[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. I hope you’ve all been hanging in there. Happy Pride and welcome to Gender Reveal season seven. I am so glad to be back, and I have a bunch of news to share with you all, so let's get started. If this is your first Gender Reveal episode, welcome, thanks for being here. If you are not new here, you may have heard me say that this season of the podcast is going to be a little bit weird. Part of that is that we have something special and deeply chaotic planned for our 100th episode, which is coming right up. But between now and then, we will be checking back with a few guests from the early days of Gender Reveal to see what they've been up to in the past... three and a half years? That cannot possibly be right.

Today, we are catching up with Kirby Conrod, who is now Dr. Kirby Conrod, PhD. Kirby first appeared in Episode 13 of Gender Reveal and I still to this day recommend their episode, all of the time, to assist people who are struggling with singular they and to trans people who are trying to make cis people stop misgendering them. Kirby is so smart and so funny and I'm really excited for you to hear today's conversation. In this episode we talk about gender as a regional social relationship, the pros and cons of pronoun sharing and pronoun go-arounds—

**Kirby [voice clip]:** ...the best thing you can do is just make the opportunity without putting other people on the spot.

**Tuck:** ...and life hacks for neurodivergent grad students that also work for the rest of us.

**Kirby: ...**please, please do a worse job!

**Tuck:** But first, a couple more announcements. If you have been here a while, you know that I am in charge of everything regarding Gender Reveal, so: the booking, the research, the interviews, the recording, the scripting, the editing, the mixing, the promo, the merch, the grant, the mutual aid—it's just a lot, so I need to thank you, the listeners and specifically the folks who have supported us on Patreon. Because thanks *entirely* to the generosity and support of our Patreon folks, we were able to hire an *entire other human being* to help make the show. I am so thrilled to announce that our new associate producer is Julia Llinas Goodman. I'm a huge fan of Julia—you might know them from their work on the science podcast Flash Forward, or as the co-host of the feminist podcast season of The Bitch, and now you will know them as the person who makes it possible for this show to continue to exist without me burning out so hard that I am just a *little pile of ash* blowing in the wind.

If you would like to support the work that Julia and I do here, consider joining us at patreon.com/gender, where $5 a month gets you Gender Reveal stickers, $10 gets you stickers and pins and a handwritten letter from me personally, and just $1 a month gives you access to our weekly newsletter, featuring a weekly picture of my cat. That is patreon.com/gender.

Okay, one more big announcement. We have a really extra spectacular lineup of merch for Pride month this year. Again, if you are new here, the way our merch store works is that we take design submissions from trans designers, and we split the proceeds in half—so half goes to the trans designer, and the other half goes to a trans-focused recommendation of the designer’s choice. So we do not make any money from it, but the money is going to very good places. Most importantly, at the end of the month, all of the merch disappears, sometimes forever. And so if you want something, you have to really jump on it. This month, we've got some top tier shit for y'all, including a design by our friend Io who you may know as the creator of the Be Gay Do Crime skeleton. Yeah, you've heard of it. Io made us an illustration of a gimp hood that says “More Kink at Pride”; I am absolutely obsessed with it. We also have several other amazing designs including our classic Surf Don't TERF tank tops by Niko Stratis, a t-shirt that says “I don't know any straight people” by Beth Easton, and our far and away bestseller so far this month, a tank top version of Meg Potoma’s Hot Trans Summer design. You can find all of that and more at bit.ly/gendermerch. Remember everything disappears at the end of the month, so do not delay—that is bit.ly/gendermerch.

We have a quick Theymail message for all of you today. Theymail is a program where a listener sends us a little bit of money and we read a little bit o’ message. This message says “I'm Jay, an agender trans nonbinary queer ace person who is giving away 21 queer books in 2021 at theiropen.page. In exchange for a book, I ask you to share a story with me—anything you want. These stories will be made into a zine next year. Queer stories did so much to help me understand my identity, and I'm excited to share these stories with you. Find available books and share a story at theiropen.page—that's theiropen.page.”

That's it for now. Hot tip to be sure to listen all the way to the end of the episode for whatever our post-credits bonus content is this week. In the meantime, it's time for This Week in Gender.

[Transition sound effect, with low metallic chimes and hi-hats plays briefly]

**Tuck:** Everyone, you've already heard me talk a *lot* this episode; just some quick thoughts. Organizers of the New York City Pride March announced last month that police officers would not be allowed to participate as a group until at least 2025. They also would try to keep on-duty officers a block away from the celebrations. This decision seems like the least anyone could possibly do to make attendees feel safe, but it of course was much bemoaned in a flurry of op-eds from shadowy conservative editorial boards and press releases from the literal cops. The New York Times editorial board, I don't know who's on it—I'm gonna assume it’s straight people—they call this a misstep and opened their article about this with the following: “Ana Arboleda always makes sure her police uniform is crisp and clean when she leaves home, but never more so than on New York's annual Pride celebration, when two parts of her identity converge. Ms. Arboleda is a sergeant in the New York Police Department; she is also a lesbian and feels most connected to the LGBTQ community when she marches down Fifth Avenue with the Gay Officers Action League during New York's annual Pride celebration, taking in the crowd’s thunderous applause.”

Homie, if you feel most connected to lesbianism when you are marching with cops in the Pride parade, you are not doing lesbianism correctly. But anyway, just to break a few things down very quickly, NYC Pride is not banning people who are cops—[laughs] assigned cop at birth—people who are cops from attending Pride as citizens, they are banning the Gay Officers Action League from marching in the parade as a group, and encouraging any individual homosexual cops who want to attend to do so out of uniform. This makes sense when we consider that the entire premise of Pride is to commemorate the 1969 Stonewall Riots in which trans and queer people fought back against a literal vice squad of cops who routinely raided their queer dance nights and charged participants with offenses like crossdressing and public indecency. or in other words, *being queer and trans*.

Even today, seeing a cop in uniform is actively triggering for many LGBT people, including possibly you if you're listening to this, and particularly Black, brown, and trans people. Again, this makes perfect sense when we consider the number of trans people and other queer people who have been targeted, harassed, assaulted, and even killed by police. And when we remember that one in six trans people have spent time in prison, and that for Black transgender people, that number is 50%—one in two—virtually all of my friends are some varietal of LGBTQIA+, and I cannot even tell you how many of them have nightmares about cops pretty much every single night, stemming from the PTSD they accrued all of the times they were chased and tackled and gassed and arrested by police last summer alone.

I have sent bail money, I have sent the phone numbers of trans lawyers to my friends, I have watched so many videos of my friends being arrested. I have watched cops laugh as they aim their guns at our heads; I watched cops drag people, full body, into vans and into buildings; I do not think any of that is anything that any cop needs to be proud of, and I certainly don't think we need to throw them a fucking parade. Some guy from Act Up—I don't care what his name is—said that banning cops at Pride was bad because little gay kids would get the idea that they can't be cops. Good. Kids shouldn't want to be cops; that's so embarrassing for them. Ms. Arboleda, the gay cop from a few minutes ago, said, quote, “Being banished for celebrating a part of my identity is not easy for me. Instead of being embraced, they're throwing me back in the closet.” Ma'am, you are welcome to simply put your cop uniform back into your actual literal closet and be a big dyke in your street clothes just like everybody else. Or better yet, fucking quit. That would be something to truly be proud about this month.

This has been, This Week in Gender.

[Transition sound effect, with low metallic chimes and hi-hats plays briefly]

[Gender Reveal theme music excerpt fades in]

**Tuck:** Dr. Kirby Conrod is a nonbinary linguist who studies nonbinary linguistics. Their PhD is from the University of Washington, and they live in Seattle with one artist and one cat.

[Gender Reveal theme music excerpt fades out]

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

**Kirby:** I frequently will describe myself as, like, wizard gender, and I think that it's like a joke and it's also not and I'm a lot further into academia than we last talked. I actually finished my PhD now, and I'm like a professor or whatever—kind of like a mini professor, not a real professor, but the social role that I play in people's lives, is like, I have a lot of license to look really weird and wear a lot of matching purple tie dye sweats, which is all that I own right now during pandemic, and then I just sort of show up in people's lives and drop really weird esoteric knowledge on them that either is totally irrelevant to their quest or gives them a whole new quest. And so when I say I’m wizard gender it's so much about my relationship to other people and how my role in other people's lives is about me having a lot of license to just do whatever. And then my other legible gender that I have is like, I don't know, like nonbinary butch. I wear keys on my belt loop, you know. You know.

**Tuck:** [laughs] I do. As a fellow key belt looper.

**Kirby:** Yeah, it's really important—it's an important part of my gender to just have a lot of pockets and then just have a lot of shit in them, and be useful in those ways. And I don't remember if this is a different answer than the last time I gave you, but I feel like less trying for a sort of trans legibility and more trying for being descriptive about how people relate to me, and it feels really honest and good now where I'm at. I just feel like an adult human finally hits great in my thirties, I'm there,

**Tuck:** Look, we're trans. If you can get through adult in your thirties, it's honestly amazing. \

**Kirby:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** So yeah, we last talked in late 2017, early 2018.

**Kirby:** Oh my god, so it would’ve been when I was like a baby little grad student.

**Tuck:** Yeah, you were a baby! So do you feel like, obviously, the cultural conversations around gender have really changed since late 2017.

**Kirby:** Oh my god.

**Tuck:** Do you feel like the way that you think about gender conceptually has changed? I mean, I'm not going to be like “This is what you said before!” because I frankly didn't look, but just like if you had to guess, do you feel like you think about gender differently now?

**Kirby:** The way that I think about gender is so much more relational and not to name drop your own podcast to you but like, one of the things that really like crystallized “Ah, yeah, this is how I'm thinking about it” is your interview with Torrey Peters and talking about the way that—and this is, this was something where—I'm not a woman. And so, I'm coming up as orthogonally, but the way that cis women can get gender knowledge from trans women about how they move through the world and through life transitions, and it's so much for me about, like, my personal gender is so much more now about my relationships, and my life transitions and the way that I move through the world, and less about my like internal core sense of identity.

My core sense of identity is weirdly less internal but more stable because I'm just trying to be descriptive now, like the way that I think about it is just “let me describe what I observed going on, and use that to form ideas about the world,” and it's working really well for me, I gotta say. Honestly between 2017 and now, my personal sort of development has been really, really different than the sort of socio-political shit going on in the States, especially. I am a lot further into working on my trauma than I was when we last talked, and I'm a lot further out from this place of insecurity and scarcity and much more in kind of a mindset where I know I'm going to be okay and so it's okay to just kind of observe what's going on, rather than trying to keep it in my clutches and control it, you know?

When we talked in 2017, I think we talked right after I got into this big blog fight with a famous linguist, and oh my god, that guy is not relevant to my life anymore. It simply doesn't come up very often, and it felt so world-destroying at the time because I was in this position of extreme vulnerability institutionally and interpersonally, and I'm just not, now. I get to just do my job and bust into the room and make people think really weird stuff about verbs or whatever and then just swoosh out and everybody just has to deal with that. I don't have to prove myself at all. And so, I feel less defensive. I don't feel like I have to be on guard against attacks against my validity because it just is not relevant. What has happened in the past four years has been so much that trans people are just real and exist and have jobs and go about our lives, and it makes them so fucking mad, but we're getting much better at just doing our shit. We're just doing our whatevers, and we're getting, like, you know, modest professional success. I always worry about whenever one of us becomes famous because it's not good for us, but you know—like being competent and recognized for being good at your job is way, way better for you than being famous. It gives you a sense of security where you're not—you don't need to be on the defensive, you can just show up and say what you have to say without fighting about it and it just feels really interesting, especially since this like huge backlash, with all the shitty bills is so indicative to me of, “Wow, they're really scared of us just being chill.” It's weirdly encouraging, in some ways? I'm feeling very optimistic in this little closet that I'm sitting in.

**Tuck:** What are you feeling optimistic about?

**Kirby:** The things that I'm feeling optimistic about are that, in some ways, the culture war bullshit is a sign that they're aware that they're going to lose. Not to be like “us versus them,” but they're aware that they're going to lose, and all of their really freaky TERF stuff right now is looking like cornered animal fighting. It sounds weird to me to be like, “Yeah what I find really encouraging is how unhinged and neurotic TERFs are sounding to me right now,” but like, genuinely, they have no reasonable things to say. That's weirdly cheering to me.

**Tuck:** So, since we last spoke, you did complete your PhD—

Kirby: Sure did.

**Tuck:** —your dissertation, “Pronouns: Raising and Emerging.” Can you give us the non-linguist PhD version of what you explored in your dissertation?

**Kirby:** I'm totally going to answer your question and I do have a normal answer for this, but like, what is a dissertation? It's a very, very big PDF that's written for an audience of five people. [laughs] And three of them get to make edits. I don't want to give the impression that your beautiful many listeners should try to read my thesis; they should read something else that I've written. For example my blog posts. But they should not try to read a PhD thesis in a field that they're not in because it's written for such a narrow audience that it will just not be fun.

But I can give you the breakdown, which is that basically formal linguistics is this endeavor to try and make a mathematical algorithm to account for what language exists and what language doesn't seem to happen, and the heretofore history of formal linguistics just wasn't dealing with nonbinary people at all. They just were like, at best, two footnotes that I found. And so my dissertation is an attempt to say”Hey formal linguists, this is a fun project where we're all making super nice little diagrams; we got our little Greek letters and we're having fun here, but nonbinary people are real, and we do really use language, and this is data that we need to be able to account for.” And so the data that I mostly focused on was English pronouns in part because a bunch of linguists kept saying stuff that was just factually not true, and I was like, “Okay, well, you guys, your theories are not good if you say false empirical facts and then base a theory on it.” And so the false empirical facts are things like, “It's ungrammatical to say Bob likes herself.” And I'm like you don't know Bob! [Tuck laughs] And so, you know. My dissertation is a very, very large, wordy attempt to say, “Okay, let's go back to all our formulas and diagrams and rearrange them so that we can account for people using different pronouns and singular they existing at all.”

I don't talk a ton about neopronouns. I talk a shit-ton about singular they. And one of the reasons that I talk so much about singular day is that a ton of linguists were saying that it's ungrammatical to use singular they to refer to a specific person and I'm like, “Okay, well then why is everybody doing it?” That's not what ungrammatical means. To a linguist, ungrammatical means language users don't and won't say this, and I was like, “Okay, well language users do and are saying this, so let's go back and look at that.” And so a lot of my contribution is just saying “Look, it is real; I don't know what you guys are talking about,” and doing big studies and surveys and interviews and stuff just to be like, “Look, it happened, it's real in the wild. I have data. Please deal with it.” And then the final chapter is like, “Oh, I'm going to do so many diagrams to you.” [Tuck laughs]

One of the cool conclusions that I think non-linguists would want to hear about from my dissertation is basically, there is not that much difference between languages that use grammatical marking for honorifics, like do and zee in German, versus languages that use grammatical marking for big air quotes, “gender,” and basically gender is a specialized kind of honorific system, but it's like the same thing, which is, “We're going to embed a social relationship in our morphemes and whatever.” That's been really informative in the way that I think about gender. When I was talking about, “gender is a social relationship,” I think about my gender relationally—I think that that's something that, like, really it comes a lot also from my linguistics research of just observationally, the thing that decides what gendered form somebody uses in a language is about social relationships. Just at a fundamental descriptive level, that's what people are up to.

**Tuck:** Last time we talked, we talked about being nonbinary and in academia, but you've also written at least two really excellent articles about surviving grad school with ADHD. So, do you have tips for all of the other neurodivergent people listening to this podcast about how to survive in academia or just on our day to day lives, ‘cause we're all trying to do something.

**Kirby:** Oh my god. So yeah, I do have tips. The first tip is that diagnosis is a tool. It's not about an absolute reality. If you find yourself but getting super wound up or obsessed and like upset about, “Am I really autistic or do I really have ADHD?” Just hold that in your hands really tight in fists and then just let it go and exhale for a long time, because it's not important. These labels are really just not scientific, and it's not really well communicated to us. And so, in academia, a ton of us are trying to be here being scholars and so we can be scholarly and scientific about our own selves and lives and minds and part of that means, “Don't worry too much about whether, you know, big air quotes ‘Are you really ADHD or autistic or neurodivergent?’” It's not important. What's important is what barriers exist and how do you want to cope with them and use coping strategies that serve you. But there's not a shortage, there's not like a scarcity economy of ADHD hacks. You're allowed to use them whether or not you think that you have ADHD. So that's my absolute first tip is like, it doesn't matter whether or not your diagnosis is real because diagnoses in general are just fake, and you should just use resources that work for you.

And then my second tip is that you should use the language of diagnosis to communicate a shorthand to the people who can help you, such as your advisors or your psychiatrists or your therapists. Use it strategically; it's not always going to be strategic to tell your advisor that you have ADHD. It can be more strategic sometimes to tell your advisor that you have a neurodevelopmental disorder that makes certain things really impossible for you and come in with a list of which things are impossible that you need help brainstorming. So for me, one of those things was that, “Okay, I have, you know, big air quotes, ‘have ADHD’ and I'm autistic.” And so one of the things that's really, really difficult for me is executive function and planning and deadlines, and so the way that I dealt with this was, I had two advisors, and I was meeting with them pretty frequently. And that's the first thing, is telling them how often I wanted to meet in a way that worked for their schedule and also for mine to keep me on track. If we met too often, I wasn't getting any work done, and if we didn't meet often enough, I would just kind of go off the rails on a side project and forget to write my dissertation, and they don’t like if you do that.

So what I did was I told my advisors, I want to meet X times a month or X times a week, and I think what I ended up doing was like alternating weeks with them. So and then what I did was I said “Okay, at the end of every meeting, I will tell you what I intend to give to you or show to you so that we can discuss it next meeting.” And then, that's my mini deadline, it ends up being like a mini two-week deadline of like “Okay, next time we meet, I'm going to give you a draft of section four,” and that deadline is really helpful for me because then I have to send them a draft of section for two days before we meet so that they have time to read it and tell me about it. And those mini deadlines were the only thing that got the damn dissertation written.

The other thing that honestly is my big advice, especially to grad students—everybody tells grad students to go to therapy but I think that there are plenty of therapy modalities that do more harm than good. I'm not going to shit-talk specific ones, but I would suggest for grad students who, if you suspect at all that you have ADHD or are autistic, or any other sort of neurodiverse thing going on with you, you should specifically seek out a trauma-informed therapist, ideally one who does somatic modalities, because the number one thing that I see grad students doing that makes it really hard for them to just accomplish their goals, is dissociating 24/7. It's not unique to grad students, it’s just incredibly prevalent in grad students, and it is something where, like, a ton of stuff that will get different diagnostic labels is something that will improve with modalities of therapy that are about grounding and being in your body and being awake and also noticing when that's impossible. So, that's my other big advice, is that the thing that I did between 2017 and now that has most improved my quality of life but also ability to do the work that I care about is switching from general talk therapy to trauma therapy. And it doesn't really matter whether you think you have PTSD or trauma or not, the modalities work pretty much no matter what.

And then the other thing that I think that grad students need to hear is that you should do a worse job and bail on more stuff. The way that our advisors phrased this advice—they tell us this—they're like, “You should say no to more things.” I'm like, “But I can't say no because then I would be doing a bad job,” and I'm like no, actually what got me through was cutting my losses, saying no to stuff. That means that I felt like I was doing a bad job, but the option is do a bad job or drop out, and I would rather do a bad job than drop out. And I had to quit a lot of stuff—I had to quit some committees, I had to quit doing extra projects, I had to bail on cool other side projects, and that was a survival strategy and if I had not done that I would have burned out really, really badly. And I think that every grad student, like if you're in grad school in the first place, the thing that you probably have a hard time doing is turning in work that you're not happy with. But you have to, you just have to, and you need to develop distress tolerance about it, and the only way to do that is very gentle exposure therapy to yourself of, just do something slightly worse, just turn into shitty abstract. Better than not turning in an abstract.

**Tuck:** Yeah, that's something that I came across a lot just in starting my professional career as a journalist and as people make a podcast because the turnover of work is so much faster and higher and you're like, “Yes, obviously if you're going to turn out 100 articles this year, some of them are going to be bad.”

**Kirby:** Do a bad job! Yeah!

**Tuck:** And that’s okay, it doesn't mean that you're a bad person.You know, I had this the other day where I was spending so long writing like three paragraphs and finally I'm like, “Just gonna write them worse. They're just not gonna be the best three paragraphs I've ever read.”

**Kirby:** Please, please do a worse job. And the thing is that there's always going to be more work and the reward for doing good work is that there's going to be even more work. You are not going to be able to do all of it and you have to strategically decide this thing is something where I'm allowed to give my C+ effort. You should not be getting all A's, you should be getting some C's because you're strategically saying “You know what, baby needs a nap” instead of “Baby needs to write another 1000 words.” Don't pull an all-nighter; don't deprive yourself of sleep or food ever, because the effects are just cumulative. You will be paying for it, you're buying this shit on a credit card and it charges very high interest; do a worse job or quit. Quitting is good. Drop out of a class; bail out of a conference that you got into; just strategically quit stuff to make your life easier.

**Tuck:** And in related news, this will be the last episode of Gender Reveal! I’m just kidding, it’s fine. [Kirby and Tuck laugh] I am hiring someone so, you know.

**Kirby**: I'm so glad you're hiring someone, dude!

**Tuck:** Well, speaking of just giving advice to people, we have gotten a lot of advice questions from listeners about whether it's appropriate for people to share their pronouns in a work or school environment, whether it's appropriate to ask someone else their pronouns. I know you wrote a thoughtful article about this so we've tackled this, but can you talk a bit about what you suggest?

**Kirby:** Yeah. Okay, so my advice about whether you should share your pronouns at a meeting is it's always fine to volunteer yours. You should not single people out about sharing theirs ever. And this includes stuff like sending people messages on social media to ask them why their pronouns are not in their bio. The answer is: don't worry about it. If someone skips when you're going around the classroom on the first day of class and someone, you know, big air quotes, “forgets,” to say their pronouns, don't worry about it. The best thing you can do is just make the opportunity without putting other people on the spot. That's my blanket advice, especially to cis people, but also to people who are like, questioning or not really sure. You can use the opportunity to gently try stuff, but don't do stuff that puts you in fight or flight mode. And if you do notice like, “Oh man, sharing my pronouns really activates me. My heart rate is up, I'm like, watching the exits in the classroom.” Boy, maybe that's something to think about on your own when you're not in a high stress environment in front of people.

But yeah, the etiquette of pronouns—my beautiful friend Leah Velleman\_\_\_[around 30:20] had this great concept which is that pronoun sharing practices, the thing where we share our pronouns at all, is an etiquette thing in the trans, sort of ally community, for the benefit of cis people. We are sharing our pronouns to make it easier for cis people to avoid being incredibly rude, because they get embarrassed when they are incredibly rude. And so when we share our pronouns, in general, that's an etiquette thing that's for the sort of dominant culture, it's not for within the trans community. We are just fine about talking directly about our pronouns or switching them or figuring it out from context clues. We have lots of intra-community practices and it's going to vary based on who your friends are and how they feel about it. That's something that we can deal with ourselves, and the thing where you know you're sharing your pronouns in a meeting, is really for the benefit of the cis people in the room so that they have—it's a nice olive branch to be like, “Here, if you want a way to stop looking super rude and ignorant, I'll help you out” and approaching it from a viewpoint of, “I'm being generous and helping everybody out by sharing this information” honestly just makes me feel better about it unless on the spot of, “I'm magnanimous; I'm so generous by sharing my pronouns right now, and I get to feel warm and fuzzy and if I choose not to, it's like, I don't know, I'm tired and I don't feel like being magnanimous.” Frankly, people can figure it out.

**Tuck:** Yeah, what do you think it looks like to be in a meeting with new people, where I'm like, “Okay, I don't want to be misgendered, but also, do I want to stand up and say my pronouns or does that make me feel worse?” What do you think the alternatives are? Because that's something I've been thinking about a lot.

**Kirby:** Yeah. So, part of it is that I am far enough into the they/them pronouns for myself now that people just kind of know. My acquaintances will correct other people on my behalf, and that news sort of spreads through word of mouth. Word of mouth is surprisingly both very fast and very slow. And so what I think happens for a lot of us when we take up pronouns, especially sort of, you know, big air quotes, “non-standard pronouns,” is that it takes a while for our social network to slowly have some turnover, where I mostly stopped being friends with people who misgender me and start being friends with people who don't misgender me, and this is a process that happens over years. And, you know, in 2017 I think I was midway through that process and now towards the end of that process where I just socially kind of don't run into people who don't already know me through other friends, because that's just how it is in your thirties. And when I do run into other people it’s through professional networks who heard of me from my friends, so some of that work is already done for me and I think that that's an organic and natural process that just kind of happens.

And when I have to introduce myself in a room full of strangers, my strategies are to—I mean, it depends on the context. So in an academic meeting, I sometimes put my pronouns on the slides. This is something where academia has some nice social norms. When I give a talk, frequently a moderator will introduce me and the moderator used my pronouns and so I don't have to say anything about it because the moderator had a little paragraph written of, like, “Kirby got their PhD in 2009.” And so it's already done. So anytime that you can get somebody else to do it for you, it's like, “Fuck, I love that,” because that's how third-person reference works.

Like, that's exactly the thing, is that these are third-person pronouns. If we're talking in English, the only gender features are, when we're talking about a third person. And so the fact that we have to introduce them ourselves is a little weird. It feels almost unnatural and again, it's this thing that we do for the benefit of other people. The other thing is that if we're going around in a circle of, like, I'm at a lab meeting or something of—we're not giving a presentation, we're just going around introducing ourselves, I just throw it in, when I'm like, “I'm Kirby, I work on socio-syntax and my pronouns are they/them and I have a cat,” and I throw them in among other relevant information so that it doesn't feel like my name and pronouns are the only thing I'm sharing, and that makes me feel a little bit more like I'm a whole person, and it makes me feel less self-conscious when I'm the only person who happens to share the pronouns.

But the other thing is I try to go early in the group because frequently what happens when I share mine is that a couple other people will share theirs, and it won't be everybody, but it'll be a couple people, which I find nice.

**Tuck:** Yes! There's so much there that I love, but I want to go back just to complain—it's not even a question, but it's so funny to me when I do see a list of people's bios and it'll be like, “Cassandra (she/her)—Cassandra works at University of Washington. She got her PhD in this” and I'm like, “See, there was context clues,” and you hear that in radio as well, where people will be like, “Hey, when we introduce you, we need to say Tuck Woodstock uses the gender neutral pronouns they/them/theirs.”

**Kirby:** No, just use them!

**Tuck:** And I’m like, “Or you can say ‘This is Tuck, they're a journalist’ and you just kind of did the whole thing.” It’s like, show, don’t tell. Just show me your pronouns in context. You do not need to have to spell them out if you just use a sentence.

**Kirby:** This is exactly what my friend Leah is talking about when they're talking about pronouns are a social nicety that we do for the benefit of cis people when we introduce them, rather than just demonstrate them. Because in all trans groups, we're not introducing ourselves by our pronouns unless we're in a, you know, therapy context or something; it almost never happens otherwise. Of like, I’m just going to demonstrate so that you can see what pronouns are going to be used for this person that I'm introducing you to at a house party. I'm not at a house party being like, “This is Tuck, they/them.” I’m going to be at a house party like, “This is Tuck.”

**Tuck:** Cis people do do that to me though! [Kirby and Tuck laugh]

**Kirby:** Well, cis people can suck an egg. My other advice is have fewer cis friends! [Kirby and Tuck laugh] Just shift the balance to, I think the golden ratio for me is about 90:10, of like, yeah, I have some cis friends but not too many, because otherwise they will do that shit and I don't car for it! [laughs] “This is Tuck, they work in radio.” How hard is it?! Oh my god, it's a microaggression and it's because it's othering, and it's also just frankly completely unnecessary.

**Tuck:** Right, well every time I'm teaching a workshop, I'm like, “Treat trans people like people, don't treat trans people like aliens,” just over and over again because that's what I'm working on.

**Kirby:** Pedagogically speaking, you can say that until you're blue in the face, but just from a teaching perspective, you've got to give examples. I'm sure you do, but when we're educating the cis, a great sort of teaching principle that I learned from my beautiful friend Gretchen McCulloch is that you give people the example first, and then you give them the term or the principal second, because the example is something that they're, they've encountered; they're intuitively familiar with it; they can be like, “Oh yeah I know what that's like,” or “Oh yeah, I've seen that happen,” and then they're hungry for, give me a word for that give me a term to discuss that give me language to talk about this experience that I've already had.

I think we, the trans, could take a big page out of the sci comm book of how to communicate what feels to us like incredibly intuitive and natural ways of moving, thinking, and being. How to communicate that stuff to people who have simply never thought about it before—didn't occur to them that that was a thing that they could think about. And the way that scientists communicate to laypeople is very similar. And so I think that that's a lesson that we can all just meditate upon, and also know that sci comm is a field that people specialize in and not everybody should or can do it well. And I think that this is the other thing is that not every random trans person is going to be a good, I don't know, outreach representative, and we shouldn't have to be. And this is why your friends should not do this to you at parties, because it's making you be an outreach person against your will when you're trying to chill out. Like, damn, bill them for those hours, you know?

**Tuck:** Right, totally. I mean that's the thing is when trans people messaged me and they're like, “Hey, someone is asking me all of these inappropriate questions like at work or whatever,” I'm like, “Literally refer them to me and tell them to hire me,” and they're like “Haha” and I’m like, “No, I'm serious. Tell them you will not answer those questions, and that if they want to hire someone, they can talk to me about it because that's not your job at this workplace.”

**Kirby:** Literally. Literally this is a whole job that people can have, and forcing amateurs to do it is one, asking for an shit ton of unpaid labor, but two, is asking people to do something that they don't have any training and doing. You know, we don't get a handbook when we transition of like, “Okay, now how do I explain this to people?” There's not a pamphlet that tells us how to be good communicators. That's a skill that we develop over time, out of necessity, but, like, we shouldn’t have to, and it shouldn't have to be all of us. Some of us should be allowed to be curmudgeonly disgusting bitches who only want to talk about syntax and never want to talk about trans stuff. That should be an option for trans syntacticians or whatever.

**Tuck:** Absolutely, absolutely. So we talked a little bit about disability and neurodivergence and transness in academia. I know you also want to talk about how disability transness and fatness are, quote, “a cool bingo for doctors being awful.” Yes, this is obviously true. Tell me more about what you want to talk about with this.

**Kirby:** Oh, I'm so sick of it. I think I told you that I wanted to talk about this right after I had a really annoying week with my medical care providers. I have Joint Hurty Disorder Not Otherwise Specified. I think it's in my, you know, how every trans person has Joint Hurty Disorder Not Otherwise Specified and also, there's this—this is something that's totally under research, but this is an incredible link between transness and trauma and very specific chronic pain manifestations. So there's that. And then there's also like, “Hey, I would like to access trans healthcare.” And so what this means is that I'm currently having to try and be a patient at both the men's clinic and the women's clinic because I need the men's clinic for the men's stuff and the women's clinic for the, you know. And so I'm like, one, change your clinic names, this sucks ass.

Two, so my experience of, “I would like to go get a transition related healthcare that involves, like, I have to hang out while you put something into my body via the small incision”—I won't get into details but you can imagine—and so it means that I’m like, you know, partially clothed and trying to be friendly, and that mode that you get into when you have to go to the doctor a lot where you—I say “you,” generic because I assume everybody does this, but I don’t know if they all do—especially when I'm uncomfortable or in pain, I become intensely charismatic. And so this means that people have no idea that I'm uncomfortable and in pain, it's this intense autism masking thing. And so, I'm uncomfortable and vulnerable, and the medical assistant wants to have the long conversation about their trans nephew that they're going to misgender throughout the conversation every freaking time, or I'm uncomfortable and I'm in pain and I'm stuck in the hospital waiting for emergency surgery for twelve hours, and the nurse is going to misgender me a shit ton and then finally enough nurses have told her to knock it off that she finally comes to my like cubicle to sort of apologize, but mostly trying to grill me about nonbinary linguistics. Ma’am, I'm in a little late night gown with my ass out. I don't want to do sci comm right now. I don't want to educate you about my research, I want you to take the organ out that's bad.

And so there's this, and there's also, like, I've been spending the last year or so, is like my health all decided to just do it all at once, and I don't know if it's pandemic or what, but it means that I’ve just spent a shit ton of time in ERs, and there's this thing where like, you know, I’m uncomfortable in in my pain so I'm being intensely charismatic. This led me to me not getting the emergency surgery that I needed for an entire month, because I said “ow” wrong.

**Tuck:** Yikes.

**Kirby:** You know when they like, poke you, and the test is to figure out whether it hurts when they poke you? And the way that I phrased it was, “I don't like that.” They poked me and it hurt very badly and I said, “I don't like that.” And they wrote it down as, “XYZ is negative for a thing,” because they didn't interpret that as a sign of significant pain. I feel like any time I'm in a medical setting, I have to convince doctors that I have enough knowledge that they should take my opinions and observations seriously and what this means is that I end up sort of in Little Professor mode and I don't end up expressing pain or discomfort, and then the pain or discomfort is the thing that I'm there to treat and so they don't fucking treat it.

And I think that this is something that, like, a ton of trans people that I know have had similar experiences, in one part because chronic pain is so, so prevalent in, you know, our community, and in another part because we're just very, very used to having our autonomy completely disregarded, and so we feel like we have to do weird social plays to try and get people to treat us like people, but there's conflicting goals when we're doing that in the doctor's office, of like, “I want you to treat me like I'm a person with as much or more education than you, but also my fucking tummy hurts, and I'm gonna cry.” And like, my most recent trip, I did strategically cry. I was like, “Okay, frequently, I would suppress this, but I'm gonna cry in the waiting room because otherwise they're just not gonna see me, they're not gonna allow me to have an appointment.” And it's just this incredibly frustrating feeling that I think pretty much every disabled person who tries to get medical care has this experience but we have such different ways of coping with it.

**Tuck:** This is really different and not about medicine, but because there's so many trans people in Portland, there's been times when—we were talking about strategic crying, where I’ll—instead of trying to dance around things, I’m trying to get my name changed on something, and I'll just walk in and I'll be like, “I'm trans, help me!” because I'm counting on them having this liberal guilt guess, of being like, “Oh I have to help this trans person.” And there are other times when I'm just not trying to bring up that I'm trans under any circumstances and I'm like, I am a Business Boy and you must listen to me.

**Kirby:** [laughs] “I’m Business Boy.” I mean, and that thing also of living in a place where people know about trans people, this is something that's so interesting. This has only happened to me in Seattle, so I'm sure you have this experience of people parse your gender really differently when you go different places.

**Tuck:** Yes, yes.

**Kirby:** Around the time when I defended my dissertation, I had to do a bunch of travel for conferences, remember that? Shit. And I noticed a couple things. One was that I noticed that in Seattle, people would either purse me as a she, so I would get ma’am’ed by bus drivers, same outfit, but then I traveled to Utah for a conference, and I got exclusively sir’ed, and boy they used some honorifics there, I was like “Why are you doing this?” So I've got exclusively sir’ed in Utah in the same outfit that I just flown in from Seattle. So this is like, you know, gender is like this local thing, and my theory is that Seattle has a legible conception of like, a butch, and so it's possible to see me in like, lil slacks and a button-down and keys on my belt loop, and be like, “Yeah, that's, that's a ma'am, sure.” There's not a concept of butches in Utah. Uh-oh. Are there butches in Utah? If I’ve pissed off the butches in Utah, they can email me.

**Tuck:** Yeah, but they're having a bad time, you know!

**Kirby:** Uh-oh, frowny face. They should come to Seattle!

**Tuck:** I mean, I got sir’ed in Chicago, like, two years before I got sir’ed in Portland, right, because, like, “Well, someone with short hair is wearing a flannel.”

**Kirby:** Yeah, the threshold is totally local, and the other thing that I think is really interesting is the local emergent consumptions of legible nonbinary-ness. So, in the same year, I was out walking at the bougie mall—not the shitty mall with the Hot Topic, but the bougie mall—with the three different Pottery Barns, and these college girls—college-aged looking kids—walked past me and my partner, and not talking to us, talking to each other, complimented my partner's sequined fanny pack. They were like, “Oh my God, look at her. I mean, *their* fanny pack.” I have never heard a stranger correct, to they before that! It was so interesting, of, these 20-year-olds have a conception of like, that's a legible thing that you can be, is a they. And I was like, “Whoa, our local gender is flourishing, looking great!” It turns out if you want to get gendered great in Seattle you wear a sequined fanny pack, that's my hot tip there. Yeah no, it was really, really fascinating. But I think the same thing about interfacing with institutions where there's a certain tipping point where they're like, “Okay, we've met enough trans people that we know that that's a thing,” and then you can utilize that legible position to be like, “Hi, I'm one of your legible categories Please treat me accordingly.” And for better or for worse, they have ways of doing that.

**Tuck:** Yeah, we have to wrap up for both of us, but I could talk forever about the difference between places that don't have a legible trans community and thus just gender you, which is sometimes better-feeling than the way that people are treating trans people right now. Okay, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like? I did not look up your answer from last time, so don't worry about whether it's the same or not.

**Kirby:** Yeah, I don't remember my answer from last time, either. I think that we're just gonna have a bunch of them, and it's gonna be like D&D classes but more, and it's gonna get really wacky and fun, and we're gonna—it's going to go through a period of being really wacky and then it's going to get to the period where it's actually really fun. That's the future of gender.

[Gender Reveal theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s going to do it for this week’s show. You can find Kirby’s work at kirbyconrod.com and follow them on Twitter @kirbyconrod. We are on Twitter and Instagram @gendereveal, and I am on Twitter @tuckwoodstock where I frequently say things that Kirby Conrod then quote-tweets and makes linguists explain to me. Anyway, go to genderpodcast.com for transcripts of every Gender Reveal episode, and a *robust* FAQ section. If you’re new to the show, check out our starter packs, which are lists of some of our favorite episodes grouped by interest; that’s at genderpodcast.com/starterpacks, fittingly. If you could use a little bit more trans community in your life this Pride season, you are welcome to join our Slack group at bit.ly/genderslack2. Support the work that Julia and I are doing at patreon.com/gender; thank you *so* much; we *really*, really appreciate you.

Don’t forget to check out our frankly amazing June merch collection at bit.ly/gendermerch, where 100% of the proceeds go to trans artists and trans organizations.

This week’s episode was produced and edited by me, Tuck Woodstock. Our associate producer is Julia Llinas Goodman. Our logo is by the talented Ira M. Leigh; our theme song is by the legendary Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender. You know what we say—special Pride sign-off, say it with me now: throw a brick at a cop.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

**Tuck:** Yeah, the sun is out, so it’s like, well, of course everything is going to be fine; the sun is out!

**Kirby:** I know, yeah! It’s really funny because I'm really, really photosensitive, but I'm also—I need to just go get the photons because I live in Seattle, and this is the season where there are photons and I'm going to go eat them with my body, [Tuck laughs] and wear little short shorts, only.

**Tuck:** Yes, yes, yes. I finally bought shorts that fit me for the first time in years.

**Kirby:** Oh, congrats!

**Tuck:** They are so much more comfortable when they are your size.

**Kirby:** Oh my god. Isn't it incredible? I haven't worn a non-elastic waistband in like 18 months and I don't think I'm going back.

**Tuck:** No, why would you?

**Kirby:** No. Yeah, and you can have short shorts that are sweatpants, somehow, and I do and I am.

**Tuck:** And that’s a gender and I love it for you.