[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. Hope you’re all hanging in there. Welcome to Gender Reveal Season 8. If you’re a longtime Gender Reveal listener, or if you made the questionable decision to binge the show from the beginning, you may recall that we started the show with a glossary of terms for folks who are new to talking about gender or transness.

That episode was made in 2017, which as we all know was four… hundred years ago. Since then, I cofounded [Sylveon Consulting](http://sylveon.co) with my friend [Cass Adair](http://www.cassiusadair.com), and began teaching dozens of workshops that also aim to explain, in simple terms, what gender is.

But here’s the thing: gender isn’t simple. We don’t even have a widely agreed upon definition for what gender is. And the more I teach these workshops and revisit our initial Gender 101 episode, the more I’m faced with the fact that these basic definitions are a little bit TOO basic. I really believe that we can create space for nuance even in introductory conversations about gender.

So, what I’m going to do here is take another swing at our Gender 101 episode, to reflect both the changing way that our communities speak about these things, and the things that I’ve learned over the four years of making this show.

Important disclaimer here that trans people are not a monolith, as shown by the roughly 100 people I have interviewed on this show, and people might very well disagree with me on key points. To be honest, I might not always agree with me on some points, but we have to start somewhere.

So, I’m going to start by giving you a version of my standard Intro to Gender spiel, and then I’m going to go back through and add a bunch of caveats. Ready? great. Let’s start…… with sex.

Wait, but first, speaking of sex! Uh, the other kind of sex, actually. This episode is sponsored by our friends at ShopEnby.com. Shopping for sex toys can sometimes feel overwhelming or dysphoric, but [shopenby.com](http://shopenby.com/) aims to create a better experience for the queer, trans, & gender non conforming community.Their entire website is gender-neutral, which makes it fun and easy to explore products that maybe never felt good or OK to explore before. 2% of all profits are donated to organizations focused on improving the lives of Queer and Trans People of Color. Visit [shopenby.com](http://shopenby.com/), that’s s-h-o-p-e-n-b-y dot com, and use the code GenderReveal at checkout to get 10% off your entire order AND support Gender Reveal.

OK, back to the show.

[Gender Reveal secondary theme music plays, then ends]

[chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Sex.

**Tuck** Biological sex is broadly determined by a combination of physical traits sometimes called sex characteristics, including our internal and external genitalia, chromosomes, and hormone levels. We’re typically assigned a sex at birth based on our external genitalia. Like, if a newborn has a penis, they’re assigned male.

You may hear guests on this podcast use the terms AMAB, A-M-A-B, and AFAB, A-F-A-B, as abbreviations for assigned male at birth and assigned female at birth, respectively. But outside of this show and some specific medical contexts — like, you’re providing hormone replacement therapy or a pap smear to someone — there’s not many reasons why you would need to know what someone was assigned at birth, or what their quote-unquote“sex” is now.

For one thing, someone’s sex at birth doesn't always match their gender—more on that in a moment. But assigned sex at birth doesn’t even tell you anything definitive about someone’s current body. As we all know, two women who were both assigned female at birth could have dramatically different heights, body shapes, hormone levels, etc. And just because a person is *born* with a uterus, or a penis, or whatever, doesn’t mean that they still have those parts now. And that’s not to mention people who are intersex.

[chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Intersex.

**Tuck:** Many people’s physical traits don’t neatly align with a rigid biological sex binary. For example, someone could be born with XXY chromosomes, or with testes and a vulva. These differences are called intersex traits.

Research indicates that as many as 1 or 2% of people have some kind of intersex variation. That’s as common as red hair, and more common than identical twins. Intersex children often face medical stigma and misinformation and even coercive surgeries, and I strongly recommend learning more about this at [interactadvocates.org](http://interactadvocates.org). You can also learn more in our interviews with [Mari Wrobi](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-70-mari-wrobi) and [Hil Malatino](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-84-hil-malatino).

[chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Gender.

**Tuck:** This is my least favorite part of the whole thing, because I have to give you a definition of something that I already said was undefinable, but here we go.

Gender is “[the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender) typically associated with” being male or female, or something else. In other words, gender is whatever we collectively decide it means to be a particular gender, recursively, in a circle. You may have heard me describe gender as a localized group project, and it’s true that while our definitions of biological sex remain somewhat stagnant, our concepts of gender vary widely throughout time and space.

The way we gender people in 2021 Portland Oregon, which is where I’m recording this, is very different than how people were gendered on this land 500 years ago, which is different from how gender worked in, like, China five years ago, or Brazil 100 years ago, or, like, Iceland now.

On this show, and increasingly in society at large, we typically classify folks as either transgender or cisgender.

[chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Transgender.

**Tuck:** Transgender includes anyone whose gender does not neatly match the sex they were assigned at birth, such as trans men, trans women and nonbinary people.

[higher-pitched chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Cisgender.

**Tuck:** Cisgender is a word that trans people invented to describe everyone else, and simply means that your gender neatly aligns with the sex you were assigned at birth. I sometimes say that if you don’t know what cisgender means, you’re probably cis.

[even higher-pitched chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Nonbinary.

**Tuck:** You’ve probably heard the word nonbinary before — it refers to anyone who isn’t strictly a man or strictly a woman. Terms like genderqueer, [genderfluid](https://www.healthline.com/health/gender-fluid#learn-more) and [agender](https://www.them.us/story/inqueery-agender) all refer to different nonbinary identities.

[record scratch/rewind sfx]

**Tuck:** Ok, let’s stop there for a minute, because I’ve got a BUNCH of caveats.

[relaxing, chill music starts playing]

First of all, the cis/trans binary can be another false binary. There are *many* people, including many who listen to this podcast, who, at some point or another, feel like they don’t quite fit perfectly in their assigned gender, but, for whatever reason, also don’t feel comfortable calling themselves quote-unquote “fully trans.” And we can talk about whether that’s internalized transphobia or imposter syndrome, but nevertheless, it is a common phenomenon.

Meanwhile, most people in the world have never personally considered their gender in any meaningful way, and I don’t know if you can even call that cisgender so much as unexamined. Have you ever asked a “”cis”” person how they know what their gender is?? We have on this very podcast, and let me tell you, they generally cannot answer the question. And yet! Somehow, we live in a society that is entirely shaped by cissexism and cisnormativity.

[music fades away]

**Tuck:** Backing up AGAIN, I’m pretty sure I just said something about “assigned gender,” which may be confusing when so far we’ve only talked about “assigned sex.” The truth is that while we can pretend, for convenience’s sake, that sex and gender are completely separate, they obviously overlap in myriad social, legal, and personal ways.

Most of the markers on legal documents are technically sex markers, but we collectively use them like gender markers… mostly... except when we don’t. It’s complicated in part by the fact that, as far as I know, no coherent definition of sex has ever been written into law in the United States. Meanwhile, there have been legal battles for years over whether laws banning sex discrimination also protect against discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation.

It also feels disingenuous to argue that sex and gender are never connected for individual trans people. When we talk about trans people medically transitioning, which we *will* talk about in just a minute, we often say phrases like “gender affirming surgery.” But by the definitions we gave earlier, those surgeries aren’t affecting gender. They’re affecting sex. Why, then, do many trans people change their quote-unquote “sex characteristics” to alleviate gender dysphoria?

And while we’re here, what does sex even mean? It’s not as cut and dry as 6th-grade bio led you to believe. As trans professor Sawyer Kemp [recently tweeted](https://twitter.com/HamletHologram/status/1448295221545115653), “​​THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS BIOLOGICAL SEX there is an aggregate of 5 different biological data that we collect about infants that all present in various ranges and change over time. [Tuck laughing] I'm sorry that science has improved since you went to high school 40 years ago” unquote. In other words, just like gender, biological sex is ALSO not a binary, but an overlapping series of spectrums.

Despite this, rigid rules about what constitutes the female sex have been used to gatekeep not only [trans women and girls](https://www.them.us/story/there-is-no-evidence-for-banning-trans-women-from-sports) and [intersex people](https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/07/sport/athletics-testosterone-rules-negesa-imali-running-as-equals-dsd-spt-intl-cmd/), but also Black and brown cisgender women. For example, two Namibian women were [disqualified from the 400-meter race](https://thehill.com/changing-america/respect/equality/561610-five-women-banned-from-tokyo-olympics-events) in the 2020 Summer Olympics, because their natural testosterone levels were deemed too high. For more details on that, check out [episode 99](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-99-checking-in-with-latisha-rico).

But as we discuss in our episode with [Lola Pellegrino](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-100c-lola-pellegrino), it's not even clear what delineates one sex from another. And there’s certainly no clear line on when a trans person has quote-unquote “changed their sex.” *My* body, personally, in this moment, is probably less coherent in terms of sex than it is in terms of gender.

What I'm trying to say here is that, in the current system that most of us live in, sex and gender are not the same thing definitionally, but they do overlap in various ways for various people. And while we used to say that sex is a real scientific thing while gender is a vague made-up thing, many people now believe that sex is just as socially constructed as gender. Former guest [Vidhya Aravind](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-74-vidhya-aravind) has said that sex is gender in a lab coat, and I wouldn't say that she’s wrong.

[calm, sincere music starts playing]

**Tuck:** But speaking of The Current System that Most of Us Live In, and also racism!!! This podcast is speaking from a specific time and place, which is my little bubble of transness in Portland, Oregon in 2021. And in this episode, I am using terms that have been developed to try to carve out space for trans and queer and gender nonconforming people in a rigid binary system in which we were never meant to exist.

But if you somehow didn’t grow up in a culture directly shaped by colonialism or Western ideologies, this language wouldn’t necessarily even make sense. Words like cis and trans and and nonbinary don't work if you weren’t assigned a sex and gender at birth, or were always presented with options outside of a strict sex and gender binary.

Cultures around the world — including Indigenous peoples who were displaced from the place I’m recording this now — existed for thousands of years with different gender frameworks than our strict Western binary, and many people are working to decolonize their own concepts of gender by embracing and uplifting those traditions.

This work is especially important because Western culture loves to weaponize binary sex and gender as a tool of white supremacy, gatekeeping quote-unquote “proper” or “legitimate” manhood and womanhood from Black and Indigenous people while also denying them any alternatives.

As we expand our own concepts of gender, it’s important that we don’t generalize by trying to assign words like “trans” and “nonbinary” to folks whose concepts of gender are rooted in different times and places. It is not radical to assign Western gender labels to people of color who don’t subscribe to them — that’s literally just more colonialism.

We talk about decolonizing genders in many episodes of Gender Reveal, including our interviews with [La Tisha Rico](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-99-checking-in-with-latisha-rico), [Kai Minosh Pyle](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-53-kai-minosh-pyle), [Sonalee Rashatwar](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-33-sonalee-rashatwar), [Meredith Talusan](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-24-meredith-talusan), [Jack Malstrom](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-45-jack-malstrom), [Demian DinéYazhi](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-19-demian-dinyazhi)’, [Farhat Rahman](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-68-farhat-rahman), and [Torri Rubi](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-38-torri-rubi), and our upcoming interview with Da’Shaun Harrison.

[music fades away]

**Tuck:** Ok, we’ve spent quite enough time here in the weeds. Let’s keep going.

[reverse record scratch sfx]

[chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Transitioning.

**Tuck:** As the name implies, trans people typically undergo some sort of gender transition at some point. But what exactly that transition looks like, and whether it has some sort of definite end point, is different for every individual.

We can break transition down into three broad elements: social, legal, and medical.

Social transitionis often a first step, although certainly not always. It might include asking people to use a different name for you, or different pronouns, or different gendered language, or all of the above. It might include a new hairstyle, a new aesthetic, or some other shift in gender presentation.

Physical or medical transition typically consists of surgery, hormone replacement therapy, which we call HRT, or both. HRT typically involves taking [testosterone](https://transcare.ucsf.edu/article/information-testosterone-hormone-therapy) or [estrogen](https://transcare.ucsf.edu/article/information-estrogen-hormone-therapy) in shot, gel, pill or pellet form, sometimes in combination with other medications. Surgery can consist of some kind of chest or top surgery, some type of genital or bottom surgery, facial feminization, and/or something else entirely.

Not every trans person medically transitions, either because they don’t want to, or they aren’t able to put together the [thousands of dollars](https://www.businessinsider.com/transgender-medical-care-surgery-expensive-2019-6) that this often costs.

I should also add that, despite what many vocal transphobes would have you believe, children under 15 or 16 aren’t often considered eligible for gender-affirming surgeries. *If* younger children have access to gender-related care at all, it is usually [puberty blockers](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gender-dysphoria/in-depth/pubertal-blockers/art-20459075), a medication that prevents puberty from setting in and making irreversible changes to the child’s body. Puberty blockers are completely reversible and low-risk, and are also used by cis children to prevent [early menstruation](https://www.verywellhealth.com/stopping-precocious-puberty-with-puberty-blockers-4135230) or for other, sometimes frivolous reasons... like... a parent wants their kid to be taller.

Finally, legal transition involves changing your name and/or your sex or gender markers on a big pile of documents and government forms. Depending on where you live and what your gender is, this process ranges from “doable but expensive” to “figuratively impossible” to “literally impossible.”

For example, in Oregon, it’s possible to change the marker on your birth certificate or driver’s license by simply checking a box on a form and paying the associated fees. But [several states](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/identity_document_laws) only allow people to change their sex marker if they’ve had quote unquote “sex reassignment surgery” — which is not a term we use, by the way. And while many states now allow residents to choose an [X gender marker](https://www.lambdalegal.org/map/x-markers) on legal documents, others still limit people to M or F markers.

I cannot stress enough that there is no one correct or normal way to transition. Trans people approach social, legal and medical transition in different orders at different times, due to both personal preference and an array of logistical and financial hurdles. My own transition timeline doesn’t necessarily match what many of my friends have done, but it’s what made the most sense for me.

[chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Gender nonconforming.

**Tuck:** While “gender nonconforming” is sometimes misused as a synonym for nonbinary, it really means exactly what it says on the tin — someone whose gender does not conform to our stereotypical notions of how someone with that gender should look or behave. In the time and place that I’m writing this from, any cis *or* trans man who, like, wears dresses and makeup is considered gender nonconforming. Similarly, butch dykes can be considered gender nonconforming. If we go back to, like, when my parents were growing up, something as simple as a woman wearing pants or [playing football](https://www.boldtypebooks.com/titles/britni-de-la-cretaz/hail-mary/9781645036616/) or becoming an engineer, that would all be gender-nonconforming, too.

This feels important to name because when someone does a hate crime, they don’t stop to and ask, “Excuse me, do you identify as transgender?” Gender-nonconforming people, many of whom are queer, are assaulted and discriminated against and [thrown out of bathrooms](https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/butch-lesbian-public-toilet-women-abuse-government-review-gender-neutral-facilities-833787) in similar ways whether they describe themselves as trans or not. And because our concepts of gender and conformity are racialized, trans and gender nonconforming people *of color,* especially [Black transfeminine folks](https://harvardcrcl.org/americas-war-on-black-trans-women/), are most at risk for this type of violence.

[chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Queer.

**Tuck:** You might have heard queer used as a slur at some point in your life. These days, “queer” is an umbrella term that can include anyone on the LGBTQ spectrum. It’s a word that's been in the process of being reclaimed for at least three decades, and is not considered an insult, especially if a queer person is using it to define themselves.

That said, gender and sexual orientation are both deeply personal experiences. Everyone understands themselves and navigates the world in their own way, so if words that other people use to describe themselves — like queer or dyke or fag or transsexual — don’t feel good to you, you’re under no obligation to use them for yourself.

Like everyone else, trans people can be queer, straight, gay, bisexual, [asexual](https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/625230/ace-by-angela-chen/) or something else entirely. There is a myth spread by anti-trans activists that kids these days are transitioning (or being forced to transition) to avoid being gay, which is hilarious to me as someone who knows literally hundreds and hundreds of trans people and like six straight ones. If nothing else, being trans gives us the opportunity to be gay in [new and exciting ways](https://www.them.us/story/sexual-attraction-after-transition).

[chime sfx]

**Narrator voice:** Pronouns.

**Tuck:** Pronouns are parts of speech that we use to refer to people in place of their name or a generic descriptor. In the four years since I last made this episode, many people have started treating pronouns as the end-all-be-all of gender. But pronouns don’t always neatly map to gender. For example, when was the last time you heard a cis gay man call another cis gay man “she”?

I am not going to get deep into pronouns in this episode. As our friend [Drew Gregory](https://www.autostraddle.com/author/drewgregory1224/) [once tweeted](https://twitter.com/draw_gregory/status/1186722939707617281), “I would rather someone work on shifting their cisnormative view of gender than work on memorizing my pronouns. The former will result in the latter but the latter will not result in the former.”

If you would like to hear a LOT more about pronouns, I suggest [both of our](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-94-checking-in-with-kirby-conrod) [episodes](https://gender.libsyn.com/episode-13-kirby-conrod) with [Kirby Conrod](https://kconrod.medium.com) as well as our series of advice episodes, MANY of which are mostly about pronouns. But If I can offer you one, broad piece of advice I think it would be… don’t overthink it.

Which, actually, is probably my advice for gender, as well. Some of y’all are thinking about it way too much; some of y’all are thinking about it never once for five seconds; and I like to believe that there’s a happy medium out there somewhere for all of us.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you’d like to learn more, please check out our transcription of this episode, which is annotated with links to additional resources. You can find the transcript at [genderpodcast.com/listen](http://genderpodcast.com/listen) or at the link in the show notes.

You can also learn more by subscribing to this very podcast and listening to our other one zillion episodes. If you’re not sure where to start, we’ve got a list of some of our favorite episodes sorted by interest at [genderpodcast.com/starterpacks](https://www.genderpodcast.com/starterpacks).

And if you would like a roughly two-hour version of this topic in workshop form, please reach out to us at [Sylveon Consulting](https://www.sylveonconsulting.com/) via sylveon.co, that’s s-y-l-v-e-o-n dot c-o.

This is an independent, listener-funded show, so if you learned something from this episode, please join us at [patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender), where you can subscribe to our weekly newsletter and get all sorts of other rewards for supporting the show.

We are on [twitter](http://twitter.com/gendereveal) and [instagram](http://instagram.com/gendereveal) @gendereveal. I’m on twitter [@tuckwoodstock](http://twitter.com/tuckwoodstock) and instagram [@tuckwoodstockjr](http://instagram.com/tuckwoodstockjr). If this episode feels like a useful resource to you, please consider sharing it with your friends and community.

If you are *looking* for a community of very nice people from around the world to talk about your gender feelings with, you are welcome to join the Gender Reveal slack community at [bit.ly/genderslack2](http://bit.ly/genderslack2).

Today’s episode was produced and edited by Julia Llinas Goodman. It was written by me, Tuck Woodstock, with a lot of help from Cass Adair, Julia Llinas Goodman, Naveen Kundanmal, Kai Minosh Pyle, Tehya Rice, and Sawyer Kemp, among others.

Our logo is by [Ira M. Leigh](https://www.iramleigh.com). Our theme song is by [Breakmaster Cylinder](https://breakmastercylinder.bandcamp.com). Additional music by [Blue Dot Sessions](https://www.sessions.blue). We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

**Tuck:** Physical or medical transition typically consists of surgery, hormone replacement therapy, which we call HRT, or both. HRT typically involves taking testostrogen — oh my god. [cackling.] The nonbinary option. [more laughing.]