**Transcript–– Gender Reveal Season 12, Episode 163: Cassius Adair**

Tuck: Popwink is a trans-owned sticker club and art shop. Sticker club members get to vote on the theme every single month. Recent sticker club themes have included: unhinged Barbie summer, cryptids, and aggressive affection. Sticker club plans start at just five dollars per month and ship for free worldwide. Use the code GENDER20 for 20 percent off your first order, or your first six months of sticker club at popwink.co.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

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

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

Tuck: Hey everyone, hope you’ve all been hanging in there. This week on the show, I am very excited to share my conversation with Dr. Cassius Adair. If you've listened to this podcast for a while, you may have heard Cass's name before. He’s popped up in the credits a couple times as a producer, he was the guest one of our very first Gender Conceal episodes, he was actually an on-mic producer for a very silly special episode with Justin McElroy. Cass is also my business partner at Sylveon, and one of my closest friends, and honestly I'm just so happy that we finally sat down for his official Gender Reveal interview today.

Today ​​on the show, Cass and I talk about a little bit of everything, honestly. Topics include how Cass got into trans studies as an academic field because he got on the wrong flight once in 2011, and some of the fun trans hot takes he's written into peer-reviewed academic articles.

Cassius: So we really wanted to put on paper like "hey, we don't have to constantly pretend this isn't happening in order to fit into the liberal narrative of ‘born this way.’" We could be really, really honest about the fact that some people get transed by a hot anime character, or by their Tumblr BFF, and just simply find that it does not matter. [Laughs]

Tuck: And we also talk about whether "T4T” is getting watered down as a phrase, and how Cass was in a Netflix cult documentary, and also trans fertility and trans guy pregnancy experiences.

Cassius: I feel like I’m “pregnant” gender right now [Laughs], where I’m like: "oh, I'm hungry" gender, "I'm crying all the time" gender, "I need to take a bath right now" gender.

Tuck: I do want to acknowledge I did make Cass record this while he was very sick, because the options were sick and eight or nine months pregnant, or we would never ever get it done ever. So, sorry to Cass for making you record while sick for so long. Sorry to all of you for the slightly sick audio. Also a disclaimer: if you're wearing really good headphones, you will hear my radiator hissing in the background of this episode, and honestly most of the rest of the episodes of this season. Because the truth of the matter is: I am making a podcast in a New York apartment in winter, and that is simply what is going to happen. [Laughs]

By the way, if you enjoy this conversation with Cass, and you want more Tuck and Cass friendship content, great news! We have a full Gender Conceal episode with Cass coming out later this week, and it features all sorts of silly little questions that were just too full of secrets for the main feed. Like “what's one fact about me (Tuck) that you think listeners should know?” and “do you think the DEI work we do is real and helps anyone?” and “what is your most cancelable trans take?” So, listen through to the end credits for more details on how to sign up for that, but basically it's patreon.com/gender.

But before we get to all of that, just wanted to let you know that everything in our merch shop is 10 percent off through the end of the month with promo code TRAINS. T-R-A-I-N-S. The end of the month is only a few days away, and most designs are raising money for Palestinians and refugees, which we love. The rest is raising money for trans orgs, which we also love. It is all at bit.ly/gendermerch, 10 percent off with promo code TRAINS.

And now, it's time for This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender segment chime theme music plays]

Tuck: This Week in Gender, I am talking about a short piece made by another trans person. And then that short piece is actually about another short piece made by another trans person. So, let's start unpacking those layers.

[Ambient music plays]

I have a friend named Jesse Lawson. Jesse lives over in the UK and like many many many trans people all around the world, Jesse has had a really nightmarish time fighting their way past medical transphobia and broken healthcare systems to access gender-affirming care. And as they've been navigating all those obstacles, and dealing with all the dysphoria that comes from being denied access to medical transition, they came across a pamphlet called *Information For the Female to Male* written by one Lou Sullivan in 1980. Side note very quickly: if you're not familiar with Lou Sullivan, please pull up your local library website right now, place a hold on the book *We Both Laughed in Pleasure*.

Anyway, this pamphlet has a section called "How to Look 30 When You Are 30," and Jesse made a really wonderful short radio piece about their experiences with this pamphlet, and these instructions for how to look 30 when you're 30, and also about medical transition and, you know, gender. The piece features a little cameo from Susan Stryker, and also a little cameo from me, so like truly a really incredible range of qualifications there. It's a really great piece. It's less than 10 minutes long, so easy breezy to listen to. It originally aired a couple weeks ago on BBC Radio 4's Short Cuts, so you can find it on the Short Cuts podcast feed, which I recommend generally. Short Cuts is amazing -- a lot of my friends have put fun trans work on there. Or you can find just Jesse's piece at jesselawson.me.

[Ambient music ends]

I will link that in the show notes. I will also link to Lou’s full pamphlet in case you want to peruse the archives.

So ideally you pause this podcast now, you go listen to Jesse's piece, and then you come back. But just in case you're off of Wi-Fi, or your hands are busy or whatever, I will close this out by reading one of Lou's instructions for how to look 30 when you are 30 (and also trans masc, and also not on T). I tried to choose the section that was least predicated on being a rich white guy. But as always, retweets are not endorsements. It was 1980 – we're just gonna cut him some slack. OK, here we go.

[Ambient music plays]

"Above all, walk tall! Head up – Shoulders back – Stomach in. While the temptation is strong to slouch the shoulders forward to minimize the breasts, rather get an effective binder. Your shoulders will appear broader when thrown back. And walking tall will project a serious responsible demeanor and that all-important air of self confidence. Learn to move slower and look ‘m straight in the eye. It is a well-known fact that if you EXPECT to be well received, you will be. If you act as though something is wrong, others will look to find out what it is. If you act as though you have a perfect right, even the most aggressive man will hesitate to confront you. Blasting into and dashing out of the men's room WILL cause alarm among the other guys. You’ll blend in better by sauntering in, glancing at the mirror, using the stall, washing your hands and sauntering out. This attitude on your part will put that unsettling hint of uncertainty into anyone who might question your status, and while they may decide you're a pretty sorry excuse for a man–hell, at least you are one! Be sure they see there isn’t any doubt in YOUR mind about that!

[Ambient music ends]

Thank you Lou. Thank you Jesse. And good luck to Jesse on their top surgery later this week. I'm so excited for them.

This has been This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender segment chime theme music plays]

Tuck: We've got a Theymail message for you today. Theymail messages are of course tiny messages from listeners. There is a link in the show notes if you wanna sign up for one yourself. This message is from Nat Quail Nelson, and it says:

You’ll laugh, you'll cry, you'll turn into a fly! *Flies Flies Flies*, a queer sci-fi comedy visual novel, is now on Steam and itch.io. When Thin Flynn – a closeted trans man – wakes up as a housefly, he’ll have to come out to his dads and solve the mystery of his transformation…all without having a voice.

That’s *Flies Flies Flies*, spelled F-L-I-E-S.

Tuck: OK. One more quick ad, and then we'll get to the interview. Here we go.

[Ambient music plays]

Believe it or not, I'm a pretty private person. I don't like to share intimate details with people I just met. I certainly don't want strangers to be able to look up my home address, or my family members’ names, or any other personal info, really. And that's why I continue to use DeleteMe. DeleteMe routinely scans hundreds of data broker websites to make sure that my personal information is not easily available online. DeleteMe can also scrub info tied to deadnames and other aliases. You can join today at joindeleteme.com/genderreveal, and use the code TUCK20 to get 20 percent off your entire order. That is TUCK20 for 20 percent off at joindeleteme.com/genderreveal.

[Ambient music ends]

[Gender Reveal theme music by Breakmaster Cylinder plays]

Tuck: Cassius Adair is a writer, academic, and audio producer from Virginia. He currently teaches at The New School in New York City, but lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Some of his scholarly work is very serious stuff about trans history, white supremacy, and histories of technology. And some of it is about how trans guy sex is hot and fun.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays out and ends]

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

Cassius: My favorite thing to say is I'm a boring guy. [Laughs] I’m just a boring guy.

Tuck: Great. You wrote a scholarly paper where you talk about describing yourself as a “chronic transsexual.” What does that mean?

Cassius: Yeah, I love to take my medical diagnosis and make it into an identity. But actually because I think it's really funny to recontextualize a dumb idea that doctors had as a serious thing for me to say about myself, and I also think that both words are very fake. Like “chronic” doesn't really mean anything in the context of transness. And “transsexual” is a game that we're all playing, right? [Laughs] About what does sex mean, and what does transing it mean. So that's my other fun self-descriptor. I mean, if I had to fill out a form, I'd probably be like “fine, I’m trans.” You know, just use “trans.” [Laughs]

Tuck: You're also a scholar, you're Dr. Cassius Adair…

Cassius: That's right.

Tuck: …how did you get involved in trans studies?

Cassius: So I got into trans studies in part because I got on the wrong flight In 2011. [Laughs] I got into graduate school in Bloomington, Indiana, and then I bought a flight to Bloomington, Illinois to attend the welcome weekend for graduate students. And then I called them the morning of and I was like “hi, I actually cannot come to your graduate program because I am too stupid; I bought a flight to Bloomington, Illinois, and your university is called University of Indiana – different state. And they were like “that happens all the time, no worries. What we could do is fly you out a different weekend when there happens to be a trans history conference; we get the vibe from your application materials you might be into that.” And I was like “cool… clocked by the admissions committee…love it love it love it.”

But I didn't know that this conference was the 20th anniversary of Sandy Stone's famous article “The Empire Strikes Back,” which is her response to Janice Raymond's book *The Transsexual Empire*, which is a TERF book. Anyway, it ended up being in a room with Sandy Stone, Susan Stryker, and Kate Bornstein, which I think is a very funny combo of the founding mothers of trans studies. So I got brought into this collective of junior trans studies scholars hanging out with the old moms of trans studies right before I started my graduate program.

I ended up not going to Indiana, but it was really interesting understanding that trans studies is both an academic field and kind of a survival clique of trans academics trying to take care of each other, and figure out what the hell we're all doing here. None of our programs actually want us to exist, and it would be better for a lot of our schools if we left [Laughs] and did not produce work that made them feel uncomfortable or challenged. And did not demand health insurance that covers our bodies, and stuff like that. So it's good to have solidarity under those conditions.

Tuck: Yeah. So some of your scholarly work has to deal with race, white supremacy, anti-blackness, things like that. As a white scholar, how do you approach that work, and how do you view your role in all of that?

Cassius: That's a really good question. I was actually recently asked that in a conference setting, where I am fairly sure I was the only white scholar there at all. And the way that I think about it is that I think that my job is not to explain how blackness works. I think that my job is to explain how whiteness works, and a lot of the way that whiteness works is by deciding that blackness is abhorrent, is bad, it is something that we should try to eliminate.

I think that I am somewhat uniquely positioned to help translate that information, in part because my family has been in the United States for hundreds of years. I'm descended from settler colonialism 1.0 in the United States. I also come from southern family, and my family is definitely part of the legacy of slavery. And as a scholar, what that means is that I really think that my job is to write in such a way that I can tell the best truth. Sometimes that means telling truths that actually indict my own family in my own legacy, and I think that's correct – I think that's just the honest thing to do. And if I were to not do those things, and I was to write a bunch of articles that somehow didn't touch that, I feel like I simply wouldn't be accurate about, for example, United States history, or the history of gender.

I don't think that everybody has necessarily a moral obligation to do X type of scholarship – there's lots of ways we can contribute knowledge to the world, or activism to the world – but I think that for me, if I'm asking a question like “hey, how did this racial formation come to benefit people like me?” I have to answer that honestly. I cannot be like “oh it's all good…multiculturalism…we all held hands.” [Laughs] That is not what happened! And that evolution to kind of coming to that place really took place over, I would say, many years of my graduate career.

I mean, part of that was I went to a conference and I was talking about how “racism works like this.” And someone raised their hand and they’re like “you're not talking about racism, you’re talking about anti-blackness in particular.” And I was like “oh shit, I just got called out in a big room with a lot of people in it.” I actually know who that scholar is now, I met that person later and we’ve exchanged emails. I said “hey, you were super right, you made that article good instead of crappy, you made my work better…and I also felt really nervous when you said that.” And they were like, "yeah, well, you should've felt nervous, ‘cause you were wrong." [Laughs] I was like “yeah, cool, it's fine.” We actually worked it out. And I was like, “oh, once I got over the anxiety of maybe being wrong if I try to talk about something that isn't my identity, and realize that I can trust that a call out is something I can handle and make my work better,” I was able to tell the truth more and more in my scholarship.

I actually did all the coursework for the African-American studies certificate in grad school, but I didn't sign up to get the piece of paper, ‘cause it feels kind of wack to call myself an Af-Am scholar, when actually I'm a scholar of why my own people are bad. I'm not a scholar of African-American history and culture, and I think that's like a really important distinction to me as someone who thinks that anti-racism is a product of justice, and requires a certain amount of unearthing of white supremacy, and like making it clear. And black people aren’t people who need to know that, right? It's white people who need to know that.

Tuck: Yes, absolutely. I was trying to decide which of your scholarships to ask about and prioritize, and I felt like the easiest way to do that is to just ask what you feel like your proudest or most influential moment of scholarship has been.

Cassius: I mean, I'm trying to write this book, but I have to have a baby first – because my brain doesn't work until the baby’s out of it – so let's just put the book aside. One day the book – I hope – will be the thing I care about the most. It's also where I'm trying to work out some of these issues around whiteness, and asking “why is the history of transness so white in the United States?” We have so many archives of trans stuff, and a lot of that stuff is newsletters from old trans communities. And it's white women in upstate New York talking to each other, right? You look at all those old photographs and they're really, really white. That's because when we use the word “trans” or tell trans history, a lot of times we’re relying on archives that are generated by white middle-class people, who had things like self-publishing resources. It's just very, very clear and evident.

On the other hand, if we are like “we’re good trans scholars, and we're going to write down the history of the United States and transgender lives, we really want to start with Marsha P., right? and with Sylvia.” That feels just so weird. It feels like we're doing this Google Doodle version of trans history when we're trying to look like we've always been really racially integrated. In what universe would trans community be the only racially integrated community of the 20th century? [Laughs] That just isn't true. We have to take seriously how racial segregation and class warfare fundamentally creates multiplicity within transness – there isn't one trans history. Because in the United States we can never have one community history that isn’t bifurcated by race. So that’s one thing I’m trying to talk about in this larger project.

I think of stuff that's out, let me say my T4T article, as it's probably my most read article. It is full of sex jokes, it has a catchy title…

Tuck: Which is?

Cassius: “All the Trans Guys Are Just Dating Each Other: The Transgender Craze Seducing Your Sons,” or is the other way around? [Laughs]

Tuck: It’s the other way around, but it doesn't matter.

Cassius: It’s fine, we wrote two titles and we like them both. [Laughs]

Tuck: We talk about that article on the second episode ever of Gender Conceal, our patron-only bonus podcast, so I don't wanna ask you too much about it. But I do want to underline that you did write an article subtitled “All the Trans Guys Are Just Dating Each Other” with a trans guy who you were dating, which is very funny.

Cassius: Yes.

Tuck: Do you want to say more about that?

Cassius: Yeah, that was a good joke. We hadn't been dating for that long when it happened either, and so in my head I was like “cool, glad I am putting my new relationship into peer review, let's see how that goes.” [Laughs] Academic publishing takes so long that I was like “I hope we’re still together when this comes out, because otherwise it's gonna be real awkward and everyone's gonna gossip about us.” But honestly, who cares if we’re gossiped about, that’s fine.

That article was also a piece where we both put on the table a lot of big contentions about how we feel transness works, one of which is like “it's totally fine if you see a trans person and you think they're cool and hot and that makes you wanna transition.” And that feels like an obvious thing to say to you, my cool hot trans friend, right? [Laughs] But to cis people, that's a real threat that we actually might be influencing each other, we might actually form social relationships with each other that make it feel fun and normal to transition. So we really wanted to put on paper like "hey, we don't have to constantly pretend this isn't happening in order to fit into the liberal narrative of ‘born this way.’" We could be really, really honest about the fact that some people get transed by a hot anime character, or by their Tumblr BFF, and just simply find that it does not matter. [Laughs] Because cis people come to their genders those ways too. Cis people are allowed to be like “oh that's a cool girl, I wanna wear the same as skirt as her.” Why can't trans people have that experience?

Tuck: That’s the concept of models, of fashion modeling. [Both laugh]

Cassius: Exactly. So that contention was really important. And also the contention that trans people fuck each other, and that also is not aberrant or weird or even surprising. Trans people having sex with one another is a pretty literal interpretation of T4T and we also don't think that we should water down T4T to exclude the erotic. We should have a conception of trans community in solidarity that allows us to fuck, and doesn't have to be all like “T4T: part of trans awareness week by Microsoft,” right? [Tuck laughs] We wanted to be unassimilable to cis people…

Tuck: Right.

Cassius: …and so we wanted to put fucking on the table as something that cis people have to accept about us. Making it a little bit harder for us to be corporatized and flattened out.

Tuck: Do you think that we're getting close to that? Because as you and I and listeners to this podcast know well, T4T is a Craigslist fucking term…

Cassius: Right.

Tuck: …that has been since used for other things…

Cassius: Yep.

Tuck: …thanks in large part to Torrey Peters and others. But do you think that maybe the sex is getting taken out of it entirely now?

Cassius: I don't know about “entirely.” I do feel like there's a Lexification of a lot of stuff, you know? [Laughs] That there's a way in which people's desire for community space is not built around sex reflects anxiety about sex and sexuality in a way that I find a little bit misplaced. And that sometimes it’s just coming from 19 year olds, right? [Laughs] Like, you wanna find a place that doesn't feel sexually fraught because you're 19, that's OK! But that doesn't mean that all of us need to excise erotic as a part of who we are. I mean it's really “no kink at pride” discourse at the end of the day, right?

Tuck: Yeah.

Cassius: And I think that I am famously a person who is awkward about sex, who feels weird about it actually a lot of the time. And whose entrance into having sex while sober is pretty recent, to be frank. Let’s be very real about who I am. I think it’s been really important to me to realize that some of my knee jerk anxiety about like “oh no, we're not allowed to be sexual” is actually social oppression. And some of it is my own trauma that I can deal with in therapy, and none of it is good politics, right? [Laughs] Me being like “oh no, we need to clean ourselves up for the mainstream” is ultimately about me and not a good prescription for how we get free. Liberation does not mean we like have to keep it in our pants all the time, and I think that it is true that T4T originated in an erotic way, but I think that there is a an impulse to make sure that whatever we put on our flier can be found by like our parents on a computer or something like that. I just don't think that's a good strategy.

Tuck: I did want to ask you about your book. I know it's not finished, but can you give people just a general concept of vaguely what it's about?

Cassius: Yeah, sure. One of the things that I am fascinated by is the mix of meme and statistically true that a lot of white trans women are computer programmers.

Tuck: Mhmmm.

Cassius: In the last five years, this has expanded to have more nonbinary people and transmasculine people, but historically it is a very transfeminine phenomenon. I got really interested in this when I started either just telling people in digital studies like “oh by the way did you know that like a trans woman invented this thing or invented that thing.” And people who did history of computing were like “no we did not know that.” And I was like “that's really weird, because I know that from Wikipedia. I haven't done deep research on this.” This was about ten years ago. And people were like “oh you should write about that, that's so interesting.” And I was like “oh it's interesting to you, because you think that trans people don't exist outside of sex work or outside of entertainment. You think that trans people have a very particular slot in our economy, and in our social world, and so you can't imagine a trans woman working in an office.” But I know that white middle class people work in offices, right? [Laughs] And some of them might be trans. Like wow, what a surprise.

And again, it’s that problem that sometimes when we talk about trans history, we talk about these cool radical activists. Meanwhile, we have all of these archives of people who are not cool or radical or activists. People who worked in offices, and nonetheless were trans. [Laughs] Were just as trans as the people who were cool radical activists. So how do we talk about that as a community? Some of these people worked in these big companies making computers, and some of the computers were used for bad stuff. Also, computer industries are not morally good, necessarily. It's cool that we have email, it's not cool that we have drones, in my opinion. So how do we talk about this really complex sort of morally fraught space in a way that acknowledges marginalized people have worked in these spaces, and how do we tell the truth about that without being like “well these were just bad people who worked in these bad companies,” because that’s not what I believe either. And I say this also as someone who works at a university, and I'm like “wow, it's actually really evil to work at a university that is actively gentrifying and kicking people out of their neighborhoods.” And also my job is to teach students how to have feelings, so I don't think that’s evil, right? [Laughs] So I’m trying to hold the complexity of big institutions when I write this.

But I think that what's really important to me about the book is that I want people to know how many trans people are involved in these industries. I want people to know that these industries – in part because they had trans employees advocating – became some of the earliest places that had trans-inclusive benefits in the United States. So the private sector took over where the state would not in terms of giving people healthcare and stuff like that. I also want people to know how those histories of money and whiteness shaped what we think transness is. Because a lot of the people who worked in those companies went on to found or to be part of trans rights organizations in the 1990s and 2000s. So transness started to look like “we're not smashing the state, because we actually are kind of doing fine in the state during the Clinton administration.” It's really, really important to me that people understand that corporate middle class white narrative as not something that we should just pretend doesn't exist – because it makes us look too moderate or whatever – but it’s something that we should really take seriously. And it’s something that implicates how and when we get integrated into mainstream culture, like when we're allowed to be at the Democratic National Committee or whatever, you know?

Tuck: Yeah, I think that's a really good takeaway about how we think about transness today. Is there anything so far that you think is an important takeaway about how we think about tech today?

Cassius: Tech has really been allowed in the last, I would say 40 to 50 years to seem like it is an inclusive, cool, innovative space. And tech companies I think were very early in figuring out that if we integrate parts of the counterculture – like the long-haired hippie or the feminist woman – we can hire those people. And a lot of those people are smart, and they’ve got new ideas, and they're really good at making cool posters that can become part of our marketing and our branding. [Laughs] There's really good scholarship on this actually by some digital studies people. But in part because tech was being built up in California – in this geographic heart of the counterculture – they figured out how to make diversity into corporate advantage. And they kept doing this, and it was never true that those tech spaces became bastions of inclusion. Trans people were just another wave of like “oh we can integrate these weirdos, we can hire a handful of them, and put them on posters and it will really make us seem like we are so progressive.” [Laughs] “And maybe people will look the other way when we do things like sponsor apartheid, or we do things like generate huge amounts of surveillance technology. We can't be doing that if we're also the good guys with the trans awareness week, right?” [Laughs] And so I think there's a real sort of classic balance that these corporations are striking between trying to look good on the one hand to liberals, and then using that to do whatever they want. [Laughs]

Tuck: I just think that’s so interesting. Because you know and I know from our work together that often tech companies that employ trans people are *so* much further behind in 2023 understanding even the basics of transness than other types of companies.

Cassius: Yep.

Tuck: So I'm like, “if they were doing this before everyone else, how did they go backwards, even?” But anyway, we can talk about that another time. [Cassius laughs]

One more question before we can talk more about our business. The thing about the Academy is to me…

Cassius: That it’s bad?

Tuck: …seems bad. But also other jobs are bad, so what can you do? It's bad. I was wondering (once again) if you have advice for trans people thinking about entering academia. And I'm curious within that if the advice is any different for trans people who are thinking about entering trans studies or something adjacent, versus people who are trans and want to study something completely different, but are going into academia.

Cassius: I think that for people who are in the sciences, to some extent that's a really different setup. Because you join a lab, and then you have this weird boss hierarchy structure. And also the hiring and firing is really different – in the STEM world, a lot of times how people survive is that they find a PI or somebody who is their lab director – who is not shitty – and that person protects them for like seven years. And then if that person leaves, you follow them to their school, because you’re working on their project and it has a really different setup. There's also – kind of akin to the way that there are surprising/unsurprising numbers of transfem folks in computer programming – there's also trans people all throughout STEM fields. I don't know them, because we don't publish in the same journals. We don’t go to the same conferences. But I'm like, “oh, you're trans and you know everything about Saturn…dope!” [Laughs] That rules, that means there's a pipeline now, because everybody can work in your Saturn lab and go study Saturn's rings, and they probably won't be kicked out for being a trans person. So there is some amount of informal mentorship that happens very differently in STEM fields.

In the humanities – and particularly in trans studies – I think that there's still a lot of theory and a lot of discourse in the humanities that is explicitly transphobic in the guise of feminism. I work with a lot of trans students, and there are many people who will say to me “I won't apply to a women's studies PhD program,” or “I don't want to do gender studies, because I’ll be sitting in classrooms having to read TERFism, basically…”

Tuck: Hmmm.

Cassius: “...that will be in my intro to grad studies 101 seminar, as if we're all supposed to be like ‘yes, this is how feminism works.’” And I'm like, “yeah you're right, that's probably true.” There are some departments that are aware of that, and they're trying to make their curriculum not so explicitly trans exclusionary. And then there are others that are like “well, this is just how feminism works: you gotta read these TERFs.” [Laughs]

Tuck: Wow.

Cassius: I think sometimes trans people can find it more comfortable to be in a field that is less explicitly about gender. One thing is just to think very carefully about who’s in the room, who's around you, what that department is signaling its values are. You can often see that right now by who has a department statement up about Palestine. It's actually a pretty good proxy for who's gonna cover your ass, and who’s gonna actually protect you. So I would actually read those department statements, because that means that everybody voted on something that isn’t horrible. [Laughs]

One thing that’s been really interesting in the last, I would say like six or seven years, is that there's literally a Facebook group that’s called Trans PhD Network. And it’s people from all different fields. It was set up by this person Avery Everhart, who is now a professor in Canada. I've actually gotten a lot out of that group, just meeting other people who are in the Academy who are trans, including people who are like “I happen to be trans and I study Saturn” but also people who are like “I am a trans studies person, and I need to build my network.” And building those relationships has been so so so important and valuable. You can't make it in this field if you don't know ten other people like you; you really need to have a group, you have to have a clique. That clique doesn’t all have to be trans people, but it does have to be people who are not transphobic. Find those ten people…you can make a whole academic career out of ten friends because that's the number who read academic articles anyway… [Tuck laughs] …you gotta have ten friends. [Laughs] Maybe that's my real advice.

Tuck: Really important tip, thank you. So famously we have a business together called Sylveon, where we help newsrooms and other businesses be more normal about trans people. One of the things that you've gotten to think about is…a weird freaky cult?

Cassius: Oh yeah!

Tuck: So one of your Sylveon jobs is to work on this podcast about this gendery cult, that later turned into a Netflix documentary that you're famously in, and then also a different documentary about the same thing that you weren't in, which has led to a lot of confusion on my part. A lot of people texted me about this documentary, so I've heard bits and pieces but for the most part whenever someone would be like “have you heard about this?” I'll be like “yeah, Cass worked on it.” But then I never looked into it or asked you to explain it to me. So here's my question: what's the deal with that cult? Like, what's going on?

Cassius: Right!? It's so weird! I want to preface this by saying I'm not a medical expert at all. [Laughs]

Tuck: No.

Cassius: I believe there was a Vanity Fair article that actually started to break some of the story, so a lot of this is downstream of original reporting, and I don't wanna steal that from the journalist. But what seems to have happened is that there's a cult called Twin Flames Universe that purports to help you find your soulmate – everybody has their twin flame out there. And they have trainings and seminars, and it's sort of classic multi level marketing. The fun twist to this one is that If you are going after the sort of typical multi level marketing audience, you're gonna get a lot of middle class, middle-aged women, and you're not gonna get as many men. But if your whole deal is “we're gonna help you find your heterosexual partnership,” you literally cannot *not* have men involved, right? [Laughs] Heterosexuality is the main core concept of this group, and they really believe that everybody's twin flame has to be in sort of gender opposition to you. So if you're a woman, you're gonna find a man.

As they realized that there weren’t enough men joining the group, and as they realized they had to set you up with someone in the group (so they could keep these matches seeming authentic to their spiritual faux-beliefs) they adjusted their ideology. So it was like: “OK, well it's fine if you aren't dating a man as your twin flame; you just have to be dating someone with masculine energy. So that changed some of the vibes a little bit. [Laughs] Suddenly you could be assigned a twin flame…because the group did a lot of assigning, like “this is who you’re meant to be with”... a twin flame who was also a female assigned at birth person. Even if you were like “I'm a heterosexual woman looking for true heterosexual love, which you and your group have said is the only kind of real love, so clearly it has to be straight right?” And then the person who would be assigned the role of the masculine partner would allegedly be pressured to do things like taking on new names, or in some cases taking testosterone in order to sort of set up this seemingly heterosexual balance.

Which to me, was really not what I'm all about [Laughs] in terms of why I wanted to take testosterone. It was not because somebody told me that I needed to be in heterosexual partnership and express my masculine energy to find my true feminine twin flame. That was not my whole deal. But I also sort of saw in this story the risk that somebody would see this story and say “see, look at this this is proof that transness is part of homophobia!” If these people are being forced to be straight by being trans, that means that transness is a way to trick people into being straight. And that transness really is part of this creepy cult – that you could be coerced into looking trans, or being trans, or taking T or whatever it is by these external forces, then you can be unbrainwashed from it, because it’s just brainwashing. And I was like “yeah, that's not true in like 99.99999 percent of cases, it just does seem vaguely true here on this YouTube cult – so let’s talk about that.” [Laughs]

So what I was really trying to do – first in the work with the podcast, and then in the doc – was basically saying that transition as I know it (and as trans people know it) is not about conforming to a masculine or feminine energy in order to find your heterosexual life partner. It is about trying to figure out who you are, and so if somebody's telling you “hey you, you're supposed to be more masculine,” that's actually exactly the same as the whole cisgender straight world telling you “hey you, you're supposed to be more X.” And therefore could not be more opposite to what trans people are trying to talk about.

Because I just wanted people to really understand that the deal here is not “oh – they took T, and you took T, therefore you're the same” but rather “I took T cause I wanted to, some of them took T because they were told they had to; that's actually the opposite.” So, making sure people understood that intention and choice matters a lot more than like “hey, did you take the same meds.” And I think it worked, because people from like middle school have been emailing me being like “good job” and I'm like “cool, I guess you understood what I was trying to say. [Laughs] It does seem easy to misunderstand how weird cults are different from the pretend trans cult that is a made-up right wing lie. But I think people figured it out.

Tuck: OK, great. So as long as I've known you, you've been trans. You've also been organizing your life around being pregnant someday. Was there a moment…

Cassius: Huh! I guess that’s true, yeah.

Tuck: …was there a moment in your entire gender journey where you thought you'd have to pick one or the other of these two things? Or have you always been like “I *will* have it all!”? [Cassius laughs] Lean in, baby.

Cassius: No way, I was told the day I got my first shot in 2011 they said “well, before we even talk to you about testosterone, we should probably let you know that you're going to be infertile, and you should think about freezing your eggs first.” I was 22, and freezing your eggs cost $10,000, which is an amount of money that was an absolutely astronomical amount of money to me at that time. [Laughs] Even still – I'm like what is $10,000? There's no way [Laughs] that I'm gonna make a choice that is about one day having a baby if literally in your other hand you're holding a syringe full of testosterone, and being like “or you could have this.” Which is basically what it felt like. [Laughs] I don't know if the doctor was literally holding T in her other hand, but it really really felt that way, and as soon as I was like “no, I'm good,” they were like “cool, you wanna take your shot? Like pull down your pants, let’s do it right now.” It was very immediate, and I actually thought when they started asking me those questions that it was gonna be a little bit more gatekeepy, but it was literally like “if you agree that it's fine that you will never have a baby, we’ll shoot you up right now.” [Laughs] I was like “alright, it's fine.” And it's really funny because that’s all bullshit, like it’s not true at all. [Laughs]

Tuck: Yeah! I mean that's what I wanna ask about. So there's so much misinformation about medical transition and fertility, which I would argue is a combination of straight-up transphobia, and doctors not being told anything, or taught anything at any point.

Cassius: Yeah.

Tuck: And I wanna be clear: I definitely have had trans friends who have struggled with infertility. But in those conversations, all of them have been like “I do not have any indication that this is a result of transition, it seems like that's just how I was going to be, regardless of what my sex or gender was.”

Cassius: Yeah.

Tuck: Can you talk about your experience and process with actually getting pregnant, after being told at 22 that you were going to be infertile?

Cassius: Yeah. I for some reason at about age 28 – which maybe that's why, because that's around the time I met you – my body started saying “hey, you're supposed to have a baby.” Which is like the *weirdest* experience – I don't even think I recommend it, because it is like something is taking over your brain. And I was like “I guess biological clocks are real, but that seems stupid and fake, I don't know.” I don't have any explanation for it, it's just like weird sci-fi shit. But I started having these persistent thoughts like I should at least learn if I am able to do this. If I’m going to be infertile, I should probably just deal with this in therapy and have a grieving period, and move on with my life and have more money. [Laughs] So I went to the endocrinologist, and they were like “hey, we’ll refer you to a reproductive endocrinologist that’ll literally just tell you.”

And I went to this doctor, who turned out to be the best doctor I've ever had, weirdly in Virginia -- which again, not known for trans rights or whatever. But actually there's this dope endocrinologist and she was like “oh, that's so interesting – I really am curious about transmasculine fertility, I’ve been reading all these papers about it, come on through!” [Laughs] She hooked me up to an ultrasound, and basically just counted all my egg follicles. And she was like “oh you just have like a weirdly high number of egg follicles, there's nothing wrong with anything – all of your anatomy is incredibly normal, I’m actually going to stop counting your follicles because you have so many that you're beyond the bell curve of fertile and you're just genetically like that, and there's nothing we can do about it, you're gonna have a baby if you feel like it, have a nice day. [Laughs] And she was like “I can't guarantee that there aren't other parts of your anatomy that might make this complicated -- like hormone levels and stuff -- but at least physiologically, you have all the parts to do this, and in fact you have weirdly too many other parts…you have lots of the parts. [Laughs]

So from then on, I was carrying around this knowledge that the doctor that I first saw when I was 22 was wrong; that my egg reserve is really high, so I could have lots and lots of tries. It's not like I'm going into early menopause. If you haven’t had a period in a decade, you don't really know if you're going into early menopause, because you're kind of on perma-menopause. So you have to figure out what's going on on the inside, and get a look under the hood a little bit. But it turns out it was totally good, and really I just needed to be in a place where I could make those things happen.

Like, my partner at the time was not super stoked about having a kid. I was living in a group house where most of what we did was smoke weed. [Laughs] It wasn't necessarily the place to have a baby, and I was like “OK, well I'm just gonna put this information in my back pocket.” I remember coming out of that doctor’s office, and I actually recorded a voice memo that was like “holy fucking shit, I can actually just do this whenever I want to – the choice is not up to that person who prescribed me testosterone, the choice now up to me.” I think that feeling of reproductive freedom really – and I don't know how to describe it – it's like super, super powerful. It’s made me into such an intense reproductive justice person. Everyone should get to feel that they can have a baby if they want to, and they don't have to if they don't want to, because it's such an important feeling. I don't think this doctor meant to, but I had this coercive experience of being told like “you don't get to have babies because you're trans, don't even think about it, cast it aside.” And I couldn't comprehend that as painful at 22, but looking back I feel so sorry for me. Like, what a sad thing that I had to feel.

Tuck: Totally. And not to immediately make this not about you, but it's also so dangerous because there's so many trans people that get pregnant because they were told by their doctors that they were gonna be infertile, so they're like “why would I need birth control?”

Cassius: Yeah, totally.

Tuck: And then they're pregnant, because it turns out it’s fine. [Laughs]

Cassius: Yeah, absolutely! I remember when I started PrEP, I was like “I guess I still need condoms, right? Like I guess? Right?” [Laughs] But like actually yeah, the answer is yes. [Laughs] I'm very glad I did not get pregnant during the many times I had sex without condoms. [Laughs]

Tuck: Yeah.

Cassius: I was lucky – not informed – during that period of time.

Tuck: Totally. I'm sure we've all heard or experienced horror stories of being a guy or other masculine-presenting person who needs to go to the OB/GYN for whatever reason, and being turned away, or questioned, or mistreated. What has your experience been like as a pregnant guy in the medical system?

Cassius: My experience is so funny because the main trans physician in town is also an OB/GYN who has a lot of baby delivery experiences, and so I was like “oh, I'll just go to her.” The weird thing – and why I'm not working with her anymore – is she's also very fat-phobic. [Laughs]

Tuck: Hmmmmm.

Cassius: And I've never been fat before, so I didn't have the experience of knowing this about her, and I've really never viscerally experienced anti-fatness like on my body. So I had heard this rumor about her, and I was like “oh, that doesn't apply to me.” Like, you know how privilege works when you’re like “this doesn't apply to me, so I’m gonna kind of ignore it a little bit”? Just stupid privileged boy shit like “I'm gonna be fine.” But actually I saw her and got really picked on about how much weight I had gained in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. And yeah, I was eating only cheeseburgers, because I needed to constantly eat or I would feel like I was gonna throw up. And cheeseburgers were around – it was food that was there – and my body was craving really high protein, really high sugar food. And also it's fine to gain weight when you're pregnant, and it’s also just fine to gain weight, period. Like, who cares.

But it was really striking to have his experience and be like “oh, you're like the best doctor at trans baby-having, but you also don't know that it's OK for me to be 20 pounds heavier…that doesn’t make any sense to me.” So we ended up working with midwives. We left that system, even though that was a trans-inclusive system, but I mean it's the same problem where if there's one person who does trans med, and that person isn't a great fit for you for whatever reason, like culturally or whatever, and you don't have other choices…

Tuck: You're in their polycule, et cetera. [Cassius laughs]

Cassius: Exactly! Precisely, right. So we really had to get out of the medical system because none of the other doctors who did labor and delivery were trans-competent enough. But the midwives were, and they benefited basically from this the whole time. All these other trans guys are like “wait a second, fuck this – we're gonna go with midwives” and all the midwives are like “great, we’ll just catch ‘em all…[Laughs]...like, we’ll grab ‘em.” So now I'm working with this really cool team of people who I super love, who I'm obsessed with, who have super dope politics. The only annoying thing is I am in credit card debit, because I have to pay them…[Tuck laughs]...and my insurance does not cover seeing the cool people.

Tuck: Hmmmmm.

Cassius: I just happen to have the financial privilege to put that shit on the credit card and pay it off over time, and not a lot of people do, so.

Tuck: Yeah. So in addition to the midwives, where have you looked for community resources, information, stuff like that? Because I know that there are a lot of sort of individual trans guys thinking about pregnancy, and having a hard time finding resources and finding each other.

Cassius: Yeah. There's a couple of different Facebook groups. I don't member the name of the Facebook group offhand, but it's like “Trans Birthing and Breastfeeding”…

Tuck: Totally.

Cassius: …or “Trans Birthing People” or something. And there's one that's the same group name, but “: no allies”. [Both laugh] Which actually I kind of like better, to be honest. I love a “: no allies”. And those groups were pretty helpful, or were helpful at first. A lot of what that was helpful for was like “hey, how long did it take you to be able to get pregnant after stopping T?” Which was a question that no one can answer because it’s different for every single body, but it was really helpful to see the range, for example. So my expectations were kind of like “oh, somewhere in this bucket, that's useful.” Or just seeing a lot of people's stories, and I spent a lot of time on there before I actually got pregnant.

Since I've gotten pregnant, to be honest it has been more helpful to connect with people who are really close to where I am in due date. So I'm part of a Discord server of mostly cisgender women – I think there's like one trans guy and some non-binary people, but it is probably 80 cis women – and we all have due dates in January 2024. So every week, we can all post the same stuff like “oh man, this is a really hard week – did everyone start vomiting this week?” Or like “hey, does anyone have the weirdest vaginal discharge right now, damn…it's so fucking gross.” And actually I needed that more than I needed people to talk to me in particular about my gender, because a lot of what you're going through, it isn't actually gender-specific.

It's like pregnancy is its own gender, sort of. It's like…I feel like I’m “pregnant” gender right now [Laughs], where I’m like: "oh, I'm hungry" gender, "I'm crying all the time" gender, "I need to take a bath right now" gender. And so I think in terms of solidarity and support, I've been so lucky that the people on this Discord channel have been trans-inclusive. I really can't imagine the last nine months without people who live in my phone to whom I am like “wow, I just ate so much pizza,” and they're like “yes, same!” [Laughs] I get so much pizza support, you know? And it doesn't really matter that much that my nipples are different from theirs, at the end of the day. It's really fine. Some people on there can't chest feed either, so we’re just part of a different group and it's not a big deal.

Tuck: Sorry, we have to go back so I can say "I need to take a bath" gender, splish/splash pronouns. [Cassius laughs] I try to ask this every time we talk with trans parents, so my last question before the last official questions and then Patreon rapidfire questions – but you know, we're getting there. My last question: what's your plan for handling the baby gender of it all?

Cassius: God, I know. I am thinking about this all the time; it's very annoying. I know what the baby’s genitals are, because when you go do an ultrasound, unless you ask them “please do not tell us about baby genitals” they will tell you about baby genitals. And we were both kind of like “well, who cares – we should probably just know, maybe just for anticipating what we need to learn.” We also made a decision to use they/them pronouns for the baby out with people, and at some point my partner was like “you know, I feel like I want to practice other pronouns too, because like they might not end up being a they/them, and they/them is not actually a universal neutral.” Some people are aggressively not a they and actually both of us are aggressively not theys, so we were like “let's not do this thing where we *assign* them they – that's also a gender assignment.” So when we talk about the baby now, we intentionally mix up pronouns. So we do a mix of he, she, and they. We did not do any neopronouns for the baby, but maybe we should.

Tuck: Yeah. Splish/splash coming soon.

Cassius: Splish/splash coming soon – maybe we’re just being really biased and fucked up…[Both laugh]...we are the oppressors. I think that as the baby has gotten bigger and bigger, and it's more and more real that they're actually going to come out, I think both of us have gradually shifted to using pronouns that are closer to what we know is their sex assignment and I think that’s kind of subconscious and I’m like “hmm, we should probably go back to mixing it up a little bit more so we don't forget to mix it up.” [Laughs] As of this moment, I actually don't know what we’re gonna do when they come out. I think that I'm so used to saying “they” that I might I use a lot of “they” for a while. And I don't think we're gonna put "it's a boy" or "it's a girl" on their birth announcement email that we send to our jobs or whatever the fuck, you know? But I feel strong annoyance by people who make all of the choices like I'm annoyed with like all of the choices for baby gender so I think I'm just gonna have to pick one that like occurs to me at the moment of birth and just vibe, because I don't wanna choose my baby’s gender, but they can't talk yet. [Laugh] There’s nothing I can do about that.

This is how I feel: I feel like me as a parent deciding how to introduce my baby to people who will take that gender really seriously…

Tuck: Right.

Cassius: …is annoying to me.

Tuck: Yeah.

Cassius: And me just telling people “hey, you know we're all trans here, can you be cool?” That's the best I can do, I think, as a parent. [Laughs]

Tuck: Totally.

Cassius: And who knows? My genetics are so strongly trans, you know, that if there is a trans gene it happened in three out of the three of the siblings in my family. So I’m a little bit like “will I pass that shit on?”

Tuck: Yes.

Cassius: Just inevitably, you know? [Laughs]

Tuck: That’s a really good point, and I'm gonna talk to you about that more in a minute.

Cassius: Cool.

Tuck: But first, I must ask: is there anything else you want to talk about here in the main sort-of-canonical feed?

Cassius: I will say that one thing I have been very surprised by in my #PregnancyJourney Is how much I have needed support that women usually get or are denied. So I found myself suddenly doing a type of working woman feminism that I have not engaged in for my entire life. Because I transitioned when I was a young person, and so I like didn't have the experience of encountering sexism on the job. This was new for me.

Tuck: Hmmm.

Cassius: And I think in pregnancy people don't look at me and see me as a woman. I think they just see me as a fat guy, which is fine, but I do need to ask my job for things like parental leave. Or I need to disclose to people “hey, I'm really tired” or “I need these type of accommodations based on gender,” and it is very, very difficult. And I know it is like a “no shit” kind of thing to say, like, “oh, man discovers that women have it rough in the workplace!” But I think there is something that I just wanna make clear: that even those of us who are transmasculine and are exempt from sexism are still one life change away from experiencing all that stuff again. So being feminists is important. [Laughs} Which is a stupid thing to say, but it has been really eye-opening to me how much other pregnant people have my fucking back in a way that non-parents and non-pregnant people simply don't. The most like normal-ass moms are fucking kicking ass to support me, and then there's some radical queers who are simply not getting it. So I would just say that some of my politics are realigning to be a lot more, I think, coalitional and open-minded on this issue, and a lot less identity-based, because they've had to be. And everybody should have paid leave forever, the end. [Laughs]

Tuck: Yay! All right – we gotta do it. The way we always end the show is by asking: in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Cassius: Oh my God, I really wish you would stop talking about it. [Laughs] I'm so over gender. I think that a kinder answer to that is that I would really like gender to be flexible. I would like for it to be potentially temporary if one wanted it to be. I would like gender to be more frivolous, like in a funny way, like a sort of “oh, I can just put this on for a while and see how that goes.” I would like there to be fewer drag kings who all have to do Justin Bieber. I would like there to be trans people who are trans in ways that I do not understand, because I would like to be obsolete. [Laughs] I would love it if the kids figured out some cool shit that I don't know about, and I would love for them to be mad at me about me not knowing what is happening. I actually think that is a realistic future of gender, because I feel like both of my children are going to think I am a big dumb bigot in 15 years, and frankly, like, good. If they're not doing better than us, we failed. [Laughs] I hope they come up with genders I don't get. And I hope they teach me about them and I hope that I look them up on Wikipedia so that I don't sound stupid in public and I want it to be sort of youth-lead and creative and I want it to keep changing and I don't want to know in advance what that gender is.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays]

Tuck: That's gonna do it for this week’s show. If you had a good time or learned something, please share this episode with folks in your community and also don't forget to listen to the Gender Conceal episode that Cass and I recorded *immediately* after this one when we were both fully delirious. That episode will be out later this week. It's available exclusively for patron, so join us at patreon.com/gender. When you do that, you'll automatically get a little link you can paste into your podcast app and access every bonus episode we've ever made, including two with Cass.

Speaking of – you can find Cassius at cassiusadair.com, and you can typically also find both of us at sylveon.co, that's S-Y-L-V-E-O-N dot co. But Cass is out of the office indefinitely because a couple of weeks ago he had a baby! By the way: Cass is doing great, baby's doing great. Everyone is safe at home and perfect. And also baby is just a she/her now -- and that's gender, baby!

Anyway, we are also on Instagram and at genderpodcast.com, where we’ve got transcripts of every episode. We're also at bit.ly/gendermerch, where you can get 10 percent off your entire order through the end of January with the promo code TRAINS. 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 by our friends at Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender. Free Palestine.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays out and ends]

Tuck: People on this podcast have had sex with each other, and I encourage that, and we love when that happens.

Cassius. Right, it’s basically a dating show. [Both laugh]

Tuck: People on the podcast have gotten divorced. [Cassius laughs] So you know, It’s like…this is beautiful.

[Windchime sound plays and ends]

Cassius: I am at least 50 pounds bigger. Only five of that is baby, so I don't know what is happening in there.

Tuck: Some of it is blood, some of it is placenta…

Cassius: Some of it is blood, placenta…

Tuck: …traditionally some of it would be tits, but not necessarily for you, so now we'll have to take that one out.

Cassius: I think some of it is, though. Because I got some real titty action going on right now.

Tuck: They’re growing back.

Cassius: Yeah.

Tuck: Top surgery two in your future.

Cassius: It turns out that all damage is reversible. [Both laugh]

Tuck: And that's beautiful.