

“Male.” “Female.” “Other.” (fall 2016)

By Ciara Rose, Mikaela, Martina Tran, Kira Killipetto, and Anonymous

Transcript written by Mikaela

Kira: What is gender? Well, first and foremost it's a social construct meant to categorize people. So many people misconstrue sex and gender. Sex actually refers to our biological characteristics, while gender refers to the societal norms thrown onto our biological characteristics. Our society boxes us into assigned gender roles where females are meant to be feminine, beautiful, and thin nurturing caregivers and males are the masculine, strong, aggressive, breadwinners. When unlearning what we've come to understand as the normalized categories of gender, we must listen to those who don't necessarily fit into our set gender binary. So what happens when you don't fit into either of these categories? Or you fit into one that you weren't born into?

This podcast explores what happens when you are the “other.” These are their experiences:

How do you identify yourself? Not just gender identity, but describe yourself a little.

- I'm a transgender woman. Um, a little bit about myself, I'm a singer. I'm in child studies, in child and youth care counselling with a minor in women and gender studies.
- Well, I am genderfluid, which means I identify as a male, a female, and as non-gender. Usually, I feel I'm non-gender bordering on male, but there are days when I feel female as well and like I wanna dress female, even on days when I feel like a male, I wanna dress female sometimes.

(Kira: ) Okay, that's fair.

I'm also asexual aromantic, but I'm attracted to everybody.

❖ I'm primarily these days, I've been identifying as an activist, um, and also as a student.

Um, I'm also a transgender woman, um, also bisexual.

✚ Um, I'd say I'm an outdoor leader, um, I'm a student, I- kay, really there's like nothing else besides that at this point (laughter).

(Kira: ) That's, that's fine. Me too, I'm a student, I'm like 'Mmmm...'

(laughter) And then, also, um, of the non-binary and, um, polysexual sort.

➤ Um, I am twenty-year-old, um, female. I am a university student. I am a, uh, libertarian socialist. I am, uh, into reading and playing games, both um, video and board games, that sort of thing.

When did you first realize or have an "aha" moment that you did not fit into the gender binary or the gender that society expected you to be from birth?

- My first 'aha' moment, was probably when I was in... I think I wanna say kindergarten. I was about five or six years old, so probably like kindergarten, grade one-ish. Um, I used- I'm a big fan of Disney and I remember one day I came home afterschool and I was singing the song 'Reflection' from Mulan and my grandma walked in and she's kinda, she kinda laughed at me and she left me alone. And I was continuing to do what I was doing and I had this little costume, it was a Snow White costume, it was the only costume that fit me because I was a chubby kid and my mom came home after my grandma had found me in her room playing dress-up or whatever, and my mom told me

that you know, 'that's not for boys, it's only for girls,' and I was like, 'oh, well, I'm not a boy.'

- I was a young kid, I think I might have been maybe, I dunno, six or seven, eight or nine, I feel like that's a broad range, but (laughter) I don't remember my age. I was old enough to have at least some semblance of like, you know, kinda nuance. I always felt like, I always felt like I wasn't meant to be a girl, I don't know, it was just a feeling I had inside me. I remember feeling, well I mean, I liked wearing dresses and stuff. And skirts, but um, I always wanted to dress as a dude too. My mom wouldn't let me. But one day I, um, I got a chance to, to dress myself for once, when I was maybe like eight or nine. We were going to a museum and, um, I wore like a, like cargo shorts and like a baseball shirt and like I felt so fucking good. I felt like, I felt like I looked like a dude. And I felt like, I felt right. And I was hanging out with this girl and I kept asking her to call me by a dude's name, but she wouldn't. Cause we were children and she was like, 'that's weird.' We were like holding hands and giggling and running through the exhibits and shit and I was so fucking happy. And then mom actually yelled at me and dad when we got home. She was like, 'how could you fucking let her go out dressed like that.'
- ❖ Um, to some extent I've always kind of not fit, I just didn't have any answers as to why I didn't fit. And so, um, around age thirty I'd been out for a little bit as, um, bisexual and had finally started to figure out what that meant to me. And I started to realize that I had kinda tied in ideas of gender to ideas of sexuality. And, um, I ended up through process of discovery, identifying myself as genderqueer, and exploring gender in myself and, um, after the better part of a year, I had kind of an 'aha' moment that, um, I was

not limited to a specific idea of what womanhood meant and could identify as a woman within a much wider boundary.

- ✓ It's a hard thing to answer with one 'aha' moment cause for me there were lots of them. And I mean they weren't really 'aha' moments you know, I didn't always know, like you know the narrator always says, 'I knew when I was two,' I didn't know when I was two. When I made the choice to come out to my family and transition, I was about fifteen years old, but I had, I definitely had signs from the age of like- I mean visible signs to anyone else- probably around the age of seven. But in myself, I kinda started thinking about it when I was really young, like five or six, and then when I remember when I was ten I had that kind of- what you're asking about- was that 'aha' moment when I was ten. I was sitting on the computer and, um, I was talking to these friends I made on a forum and I was like lying to them that I was boy. And then I realized like, you know, oh this is a serious thing, I should probably tell my parents, but of course I thought 'oh I have to wait till I'm like twenty-five years old to tell my parents or else,' you know. When in retrospect it would have been better to tell them when I was really young, they would have believed it easier, but yeah, that was the 'aha' moments I had.

- ✚ Um, I'd say like growing up you kinda always like, there was always points where you were like 'okay this is like outside of the norm, but, um, I didn't really figure things out until like you start to really, um, until I started to like really know what gender norms were and then like really be able to shape, um, and like make the connections and the dots and also just like have a safe space to feel comfortable to like play and

identify in different ways, so like, um, mainly university, but like, it happens like all through your life.

- It was within about the first month after I came to university and had my first experience meeting a person who was, um, identified as a trans person that I could tell they were. And I had no, um, understanding of what that was or any, um, idea what, yeah, anything about that sort of thing so I remember I went home and I looked it up on the computer and I remember thinking as a lot of my, uh, upbringing had told me to do, um, 'wow this is clearly bullshit that th- this is such bullshit! Everybody feels like that. Everybody has this and this and this and this. And then the more I read, the more I realized, huh, a lot of these symptoms directly apply to me and my life. Oh shit!

How do you feel about trans representation in the media?

- That I've kinda found kind of annoying is that it's being transgender or being trans or like the topic of gender itself. Now because of pop culture it's kinda like trending, so it's I dunno, kinda just, it's kinda weird sometimes, but like the fact that there are trans faces out there it just, you know, kind of, it adds to the visibility and the validity of our lives and it's really- I think it's really great.
- ❖ I think we need a lot more quality trans representation. Um, right now I think what we have is, we have, the representation gets decided upon by the CIS sexist views within the media. Um, so people are still judging what stories are going to have the broadest appeal, they're aiming for ratings, they're aiming for sensationalism. And our lives, while we do have matters that are important to us that can be considered sensational matters

that, um, that need attention and need to be dealt with, our lives are not independently, um, the sensationalist view that the media has generated of trans people.

- ✓ See when I was reading over the questions you gave me, this is a big thing for me. I have a lot of opinions that are deviant from the transgender community and my transit- my transition- my opinions are very different so with the trans representation that we do have, I don't think they're doing it right. Me personally, I don't think they're doing it right. Especially for transwomen, we've- they've got like Catelyn Jenner and I mean, she's really not really a good role model I think for young trans women or any trans woman for that matter. Not even just in the transition sense because first of all, nobody gets a transition that fast unless they have a shitload of money and in Canada, like, even if you do have money, you probably can't transition that fast. And, the other thing is they've got liver and cotch which is good. But like, for me even when there is what's considered good representation for trans men, a lot of it is like, for example, I go into the center at my school and I don't spend a lot of time in what they call the cue center because they've got posters on the walls that say things like 'trans men get paps too,' and I really don't like that because it's drawing my attention to the fact that I was not born male. And it's agony for me every day and I don't like to be reminded of that so that's one problem with the representation I have. Another one is, they always simplify it so much, they simplify it so much and they always get characters who are women, in real life, or actors that are women to play transmen instead of getting a transman to play a transman, cause wouldn't that make sense?

(Kira: )Yes, that would make sense.

That would make sense and they don't do that and I think, I mean if you're trans and you're pre-transition especially, how are you supposed to get acting work if that's the field you work in, if nobody's going to hire you even for a role that you literally are. So, that's the thing with trans representation. I also, I dunno, I can't really point towards a positive trans male role model. Just cause, I mean is- can anybody really exemplify the trans community? I don't really think so. Yeah, I think representation could be changed to reflect opinions of people that might view as an nonconfulician and not just an identity and stuff like that. Yeah, I don't think it's terrible, I think for transwomen it's definitely a little bit worse.

✚ Oh! Media is always a tricky thing, like always. No matter if it's representing a minority or like, like anyone (laughter). Media is so tricky, so like it's har- it would be so hard to be a representation, um, for like such a minority and also like, uh, someone that's like really just getting, um, some attention and like much deserved attention. And so, um, I feel like you know, with anything in the media there's gonna be bad and there's gonna be good. I think it's really important to notice that like, there are really great role models out there, um, and like some that don't really get great media coverage, but also like, um, one's in the media like especially if they're seen like getting a lot of harassment, um, can almost like prevent people from like coming out. So like, there's so many different takes on media like, um, not like outside of the- because there's representation people are gonna be like, 'yeah I wanna be like this person and it's gonna be great,' like they feel more comfortable talking to their friends about it because I'm

like- cause you can like point to somebody in the media that they admire and like I think it's good to have people for the general public to be like 'oh, I really admire this person and they're like a minority,' so like it makes this connection in their brain that like, you know, even though there's celebrities there that are like, they're like these things that have been brought to attention so like, you know, people often times hold media really, really high, to high standards so like, they believe it represents the "real world." And so for people who believe that I think that like having representation in the media is important but like it can also be harmful, it's just such a tricky thing.

➤ It's gobshite, next question.

(Kira: ) It's what?

Uh, gobshite

(Kira: ) Uh, Okay (laughter)

Not good.

(Kira: ) It's not good?

No

(Kira: ) Do you have any other thoughts on that? (laughter)

Would you like me to expand?

(Kira: ) I would like you to expand, yes! So it's not good, but how is it not good?

It's still very much, a lot of it is, um, like very rarely is it done well, if at all. The vast majority of it is just, sort of, either I find it's usually either queer coding or queer baiting and is, I don't particularly like using those words, but that's the best way how I know to describe it is either you see a lot of times in representation if they want to get across

that their character is the bad guy, they will go to the men in dresses sort of stereotype. And even in a lot of modern shows that are coming out, if they want you to know this person is a bad guy, all of a sudden, they are now very feminine instead of a directly masculine like the protagonist. That's not good and even on the more progressive shows you'll rarely get an outright case of somebody being trans without them immediately- without the entire story being about how they are treated like shite.

What are some questions you wish people would stop asking you about your gender identity?

- Actually, the first, one of the few questions I get are like you know, 'have you had the surgery yet?' And I think one of the other questions I get is, 'when did you know?' Yeah, um, it's just, just because they're like, it's like you just, I don't know, you never just know, I guess. Like I've always know that I was different, mostly because like my mom and my family and friends were always pushing this other, this stereotypical like boy gender on me just because apparently that's what I was presenting. Um, so that's one of the harder questions that I have a hard time answering because it's just it's so repetitive and counterproductive. Um, but also like another question is like, 'what's, have you had the surgery yet?' Or like, 'what have you had done?' It's just like those are really personal questions like I'm not gonna go up to somebody and ask, 'what do you have between your legs?' That's, I don't think that's fair to ask anybody. Um, another bit, I think those are the only two questions that I have like, are hard to- or 'what's your real name?' I've had a few people ask wha- when I first started my transition I've had people ask me like 'what's your real name?' I'm like my real name is Aalayana and like yeah, it's

kinda, it's really disrespectful and it kinda just invalidates my experience as a woman, and it invalidates- like it dehumanizes me really, and it just kinda sucks.

- ❖ Uh, I'd say in past, um, people are still very curious about anatomy, um, people still ask, just questions that they wouldn't ask anyone else for the simple reason that they're curious and think it's my responsibility to satisfy their curiosity, um, but my body's my business and I don't really intend to share details that I haven't already shared

(Kira: ) What are some questions you wish people would stop asking you about your identity?

- ✓ I was waiting for this one because this one is funny. Uh, god, now this goes along with the thing about like I don't like when people- wait, what was I saying? It goes along with the thing where I have a different opinion than lots of the trans community, a lot of the trans community, a lot of the LGBTQ community think that asking pronouns is good. And it's, like I said, pre-transition me Daniel good, yeah that would have been perfect because then people would have known how to refer to me, but I don't want to be asked my pronouns anymore. Because I look, sound and I guess act like a male. I present as male and when people ask me my pronouns, even if they're in an inclusive space or whatever, it gives me a tinge of like you can't tell. It triggers what we call dysphoria in our community, it triggers- I hate using the word trigger as well cause that one is technically not really for this condition, but I'm gonna use it- it triggers my dysphoria, it makes me feel like I don't look like a man. And I want to look like a man, that's why I transitioned. I transitioned physically so that people would read me as a man and I get that like safer spaces are made for that kind of stuff, but I just can't shake the feeling

that it's because I'm not man enough, especially because, even in those spaces, usually when people ask me that question it's because I'm acting, looking, or dressing more feminine. So, it can be used as a device for sexism at times, but I understand that it's well-intentioned, but I wish that was one they would stop asking me. Another I wish they would stop asking me, can I answer it like assuming about me instead of asking me?

(Kira: ) Yeah, you can answer it however you want (laughter).

I wish they would stop assuming that I don't want bottom surgery. Bottom surgery refers to genital surgery and people assume, like this is funny because a lot of people will say like, lots of people will be like 'oh really, they don't just assume that you want it because lot of people'- this is another question actually! I don't want people to ask me if I want a penis. Because yes, the answer might be yes, but I don't want you to ask me that. Not even like, for example, when I got my top surgery, my chest surgery done, my doctor asked me 'so do you want bottom surgery?' and I was like 'this is not relevant to this situation,' the other thing is I was at the blood donation clinic, I don't go there anymore cause they asked me 'do you want a penis?' And like it just hurts because it's like I really, really, do, please give me one. So never ask me that question, unless you're gonna give me one, you know? Where was I going with the other thought?

(Kira: )I don't know.

Oh, uh. Oh yeah, assuming that I don't want it is another thing. Just avoid assuming things about my genitalia because, because like, yeah, just I don't want to talk about it, unless I offer to talk about it, unless I come into the room and I say 'you know what I

really want today is a penis, that's be great. And balls too. Um, don't ask me about it, you know.

✚ Sometimes they'll be like 'I just don't get how you don't feel a gender.' And you're like, 'well like that's just how it is, I don't really get it either, like' (laughter).

(Kira: ) Yeah. No, definitely. You're like I'm trying to describe a feeling to you that I don't- that you don't feel, but I can't describe it to you.

And also like, I don't have the right words for that yet and like, yeah everybody is growing and always learning, so like I'm just not at a place where I can like really explain that I don't, like I like to break gender norms and I don't feel comfortable like with people putting me in a box and like, this is like a, like a thing for me that I'm just like, like it's just like helps me be comfortable with like where I'm at and like and who I am and it's just like a good word of like a good describer for me and like that kind of thing. And just like any identifying like thing like 'student' like I'm not comfortable saying my 'career in studies,' like, I don't know, like it's just a word to describe what you're feeling to other people like, um, and that's what labels are, like labels are about communication with other people to try to express your feelings and like if the other person doesn't get the feeling, then like, what's the point of the label? Like, and like the whole and the part of it is gaining a community so that you can learn more about it, like, and so I get like people who are like 'I just don't understand you' and you're like 'yeah, well I don't understand me either and I don't understand anyone else.'

➤ Um, in terms of coming out to some of, some more old- or some of- like family and that, um, I wish I would not get asked 'if I'm going to have my dick chopped off.'