked on the subway when I’m trying to go to work, or I’m not being fired at work for just being trans! There’s so many more issues than the damn bathroom! And so for everybody to be talking about the bathroom bills and the bathroom, the bathroom, it was annoying me. *An-noy-ing me*. So, not saying that that is not a core issue for somebody or somebody’s experience, but on a national political level? Trans people got bigger fish to fry.

So, I was like, “Well I live in a new era, where we have the whole big world wide web. And we have platforms that we can use to get our voices out that don’t have the traditional gatekeepers like regular media or television. We actually can create our own platforms.” So I was like, “Okay, let’s start a podcast.” So I was going to have it be three Black plus-size women and it was going to be Marsha’s Plate, it was going to be named after Marsha P. Johnson, the theme was going to be cookout and food and stuff like that. [laughs] I just wanted to create that space, but the two girls that I first initially chose, one of them ended up moving and one of them really wasn't prepared for the work that comes, goes into a podcast and she was like, “Mmm, I don’t think…” and so they both ended up dropping out. So I was like, “Okay, so what can I do?” So I reached out to my friend Mia Mix. She recently had met a trans man named Zahir, and they both lived in Houston, which was a criteria, ‘cause I didn’t want to do it long distance with people, I wanted to be in person. And so I brought them on and we recorded a test run and it all worked out. We all had good energy, and they started dating! [laughs] They started dating, so that was a source of great conversation, and tension, and it just was amazing, and it just turned into something amazing. And so yeah!

My intention for the podcast is really just to share and archive transness, trans current events, and trans community leaders that may not get the spotlight if they don’t fit a particular demographic. Amazing cisgender people with very trans inclusive politics, sharing their experiences, it just—I want to do great archival work, I want to give cultural context to people who may not be familiar with transness, particularly from a Black trans experience, so I really wanted to be, you know, historical. I wanted to be historical, I wanted to be cultural, I wanted to be funny, I wanted to be real, I wanted to be progressive, I wanted to be inclusive of all trans experience. I’m a binary trans girl, I wanted to include non-binary people. I think that that is important, even though, you know, it’s not my experience, I want to include it ‘cause I think the more inclusive you are, the more educational that you can be. I just wanted to create a space where I can be my full Black trans self.

**Tuck:** So when I asked you about what you wanted to talk about on the show, you know, you had a lot of ideas, but one of the first things you said was womanism. I would love for you to share with me and with our listeners what that term means to you and why it’s important.

**Diamond:** Oh, gosh. Womanism is just a deeper feminism. Just a more inclusive feminism. We know historically that the white feminist movement didn’t always include Black women, didn’t always include a racial analysis that would uplift all women. They would be kind of tunnel vision focused on dismantling patriarchy and misogyny, and not thinking about how their whiteness privileges them and how them being in a position of privilege and being where they are in hierarchy of racial privilege, they can be in a lot of times in a position being the oppressor. And acknowledging that and the part that they play in that, sometimes they are blindsided and don't think about it. And so womanism is the answer to that. It’s not that it is totally separate, it’s just a deeper, more robust version of feminism that includes everybody. And so that’s what it means to me, it means that we want, for me, my imagination of womanism and how I define it, we want every person who is a femme, who was assigned female at birth, who is a woman, who is a trans person, we want them to be free from sexism. We want them to be free from patriarchy. We want them to be free from any level—even trans men who experience a form of misogyny just because they were born female—whatever way misogyny and patriarchy is oppressing *anybody*, we want that shit gone.

**Tuck:** Something that you brought up on an episode of Marsha’s Plate at some point was, “Okay, let’s assume we’re working from sort of a police abolition standpoint or restorative justice standpoint, anything that’s different from the carceral system we have right now that’s clearly racist and fucked up. So if that’s the case, what does justice look like for women, for trans women, for trans people who are the victims of patriarchy and specifically violence against these groups of people? I heard you ask this question somewhat rhetorically, but I am curious, it’s a really complicated question…

**Diamond:** Mm-hmm.

**Tuck:** ...where your thoughts are with that right now.

**Diamond:** It is a complicated situation. So, I do feel like sometimes when people do so much harm to community, that they need to be exiled. And right now, in our current state, the prison is the tool we have to use to exile them. And I’m not above using that system. [laughs] So, that being said, what I and what I feel my community is working towards is a multifaceted strategy in how to reduce violence. And not just using the tool of prison. Sometimes the tool of getting people healthcare and healthcare not just including your physical health, but your mental health. Getting people in therapy to deal with their stuff when they’re young so they don’t grow up and be somebody who’s an abuser. If they have access to those kind of resources, it might help them. Getting people tools to get out of a situation that they are in already with somebody who is violent. ‘Cause sometimes they have to stay ‘cause financial reasons! “I don’t want to leave my babies!” “I don’t want to be homeless with my babies!” “I don’t want to be homeless with no—dealing with this drug addiction!” “He’s the only—my family don’t care about me!” Blah-blah-blah. It’s so many reasons why people could stay with somebody. And so getting them in a better situation and getting them resources to be able to be housed, ‘cause some people are with violent people just because they don’t have no place to stay, and this is the only people giving them places to stay.

So it’s multifaceted ways to be able to—when we talk about “defund the police,” we’re not talking about the police is going to be broke and totally dismantle it *right now*. What we’re talking about is reallocate that funding to go somewhere that we see promise and statistics of how this can reduce crime. Just giving all this funding to the police is not stopping the crime or reducing it. So put that money in other places until we get to the point where crime is super, super low. Oregon just did all drugs are decriminalized. Other countries who have done that, they literally have almost zero incidents of OD-ing on drugs, it reduced the crime rate, they literally have statistics showing—Portugal is one—they literally have statistics showing that this actually reduces crime! For whatever reason. And so just looking outside of the box and stop investing in ways that are not working. It’s not just, “Oh, get rid of prisons.” No. We might need them right now, and we might need them forever—I’m still battling on whether or not I think it can get to the point where they have to be fully stopped. But I think we can reduce the incarceration rate if we just do the work in getting people the care that they need.

**Tuck:** We talked about the 2016 election. I’m curious what your thoughts are on the incoming administration, whether you’re hopeful for it, whether there are things you’re keeping an eye out for, things you want to see, things you don’t want to see.

**Diamond:** You know, I’m a far-left progressive. So these are moderate people going into the office and they were a better choice than Trump. They are not my first choice, they are not really—almost none of the people that was up there was on the democratic primary—some, all of ‘em had some issues. But these *definitely* were—Biden definitely was not going to be my first choice, he’s the choice that I had to choose. [laughs] to not have a Trump. And I’d much rather choose the battle of dealing with Biden than dealing with a Trump. So. Now that we have won and we have got us the Biden, finally. [laughs] I want him to undo all the BS that Trump did. When we talk about the ban on the military, when we talk about rolling back protections for trans people and healthcare, when we talk about—whatever the mess that he has—the steps that he took us back, I need him to put us back in place. And go further.

Particularly in Texas, I want him to support us getting federally protected under the hate crime law, not just on state, ‘cause here in Texas we have the James Byrd Crime Bill—the hate crime bill—we are not included, and we want to be included in that. And so I really want protections in healthcare, better, robust healthcare all across—and not just on a state level. I want it to be everybody. Because you don’t know as far as what—*you* probably do, but if you’re not trans, there are healthcare systems that are much, much better. If you go to California, you literally can get surgeries done. You go to New York, you literally can get surgeries done. I can’t do that in Texas. So there are literally people, trans people, moving to these states with better healthcare plans. [laughs] So, you know, I love Texas. I don’t want to have to move from Texas! I’m a Texan! I don’t want to have to move here. I want to have great healthcare. I know we’re a red state, we’re trying to keep pushing every year, get closer, closer, to turning it purple, but I want protections on a federal level. I love that we got the workforce discrimination protection this year in June, but I just want more. I just want them to go further. I just want it to be more robust, I want it to be more inclusive, I want it to just go further.

I’m tired—I’m negative about moderates—is they just pinch. “Oh, just, let’s, these baby steps, we gotta placate to the, we don’t want to get the conservatives mad, because, oh my god,” but then when conservatives got power, they’re snatching! Whatever they can grab, they’re just snatching it. Not trying to compromise, nothing. They’re just snatching it. And then we’re, we’re taking whatever little bit, just being so cautious, not being aggressive, and I feel like we need to be aggressive.

Oh my gosh. I spend so much time thinking about how long Obama spent trying to win over conservatives about Obamacare, and put all these concessions in so they would support it, and then at the end they were like, “No, we’re not supporting this. Fuck you, dude!”

**Diamond:** Right. “We’re trying to undo it.”

**Tuck:** He wasted so much time! Ah—this is the part of the show where I just ask what else you want to talk about that we haven’t talked about yet.

**Diamond:** Oh, [singsong] let me see, let me see. Ah, let me see, let me see. [Tuck laughs] Have you been watching The Crown? The Crown is so good! [Tuck and Diamond laugh] They really did Diana wrong. She just was looking for love, trying to be young and fabulous, and they really just bulldozed that lady and she ended up dying and it’s crazy. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Oh my gosh, your singing while you were thinking reminded me that you have all this singing on Marsha’s Plate, and it’s like, one of my favorite parts is all your little singing interludes, and you have so many different talents! It’s like, wow. She’s doing this podcast, she’s an activist, she’s singing beautifully, what the heck!

**Diamond:** I don’t know! Any creative avenue that I take, I want to include everything that I do. And so my dream, if I wasn’t trans, I would be a singer-songwriter! [laughs] Not that that’s not possible, but at the time that I was growing up, it seemed so unrealistic. Not now. If I was growing up now, I’d be like, “Ooh, let’s go for it.” But I’m a little too old in my mind, so I’m intimidated by it. But I love music; music was my first love. Music—I just love it. So, just, I had to include my own work and my own songs and I love that people love it. I love that it’s catchy. The theme song is catchy and people will send me videos of them singing the theme song in their car while it’s playing—it’s so adorable and I love it. It makes me feel so special. [laughs]

**Tuck:** I love that. And it also, I think, trans people can have so much dysphoria around our voices...

**Diamond:** Oh my god.

**Tuck:** ...and so it’s really cool to see someone who, you know, showcasing and celebrating her voice like that. That’s awesome!

**Diamond:** Oh my god, you just spoke a word! Because that is something—I have a tenor-bar—I have a wide range, like I can sing in soprano, but it’s, you know. You know, I do have a low voice, but you know what’s crazy? And she’s kind of transphobic, but it’s—sometimes, don’t shoot the messenger, this is not the messenger, it’s the message—Lauryn Hill, she had a live album, and in that live album, she was talking about how she was starting to be a prisoner of her voice in her peak stardom. And she was like, “I couldn’t even speak to my kids because I was sipping tea and trying to keep my voice right for the show that I was about to do, and I would be on silent therapy where I’m not talking to anybody and I wasn’t enjoying life because I was trying to preserve this pristine voice. And so now, I’m to the point where I’m just going to come up here and sing and whatever comes out is what’s going to come out. Sometimes it’s going to be hoarse, sometimes it’s not going to be hoarse, sometimes I’m going to be—it may not be at its pristine quality, but I can still deliver this song, and blah blah blah blah blah blah blah.”

And in that moment, even though she wasn’t talking about transness at all, it spoke to my transness because this is my voice. This is—I can’t change it. Well, I can go get surgeries, but I don't want to. [laughs] I can’t change it, this is my voice, this is what it is, and if I can convey whatever this song is trying to convey, if I can convey it in your ears and it sounds good and I’m on key and I’m on pitch and I’m giving you the emotion and I’m giving you the feeling of what I’m trying to convey in this song, this is my voice. Accept it. And I’m not just talking about the person who’s listening, *me!* This is your voice. You sound good. Accept it and just put it out there. [laughs] And once I got to that point, I started creating better, I stopped worrying about, “Am I too low? Do I sound like a man on this part?” I stopped worrying about it! I sound like Diamond. Thank you.

In my younger years, like late teens, early twenties, when I would be on the phone and talking to people, I’m always, [high pitched voice] “Hey! How you doin’? [intentional gibberish]” Trying to give this, whatever that is, and I’m sounding like fuckin’ Minnie Mouse. No! I just want to sound like myself and be comfortable and the women in my family have deeper voices. And once I accepted that, I’m like, “This is just your voice. You're still a woman. It doesn’t make you any other—you’re just a woman with a deep voice!” And so, you know, once I got to that point and then I heard that from Lauryn, and really just started believing in myself and accepting whatever I bring to the table, it just go better.

**Tuck:** Mmm. I love that. All right, so because, you know, we’re in this sort of quarantine hellscape, it’s hard to find things to look forward to, so I’m trying to ask all our guests this season, just, what’s one thing that you’re looking forward to in your life? Doesn’t have to be trans related.

**Diamond:** One of the things I love about COVID [Tuck and Diamond laugh] is on a poetic level, it is teaching cisgender people how trans people live.

**Tuck:** Mmmm.

**Diamond:** Think about this. We have to be isolated, because a lot of times, if you are a trans person that doesn’t benefit from the privileges of passing, and people can tell that you’re trans when you walk in the street, there are a likelihood of something harming you out in the world. So you stay in the house a lot because if I get on the bus, if I get on trains, somebody’s going to call me a name, it could—I can see it pop off into violence, so I don’t go out because I don’t want to deal with that. So COVID has cis people staying in the house. [laughs]

When you go to the doctor, they don’t know how to treat you. They don’t know, they don’t really know everything about this. So they don’t know what angles to hit this from to make it better and sometimes, you just gotta tell them, “This is my issue,” and they don’t know how to fix it. So cisgender people, they’re going to the hospital with COVID, and these motherfuckers don’t know what to do. That’s very, very trans-like, right? The isolation, the—oh! And then we think about, we are a small portion of the population. Look at how COVID is forcing them to figure out a way. Everybody complains about, “Oh, you’re such a small portion, why would we need to make all these changes for just a small portion of people?” Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Look. “Now, we gotta find a way to capitalize! So now, we’re making a way for you to work from home! You can work from home! We can make it work! We just gotta be productive! We gotta continue production! We gotta make this money! So yes, let’s figure out a way to make you work from home!” But when single mothers needed to work from home to be with their children, y’all couldn’t find a way.

**Tuck:** Mm-hmm.

**Diamond:** When disabled people said, “I really can do this job really, really well if y’all let me do it from home,” you said, “No, uh-uh. We’re going to ignore this whole pool of resources of disabled people that could be able to do this work, but we’re going to ignore them.” But now! “We’re trying to make it work.” [laughs] The hypocrisy of that! So for me, COVID has really taught us that these folks are fake. [laughs] They are full of shit. They can make stuff work when they want to make it work. We are no longer going to accept them making excuses [laughs] for anything. For any marginalized people, make it work. You made it work for you, make it work for us. And so I wanted to point that out. But let me think. What was the question again? [Tuck and Diamond laugh]

**Tuck:** The question was something you were looking forward to, but wow, no, I’m so glad that you talked about that.

**Diamond:** Looking forward to...I’m looking forward to our house for Black Transwomen Inc., our house, which I’m going to name after Monica Roberts. I’m lookin’ forward to that opening up, if we get it funded. So yes, I’m lookin’ forward to all these things. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Mmm. I love that you’re naming that after Monica.

**Diamond:** Yeah, we’re thinking about naming it the Monica Roberts Women’s Center of Equity and Liberation.

**Tuck:** Oh, I love that! I’m so excited for y’all. Yeah. You know, actually this feeds in very well into the last question, because the way we end the show is by asking, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

**Diamond:** Gosh. I would feel like there wouldn’t be a distinction between man and woman. I know there would be a physical distinction, but I would feel like that would be such a small thing. I would love to have everyone is way more free to express their gender in any way; everyone is way more free to love whatever gender they love in any way. I think a lot of the problems we have in relationships is because of gender roles, and, you know, our self-esteem is rooted in how you’re supposed to present in a gendered way. I think a lot of the problems are rooted in that, and I think if those roles weren’t so rigid, we could be more free. And so for me, that’s what it looks like. It looks like people being more free in who they can love, and how they can love, and how they present and how they can show up in the world. So that kind of freedom.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time, or learned something, please share the episode on social media or with members of your community. It’s really the only way we get the word out about the show.

Diamond is on Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube @diamondstylz, that’s S-T-Y-L-Z, and at diamondstylz.com. She’s also on Twitter and Instagram @marshasplate.

We are on Twitter and Instagram @gendereveal. You can donate to Black Transwomen Inc. and please do so at blacktranswomen.org/donate. You can support Marsha’s Plate at patreon.com/marshasplate, and subscribe to Marsha’s Plate wherever you’re listening to this podcast. And of course, if you’d like to support our show, Gender Reveal, you can do that at patreon.com/gender. Honestly, we donate to Marsha’s Plate, and I know Marsha’s Plate donates to other trans folx, so all your money goes in a big circle anyway.

This week’s episode was produced and edited by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our producer for this season is Isaura Aceves. Special thanks again—two in a row!—to Cass Adair for connecting us with Diamond. You can hear more from Diamond on Cass’s trans activist history podcast, called Transcripts.

Our logo is by the talented Ira M. Leigh; our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

**Diamond [voice clip]**: People bein’ selfish, takin’ all the toilet paper! [laughs] Takin’ all the resources and leavin’ us scraps! Y’all see the feelin’!