Tuck: If you don’t drink or don’t want to hear an ad for alcohol, skip ahead 30 seconds… because this week’s episode is sponsored by Reverend Nat’s Hard Cider, who is now offering shipping nearly nationwide to 41 states plus Washington DC. I pretty much always have Rev Nat’s at my house. They have many, many kinds of cider made from many different fruits, not just apple. They’ve got a limited run collab right now called Cider for my Family that I absolutely love. And they are celebrating Trans Day of Snack all year round by offering 20% off your first cider order using the code “SNACKS.” Learn more and place an order at RevNats.com, that is R-E-V-N-A-T-S dot com.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

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

[Music ends]

Tuck: Hey everyone, hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show, it is a pleasure and an honor to speak with Da’Shaun Harrison, author of *Belly of the Beast*. In this episode, we talk about why anti-fatness can’t be separated from anti-Blackness, why gender can’t be separated from colonialism, how those four concepts and more are all intertwined, and how disentangling them is going to require some pretty big changes.

Da’Shaun [interview excerpt]: The only way to arrive to any sense of actual liberation is to destroy the world.

Tuck: But before we get to all that, it’s time for this week in gender.

[This Week in Gender music plays]

Tuck: This week we are talking about WPATH; y’all probably know WPATH, but it is the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. And they’re responsible for putting out something called the WPATH Standards of Care, which were first released in 1979, and most recently revised in 2012. These standards of care are really important; they are used by healthcare providers to determine the best course of treatment for people seeking gender affirming care, like hormones, puberty blockers, surgeries, that stuff. They’re also used by insurance providers to determine what procedures those insurance companies will and will not cover.

[Music starts]

WPATH is months away from releasing its newest provision called Standards of Care 8, and as you might expect from a document about trans people that hasn’t been updated in a decade, it includes some pretty significant changes. I am immensely unqualified to walk you through the document in detail or really dive deeply into exact changes, but broadly speaking, this new standard of care should, for example, cut down mandated wait times before surgeries, lessen or loosen the requirements that trans people obtain multiple official letters affirming that they are indeed trans before they can access specific types of care, and also make it easier for minors with transphobic parents or guardians to medically transition. There is also a nonbinary chapter where I believe there just… wasn’t one previously.

Now, as I said, everyone is supposed to abide by WPATH standards, but can we guarantee that every healthcare practitioner and insurance provider will abide by the guidelines set in Standards of Care 8? No, nothing’s guaranteed baby, that would be too easy. For example, as we mentioned a few weeks ago, somewhere between eight and ten states have Medicaid policies that explicitly exclude coverage of gender affirming care. Going forward, I’m just gonna call gender affirming care “trans care,” which I think is bad form in sort of mixed group settings, but I love to be succinct and annoying, so we’re going to call it trans care for the rest of this. You know what I mean. So roughly 1/5 of states do not cover trans care under Medicaid, less than half of US states explicitly prohibit anti-trans healthcare discrimination, and that leaves a huge amount of gray area where it’s unclear whether refusing to cover trans care is legal or not. Meanwhile, Arkansas passed a law earlier this year to ban trans youth from receiving trans care at all. And judging by what Chase Strangio said in our chat with them about this a few weeks ago, more states will almost certainly try to exclude trans care coverage or even ban trans care entirely in the next several months. Not to be all dystopian about it.

So, in other words, no matter what WPATH says, there are a lot of places in the country where insurance providers can get away with denying care to trans people. And of course, there are also critiques to be made of the new standards of care themselves. For example, some people are saying that the rules are still too conservative. Others are critiquing specific policies within the document. This is all valid, and if you would like to offer critique and feedback, the public comment period for the new standards of care is open through December 16. I believe that’s just a few days away from publishing this episode. So if you are interested, go straight to wpath.org/soc8 right now.

But anyway, what I was going to say is, despite the caveats, I think these updates are going to actively improve trans lives. It feels too earnest and optimistic to say, but I do believe it. It is going to change and improve the policies and practices in many medical institutions, and it’s going to be a very useful resource to point to and cite when trans people are forced to advocate for their own care. And it will also be a very useful resource for medical providers who are actually trying to help because it will make it easier for them to get gender affirming care, I mean trans care, covered by insurance. So, the final version of WPATH Standards of Care 8 is expected to be released next spring, and as I said, they’re available now at wpath.org for public comment. If you wanna be a total nerd about it. This has been This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender music plays]

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[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

Tuck: Da’Shaun Harrison is a Black, trans abolitionist in Atlanta, Georgia. Da’Shaun was until recently the managing editor of Wear Your Voice magazine, and is the author of *Belly of the Beast: The Politics of Anti-Fatness as Anti-Blackness*. Da’Shaun is a public speaker who often leads workshops on Blackness, queerness, gender, fatness, disabilities, and their intersections. Their portfolio and other work can be found on their website, dashaunharrison.com.

[Music ends]

Tuck: Well, the way we always start the show is by asking, in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

Da’Shaun: I love this question. So I guess by Western linguistic standards, I refer to myself as nonbinary, a nonbinary trans person. But I think that that language is very limiting, of course, and so oftentimes, I’m not really sure how I would refer to my gender or genderlessness, really, outside of that. Because I do not have a gender, I don’t desire to be gendered, and I also think that so much of the language that we have around gender, even when trying to describe genderlessness, is still very gendered. So I am, for all intents and purposes, a nonbinary trans person, but I do not mind being referred to as just you know, an individual, a music lover. That’s my genderlessness today.

Tuck: Totally. Yeah. Do you think that it is possible to talk about gender in ways that aren’t colonial at this point?

Da’Shaun: No, unfortunately. I wish that I could say yes and that there was ways for us to talk about gender in a way that wasn’t steeped in colonialism. And I think there would be some folks who would call on different indigenous namings of gender expressions that folks have found, like two-spirit and other indigeneity, but I think even still, then so much about the desire to be gendered in that way is still very colonial. I don’t believe that the people who were referring to themselves with this language was necessarily invested in gender or calling themselves gendered, right, because that word itself is a very colonial thing. So, I don’t think that there’s a way to talk about gender in terms of language and embodiment that’s completely void of colonialism.

Tuck: Yeah, absolutely. So, I agree, and that makes it difficult to make a podcast about gender. (Both laugh) Yeah, when we’ve spoken to other guests, I’m thinking specifically about Salimatu Amabebe, but others as well. They’ve spoken about how Blackness has denied them the opportunity to have access to gender whether or not they wanted it, which is kind of what led them in part to rejecting it. Is that something that you have experienced where you feel like your genderlessness comes from being systematically denied gender? Or does it feel more like you just personally don’t relate to it? Or maybe it’s impossible to separate those things?

Da’Shaun: I think that it’s the latter, I think it’s impossible to separate those things. However, I do think that coming to understand those two things can be separate experiences. For me, it wasn’t that I decided, and I’m using that word loosely, to be nonbinary one day because, you know, I just knew that I was being denied access to gender. That wasn’t my revelation. It was more so, I know that what I’m embodying, the things I enjoy, the way that I like to present myself, the things I like to do, don’t really necessarily align with maleness or manhood, and I’m not interested in salvaging it or creating a subgenre of man or maleness. The illogical next step to me, and I’m using illogical intentionally, is to be nonbinary. That was sort of my revelation. And then, once I started to read more work on gender studies… well, gender studies and Black studies, so reading folks like in particular Hortense Spillers, it was then that I was like, okay, this makes sense for why I arrived there, for why I felt that way, and now I understand that that’s part of a larger context that I didn’t have before.

Tuck: Right, and of course, that also intersects with fatness. And you write in your book, *Belly of the Beast*, that fatness functions as a gender of its own. Can you talk about that as well and the way that those things intersect in your life and more broadly?

Da’Shaun: Yes. So I think that this is so convoluted because, for example, in terms of what I’ve talked about, specifically in the book, this was written for, on the behalf of, with, Black, fat, transmasc folks. So folks who are trans men, folks who are transmasculine, and folks who are nonbinary, but present as or identify as masc. And so that was the lens through which I was writing this chapter, that’s chapter six in the book. And what that really meant was that fatness in the way that that it functions today, really is its own gender of sorts. By which I mean a lot of fat trans folks, fat Black trans folks in particular, who attempt to settle—I’m going to use that word—to settle within a gender identity like manhood or our maleness, are often pushed outside of that, or are never allowed to comfortably sit within that identifier because of our fatness, right?

I think that the largest example I use in the book is about gender affirming surgeries, and how oftentimes folks who want to have gender affirming surgeries cannot be of a particular size, and when they are of a particular size, and doctors will still perform the surgery on them, the cost is significantly higher than their thinner counterparts, right? But that’s also true for who can get put on hormones, or who is clockable and who is not right, who is engaged as quote unquote “passing,” and who is not. And I’m saying quote unquote, because I hate the language like passing and clockable and all of that, but, you know, using it here for accessibility reasons. And so, I think that like, there is something very specific about the Black fat trans experience that forces us outside of a gendered experience, even if it’s one that we want to embody.

I also talk about in that chapter the ways that a lot of times fat, Black, dark-skinned trans women, irrespective of how they present themselves, will oftentimes be engaged as though they are not women, because of the ways that dark skin and fatness are read. And oftentimes, that then forces so many to always present this hyperfeminine presentation, even if it’s something that they don’t want to always embody, as a way of trying to avoid being misgendered or pushed outside of gender. And so yeah, I think that Hortense Spillers, for me, helped me to arrive to a very clear understanding of what being ungendered means and choosing, for me at least, to sit in that revelation, to honor that revelation and not try to salvage something that was never created for me to be a part of in the first place.

Tuck: Yeah, and we’ve talked about Hortense Spillers work and *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe* a couple other times on the podcast, but if folks haven’t checked that out, that is obviously a really important resource, we will try to link to it so people can read more about that. So, I have heard people of all genders, and all genders assigned at birth, say that they needed to lose weight in order to be seen as more feminine, and also that they needed to lose weight in order to be seen as more masculine. Do you think that it’s possible for people to parse gender dysphoria from anti-fatness? Because I think there’s this tension of, disliking your body because of size and fatness is “bad,” quote unquote, to be like a progressive person, but disliking your body because of gender is okay, so we can use that as an excuse for anti-fatness. Do you see that as well?

Da’Shaun: Oh, absolutely. And that was something else that I explored in the sixth chapter. The reason why I chose to include the interviews of the folks that I interviewed in the chapter was because I wanted to make clear to the reader that this is not just a revelation or a conclusion that I’m drawing on my own, but that this is something that seems to be central to the experience of fat, Black trans folks more generally. And I think that’s also true for trans people at large, where I agree, I think that oftentimes gender dysphoria is often thought about or justified through the language around, like you said, gender, because it’s not necessarily likened to body dysmorphia, right. It’s not something that you talk about as if it’s particular to your body, but I have to always ask if the concept of man/woman, if these concepts didn’t already have a very specific look, would you have a need to feel dysphoric about your body? What would lead you to feel that way if you didn’t have a model to look to?

Yeah, so I agree wholeheartedly, and I can talk about it all day long, because I think it’s one of my biggest critiques and also, I think one of the hardest things to talk about in trans spaces, because then it becomes as if you are invalidating people’s experiences, right, or their gender or gender expression. And that’s not the intent, but it is to say that so much of what leads us to these expressions, so much of what leads us to these experiences, to these identities, doesn’t have so much to do with ourselves and what we want, but rather what we’re coerced into and the violence that’s created by gender.

Tuck: Absolutely. And I also think, yeah, that’s hard to fight on an individual level. I know that even for me as someone who is not Black or fat, I had years where I was like, okay, I am going to look exactly the way that I look and I’m not going to change anything based on how people are perceiving me, and they can just learn that my gender is my gender and I don’t need to perform it a certain way to be recognized as that gender, and then as the years went on, I just got tired. And I was like, actually, what if I did make some changes? That would feel fine with me, but also would make my life a lot easier. And I’ve talked to a lot of trans people who do that, too, and so I think that’s hard as well to be like, yes, of course, I wouldn’t have these feelings of gender dysphoria if we didn’t have this idea of what men look like, what women look like, what non binary people look like. But I can’t change the minds of everyone around me, and they’re going to keep perceiving me regardless, you know, it’s like, it’s hard to fight that, I think.

Da’Shaun: It is, it’s really hard. And this is something that I often battle as someone who, again, who is dark-skinned, fat, and Black, but also someone who oftentimes moves through a masculine and feminine presentation as much as I want, right? Like there are the days where I will dress more masc-presenting, and then there are days where I will dress more femme-presenting, and irrespective of how I present, people are going to read my body as they so choose, and oftentimes, that is as “man,” because of what we’ve considered to be maleness or a male presentation. And so it’s really hard to think about what combating that looks like, and understanding that, you know, on an individual level, all you can do is show up as yourself. You can’t change the way that the world works, and that’s an unfortunate reality.

But I do think that, for me, it mattered more to me that I felt comfortable in my body than what anyone else considered or thought about, so I was like, I really do not care how I’m read or how I’m engaged. I will correct those who need correcting, but I’m not changing how I choose to show up in the world because this is what’s comfortable for me. And I recognize also that not everyone has that sense of safety to do that. And I should also name that for me, it’s not so much about whether or not I feel safe, but rather, like you said, I’m just too tired to not live as me, I’m too tired to not present however I want to, for the sake of other people’s approval. It does become a really hard thing to navigate because, you know, you can’t end it all on an individual level, but it is still important to me, to always think through these things, like I talked about in chapter six as well. It’s like, why is it that so many transmasc folks want to have, you know, a flat chest to feel affirmed, when there are cis men who do not have flat chests, right?

Tuck: Oh my gosh, I think about that all the time. Absolutely.

Da’Shaun: I’m always like, you know, this is exactly what it means for fatness to exist as its own gender, but also what it means for gender to be violent inherently. Because it creates this mold, this model, that people have to conform to, that completely dismisses the reality of other fat folks for one, but also forces people into feeling, you know, gender dysphoric because of a perceived state of perfection that you’re supposed to embody that many of us can’t and won’t. And so it’s always something for me that I think through, that I think it’s important for all of us to think through, because there’s no way for us to fully become the singular notion of what a person should look like. And I think the sooner we get to that conclusion, the less, I think, on a structural level, the less we’ll have to deal with understandings of gender dysphoria, and in many ways, body dysmorphia. But that’s a different conversation.

Tuck: I think that ties really well into another thing you write about, which is Insecurity, capital-I. And you, write, “What would it mean for us to lean into Insecurity as a political tool, in which we free ourselves from insisting that we perform perfection,” as you just mentioned, “and total confidence in order to advocate for our collective liberation?” So, I was hoping you could talk a little bit more about the way you’re reconceptualizing insecurity as a tool, and how it differs from more of a lowercase insecurities that we all have.

Da’Shaun: Yes. Insecurity, I think to me, is just such an important tool, like I named, and not as something that we should use to develop our political practices, right? And I talked about that in the chapter as well, where I’m like, you know, this is not something that… we shouldn’t use trauma as a way to inform how we move throughout the world. But I do think that it’s very important for us to acknowledge the fact that insecurities are not something that are birthed from individual experiences. This is something that is an indictment on the larger world around us. And I think that the sooner we recognize that, the sooner we understand that insecurities are something that will exist for as long as this world exists, and these structures in particular exist, then we can take some of the shame and the burden off of our own shoulders to realize that we don’t have to try to overextend ourselves to become this idea of perfect, or this perfect idea, before we can achieve happiness or safety or whatever. But instead, we have the right to not burden ourselves with shame around feeling insecure about the way that the world works, that we didn’t help create, and that we don’t have to help sustain. And I think that is the importance, the brilliance, of embracing and being mindful of your Insecurities with a capital I, as something that is structural, and not something that you necessarily have to blame yourself for. Because it’s not your fault. It’s not an individual’s fault.

Tuck: Yes, I love that, and I have nothing to add, so I’m going to pivot slightly. I don’t think that most people know this on the podcast, because I don’t talk about it kind of intentionally, but many years ago, I was like the quote unquote “health and wellness” editor of a magazine. And I took that job because I thought I could do radical things, like making it trans inclusive, and Health at Every Size, and, I don’t know, it’s embarrassing now, but I was a baby, and I was like this is cool and good, and I mean, it was better than whoever else would have done it, honestly. But I quit because I was like, “Literally, health is fake. There’s no possible way for me to write about it in a way that means anything, and there’s no way for me to write about it in a way that does more good than harm.” And it made me feel like I was losing my mind to even try. And it reminds me of gender in that way, that it’s like a concept that was built to exclude Black people, fat people, other groups of marginalized people. It can do all this damage. It also doesn’t really seem to mean anything as a word at its root. So I’m curious if those concepts feel parallel to you in some way as well.

Da’Shaun: Yes, that is all of what chapter three is about, is literally interrogating health as a concept and how its very foundation is predicated on anti-Blackness, how its very foundation is predicated on anti-fatness, and as that is the case, how I’m uninterested in, and how none of us should be interested in, salvaging health as a concept, to where we are… well, one, for where we’re considering BMI and things like that, that are birthed from the medical industrial complex that is predicated on anti-Blackness onto people. But also so that we’re thinking beyond a quote-unquote “health at every size,” right. Like, in and of itself, even though the intent is to be more inclusive and more thoughtful of people’s bodies, it to me is still a reformist project, because it’s asking us in some ways to salvage or find some sense of refuge in a health industry that is still designed to enact anti-Black policies and anti-Black ways of being, irrespective of how you turn it. So, I absolutely do think that those concepts are intertwined, and I’m glad that you asked that question, because the reason that I am writing all these chapters in the way that I am, is so that folks can see that from chapter one to chapter seven, there are several concepts that we think of as something worth salvaging or not interrogating more deeply, but that’s necessary for us to interrogate more deeply because of the fact that they are built on anti-Blacness. And as we understand that, and begin to understand that as such, then we can find a way around trying to work to salvage that, and move towards trying to destroy it.

Tuck: Yeah. So the last line of your book is, “Moving beyond abolition requires that we destroy the world that produces the cage by which the Black fat is bound.” And you also write about destroying health, destroying gender, with the specific word destroy. And I’m curious what your relationship to hope is, and hope that those things will be destroyed, and how you handle living in a world that needs all of this fundamental destruction and rebuilding and reimagining in order to just feel livable?

Da’Shaun: I think my relationship to hope is nonexistent on most days. I don’t have hope that the world will actually ever be destroyed. And… and I’m pausing there for a reason, *and* I think that I’m sometimes forced into a sort of tug-of-war with myself as someone who’s an organizer, who also is writing with and living with this understanding that these things have to be destroyed, and I don’t have hope that they will be. I think that because of that, I am oftentimes experiencing this sort of push and pull, where I am not hopeful that these things will happen, but I also am interested, invested, desiring to engage in practices that can perhaps move us forward in the process of destroying the world, right? That being, you know, organizing, that being writing, that being teaching.

And I want to say that the notion of destroying the world is not what a lot of folks would like people to think, right? It’s not that you’re requesting that people do what colonialism and white supremacy are already doing, literally actively destroying the earth. It is making a statement that forces us to acknowledge the fact that because anti-Blackness exists in the cosmos, because it is cosmic, because it is intercontinental, because it is metaphysical, meaning that it exists in matter, right, because of all of these things, the only way to arrive to any sense of actual liberation is to destroy the world. And I think that that is very different from what colonialism and white supremacy and anti-Blackness are already doing. Precisely because of the fact that world destruction is arguably impossible. And so I wanted to make that distinction clear, because I think that that’s oftentimes something that I see as a critique of that phrase, “destroy the world,” that I think is an unfair critique, because it is misreading the quote, I think. But that is to say that my relationship with hope is nonexistent. And I think that all I can do, in a moment when I do feel a bit of hope, is lean into that with the people that I love and the people that I am interested in fighting for. But whether or not the world will ever be destroyed is not something I’m very hopeful about.

Tuck: I was looking—your Twitter is locked right now, but I was looking at your Twitter because I can still see it, and there’s a lot of content with you and your partner lately that was really, really cute and heartwarming, and it was nice to see you talking about and engaging with something that seemed lighter and more joyful. And I was just curious if having this partnership that’s not just a partner, but like a T4T, fat, Black partner has changed the way you think about any of your work at all.

Da’Shaun: Kind of, right? Yes and no. I think when I first got into this relationship, it did for a moment. It made me, I don’t want to use the word question, but interrogate the work that I was doing, because I was having a much more real experience, I think. But now, it actually feels like it only affirms the work that I’m doing, because of a number of reasons. One, because I know for a fact that many people who live with my marginalized identities are never going to experience this type of love. And they should be able to if that was something that they wanted. Which for me, that’s all the more reason for me to want to destroy the thing that takes that away from them. I also think that being in a Black, T4T relationship as a fat person, with a partner who is thin, societally, is a very interesting dynamic still, which again only affirms or reaffirms and continues to bring me closer to my work. Because it forces me to acknowledge the limits that love has, and the violence of love itself, and how we as a couple are building something that I think moves beyond what love can do. And also, is still seated in in what love is, because we cannot move ourselves from colonialism. We all live under a colonized world. So yeah, that’s my answer to that. I think that at first it really forced me to interrogate my work more closely, but now it feels like affirms my work in more ways than one, and also continues to push me to want to destroy the things that take away our collective ability to experience this sort of happiness and freedom.

Tuck: Well, while I’m asking you personal questions, I have one more, because my producer is also a nonbinary cancer, and they were like, “I’m gonna think of a nonbinary cancer question,” and I was like, “Great.” So they said, “I feel like sometimes the whole idea of being super in touch with your emotions as a Cancer is very at odds with the way I experienced my gender, which is like, ‘No idea. Don’t ask me.’ And I wonder if they ever feel like a “bad Cancer,” quote-unquote, for not being fully in touch with or understanding their exact feelings about gender all the time? I personally feel this way a lot.”

Da’Shaun: I love this question a lot. So actually, no, I don’t think that… yeah, I’m gonna say no. Because I guess for one, because for the most part, I do feel like I understand my genderlessness, at least as much as one can understand something under the hold of colonialism. So for me, I feel very clear on that, but I will say that it is, I think often very weird to be a Cancer in a world where so many people are not in touch with their feelings in general, around the gender or otherwise, and that oftentimes can push me to feeling uncertain even if I am certain about something. And I’m like, “Well, maybe I’m not certain, because I feel like I’m not supposed to because everyone else isn’t!” I don’t know, I think sometimes I do have that type of experience. But in terms of clarity around my genderlessness, that is something that I am actually most clear about, which is weird, because a few years ago, I was not. So actually, I think maybe a few years ago I was in your producer’s shoes in a way that I’m not right now. But you never know what you might arrive back to. (Both laugh)

Tuck: Absolutely. Well, that reminded me of a conversation that you had with your friend, my friend, Tre’vell Anderson, on FANTI. And you talked about how at one point you were using he/him pronouns exclusively as a nonbinary person, as like a subversive act, and then stopped. But that just made me think of the way that people seem to hyper-fixate on what they see as markers of gender, specifically pronouns, rather than reevaluating the way they actually are thinking about gender. Are you also finding that there’s like, this weird hyper-fixation on pronouns lately? I feel like I really have come around from being a person who, as a gender educator, was like, “We should all think about pronouns,” to being like, “We have to stop thinking about pronouns! We’re thinking about them way too much.”

Da’Shaun: Seriously. I actually, literally hate the discourse right now around pronouns. It’s so exhausting. It’s like I was saying in that conversation with Tre’vell, who, yes, we love them. I used to use he/him pronouns exclusively because for me, I didn’t have qualms with he/him pronouns, because *I* knew they were not my gender. They were just how I was referred to. And at the time, I didn’t like they/them because they/them to me felt very othering in a way that I wasn’t yet comfortable with, and now I’m very comfortable with. And so I was like, “Yeah, I use he/him, like, just call me he/him. I’m still non-binary.” But that was the most complicated thing for people, for whatever reason. And I think that that reason is, like you said, what we see so much of now, where pronouns are the indicator of who slash what you are, and there’s no room for you to exist outside of those pronouns. It’s really fucked up because like, we are all so much more than just our pronouns, and also pronouns are not gender, right? My pronouns do not tell anyone what our actual gender is. And the more we position them as though they are interchangeable, the more harmful things actually will be for trans folks, and I’ve been saying that for years to, almost to no avail.

But it’s like, one, that is how we get to nonbinary being almost, you know, collectively understood as a third gender, and not as something that is defined by the individual. But also I think that it makes things a lot harder for trans folks in general, because, as I understand it, we should have the right and the ability to move in and out of gender labels and expressions as much as we want to, right? Today, I can say I’m nonbinary and I use they/them pronouns; tomorrow I can say I’m a trans woman and I use he/him pronouns, right? That should be the sort of validity we’re allowed to embrace, and yet we’re not. Because our fixation on pronouns and their usage, I think, really drives us to leaving folks boxed in and experiencing a very stagnated state of being that doesn’t really give them room to explore or shift or change if they so choose. I remember talking in a thread after… I don’t remember her name, Dwayne Wade’s daughter, after she came out, well she didn’t come out as trans, she came out as she/her pronouns. After that happened—

Tuck: Zaya!

Da’Shaun: Zaya, yes, Zaya Wade. I remember being like, well, for one, she actually did not tell us what her gender expression or her gender is, all she told us was what her pronouns are. But beyond that, like for people who are arguing like, “Well, she’s too young to know, like, whether or not she’s trans, blah blah blah,” of course, all of us who are trans know that that’s not true. But also, what I was thinking was like, even if that is the truth, right, even if you could have surgeries at her age, which you *can’t*, even if you could be put on full hormones at her age, which you *can’t*, even if all that was true, there’s still nothing wrong with her saying today I am a trans girl, and then 10 years from now being like, actually, that’s just not who I am anymore.

That, to me, is the type of experience we should be able to have. We should be able to move fluidly through our genders and our gender expressions, our genderlessness, as much as we so desire. And for some that can mean never changing, and for something that means changing every day. And I remember when I first learned about pronouns, that was how it was understood, and that was just, you know, a couple years ago, 2014, 2015. That was the experience that everyone was always naming was like, you know, if someone shows up today with these pronouns, they can change them, and it may be different tomorrow, blah, blah, blah. And now, I think with this very cisheteronormative desire to understand things only as they are, and never as things that evolve, we are very much forced into thinking of pronouns only as our gender. And therefore we’re forced into these cages that so many people are trying to escape by being trans themselves. So I know that’s very long, but I feel very, very, very passionate about that.

Tuck: No, it’s great, and I’m gonna keep talking about it. Because what you’re talking about makes me think about how I think when we talked about pronouns in 2014, 15, even 16, it was mostly in spaces of trans and maybe other queer people. And I think that trans and maybe other queer people have more space and tolerance and celebration of people changing their pronouns all the time, changing their gender all the time, not being sure where they’re at. I don’t blink an eye when my friends, you know, change their pronouns or their names or their gender labels, and I don’t necessarily expect them to be stagnant. In fact, I actually expect them *to* change over time. And now, again, as a gender educator, I am constantly talking to cis people who are like, I just need to know the right answer so that I don’t get it wrong, because the worst thing that could possibly happen to me is that I said something wrong and got cancelled for it, and so they really want everything to be stagnant, right? Because their identity is stagnant, so they can’t understand that our identities wouldn’t be stagnant. And so, I think by insisting that we only come out once, or we have very specific language that’s also prescriptive of our genders, we’re actually, like you said, making it more cisheteronormative by being like, “Oh, because cis people have, you know, because cis people think they have stagnant genders, we also have to have stagnant and fixed genders,” which is not what it necessarily is to be trans.

Da’Shaun: In fact, I think that is antithetical to what it means to be trans. Which is not say that I think that transness in and of itself is this revolutionary concept, but I do think that for so many of us who are trans, whether we are able to name this or not, we are seeking to remove ourselves from the box and the cage that is cisheteronormativity. But because of cisnormativity in particular, and the hold that it has on the world, to give trans folks more space to be understood means to further indoctrinate transness and all that comes with it into cisnormativity. Which sucks.

Tuck: It does. There’s all this discourse about, you know, gender markers, and obviously, I think we just shouldn’t put gender markers on things. But the X on licenses and whatnot typically stands not for nonbinary, but for like unknown or undisclosed, and I actually like that better. I like that there’s a marker that’s just like, “None of your business, please leave me alone.”

Da’Shaun: Yes. No, I was literally telling Tre’vell, I was like, “The moment that I can get that, I’m going to.” Yes. I do not want to be perceived. Just X, that’s it.

Tuck: Well, we have already established that we need to destroy gender; I know that you told *Scalawag* that you hate gender, and that we’ve established that gender doesn’t work as a word. And yet, the way we always show is by asking, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Da’Shaun: And my answer is that it wouldn’t.

[Music starts]

Tuck: That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode on social media, or your group chat, or like, a big billboard, or wherever it feels right for you to share. You can find Da’Shaun at dashaunharrison.com and at their Linktree, which is L-I-N-K-T-R-DOT-E-E-SLASH-D-A-S-H-A-U-N-L-H. We’re just going to link that shit. But they’ve got a bunch of links in their Linktree to their social media, to their payment information, hint, hint, hint. Plus links to buy copies of *Belly of the Beast* for you and folks in your community. We are at genderpodcast.com and on social media @gendereveal, and you can support the work we do here on the show and sign up for all sorts of fun perks at patreon.com/gender. This show was produced and edited by Julia Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Special thanks this week to Lola Pellegrino for all of her help and insight for our This Week in Gender segment. Our logo is by 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.

[Music ends]