**Tuck:** Do you find yourself funding evil billionaires’ rocket ships every time you buy books? Check out Bluestockings Cooperative Bookstore in New York City or online at bluestockings.com to support a trans-owned, worker-owned, radical community space that’s bursting with great books, free Narcan trainings, free Plan B, free COVID tests, and delicious one-dollar coffee.

[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. This week on the show, I am very excited to share my conversation with Renée Yoxon. Renée’s entire job is helping trans people modify their voices in any way they want, and one thing I love about this episode is it’s full of examples and demonstrations, like this one.

**Renée [voice clip]:** [raises voice] Bright resonance tends to be gendered as much more feminine and [lowers voice] dark resonance tends to be gendered as a lot more masculine.

**Tuck:** Renée and I also talked about what nonbinary voice training looks like, the physiological explanation of T voice, emotions involved in modifying your voice, and even how this podcast has affected Renée’s teaching.

**Renée [voice clip]:** And then I was like, “What if it was cool to be an aberration? Maybe that’s good, actually.”

**Tuck:** But before we get to that, just two super quick reminders. One is that if you love Gender Reveal and you want even more of it in your life, we’ve got a monthly bonus podcast and a weekly newsletter over at patreon.com/gender. I will also send you stickers in the mail. The other reminder is that we of course have a live show coming up featuring interviews, advice, and a fun new segment that I made up that is on February 1st, just a couple of weeks away. So get your tickets now at TheBellHouseNY.com. And now, it’s time for This Week in Gender.

[Gentle, cheerful tones play]

**Tuck:** Many weeks ago, I asked folks on Twitter if they had any suggestions for future This Week in Gender segments, and I heard from two really badass organizations that I then had no time to talk about. So now that I have time, I just want to tell you about them really briefly.

The first is for all y’all thems in STEM. It is the International Society of Nonbinary Scientists. The ISNBS was founded in 2020 and already has more than 800 members across six continents. It is a free, collectively run organization open to people of all different career stages, academics, and non-academics. And even if you are not a scientist, I encourage you to check out ISNBS.org because I had a great time reading about what their members are up to. They’ve got folks studying cancer research, sea life, Mars monkeys, microbes, droughts, dark matter, quantum mechanics, parks, bee nutrition, climate change, extraterrestrial life, and more. They also have merch in multiple languages in case you need a gift for the Spanish-speaking nonbinary scientists in your life. That is, again, ISNBS.org.

The other group I want to mention is Elevated Access. This is a network of volunteer pilots who use private aircrafts to provide free flights for people who need help accessing care. Most of the media attention that elevated access has received has focused on these pilots flying people to get abortions. And of course, that is incredibly important and we love they’re doing that. But they also fly trans and nonbinary people to get gender affirming care, which is a term that they use very, very broadly in fact. Let me just read this message that I got from them, quote: “We view gender affirming care broadly in that it obviously includes things like surgery or hormone therapy. But for us, it also includes generally anything that is going to improve the health and well-being of someone who is trans or nonbinary. For example, one of our earlier efforts was to help an underhoused trans person get from a shelter that was housing them with people of their gender assigned at birth to a shelter that would house them as their identified gender. We work by referral, which we’re finding is harder in our gender affirming care work because there aren’t nearly as many broad travel support organizations, so we’ll take a referral from anyone’s healthcare provider, caseworker, et cetera. And sometimes that’s just an e-mail from them saying, ‘Hey, can you help so-and-so travel?’ We don’t collect the purpose of the passengers’ travel and we also transport providers, staff, volunteers, and supplies,” unquote. Elevated Access reports that more than 1,000 pilots have volunteered to fly folx for free, so they are waiting to help. If this sounds like something that you could benefit from, you could learn more at elevatedaccess.org. I do not know the lead organizer personally, but I have spoken with him enough to know that he listens to the podcast of his own volition, which is a good sign in my book. Again, that is elevatedaccess.org.

This has been This Week in Gender.

[Gentle, cheerful tones fade out]

**Tuck:** Look, you already know how common it is for trans people to get doxxed. There’s entire websites devoted to doing it. I was doxxed once a few years ago. Transphobes posted pictures of my house, all my old names, my birthday. It was very bad. I hated it. And of course they got all of that information from data broker sites which are just sites that aggregate all of our private information. Yours is probably out there too. So I signed up for a service that would delete all of that info off of those data broker sites. And now when people try to doxx me, I feel much less panicked about it. And you can skip the part where you get doxxed and just go straight to the part where you delete all your info off those data broker sites. All you need to do is to join me at joindeleteme.com and use the promo code TUCK20 to save 20% off your annual membership. That’s joindeleteme.com.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** Renée Yoxonis a queer, nonbinary, and disabled gender-affirming voice teacher with a passion for voice education, creativity, and vocal curiosity. Over the past 12-plus years, they have taught thousands of students how to love their voice. They are the creator of four online courses that provide concise and easy-to-follow trans voice education to trans and nonbinary people all over the world.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

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

**Renée:** Yeah! I identify as nonbinary. I have also identified with the word maverique, so my like flavor of nonbinary is not related to manhood or womanhood. It’s not neutral, it’s not—I don’t feel agender, I just feel strongly myself. Does that make sense?

**Tuck:** Sure, why not? It makes as much sense as any of the other genders. You know what I mean?

**Renée:** Yes, exactly.

**Tuck:** Perfect, I love that. So, since we’re going to be talking about voices all episode, I wanted to ask something about your voice because you said in a documentary about yourself that voice lessons specifically helped you start unpacking your gender and your sexuality, and I was wondering if you could say more about that connection.

**Renée:** When I started learning to sing, I was in the jazz field. And I don’t know if you know much about the history of jazz or even the modern landscape of jazz, but it’s very, very, very gendered. I would say that as a university subject it has an even harder time with gender disparity than other things like sciences, weirdly. So you know, when I went into jazz originally it was like if you’re not, you know, wearing a gardenia behind your ear and shoulder-length gloves, then you’re not the right type of jazz singer. And through studying with really cool teachers, I just found that I could express myself in my own way and there was a very natural progression between learning to express myself musically and learning to express myself through my gender expression.

**Tuck:** That’s so interesting because I feel like maybe in a vacuum people would think that the arts are more creative and flexible and that it’s easier to get away with being gender freaks, but that’s often not the case. Like you know, you talk to dancers, especially ballet dancers too, and it’s almost impossible to get out of, like very overt, obvious gender roles. And yeah, I don’t know.

**Renée:** Yeah, it doesn’t exist in a vacuum, right? Like our art exists in the same world that we all live in, and it’s not exempt from being influenced by the *patriarchy*.

**Tuck:** No, it’s true. All right. I have one more question about your gender and then we will talk about voices. So sorry to give you a big question right at the beginning, but you said in the past that your experience of gender is different by virtue of being disabled both in that you didn’t ever experience all the trappings of this womanhood that like an able-bodied woman would experience, but also that when you use your mobility aids, people might not see you as trans. So maybe you couldn’t access transness but also couldn’t access womanhood, which is so interesting to me. So I was just wondering if you could talk more about that.

**Renée:** Yeah, absolutely. I think it’s less impactful in my life right now because I don’t use my mobility aids as often as I used to like back when I said that. But for me I just found that when I was using my mobility aids and when I was being read as disabled by the majority of people who would see me, that was the only thing they would see. They just wouldn’t also be able to take the time to read my gender. It was just so funny, you could just tell their eyes are going to the mobility aid as opposed to reading your gender, I don’t really know how to describe it. It’s so strange, but you know when you’re moving through the world and you’re trying to be nonbinary or be trans or project a particular gender, you can tell when people aren’t when you’re not—I hate to say passing, but you know what I mean. Like when you’re not passing, you can kind of tell, and I sort of felt like that when I moved around with my mobility aids, it’s like I don’t feel like a woman or a man, I feel disabled.

**Tuck:** Interesting. So you’re a voice teacher. You are, were, a singer, but when we say voice teacher, we’re talking about talking and not singing or both?

**Renée:** Yeah, so like I said, I have a background in jazz and in songwriting, and I’ve made a bunch of albums. So like I have been a singer all my life and I was a singing teacher for 12 years or something. I call myself a voice teacher now because the majority of my students are working on their speech voice and not their singing voice, although I have a subset of students who also are working on their singing voice. But yeah, for me there’s voice professionals and they might be working in the drama space or in the singing space or in the speech space, or in the pathology space; they’re all voice professionals. So that’s where I fall.

**Tuck:** Gotcha. And can you explain the difference between what you’re doing as a voice teacher and a speech language pathologist?

**Renée:** So there’s not a big difference, to be honest. I would say speech language pathologists, they can work on trans voice alteration and some of them do, but a lot of them don’t, so a lot of speech language pathology programs never cover trans voice alteration because it’s a funny thing where it’s not really a pathology, right? Like SLPs work to solve problems, like you come in and say “I have this dysfunction,” and they say “Okay, let me fix it for you.” Like that can be a lot of things, right? For them, that can be a cancer. You could have cancer of the voice and they would work with a doctor with an oncologist to help you with that, or you might have a speech impediment, or you might have difficulty using different structures or swallowing. Breastfeeding. Those all fall under the purview of SLP.

I only think all day long about trans voice alternations, so in a lot of ways I am more qualified to teach this particular subject than SLPs, and in fact now I also do a teacher training program where my intention was to teach singing teachers like me to pivot into this space because I think we have a serious lack of teachers in this space, but a lot of SLPs come and study with me also because they didn’t necessarily get it in their program or they did get a little bit in their program and they want a little more. And now I actually work with the SLP program in Montreal at one of the universities here to teach them about this subject. So there’s a lot of crossover in what we do. But I am not a pathologist, so I don’t approach the work as if you have a problem to be solved. For me, it’s more about “Here’s a fun tool you can use to express your gender, if you want to.” It’s more about exploration. It’s an exploratory process.

**Tuck:** So you’re teaching this topic to a lot of other people now. When you were first learning about it, were you learning it from someone, or were you just doing DIY research and personal experience to try to figure it out?

**Renée:** Great question. So I did a bit of both. I got a lot of books. There’s a couple of books on this subject. I think I can think of about four really good ones that I read back when I started learning this. I did a lot of the same work that a lot of people do when they’re first starting this out on their own, like cobbling together your own education through the Reddit threads and all the YouTube videos, and I also reached out to some of the teachers who were teaching this subject at the time and just took lessons with them. But it was more of a pedagogy lesson, like I was learning how to teach the subject rather than learning it for myself. But very quickly I learned that all the skills I had as a voice teacher were already going to apply, so it wasn’t like going from scratch, which a new student to the subject, that might be their case, but for me it was like okay, wow, I already can hear a lot of these things and I can already use all these structures, like how do I put them together in this new way? Then I had to learn how to do the pedagogy side of things, like how do I teach a student who has no musical background or no audio background who’s never thought about their voice before? How do we go from zero to one hundred?

**Tuck:** Together, yeah, this is maybe really in the weeds, but when you’re teaching other teachers, that part of your job, is there anything particular that you find is surprising to them, like they especially had not been thinking about previously?

**Renée:** It’s interesting because I teach a good mix of both trans and cis teachers, and so a lot of the cis teachers, it’s the trans stuff that they find very surprising, you know, like, actually, I’ve changed how I teach based on some of the stuff that I’ve learned from this podcast.

**Tuck:** Wait, tell me more about that!

**Renée:** Sure! I listen to your podcast all the time, and I think it was the episode with Jules Jills-Peterson?

**Tuck:** Jules Gill-Peterson?

**Renée:** Yeah, about how cis people don’t really identify as cis in any appreciable way and I was like “Ah, brilliant!” because before I used to teach to my cisgender teachers, like, if you identify cis it’s really important or if you are cis rather it’s important to identify that way because it makes being trans less of an aberration, and then I was like, “What if it was cool to be an aberration? Maybe that’s good, actually, you know?” So I’m changing the way I teach all the time, but I find that cis people especially really struggle with the idea that there is no right answer. There’s no fixed definitions for a lot of this stuff. And so they struggle, they really do, with that.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I do find that they would like one easy answer and a neat style guide that they could refer to in all situations and it’s like well, unfortunately it’s very individual.

**Renée:** So yeah, I mean, and that’s the takeaway. Usually it’s like you can think of it broadly, but you’re also working with an individual at any given time. So just listen to your student and reflect back what they say. But they’re usually coming from a really good place, like, they’re coming to me in the first place because they wanted to harm less in general in their teaching, but unfortunately you can’t. There’s no one size fits all.

**Tuck:** Totally. Well, speaking of non-trans people, you said that you receive a lot of comments on your social media asking if it’s okay for people to take trans voice courses if that person isn’t trans, and my assumption just hearing that is that it would be a combination of people who are trans but are not ready to call themselves trans yet and possibly other reasons. So I was just curious, what are the different reasons that people come and work with you?

**Renée:** Yeah! I don’t think there’s any bad reason necessarily to want to explore your voice, because there’s this thing about the authentic voice, like what is your real voice? And I just patently don’t think that’s a thing. Your voice is a result of the things that you listened to as a child, so if you grew up somewhere with accents that are different from the one you have now, then you would have that accent. Like it’s not biological, your accent. Right? So I say if you want to change your voice, change your voice, whatever the reason may be.

But for the people who are not trans or necessarily closeted as trans, usually it is just about some kind of gender dysphoria, actually, but it’s just with the gender they were assigned at birth, you know. So I’ll see cis men who don’t feel like their voice is masculine enough and they want to have a more masculine voice in the same way that trans men do. And then same thing for cis women, although for cis women I also hear that they want to sound more masculine as much as they want to sound more feminine, and that’s usually to be taken seriously, more seriously, in their jobs, things like that, and then sometimes it’s for safety. So I’ve seen gay men from countries where it’s not legal to be gay or it’s not safe to be gay want to sound less gay. I mean, that breaks my heart, but I’m not going to turn someone away who wants to study that. Yeah, those are the common reasons.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Sorry, you said women want to sound more masculine to be taken seriously and I just thought of the Theranos lady.

**Renée:** I wasn’t gonna say it, but she’s a prime example!

**Tuck:** I figured.

**Renée:** Everybody makes fun of her for changing her voice, but I’m like, go off, queen. Like, do what you want!

**Tuck:** Yeah! It was the most iconic thing about her, I feel, other than the scamming generally, but like, you know.

**Renée:** I agree!

**Tuck:** Incredible.

**Renée:** Yeah!

**Tuck:** Yeah, so I think we’ve talked about this on the podcast a little bit, but without any actual knowledge. I was talking to someone about how pitch isn’t the only part of voice, like voice isn’t just a binary of high pitch and low pitch; there’s all these different components, but I don’t know what the other components are. So could you tell me what the components are besides pitch that are contributing to how strangers gender our voices?

**Renée:** So yes, pitch is the one that most people are aware of and it’s the one that I think people hear the most easily, like we can all differentiate [raises voice] high from [lowers voice] low. That’s something that’s easy for us to hear, and we tend to associate high pitch with femininity and low pitch with masculinity. I’m not going to say pitch is not important because these characteristics are all interrelated and they affect each other, but it is less important I would say than another characteristic called resonance. And that is a measure of relative brightness or darkness of a fundamental pitch. So if I take a single pitch, I can like, I’ll just demonstrate. I can make that pitch bright or dark. So: “Aaaaah.” “Aaaaaaah.” “Aaaaaaah.” “Ooooooh.” So the pitch has never changed, but it goes from bright to dark, right? And you can already modify this yourself. People do it all the time to say vowels, so if you say “Ay” versus “Ah” versus “Oh,” that’s resonance that is changing, not pitch, so everyone’s a professional modifying their resonance. But bright resonance tends to be gendered as much more feminine, and dark resonance tends to be gendered a lot more masculine, right? So that’s the two big ones, and resonance is, I think Zheanna Erose from Trans Voice Lessons refers to it as the gender dial, because it’s the one that really affects the perceived gender of the voice the most.

Then there’s also vocal fold mass, and this goes by a lot of different names. Some people call it thickness or thinness of a sound. And this just kind of refers to how much vocal cord adduction or abduction we have. So I’ll just give you an example of that. It’s thickness, or thinness, so it sounds like “ah” versus “aw,” right? So we tend to associate a thick vocal fold sound with a masculine voice, because testosterone mechanically thickens the vocal folds, and a thin sound with femininity because they are just mechanically thinner. However, this one is not so black and white when it comes to gender. Because if you’re shouting, for instance, you can’t have a thin vocal fold mass, so you have to have a thick vocal fold mass whether you’re feminine or masculine. And there are ways to shout—like a really thick feminine vocal fold mass sound would be like “Hey, hey!” All right, that’s opposed to “Hey, hey.” It’s not thin, it’s feminine. But it’s a thick sound, which sometimes we think of as masculine. It’s a little bit complicated, but those are the big three: pitch, resonance, and vocal fold mass.

And then I also teach about inflection, and this is like the contour of sentences. And this really varies from culture and language and location and it varies so much from student to student. And in inflection we also have dynamic range, so a really wide dynamic range with a lot of highs and lows is considered very feminine, like, [sing-songily] “I just can’t wait until I can find my prince!” Like very Disney princess, whereas a limited dynamic range would be considered more masculine under certain circumstances like Neo, like, [flatly] “I know kung fu.” Like very masculine, we’re not changing our dynamic range at all, right? So that’s sort of inflection, so those are the four big ones that I talk about with my students, and they are interrelated and they interact with each other. But you can work on them more or less separately.

**Tuck:** Why do you think it is that a “masculine voice” quote-unquote is associated with this flat lack of dynamic range? Is there something sort of intrinsic to it or is it just that we don’t let men have emotions?

**Renée:** I think it’s the second one, personally. So this is a thing that I have to think about daily, it’s like how do I help people have a voice that reflects their gender expression, but doesn’t limit them emotionally or just reflect stereotypes culturally? And it’s challenging, and I will say this limited emotional breadth for men is really a sort of English language, North American-specific thing. We don’t see this in French. We don’t see this in Spanish. We don’t, you know, there’s lots of languages in which this is not the case; it’s really just a particular trapping for us, which is sad. So I think the question sort of needs to be like culturally what’s going on there, as opposed to vocally what’s going on there. You know? Why is it that men in the US and Canada who speak English can’t express emotions without coming across as feminine, you know what I mean?

**Tuck:** Yeah, it’s so funny that when you’re describing this, you’re like, “Oh, this could come across as feminine in men.” Of course, that’s the word that you would use, but in my head, whenever I’m talking about it, I just call it “faggotty.” You know, I’m like, “Oh, whenever I have dynamic range and I sound faggotty,” you know. Whatever, either one. But anyway, so when you’re talking about resonance, what is involved, sort of anatomically, when you’re changing your resonance like that?

**Renée:** So resonance is controlled by the vocal tract, so I tend to break up the instrument into three sections. There’s like the power of the instrument, which is the wind from your lungs. There’s the source of your sound, which is the vocal folds vibrating in your larynx. And then there’s everything after your larynx, the vocal tract. So that’s your throat, your mouth, your nasal passages, to a certain extent. And that’s what shapes and colors and sound. It’s the same in any wind instrument. So if you think about a trumpet, the sound source is the mouthpiece and then you change the shape of the body of the instrument by pushing down the valves. That’s the same for us. But we modify the vocal tract with the height of the larynx. So if you just put your hand on the bony protrusion on your larynx, that’s sometimes called the Adam’s apple, although I don’t use that in my teaching, we’ll call it the thyroid notch. You can feel when you swallow, it raises and then returns to neutral and you can feel when you yawn, it lowers and then returns to neutral. So that lowering and raising makes the back of the throat, otherwise known as the pharynx, wider or smaller. So in a nutshell, small vocal tract: very bright sound. Wide vocal tract: very dark sound.

I had a student recently, a student teacher, who uses the big dog/little dog analogy. And it’s actually really effective. So if you think about panting like a big dog: [deep panting] woof-woof-woof—you get like a big vocal track and a big sound. And if you think about panting like a small dog—[shallow panting] ruff, ruff—you get a really bright sound. And that does the work for you of making a big vocal tract or a small vocal tract. So the throat, the larynx, rather, that controls the size and shape of the throat is one thing. We also control it with the size and shape of the mouth and the position of the tongue.

**Tuck:** Yeah, that’s so interesting. So obviously there’s a physical element to what you’re doing where you’re learning about your larynx and where it is and your vocal folds and what they’re doing, and whatever. But I feel like there’s also such a big emotional element to learning this and then implementing it into the world. So how much of your work is the emotional side of things and what does that look like when you’re working with trans people?

**Renée:** Yeah, I mean it really depends from student to student. I made a course actually specifically for voice feminization called Mindful Voice Feminization because of this exact thing. I found that fully half of the work we were doing or more like 60-65% was just working on the emotional hurdles that we have to get over things like practicing, but also using the voice with people you care about and with strangers, like how do we deal with all those things? But like I said, some students have no problem modifying their voice and are happy to be silly in public and other people really worry about the expectations of others when they go to modify their voice. I think everyone’s experienced this, like for example, if you have a radical haircut, okay, going to work, and you’re like, “Oh my god, everyone’s gonna notice me; they’re all going to see how different I look and I was going to talk about it.” And yeah, that’s natural. So if you walk into work with a different voice, the same thing’s gonna happen. It has nothing to do with whether the voice is authentic or whether the voice is right for you. It just has to do with the fact that it’s different. You know? People notice things that are different. So I try and encourage students to remember the first time you wore lipstick to work. Like, everybody commented on it, but now they don’t care. It’s gonna be the same for your voice, you know? But we work on it a lot. It’s a big part of it.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Do you also end up talking ever about just the concept of wanting or having to change your voice in the first place because I feel—yeah, you’re rolling your eyes. Just what were you going to say?

**Renée:** Oh my god, I think about this every day, because I want to help people modify their voice if that’s what they want to do. But I also want to live in a world where you don’t have to. So a lot of times, people come to me and they want to change their voice because they have severe voice dysphoria. When they hear their own voice, it’s triggering and they feel bad. And okay, we can work on your voice. But a lot of people come because the expectations others have aren’t lining up with the voice that they have, and it’s about safety. But when they’re in their own home and they’re with their family, they don’t actually care if they have a feminine voice or a masculine, they just have their voice and it doesn’t bother them at all. So for those people, sometimes it’s actually really hard to do the work because they’re a little less motivated. They don’t have inner dysphoria telling them you have to change this. And I really want both people to be able to exist happily in the world. You shouldn’t have to change your voice, like this is so funny because I’ve now only worked with trans people for years, and I’ve actually become a really bad judge of what a feminine voice and a masculine voice is. If you tell me you’re a woman, you have a woman’s voice, period, and if you’re a man, you have a man’s voice in my estimation. But if you want to modify that for fun and me time, then we can do that together. But I don’t like the idea of people feeling like they have to do that as part of their transition in order to conform to cis ideals of femininity and masculinity. That makes me sad. Also, all the nonbinary people I work with, they just want to sound different or weird or alien or neutral, you know? And there’s really no road map for that.

**Tuck:** Yeah. So what does that look like when you’re working with them?

**Renée:** So when I’m working with a student, we kind of have to do two things. We’re both working with the voice that they are hearing themselves and the voice that other people are reacting to. And those are the same voice, but they are listening to different responses, so we want to develop a voice that makes you happy. We also want to develop a voice where the reactions of others makes you happy. And that might be two voices, might be the same voice, but those are two separate things. Do you know what I mean? And this can be really challenging for nonbinary people specifically because if they want to be read as neutral, well, voices aren’t read in a vacuum. Like on the phone maybe, but in person it’s really affected by what someone sees and how they’re reading other parts of you. So it can be—it can look like feminizing to a point or masculinizing to a point, or adding in some like a mix of combinations, so like a really low pitch and a really bright resonance or vice versa, you know having something a little more quote-unquote “unusual.” There are lots of options.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Well, speaking of a sort of a clockably trans voice, I know I’ve already talked about this so many times, but now you’re the expert and you’re going to tell us what I was trying to talk about. So when people talk about T voice, what is that referencing in your sort of professional description as opposed to our just, like, “You know the thing?”

**Renée:** The clockably trans thing?

**Tuck:** “You know the one voice that we all have?”

**Renée:** Yeah! Sure, so what we’re sort of hearing when we’re identifying a T voice is we’re hearing like a thickened vocal cord, but we’re maybe not getting as much lowering in pitch or darkening of resonance. And that can happen because when you have an exogenous testosterone puberty later in life, the cartilage of the larynx may have ossified so gotten harder to the point where it won’t grow in the same way that an endogenous testosterone puberty in teenagehood would have it grow, so when that cartilage grows, basically, the anchor points of the vocal folds move away from each other, so you end up with both a thicker vocal fold and a longer vocal fold and a bigger chamber in the vocal tract, right? So you end up with a deep dark voice that rattles and also has that buzziness to it. But when we only get the buzziness then we get like a voice that sounds a little bit more like this. Like it’s a little bit brighter and a little bit raspier and it’s buzzy, but it doesn’t have the big wide thing happening.

It can also happen, and I think this is actually more common, because people are just used to talking with their larynx at a particular height and with particular structures in particular places. So they’re not used to lowering that larynx all the way down. They’re not used to making that space. They’re not used to relaxing it down, and that takes time and effort and if you’re not explicitly taught how to do that, you might just never do it. Also, if you’re happy with that T voice, why would you change it, you know what I mean? And lots of people want that.

**Tuck:** Well, I was curious if you are not experienced vocally and you are not thinking about your larynx all the time, how do you know what it’s doing and how do you know how to change it?

**Renée:** Yeah, I think based on your own perception you can kind of tell if your voice is feeling strained. If you’re feeling pain or discomfort where you’re straining to speak, you know that might be an indication that you’re doing things in the old way with the new instrument. It’s kind of like giving a violin bow to a cellist or a bass player. You know? It’s like the bow is not big enough, like this is not the right approach to this instrument. So, I mean, there’s lots of things you can do. I’m actually planning on making a couple of courses in the next couple of months about this so I don’t have all my thoughts particularly in a row because I specifically am planning to organize my thoughts. I’m going to make one course on adapting to your new voice on T and another one about masculinizing your voice without T, but the processes are pretty similar and that’s why I’m releasing these courses at the same time.

One of the things you can do is simply yawn, like just put your larynx into a yawning position and relax it down. And another thing you can do is put your hand on your belly or on your trunk and do a moan as if you’re sick, like, “uuuuuggggghhhh” and just get used to the feeling of things vibrating and resonating really deep inside of you. Because we tend to think when we’re thinking about the voice, we think about our head and things can kind of climb up and we end up just being a brain. But we’re actually a whole body, and the more you can release into the lower parts of your body, the more boominess you tend to get from the voice, and that can really help.

Another really, really easy thing that will definitely be included in my course and you can get it here for free right now is just to sing or speak in a downward slide. So just like “Aaaaaah” and just go into the depths. It’s really important, especially when you’re first starting out to start to learn where the new bottom is, because as if you’ve ever taken T, you know, the bottom is shifting constantly, but the real mindfuck of taking T is that your registration events change, so that’s when you switch from your chest voice to your head voice. Where that happens and how it happens. That’s hard for anybody. It’s hard for anybody to navigate, but now if it was one way all your life and then suddenly it’s in a new place, that’s really challenging. So you can relearn how to navigate that change by glissing from high to low, from above the break to below the break, and something a teacher a trans guy teacher taught me was to do like a siren sound, like an ambulance siren above and below the break, like a “Ah-ah ah-ah ah-ah ah-ah,” which is really good for getting to know where that break is happening.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I mean you reminded me of something that has happened to me a couple of times during voice changes, which is that I completely lose my ability to match pitch which is the most disorienting thing that could possibly happen, so what’s going on in the body? Why does your brain and your throat lose the ability to know what to do?

**Renée:** I’m such a nerd. I’m so excited to get to tell you I know exactly what’s happening. So basically, your brain has a map of your body, but it also has a map of your vocal folds. It’s like a really, really tiny map. And so when someone is trying to match pitch, they have to first hear the pitch being played. Then they have to rehear it in their mind’s ear, and then they have to send that idea to the vocal folds and say, “Okay, make the shape of that note that you made 100 times before,” and then you make the shape and then you add air to that prepared shape and the vibration causes the note.

Well, suddenly the instrument is different and the map is wrong. The map is wrong. It will give you the wrong note every time. So what happens is your brain hears the note, it goes, “Ah, I know what to do,” and sends a message to your vocal folds which is incorrect, and then you try to make that note by adding air to that shape and it’s the wrong note and your brain goes, “Oh,” and you then you get this external feedback loop where your brain is asking your vocal folds to correct until it gets to that note. So you end up doing something like a gliss glide or a break or something like that, and so you kind of just have to do this over and over again until your brain has created the new map. Once it knows what shape creates what note, then you won’t have any problem matching pitch again, but it does take time to remap that area.

**Tuck:** Okay, so speaking of mapping, I have one more question about this topic and then I promise to everyone else that we’ll move on, but say you can almost never access your head voice and you want to practice, but every time you practice it hurts super bad. Where is the line between I need to practice this so that I can ever do it again, versus this is hurting me?

**Renée:** Okay, so there’s a lot of things to be said here. The first is I don’t think—like obviously acute pain we want to avoid, so if something is acutely painful, I’m talking stabbing, pinching, that kind of thing—we don’t want to do that. A little bit of discomfort is not the end of the world, I think. I think people are actually very afraid of working with their voice because they’re afraid of this, the fear of damaging the voice. What if I do something wrong and I damage it permanently? That’s very uncommon in my experience. I have not seen a lot of people getting nodes from five minutes of discomfort in practice. People get nodes when they’re singing for like eight hours a day or chronically losing their voice, chronic laryngitis, like that’s when we start to have vocal damage. I do think that learning to phonate in your head voice after T is a different process from when you may have been doing it before T, and I don’t think a lot of people appreciate that. I ended up talking to a classical singer who took T about this specifically and he was very surprised how differently the function was when he went to use his head voice. He was like, “It doesn’t feel like using your head voice before T; it’s a different way of phonating.”

So if I was working privately with a student, we would do a lot of experiments with air flow. So like can we get into that head voice if we really reduce the airflow? Like if we kind of go “Ah, ah,” like a very whisper sound, can we get there with the lower note? Can we get there with a much higher note? Like there’s lots of ways to experiment, and I think especially if you’ve been a singer, oof, this can be really challenging if you have been a singer. You have this one way. You’re just trying to get back there, but you have to be creative and curious about what the function of your voice might look like if I was to try something different.

But I will say for the people who are just starting T, there are going to be moments where you might not have access to your voice at all. Like I think this is something that’s not talked about a lot, but one of the side effects of testosterone, especially at the beginning, is water retention in your muscles, so you get a little puffy, but you can also get puffy in your vocal folds. And what happens when you get puffiness in your vocal folds is you don’t get good closure of the vocal folds. And if you don’t get good closure of the vocal folds, you end up with an airy sound like a “Haaaaaah.” And so what a lot of singers especially find is if they try to sing through that, that is where damage can occur because you’re forcing together these puffy vocal folds and all you can do in that moment is just wait. Like work on your musicality, work on your time or your training or something else, and come back to singing once water retention has gone away, and usually you can tell it’s water retention if you try to phonate and there’s a pause between the attempt at phonating and the onset of sound. That’s it, I just really try and spread that message because I don’t think a lot of people know about this water retention thing, and it’s really important.

**Tuck:** What am I not asking about like feminization that perhaps our transfem listeners are screaming at me to talk about even once, but I don’t know because it’s not my experience so I don’t have hyper-specific questions about it?

**Renée:** Yeah, I don’t know. I think that a lot of transfem listeners are probably wondering if I’m qualified to teach this subject because I know it’s a hotly contested thing. A lot of people, rightly so, only want to study with somebody who is also transfeminine, and I’m not. I’ve never had a testosterone puberty, so I don’t know what it’s like to—I don’t know physically, for myself—what it’s like to work against that kind of structure. If you’re really comfortable working with somebody who’s transfeminine like good, okay, that’s why I’m training teachers because I really want there to be more teachers because I’m not gonna be the right teacher for every single person. It’s just not possible. So more teachers is better for everybody.

But I will say that now that it’s been like three years, four years that I’ve been doing this on top of my experience as a voice teacher more broadly, I now have seen every edge case. I’ve seen so many different types of students with every type of issue. And so, you know, working with somebody who has your exact type of marginalization, that can be important to you, but what you want is a teacher who knows how to solve your problems and that might not be the teacher who shares your identity. So what you should ask for in a teacher is have you ever had a student and have you ever helped a student who can’t X, Y, or Z, who has no experience with whatever, like those are things I really, really encourage people to interview their teachers, find the teacher that is going to work for you specifically before you lay your money down.

**Tuck:** Thinking about this sort of representation is not the end all be all of your teachers in all circumstances, there was one point when I was going through baby trans things many years ago where I wanted a queer trans punk therapist and I got one and it was very helpful with baby trans thoughts, but I also kept accidentally dating the same people as him because we were in the same community and then eventually I was like, “Okay, I’m not working on my validity as a trans person. I’m working on other things and I don’t know that this is necessarily helping,” and then I went to a therapist who’s a straight, cis, white, parent lady, but is the best therapist that I’ve ever had and understands enough about me to never fuck up and that’s all that matters, you know? And it’s much more convenient to me to have a therapist that knows how to work through the things that I’m trying to talk with now than someone who you know shares all of my identities but might not have all of the skills, and also who I will keep running into at the bar with the person that I’m also dating and being like LOL, funny!

**Renée:** Yeah, that’s awkward.

**Tuck:** So yeah, I just think that people get really excited about representation. I think that’s a good thing, and sometimes you really do need that. Like people who are folx of color who only work with therapists who are also people of color, I really support that. I think that makes so much sense and such a big difference, but sometimes you just need a therapist or a vocal teacher or a whatever-whatever teacher that knows what they’re talking about and won’t do microaggressions to you, and that can be the line.

**Renée:** I think for voice practice especially for speech, it’s most important to have a teacher who understands your accent and your cultural background, because a lot of my students are from Montreal or from regions around Quebec and I have to be able to speak French with them, and I do. But if I don’t understand what a feminine French accent in Saguenay is versus a masculine French accent in Saguenay, that’s gonna impact my ability to teach that student. And I mean this is a real literal case. I didn’t just pull that place out of my butt, you know? I had a student who was saying, “In Saguenay, the French is extremely masculine-sounding by everybody, so how do I feminize my voice but maintain my connection to my culture?” And that’s a really challenging thing, so rather than looking at identity, necessarily, I always encourage students to find a teacher who really understands their goals in a practical way. Or if you, I mean, if you can communicate those, then that’s all so great. And I’ve worked with people from all over the world. Sometimes it doesn’t matter, but I can’t necessarily work on every language because I just don’t have that knowledge, you know?

**Tuck:** Yeah. Has working with so many trans people and thinking so much about voice gender changed about the way that you think about your gender or the concept of gender?

**Renée:** Yeah, I mean, I think a lot about my own voice, because the more that I listen to myself, which is now happening a lot, thanks to TikTok and other things, the more I think I sound so gender neutral. I think I’ve lost all perspective in terms of what cis people think of me. I think I have a voice that is kind of higher shin pitch and medium in resonance, and really thick vocal fold, kind of clowny sounding and I’m like, that’s me. That’s perfect. I love that. So when other people are coming to me and being like “I want to sound like a woman or like a man,” I’m like what is that? I don’t know. Let’s talk more practically about your goals. You know, gender and voice to me are becoming this divergent fractioning subject that’s just so confusing these days, so I really have to think about it individual by individual.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I mean, I agree. I was actually thinking when I was watching your TikToks that I feel like you also have sort of a neutral voice but I don’t know if that’s true or not, but I was thinking it.

**Renée:** Thank you so much!

**Tuck:** Yeah, it’s so funny though because it really, the rest of how we perceive people and also what we know about their genders, it really does change the way we think exactly how you’re saying, because I’ve definitely had times where—so for example, one of my roommates was on T and it used to be that when I heard, you know, a lower voice in the other part of my house, it was this roommate. When I heard a higher voice, it was that other roommate, and at one point that switched right.

**Renée:** Ooh, interesting.

**Tuck:** And I wouldn’t have noticed that it had switched if I wasn’t just hearing them without seeing who it was and then having to be like who’s talking, you know, in my brain, and so it is a funny test to suddenly hear a voice and be like “Oh wait, who is that? What? Oh, it’s my friend!”

**Renée:** Yeah, one of my best friends started taking T like maybe about four or five months ago—and I swear just this one experience, every time I work with or work or am around new trans people with their different voice experiences it informs my teaching a little bit—but like this person, I always used to say that the older you take T, the more likely it is that you’re going to have a more T voice, a more clockable voice, whatever. But this person’s my age, I’m 35, and his voice dropped so much and he has a really like kind of classically “cis,” quote-unquote sounding voice, and I’m like what is going on here?

And I was talking to another one of my teacher students yesterday and we both agreed that there just isn’t enough research done on this subject, like we really don’t know anatomically, mechanically what is going on with androgenizing the voice at different parts of life. Like even when we’re talking about cis women and menopause, there’s an androgenizing effect that can happen around that time, and a lot of classical singers will go on HRT to avoid those things. The voice is so complex for all people, all genders. That’s why, when students are like, “Please Renée, be the gender police,” I’m like, “Ugh, don’t make me.” I do have a few students who just are like I need you to tell me if this is feminine or masculine enough, but in a perfect world I like to just foster a learning environment. You know what I mean?

**Tuck:** Right, yeah. I know that you said that you like your voice, which I’m so glad. You have all these tools, though, to make it different. Do you ever play around with it like in different circumstances on the phone with strangers where you just try on a different one?

**Renée:** You know, that’s so interesting. Okay, I know what you mean, you’re talking about intentionally modifying my voice just to see I haven’t done a lot of that. Although I have been kind of toying with the idea of doing a TikTok series where I go order coffee in different voices to show people how not an issue it is. I’m sure that I could go to a coffee shop and be like, “Oh, I can have an iced latte,” and no one would blink because truly, nobody cares about you in the best way possible. Nobody cares about you as you’re going through your day.

But I can’t decide if that would be good content or just intentionally boring content, but I will say that I do modify my voice all day long and most people do. Most of us, this is something I teach usually very early on in my courses and in my lessons, you have multiple modes of speech for the different parts of your life. You know? You don’t talk to your dog the same way you talk to your teacher. We’re always changing our voice depending on who we’re talking to and our mood at the time and the wellness of our body. So when you’re sick, you have a particular voice. When you’re energized, you have a particular voice. Like really, really early in my learning about trans voice alteration, this was something that I harnessed a lot, like how do you already use your voice and how can we take that and intentionally move it to these other parts of our lives just to see what happens?

**Tuck:** Yeah, something I thought about a lot a few years ago, and again, I’ve probably mentioned before in the show is that years ago, if I was in what I felt like was a situation with a man where I was just trying to get out of this situation and have him do what I wanted him to do without anything going terribly wrong, my voice would go higher because I’d be a little baby and I’d be like, “Oh no, I’m just a tiny baby. Don’t hurt me!” And I had to really think when I was transitioning that’s like, actually, now if I want men to take me seriously, I need to make my voice lower so I can be like, “Oh, I am one of you. Do what I want.” But it was like a really conscious thing that’s like, “Oh, when I’m threatened, my voice goes higher. And actually, when I’m threatened, I need my voice to go lower,” and I had to like remap that whole thing, and that’s modifying your voice, baby.

**Renée:** That is what it is, 100%. A lot of my commenters call that phenomenon customer service voice, like, “Oh hi, can I just get a couple of,” you know, that’s a very normal phenomenon and it has to do with tension. But also, as you mentioned, just what we learn culturally, like you probably learned that from someone you were modeling your voice after in your life. And actually I say this to a lot of students, like, changing your voice is not faking anything. You’re just maybe taking on the characteristics of another person in your family. So if you were raised as a girl all your life, and you know mom as a girl, then you’re going to be imitating mom’s behaviors, but if you had been raised as your gender or as neutral, you know, in a perfect world maybe you wouldn’t have thought to take on just the characteristics of mom, but you might have also taken on the characteristics of dad or older brother or whoever. And then you would have had a different-sounding voice, you know? So it’s like a lot of times we’ll kind of think of this in like a, this is sort of silly, but like you know the rebirthing concept like, “Okay, now we’re gonna be a little baby again. And now we’re listening to how Dad sounds and what does that sound like,” you know? What’s the process there? And that can lead you down a new path. I don’t know, I just think it’s super exciting all the different pathways that there are for the voice.

**Tuck:** Yeah! This is the part of the show where I ask if there’s anything else you want to talk about that we haven’t talked about yet.

**Renée:** Well, maybe I’ll just let you know that I’m going to be doing a live run of my first course, Trans Vocal Exploration, so this is like a course that was meant to be for everybody. You could be any gender doing whatever you want with your voice; it’s really especially good for people who just want to put their toe in the water and experiment with the voice alteration. But a live run is basically where I’m having a weekly live office hour, so it can be motivating to follow along with the course material, especially if you need that little outside motivation, so that’s going to be starting in February. And then, like I said, I’ve got a couple of masculinization courses coming up, which I’m super excited about, because there’s very little information out there for people who are masculinizing their voice, so I’m super honored to be adding to that knowledge pool.

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

**Renée:** So I thought about this a lot and this is going to be extremely Capricornian of me, but I have like a short-, middle-, and long-term goal for this.

**Tuck:** Oh my gosh, wait, I forgot to ask about you being a double Capricorn, but anyway, go ahead!

**Renée:** Well, here it is. The double Cap is about to jump out with the Aries moon. But yeah, so in my short-term vision of the future, cis people, mind your business, like it’s not about you. Middle-term I would really love for people not to gender babies. Like I would love for a gender reveal party to become like something we expect of teenagers when they decide, and some people, like a wedding, you can decide to do it multiple times in your life or not at all. And it’s always a party. And there’s cake. So that’s like my middle-term.

And my long-term view of gender in the future, it’s like I really think that sex as a concept needs to evolve and that will inform gender, you know? Because I think that right now, these concepts are linked in this really perverse way, and I wish that sex was more exploratory just in general between, especially cis men and the people that they have sex with, because then it wouldn’t be so much about the PIV. It would be about like giving and receiving pleasure and having fun getting to know somebody and then the genitals wouldn’t be so important. And then trans people wouldn’t be in danger. You know what I mean? So I think that gender is going to be blown apart wide open when sex has a chance to evolve, but that’s a long-term vision of the future. Do you know what I mean?

**Tuck:** Yes. So I went on a journey when you were like sex has to evolve, I was like sex as in biological sex. No, sex as in fucking, no, sex as in...

**Renée:** Sorry! Yeah I meant sex as in fucking, yeah.

**Tuck:** Incredible. Yeah. So I think that can be a short-term as well.

**Renée:** Hope so.

**Tuck:** I think we can all go out and evolve fucking and—

**Renée:** Do your part for the trans agenda today! [Both laugh]

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with folx in your community who you think might benefit from it. You can find Renée across social media @RenéeYoxon and you can learn more about their many amazing courses at renéeyoxon.com. You can find us on Twitter and Instagram @gendereveal and at genderpodcast.com. And you can also find us at patreon.com/gender, where we release a newsletter every week and a bonus episode at least once a month. You can also find us at The Bell House on February 1st along with Sabrina Imbler, Mattie Lubchansky, AC Dumlao and Danny Lavery. Tickets are on sale now at TheBellHouseNY.com. They are going fast, so get yours today.

Today’s 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 ends]

**Renée:** So even in the last year my teaching has changed a lot.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I do that with workshops as well, where I change them basically every single time because I learn new things. I both learn new things about gender from making this podcast and being in the world, and I learn new things about teaching, and you know, also a lot of my workshops are for journalists and the New York Times is constantly putting out new examples of how to fuck up your journalism. And so between all of those things it’s updated all the time!

**Renée:** Classic!