**Tuck:** The Bistitchual Yarn Shop offers a wide range of beautiful queer and/or Canadian indie dyed yarn and handmade accessories. They also offer knitting and crochet zoom classes so you can join from anywhere in the world. Visit them in person on Annette Street in Toronto or online at bistitchual.ca. They ship internationally and offer free shipping on orders over $100.

[Gender Reveal theme music fades in]

**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 fades out]

**Tuck:** Hey, everyone. Hope you’re all hanging in there. This week on the show, I’m excited to share my conversation with Jo Krishnakumar. Ozzy and I learned about Jo through the Center for Applied Transgender Studies, and were super interested in learning more about the work they do at the intersections of gender, sexuality, sex work, anti-casteism and more. In our chat, we talked about reimagining the closet through art, the way that gender and queerness—and our access to those things—vary in different countries....

**Jo (voice clip):** I just don’t think enough white, cis queer people know people from other countries and how they experience their queerness.

**Tuck:** And about how ADHD has us starting way too many projects....

**Jo (voice clip):** And I’m only 4’ 11” in height! I’m a very small person to be doing so many things. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** But before we get to that, just a reminder that we have new merch in the store this month, including a take on the classic phrase “Queer as in Fuck You,” and a stunningly gorgeous new design by our friend Ariana Martinez that says “Trans and Disabled Solidarity. Freedom for Every Body.” I really urge you to go look at that design by Ariana, even if you don’t buy it. It’s just very beautiful. I want everyone to see it. That’s all at bit.ly/gendermerch. And now, it’s time for This Week in Gender.

[Transition music plays, with chimes and cymbals]

**Tuck:** You may have heard that the academic journal *Pediatrics* recently published the results of a longitudinal study that began in 2013. The study followed more than 300 trans boys and girls between the ages of three and twelve, and found that after five years, more than 97% of those kids were still trans. Meanwhile, out of the eight kids who did detransition over that five-year period, seven of them did so before the age of nine. And only one kid made it as far as using puberty blockers before deciding that they were cis after all. So to frame it another way, out of the 190 kids who went on puberty blockers or hormones over the course of the study, only one later came to identify as cisgender, at least so far. So in other words, kids that are trans almost always stay trans, and the ones that end up cis almost always figure it out before they get to any kind of medical transition. And of course, even if more cis kids *were* ending up on puberty blockers for a while, that’s also fine, because we know that puberty blockers are given to cis kids all of the time.

This entire paper is available for free, and I will link it in the show notes. I think it’s a really valuable resource. But I do want to add one more perspective to this segment. Riley MacLeod, who you might know as one of the Topside Press guys, wrote a thread about this on Twitter, and I’m just going to read it more or less in its entirety. So Riley writes, “I think what’s filling me with the dreaded feelings is that the researchers aim to follow the subjects for 20 years. That is, you may know, about how long I’ve been trans. I saw my doctor the other month and asked him some long-term health questions. Am I worried about menopause? Osteoporosis? And he told me he didn’t know, that no one that he knew of had really studied those questions. And here’s this longitudinal study, and the outcomes it’s reporting so far is: trans people still trans. Something that maybe feels useful or interesting or important to cis parents or gatekeepers or politicians, but is, in my opinion, not terribly useful to any trans people. Like, there’s nothing wrong with studying any of this. More power to them, I guess. But if you want to know if trans people are still trans long term, you’ve got an awful lot of data already floating around. Anyway, I’m spending the evening trying to figure out if I should finally get a hysterectomy, research that thus far has included parsing through these same urban legends and guesswork I’ve been hearing since the early 2000’s.”

So where should we land on this? I’m not sure that there’s one right answer, to be honest. I personally love knowing that trans kids stay trans, and I also understand that this is, by and large, a decades-long demonstration for cis people that trans youth deserve rights and care. And we all know that in many cases, no amount of data or logic or common sense will stop lawmakers from depriving kids of that care for as long as they can use transphobia as a reliable way to rally their base. So I guess my hope is that people will keep doing longitudinal studies of trans people and that those studies will collect more info than just, “Are the trans still transing?”, because there are still so many open questions about transsexuality and “Are trans people trans?” is so much less interesting to me than like, “Why does HRT change everyone’s shoe size?” This has been, This Week in Gender.

[Transition music plays, with chimes and cymbals]

**Tuck:** Okay, one more thing I got to tell you about before we get started. Queer Candle Co makes small-batch, hand-poured soy wax candles topped with pressed flowers, dried herbs, and zested aromatics. I’ve been burning one called Fig & Vine, which has a very pleasant scent, and which also sounds like the name of a t4t couple. Right? Anyway, my favorite part about Queer Candle Co is that they donate 10% of profits to the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, and now you can get 10% off your first order with the promo code Gender10. That’s all at queercandleco.com.

[Transition music plays]

**Tuck:** Jo Krishnakumar is a facilitator and writer based in London who works within and learns heavily from the trans, feminist, queer, sex worker, anti-caste, anti-race, and transformative justice movements. They are currently a doctoral candidate of anthropology and sociology at SOAS University of London, and they are interested in all things sex, sexuality, gender, and how different groups and people experience these words and worlds.

[Transition music ends]

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

**Jo:** In terms of gender, I think currently I describe myself as a trans, agender person. These are two words I’m comfortable with. Might not be later, but who knows?

**Tuck:** Ilove creating that space of being like, “Just for now! Who can say?” It’s perfect. I love that. So you are a doctoral candidate of anthropology and sociology at SOAS University of London, which I didn’t know until I was googling for this interview is the world’s leading institution for the study of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

**Jo:** It really is. This is not marketing. [Both laugh]

**Tuck:** Amazing. I mean, that’s so cool. So can you talk about the work you’re doing there and what drew you to study here?

**Jo:** So, not very proud of the name of the school. It’s still called the School of Oriental and African Studies. Yeah, so nobody actually calls it the entire name; we just call it SOAS University of London. My work is on the sex workers’ movement in South India and West India, and I study leadership, collectivization, and I have some pressing questions on why movements that are based on self-determination, like the anti-caste movement or the queer movement or the trans movement, is not as solidified with the sex workers’ movement as it could have been. So that was a question that came up for me one day when I, my partner and I, were sitting on this beach in Bombay. And we met this trans sex worker, and very naively I asked her, “So you must be coming from Bombay Pride?” Because we just came from Bombay Pride, and we thought everybody around us at 3am is coming from Bombay Pride. And she was like, “There’s no space for people like me over there.” And I had no idea what that meant. We spoke for 20 minutes after that, not about this, but that’s the only sentence that just stuck in my head. I was quite confused about what she meant. I was like, “Why do you not have space? I thought Pride was a space for everyone.” Because I had just come out, and going to pride meant like, wow, all these people like me and everything. And I was reeling in this euphoria of finding other people like me. But there was this person who broke that down for me that night, by just saying that “I don’t exactly belong there.”

And it really fucked with me, honestly, why somebody didn’t belong there. And I think I made it my life’s goal to find out *why*. Why don’t you belong somewhere? Is this a you problem? Is this an us problem? What problem is this? And that was my great academic question that led to a PhD In academic words, it’s about social organization in sex worker spaces, about how caste, class, et cetera work in sex worker spaces. And then it translated into a PhD project. In this case, I work with the National Network of Sex Workers. I keep saying that my work extends before this PhD and after this PhD, and I feel like a lot of academics don’t think of their research work like that. I think of my research work as a tool for sex workers’ activism. For me, the only important people are my community members, and not academics who are going to be reading my work. But yes, I think I’ve gone on a rant.

**Tuck** No, no, no, that’s super helpful. So I’m curious because, just from what you’re saying, it sounds like you came into this work, at first, really not knowing much of anything about it, because you were learning from this person that you ran into. How did you take this journey from just learning about this on a beach to making it be your life’s work? And still being mindful—because I think as a trans person, right, I see cis people come into an ally role and do amazing work, and then I see cis people come into a role and do absolutely more harm than good. So I’m sort of like, how do we negotiate this, as people coming in as outsiders, to make sure that we’re being useful, you know?

**Jo:** Mmhm. Okay, I think the first thing I could talk about is, yes, I just ran into this person, and I was doing my master’s at this point, and I had to write a dissertation. And at that time, very childishly, I was like, “There’s not a lot of work I see on sex workers,” and I, every book I found in my library at that time, it was about victimization of sex workers, and I didn’t see a lot of sex-worker-led work. It’s not that it did not exist; now I know that it does exist; but I just did not know about it, because I did not know where to look. I think we’ll come to why a lot of work by sex workers, or work by the community, is not marketed as much as all the other work about the community made by people from outside communities. They’re marketed a lot more; they’re more visible. So that’s a structural problem, which is why I myself, outside the community, had no idea that these things existed in the first place. So, but I was quite disturbed, and I had a very good professor who every time I asked him a question about, how does caste work in sex worker spaces? Are they stratified? How does race work? I had all these questions, and he just told me to go find out. And my entire dissertation became about finding out, which is why I still call it an entrée. I didn’t publish anything from my master’s dissertation because for me, it was just about entering a space that I had zero idea about. And actually, I still haven’t published anything about sex work, even though I have six years of experience, because I feel like I still don’t know enough.

And I think a lot of me refusing to say anything about anything without knowing 100% what I am saying about this community is because I’m an outsider, and I’m hyper-aware of that. Being from the trans community, being from the queer community, as you said, I’ve seen so many people walk into spaces, parachute in and take, and then write something without exactly understanding a lot of lived realities. And I am hyper-aware, and a friend of mine within the sex workers’ movement has told me that allies need to understand that they have more capacity for harm than they have for good. And allies should just be comfortable with that. You cannot know everything; why would somebody tell you everything if you are not part of the community? Be comfortable with that, and just understanding that it’s okay that you’re not doing anything. You can just exist and support a community. It’s okay that you’re not doing anything. You really don’t have to do anything, because mistakes by an ally are much more pronounced than mistakes by people within the community. Allies have so much power outside of the community; people also listen to you. So there’s a lot of capacity for something negative happening if allies are not careful about how they use their voice and what they do with their power and with that privilege. So I’ve always been hyper-aware of that, precisely because I’m already from a space where I’ve seen this happen. I just did not want to do the same thing. My entire work is participatory in nature. It is community led. And the way I did that was just by starting work with the national network. I asked them what they wanted me to do, what they wanted me to write, how they wanted me to write it. Of course, that does not mean that I write what they’re saying, but I do it in direct consultation with them, rather than thinking up ideas and then digging into them. I needed them to have the decision-making power and tell me that this works or this doesn’t work for them, and that took a long time.

Don’t get me wrong, it’s extremely difficult to have people comment on every step of your research. It’s in the small things. I really feel like it’s in the tiny negotiations that you make. Should you pay your respondents? Mostly all of social sciences research says you should not pay your respondents. For me, that was just non-negotiable. My respondents are spending their time and labor for me; why would I not pay them? So I applied for a grant specifically to be able to pay them. I worked as a translator and supporter for the network for eight months without even talking about my research. I never put my research as the front of why I’m working with them. I am, first and foremost, always a supporter of the movement, and *then* I’m an academic. And I feel like, I tell this to my students, that if tomorrow my respondents say that “This does not help us, and I want you to take it down,” I’ll take it down. Hopefully that won’t happen, because it took a long time to do this. But if it does, *okay*. Because it’s a piece of written work. Academia expects you to just, it puts so much pressure on things like, you know, individual human beings, to know everything about everything, and then they call you experts. I don’t think any of us can be experts because of four years of learning on something. I have six years of learning, and by the time I finish my PhD, it will be a decade of being in the sex workers’ movement, and I *still* will not be an expert. The only experts over here are the sex workers themselves. And yet we wouldn’t ever say that because I’m the one who spent all the time reading, and that’s really fucked up.

**Tuck:** So you have said that academia is not the only place to do research that benefits our communities. And a lot of your biggest or most public projects are outside of academia. So I want to talk about a lot of the work around the concept of the closet that you’ve done. So a lot of your work focuses on the concept of the closet as a metaphor, as a sort of rich sensory exploration. I’d love to hear more about this work so you can explain it for our listeners, and also why you chose to do this work outside of an academic space.

**Jo:** I didn’t think of this project as an academic or nonacademic project. It’s one of those things that just came to me because I was troubled. Usually, most things happen to me because I’m troubled. Which is a good thing! Take your pain and put it, I don’t know, into projects, I guess. Almaarii, which is my project on closets, is, now I know it’s an anthropological exploration. I did not know I was doing anthropology, or that is what one would call anthropology, when I started it. It’s four years old now, I think. One day I was just sitting and thinking about whether I ever came out, because the way I remember it, I just never denied it when somebody asked. That’s how I would talk about my “coming out” process. If somebody asked, “Oh, do you like girls?” or something, I would say yes.

There was never a definitive moment that I could think of, where I called a lot of people up and said, “Hey you, do you know I am gay?” or something like that. There was no definitive moment. I knew I was ungendered, let’s say, when I was nine years old. I told my mom that I did not like my given name when I was extremely young. But I only found the words for it much later in my life. And now I like the words agender and trans to communicate what I feel. If there is another word to communicate what I feel much later, I’ll probably use that. That’s what I meant in the beginning. But that’s what words are, is to communicate what I’m feeling. And it is so that somebody else can perceive me, otherwise I actually don’t need any words, right? I was just vibing in life, until people started asking me questions and made me really uncomfortable and I had to answer those questions.

People ask me, “So when did you come out? How did you come out?” So then the question is, where did I come out *from*? I was just like, so, if I had a closet, what would that look like? What is it supposed to look like exactly? If it was a space, what would that look like? And I called up five of my closest friends at that time, and I asked them, and they gave me these little descriptions. And that’s what the project is. Four years later, we have around 200 little descriptions and illustrators who have drawn these closets out. And one thing that I really wanted to do is, the word closet is not exactly something that we use in India. They would use regional languages. So I had, I put up an Instagram story on Almaarii’s Instagram at that time and asked, you know, if closet was not the word that you would use.... Because it’s definitely given to us, and it’s usually used in the context of being queer. Because a lot of us don’t even have walk-in closets, like why would you use the word closet? You just wouldn’t. So we would use cupboard, *almirah*, *almaarii*; these are words that you would use. And a lot of people even had other ideas, like they used the word *gufa*, which means cave. Or they would use the word nest in some other language. They had all kinds of words.

For me, I would call it a balcony, because for me to come out of somewhere, I just need to, you know, in my passing self, I need to be peering out of the keyhole or like, looking down from the balcony to see who’s there watching me. Then I would open the door, right? So, but then I just didn’t feel like there was space for those conversations about the actual spatiality of a closet, about what are you doing in that closet? There’s always the, “You’ve come out of the closet,” or “You’re in the closet.” But what are you doing in the closet? Is there an in-between space? And I feel like for a lot of us, there is that in-between space, because we’re not out to everybody at the same time. You’re first out your mom, then your dad, then you’re out to your third cousin, then you’re out to your first cousin, then you’re out to one coworker, and then you’re out to three teachers. And that’s what Almaarii comes from. And I haven’t written my own, by the way. I still don’t know what my closet looks like. [Laughs]

**Tuck:** Mm. That’s so interesting. I mean, first, I just want to acknowledge I am sitting in a literal closet right now, and I was like, aware of that, so just on the record. I wanted to ask, because I had seen that you have written about this dilemma around this project that was really interesting to me, which was what language should I do this work in, and then what language should I translate it into first? And I was wondering if you could sort of talk about that and the considerations around that.

**Jo:** Yeah, so I’m South Indian and I think that’s where I should start. There’s a lot of Hindi imposition in India because—I mean, this is a historical issue—there are very few states that speak Hindi, and that Hindi, and expectation of speaking one language has been put on a lot of South Indian states. So for me it was a very political decision to not sit and translate everything to Hindi, because that is what is expected in most cases. A lot of projects do start in English, and the next language to go to is Hindi. Even though if I were to translate, for example, to Tamil, I would find more people, because it’s not just Tamil Nadu, but it’s also Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Singapore. I was quite uncomfortable with being expected to translate all the *almaariis* in Hindi, and also for whom? I don’t even know that all of my audience members want to read it in Hindi, so it just did not make any sense. But, so a lot of us in South India actually prefer English, even though it’s a weird negotiation, because it is the colonizers’ language. But at the same time, it is a language we are comfortable with and we can speak to each other. It’s quite funny actually, because my partner and I are both South Indians, but we’re from two different states, so we speak in English to each other. And it’s a little wild for people from outside India to understand that Indians speak to each other in English and not in their home country language, whatever that is, because there are 27, 28 languages in India. We’re all multilingual, but we still can’t find a language to speak to each other in. So a lot of us actually prefer English rather than Hindi because of the cultural imposition that we are subjected to in South India.

**Tuck:** So as someone based in the United States and has always, always lived here, when I’m doing like gender education, things that I hear and things that I repeat have been like, “Okay, just because we’re seeing gender from this like Western colonial angle doesn’t mean that that is how it exists everywhere in the world throughout time and space. For example, in other countries like India, there is a different third gender that is legal, that is not nonbinary, it’s something else.” And so I guess what I’m asking is like, are the people who engage with concepts of transness using language in English, taken from this sort of Western construct of gender that we then sort of tried to deconstruct, and folks who are thinking about gender in some other way, in some other language in India, are those things overlapping, or are they like distinct groups? Like how do those worlds interact with each other, if that question makes sense?

**Jo:** The *hijra* community, first of all, is not the only sociocultural group that falls out of gender binaries in India. There are *aravani* communities, *kothi* communities; there are lots of other cultural communities that have existed forever in India. Of course, the *hijra* community’s very, very popular, and also, they do have a lot of space in mainstream media. Mainstream, I don’t know, just generally speaking about trans people, we usually speak about *hijra* people, but *hijra* was one of the words that made sense for trans people from all kinds of spaces to come and congregate together in one umbrella. But a lot of young trans people now know words that they can talk about their gender; we have access to words like agender and genderfluid. I have also not lived in India all my life. I’ve lived in two Islamic conservative countries until I was 18; I was in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia and I was in Sharjah which is in the United Arab Emirates. And I could only come out once I came to India. But there are issues, I mean, like, I’m sure there are lots of people who don’t think nonbinary people are trans enough, or people who use English words to talk about their gender identity are trans enough. Those solidarities are something that we need to work on forging together, because sociocultural communities are existing in their own way, historically, as they have existed. And then there are all of these new people, including me. Those are solidarities we need to forge. But there are so many people who are already forging those solidarities. Like we meet each other during Prides, we meet each other during, I don’t know, capacity-building workshops or something. And, yeah, I guess we like, we get each other at some level. Might, maybe not completely, because when I tell them that yeah, I’m also trans, they’re just like, “In what way, though?” [Laughs] And I explain it to them. But I guess as long as there’s respect, that’s fine.

**Tuck:** So, you write in your bio that you’re interested in all things sex, sexuality, gender, and how different groups and people experience these words and worlds. And something that I have talked about arguably almost too much at this point on this show is thinking about gender and those other things, sexuality and sex, as this localized group project that varies so widely based on who you’re talking about. So I feel like we have a lot of overlap there. But you’ve lived in *four* different countries that I’ve never lived in, and so I’m just really curious how living in those different spaces has maybe highlighted some difference in these different groups, and how they create these group projects? And again, that’s like a huge question, but I’m just wondering if there’s anything that like particularly struck you when you were moving from place to place and how those things were conceptualized differently.

**Jo:** About my first two countries, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, I can’t speak much about it, because I probably.... I think my closet were these two countries, because I was just not allowed to understand anything about myself. Like, as I already told you, I already had these issues within me where I had a feeling that my gender isn’t matching and I’m not able to have “normal relationships” with men like I was expected to. All my friends around me were having relationships; I was forcing myself to have relationships with men. I’ve dated men for *nine* years of my life. What a colossal waste of time! For myself and them, but mostly for me. Because I wish I just knew and was given the option to not do that. I was in an “all-girls” school, and in the all-girls school, of course there were lots of sentences like, “Don’t hug girls; hug boys.” And there was this light homophobia sprinkling everywhere. And I remember calling people lesbo*.* Ha! God has played tricks on me. So, but I mean, I forgive myself because I don’t know what else I would have expected myself to do in that space. I think I was just trying to fit in or whatever, but I’m glad baby Jo got out of that. And in India, thankfully, always—might be changing now because of our right-wing rulers—but in India there has always been space for that freedom of expression and that freedom of speech. In the countries before, I couldn’t even google it. In India at least I could google things: “Am I gay?” I could google movies, I could watch movies, I could do those things. And then I went to Bangalore to do my master’s, and that’s where I met my partner. And that’s where I met an actual community of people who were also queer and who were having these conversations with each other.

And met my partner; then we moved to London together for our studies. I started my PhD and they started their master’s. And in the UK, I guess one thing that got added was racism. I was just coming to terms with my queer identity and being different in in Indian terms, because I was Indian, but not cis-normative Indian. I was different Indian over here. Over here, I am Indian and I’m also not cis-normative, but now there’s just, yeah, there’s a sprinkling of racism added over here. So there is still not enough of a global community of queer people. There are not enough ways for us to connect to each other. And that’s something that the sex workers’ movement has really done very well because it is such a small—small and absolutely pushed to the fringes—group of people. Everybody knows everybody. And that’s something I really value. And that’s something that I really want for trans people and for queer people. I just don’t think enough queer people, for example, enough white, cis queer people know people from other countries and how they experience their queerness. Because I felt like after I came over here, I had to restart my queerness. I had to restart my negotiations with queer places, how to talk to people, how to be queer here in this place. I’m not saying I changed anything about myself, but it’s all a performance at the end of the day, because other people are perceiving you. But I just feel like there’s not enough solidarity between.... Forget solidarity, I just don’t think we talk enough! And if we just talked more to each other, and knew each other, it could have been nicer.

**Tuck:** So earlier when you were talking about the work that you’ve done, you mentioned casteism, and I was really interested in the ways that casteism could intersect with other forms of oppression like transphobia or, you know, the sort of anti-sex worker bias. And so I was wondering if you could speak to that.

**Jo:** Casteism functions exactly like race does. It is not something that just happens in one community somewhere in India, but it does travel. It takes itself to all the communities outside of India; what I mean is diasporic communities, which is why casteism is a problem even in the UK; it is a problem in the US. And that is why there has been such a wide call for including caste as a marker of oppression in US universities and UK universities. In the UK it hasn’t happened; it has started in the US, which is a great thing. But yeah, as I was saying, it functions exactly like race, and the way it functions is there are four castes, and there are outcastes. So while I’m not a Brahmin, which is on the “uppermost level,” in quotes, of the caste system, or what is written in this piece of text, which is a horrible piece of text, called the *Manusmriti*. I’m not a Brahmin, but I come from a farmer caste, and that is much “better,” in quotes, according to the caste system, than being an outcaste. Dalit people are not part of the caste system, and according to the caste system, they are expected to exist outside of the villages and exist as “untouchables,” in quotes.

A lot of these things are in quotes, I wish I was writing it, but these are not things *I* am saying. But according to the caste system, there is this whole idea of purity and pollution. So some examples that I can provide is you wouldn’t take water from a Dalit person, and if a Dalit person’s shadow falls on a person of an upper caste than them, the Dalit person gets attacked violently. And it still happens, still today. And that is something that I need to say, because, you know how we say that white people can ignore race because they are not at the receiving end of it? It’s the same thing with casteism. A Brahmin is upper caste than me, which means I am constantly reminded of me being a lower caste than a Brahmin. But a Dalit person is constantly reminded of being a Dalit person by people like me, which is why we nowadays say things like oppressed and oppressor caste, instead of upper and lower caste, because we don’t exactly want to talk about what has been happening historically in the same language that recreates those oppressions. So I come from an oppressor caste.

And when we talk about how this affects the queer community, firstly, if you were to talk about cis queer people, there is hardly any representation of Dalit queer people at all. Now there are a few movies, for example, made by Dalit queer people about Dalit queer people, but that’s the whole point of intersectionality. Within queer communities, also, there is this whole idea of purity and pollution. There have been queer people who have said things like, “I will only marry another Brahmin.” It’s similar to saying, “I will only marry another white person,” and then saying that, “No, it’s just a preference. It’s not about race.” A lot of Dalit queer people do not even feel part of the mainstream queer community, because it is usually focused in urban centers like Bombay, Kolkata, Delhi, where it’s usually run by upper-caste people. And you know a person is upper caste by specific surnames. A lot of the power is still held by upper-caste people. And while they keep, like, a lot of upper-caste people say that, “Yeah, we want Dalit people to have more space,” they still don’t say that they want more Dalit people to have more *power*.

The same thing happens in the case of transphobia, because Dalit trans women are at much more risk than non-Dalit trans women. Just like how Black trans women are at much more risk than white trans women. People are still discriminating against and stigmatizing against Dalit queer people, trans people, just generally Dalit people. But unfortunately, that intersection is not talked about enough. People would rather talk about your queerness much more okay-ly than they would about you being a Dalit person. Or directly talking about, for example, how you found your partner. We don’t talk enough about the fact that.... Me and my partner belong to the same caste; although we didn’t fall in love thinking that we belonged to the same caste, both of us being on Tinder at the same time and being able to speak English in the same way, and being able to communicate with each other in the same way and having the same kind of wavelength. What we call a wavelength is not something that comes accidentally, it’s because we are exposed to the same kinds of things; we are socialized in the same kinds of ways. And we like something about each other and, unfortunately, we don’t talk about that enough, about how much caste plays a role in how we have access to things.

**Tuck:** So I want to make sure we have time to talk about Transform, especially speaking of violence, as we just were. Do you want to just explain what this project is? My understanding is that it started as like, a pyramid-shaped infographic, and then you were like, “Wait, it can’t just be an infographic,” which I appreciate because I feel like lately everything is an infographic, like it has to fit on one Instagram slide. So yeah, I would love to hear what this project is and how it’s expanded.

**Jo:** Transform was also created because I got very angry and bothered. So the 11th Principle: Consent Rape Culture Pyramid is something that we have used to talk about how rape culture works, mostly against women, and that’s the version that is most widely available. Now they’ve made a gender-neutral version, but that’s a very, very popular infographic. And this was an infographic before infographics. And it’s quite popular to talk about how small microaggressions and things that are seen as non-threatening things can actually be very, very threatening things. And why does violence happen? So when I saw that, I was just like, we should make something like this for trans aggression. And this was at a time where there were lots of news articles of, people we knew were getting murdered in India. There were a few close friends who had gotten beaten up on the street; there were people who were not able to find enough money for their surgeries; there were a couple of people who were murdered. There was a lot happening at that time, and I think at some point I was feeling super helpless because I think I was also going through some amount of survivor’s guilt. If I would call myself a survivor; I left the country, and all my friends are still there, and I don’t feel like I left because morning, night, I’m always talking to people in India. I’m super tuned into what is happening there now, even more so because of the work I do with the sex-working community. But yeah, I just wanted to create the same thing, and see how aggressions against trans people, microaggressions become macroaggressions against trans people.

And I called one of my closest friends, Mrinalini, who is my co-founder. And I was just like, you know, I want this infographic but for trans people. It was just supposed to be a one-week project! And we are still here; it’s not gotten done; it’s been a year. We started putting down these microaggressions, you know, what people say to trans people on an everyday basis. What are the kind of comments we get on, like, YouTube videos, things like, “Fear God.” And then we realized that when we talk about trans people, who is this trans person? Because the hazards of being sex workers while being trans is, I don’t know, it blows everything up even more. Then we were like, no, but also like, if you’re in a militarized zone like Kashmir, that’s a completely different issue as well. Being in a militarized zone and being trans is completely different, and it’s even *worse*. So how can we not talk about that? How can we not talk about disabled trans people? Because I’m a disabled trans person, and I clearly do not go through the same things that an upper-caste, upper-class, neurotypical trans person goes through. And then the intersections of violence are not talked about enough. For example, a trans woman wearing a hijab will get attacked for two reasons: for being trans, and for wearing a hijab in India. A Dalit trans woman would get assaulted for not only being a trans woman, but also being a Dalit trans woman, because there’s something else completely expected out of her according to the caste structure.

We both are researchers, and we both just really felt like, okay, let’s put all of our research energy into actually creating a tool to talk about: How exactly does violence happen when you are in these multiple intersections? How exactly does violence happen? One thing that we made sure was from the beginning, we had reviewers from the community. So once we had put down a very large Excel sheet of how does violence happen, we showed it to 30 reviewers from the trans community, and they were part of all these intersections. You know, we had Dalit trans people and Muslim trans people and disabled trans people; so many people looking at this. And we were able to create a whole page where now you can toggle, for example, “Trans men.” And you can go to “Media portrayal,” and then you will have an overview that tells you about how media portrayal works. And then you have recommended readings and you have footnotes, because you know, academics, we love footnotes. We have a glossary section, because, not expecting everybody to know everything. And we also have lived experiences, if people want to add lived experiences to these things, to make it also an evidence-building tool that is run by trans people.

It’s been a project that talks about violence, yes. But we also have spaces like “Affirmative action,” where we talk about the cool things trans people have done despite the violence we face, especially mutual aid things that trans people have been doing in India since forever. So we didn’t want to only focus on the trauma. Violence doesn’t happen in silos. It’s not, one day somebody woke up and they wanted to hurt somebody. That’s just not how it happens. And both me and Mrinalini believe in transformative justice; we really feel like if we don’t understand why people are violent and how we are teaching violence to our children, that it’s not ever going to stop. And putting them in jail, killing the person who killed another person, is not going to solve anything. Because we’re still going to have trans people who are going to get murdered; until we understand and get to the root of why it happens, I don’t think we can ever stop it from happening. And I really feel like there is not enough information created by people outside the community to understand *why*. Why do we hate trans people so much? What is the issue?

**Tuck:** I mean, a great question. Yeah. I wanted to jump in really quickly, because you mentioned not being neurotypical. And we get this request all the time that people want us to talk to more neurodivergent guests. And I’m like, actually, almost *all* of our guests are neurodivergent; I just don’t ask them about it. I guess since you mentioned it, is there anything you want to say about being neurodivergent, neurodivergent and trans, the way those things intersect for you, anything like that? Just so people will get off my back! No, I’m just kidding. But is there anything you want to say?

**Jo:** I only started using the word neurodivergent very, very recently, because I recently got diagnosed with ADHD. But before that it was just anxiety. “Just anxiety,” as though that’s not bad enough. “Just anxiety.” Usual package of anxiety, some, I don’t know, borderline personality traits and some amount of depression, but it’s a basic package.

**Tuck:** I was just laughing because that’s like, every trans person package. It’s like the trans starter package. So yeah. Anyway.

**Jo:** Like, choose your gender and then you also get this package that you go home with, and just like, and then, I don’t know, some 20 years later, you also come to know you always had ADHD. Like every trans person I know has ADHD.

**Tuck:** Same! I literally think it’s all of us. There’s like three of them that don’t, and they have their own little special brains instead. I don’t know what’s going on.

**Jo:** It’s actually so weird, yeah! Which is exactly what you’re saying, that actually, everybody you’ve spoken to is neurodivergent. So that’s, this is how our life is like as a neurodivergent person. I think the cool part of it is that I run three projects, including my PhD at the same time, and it does not make sense to neurotypical people. It does not make sense.

**Tuck:** Yeah. I mean, a lot of what you were saying about starting new projects whenever you were like, angry and bothered, or having one simple thought and turning into a huge problem, like that is exactly how all of my projects start. That is why Gender Reveal also isn’t just a podcast. It’s also like a mutual aid project and a grant program, and then this, you know, nonprofit merch center, and all of this. It’s the same thing that you’re describing that I’m doing where I’m like, “Oh, I’m mad about something and so I have to go teach a four-hour workshop about it,” which means I need to organize a four hour workshop. And it’s like, is this what normal people do? I don’t know. This is how we are and that’s what’s important.

**Jo:** I only realized that this is not normal when people started making videos and things about how this is an ADHD trait and I was like, “What? I really thought all of you functioned like this!” I thought everybody does random projects like this and then leaves them in the middle halfway because you’re tired now. [Laughs] I thought everybody did that, but clearly not. So I guess like the first thing is that, I do too many things. And I’m only 4’ 11” in height! I’m a very small person to be doing so many things. [Both laugh] But I also get tired very fast, but I also take a lot of naps, and I got a cat for mental health. That’s how my neurodivergence associates itself with my gender. I for some reason thought that while doing two already anthropological projects, that I wanted to do a PhD in anthropology. And I thought that the best way to get the “Miss” before my name out of my future is by adding “Doctor” there. I don’t know if I’m joking or not anymore.

**Tuck:** Imean, you wouldn’t be the first one.

**Jo:** Yeah, it’s, yeah. I feel like I see so many trans academics who are just like, “Yeah, I clearly did this for this, and I spent four years doing it, made up a whole project and everything.” Could have done anything else! This is like getting knighted, just like, we don’t want to get knighted, though. But it’s like that. All the trans people I know who are neurodivergent do 100,000 things, and that always includes mutual aid. I guess, yeah, the neurodivergence comes where I feel like I need to do this and that and this and that—and I sleep a lot.

**Ozzy:** I just wanted to ask, going back to your anthropology research, when you were talking about just like, how you are informed by talking to folks who are doing sex work and asking them what they think is important to research in their communities. It kind of made me think about this issue that comes up in journalism too, sometimes, where people will not... like editors won’t let trans people write stories about trans communities because they consider that too biased. Or like working with activists, or alongside a community, is seen as making your work too biased. I’m just curious if you’ve faced any pushback within the anthropology world for doing your research in the way that you do it.

**Jo:** Thankfully, no.

**Ozzy:** That’s good.

**Jo:** Yeah, but I think, I do have a lot to say about this, mostly because thankfully anthropology’s a subject where a lot of people are questioning this whole idea of having objectivity, because it doesn’t exist. You can’t actually be objective about anything. We are all human beings who’ve learned certain things, and we all have subjective experiences of everything in the world based on our subjective experiences of what we’ve been taught. And anthropologists know that; sociologists know that, because we study socialization, we study things like: How do people receive information, and how do we behave with the information that we receive? You can’t actually be objective about anything. You can be balanced, maximum. Having said that, all thesises, all pieces of, you know, written work, and like this podcast itself, is an edit. And we should be okay with that. It’s always going to be an edit. And if we can just try to put the best foot, like our best foot out there and our best edit out there, but it cannot be a completely unadulterated version of anything, of anybody’s truth.

Speaking to that, about everything being an edit, for example, see, like, if I’m working with a community, there will be a lot of stuff about the community that I will know that does not have to go in my thesis because it does not serve them. And that that is what I mean by everything being a negotiation. Like, giving an example, so the reason I started working with NNSW is because when I had to go for my fieldwork in anthropology you really do have to have a field, and you need to go on fieldwork. What I could not bring myself to do is go to India during a pandemic and expect the community to talk to me. And this was at a time where all the all the spaces that they were working in were closed, because the kind of word that spread was if you keep sex workers’ workplaces open, they would spread the pandemic. And there was a Harvard-Yale paper that said that, that they should close down sex workers’ workspaces, because they would spread COVID more than any other person. So the last thing I wanted to do was walk into their workspaces and be like, “Talk to me, I have research to do.” And unfortunately, academia in some way pushes academics to do that. One good example would be that in the UK, you have only three to four years to finish your entire PhD. You don’t actually have time. So what do you do when there’s a pandemic and you don’t want to suddenly go to India and ask your respondents to respond to you? So that was my first negotiation. I did not go on field. I just waited for three months, and I found NNSW, and I was like, “Okay, I’d like to support you.”

And I became their communications coordinator, because they needed a person who could do some translation work, and basically just build their capacity with being able to talk to each other. That’s all they needed. And I became that person for them because I wanted to support the community, and I would have done that for another trans person; I would have done that for my own community if they just needed translation help. It doesn’t matter that I’m doing a PhD and that I have a master’s degree and this is “below my pay grade,” or some shit like that. Because that’s the thing about living in a capitalist structure, right? Like, you are supposed to only keep going upwards on some job-hunt scale thing, and only do things that will make you more hirable and employable, than just do things that the community needs. So that’s what I did. I did that for eight months, and I’m finally going to India at the end of this month, and I’m going to be meeting the people I’ve been working with for the past one year. And how close we’ve grown, and how they see me as a human person—and they’ve always known I’m a researcher, but they also know me as a person who loves them and supports them in other ways. And I feel like that’s a much better way to do research than as a thing where you just get a doctorate and then you completely lose touch of the community that you’ve been working with.

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

**Jo:** I like watching a lot of sci fi movies, and I do find it really curious that cis people who do sci fi movies can absolutely imagine a post-gender world where we all are bald and wearing silver suits, but cannot imagine it right now. And we can’t all be bald and wear whatever we want, or I don’t know, grow all our hair. I find that very strange. So I need people to act like they do in movies, and just let people be. So I don’t know about the future; I do know about the present. I just want people to let people be.

[Gender Reveal theme music fades in]

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with someone else who might also enjoy it. You can find Jo at WaytoJo.com. We are @gendereveal and at genderpodcast.com, where you can find transcripts of every episode alongside all sorts of other resources. We’ve also got new merch in the store through the end of the month. Take a look at all of these new designs before they’re gone at bit.ly/gendermerch. If you like what we do here at Gender Reveal, please consider supporting the show at patreon.com/gender. By signing up, you’ll automatically get access to our weekly newsletter and our bonus podcast feed. Also, I’ve had a few people ask me about whether the Gender Reveal Slack still exists. So, it does exist, and you can join it at bit.ly/genderslack2. This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock. 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.

[Gender Reveal theme music fades out]

**Jo:** There is a starter pack there as well, like, you create a project of your own. You have some merch, you have a podcast at some point, you… these are direct attacks to all trans people.

**Tuck:** I was like, literally drag me right now! I’m here for it.

**Jo:** Some of us do a PhD if we have some energy, but lose fuel in the middle.