

[Alternative take of “3am” starts playing]¹

Episode 3: Learning to Do the Almost Impossible

The window in my parents’ kitchen is above the sink, looking out into the backyard. [Music fades into a drone] On the windowsill, my mum keeps a photo of my great-great-grandmother in *her* kitchen, Nan Vater grinning at the camera while washing up after what I assume was a big family meal. Growing up, I spent a lot of time in kitchens. My mum is the cook in our family – although my dad makes deadly pancakes – and my family ate most of our meals together at the kitchen island. We had pizza with family friends in the kitchen every Friday night. All of my memories of going home to St. John’s take place in kitchens, too: sneaking lemon tarts from my great-Nan’s fridge with my cousins before the dessert was ready to go out, drinking tea with aunts aplenty, the women in my family prepping meals together while the men played darts in the basement.

When I think about my family’s relationship with food and eating, it feels... complicated. I have all of these warm, cozy memories in kitchens, and I also remember my Gran’s WeightWatchers® materials living on her kitchen counter. (WeightWatchers® is a registered trademark of WW International, and the name of a diet that assigns a number value to everything you eat. There’s a great *Maintenance Phase* episode about it (Gordon & Hobbes, 2021)² that I’ve linked in the show notes if you want to know more.) I remember scales in every bathroom. I remember my Nanny O’Brien, who had gained a lot of weight after her kidney transplant, making negative comments about her body and other fat bodies. I don’t remember any of my family members explicitly saying *my* body was wrong, or that *I* needed to change how *I* was eating, but I

¹ Purple text is not read aloud in the recorded podcast episode.

² Red text is translated to an arpeggiated synth sound in the recorded episode.

definitely felt like they were saying that to themselves. I internalised these messages. How could I not?

I don't think I realised that my family's relationship with food and eating was so gendered until writing this thesis. When I listed these kitchen memories, the omnipresence of women – my mum, aunts, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, even great-great-grandmothers – jumped out at me. [Background drone fades out] Until very recently, the act of feeding others has been rigidly gendered as a woman's role in white Western society (Bordo, 1993/2003; McLean, 2013). White food scholars Patricia Allen and Carolyn Sachs (2007) have described feeding others as women's socio-cultural relationship to food, and feeding themselves as women's corporeal relationship to food. These relationships can feel at odds with one another, given that “although women bear responsibility for nourishing others, they often do not adequately nourish themselves”³ (Allen & Sachs, 2007, p. 1). Citing white cultural historian Susan Bordo, Allen and Sachs note that “the restriction of food and denial of hunger serve as central features of the construction of femininity” (p. 2). I feel like this conflict is part of that complicated feeling I pointed out before – I feel nourished when thinking about the socio-cultural relationship women in my family have with food, but uneasy when thinking about their corporeal relationship with eating.

I'm going to introduce a concept here that I think will be helpful in understanding that corporeal relationship: diet culture. It's a complex concept, but let's break it down together. White health sociologists Natalie Jovanovski and Tess Jaeger (2022) have defined diet culture as having three parts. The first part of diet culture is made up of “moralising, medicalised discourses about what constitutes [quote-unquote] ‘healthy’ bodies and eating behaviours” (p. 4). This means that diet culture tells a lot of stories about what healthy looks like, including the ideas that lower weight equals better health, and that we should feed ourselves according to external rules rather than

³ Green text indicates a typing sound plays underneath the spoken words in the recorded episode.

listening to our bodies. These stories are biased because they buy into the idea that our health says something fundamental about our character – this is a social construct called healthism, which we’ll come back to later on in the episode. They also buy into the idea that we can tell how quote-unquote ‘healthy’ someone is by their body size, which isn’t true. These stories are also violent, meaning they cause harm, because they mean we have our bodies constantly policed by every person and every system that buys into diet culture.

The second part of diet culture is “a moral hierarchy of bodies, which preferences an elusive thin-ideal that often masks a fear of fatness” (Jovanovski & Jaeger, 2022, p. 8). By ‘moral hierarchy of bodies’, Jovanovski and Jaeger mean that diet culture ranks the acceptability of body size, with thinness thought of as virtuous and fatness thought to indicate some kind of moral deficiency. If you feel like you’ve heard this kind of thing before on this podcast, you’re right! This part of diet culture is plain old anti-fatness, which we talked about in Episode 1:

[Rewind sound, prefacing the following quoted section from Episode 1] Anti-fatness is rooted in colonialism (Robinson, 2019). As early as the mid-1500s, European artists personified the so-called ‘New World’ as a fat Indigenous woman (Robinson, 2019). Bisexual and Two-Spirit Mi’kmaw scholar Margaret Robinson (2019) argues that these propagandic images “trained Settlers to perceive Indigenous bodies and land as requiring domination” (pp. 15–16). Anti-fatness is also rooted in racism, specifically anti-Black racism (Harrison, 2021; Strings, 2019). In *Fearing the Black Body*, Black sociologist Sabrina Strings (2019) details how, before European nations embarked on their colonial projects, they found fatness desirable and a marker of prosperity. It was only when European colonisers started to interpret some African bodies as fat that these colonisers started to equate fatness with being ‘lazy’, ‘barbarous’, ‘immoral’, ‘greedy’, and ‘Other’. As such, Black nonbinary scholar Da’Shaun Harrison (2021) argues that “fatness is formed as a coherent ideology through the creation of (anti-)Blackness and therefore does not intersect with Blackness, but exists

with Blackness itself”⁴ (p. 18). [Sound of a tape being ejected, marking the end of the quoted section]

This brings us into the third part of diet culture. According to Jovanovski and Jaeger’s (2022) definition, diet culture is “driven by intersecting patriarchal, racist, and capitalist systems and structures, through industries that reinforce dieting, beauty, sexualisation, and ideas about [quote-unquote] ‘health’” (p. 8). I feel like this is something we’ve talked about already, too: it puts diet culture inside of the medical-industrial complex (Clare, 2017), that fancy term for the practice of medicine under capitalism (Johnk & Khan, 2019) and the state (Rojas Durazo, 2016). [Rewind sound, prefacing the following quoted section from Episode 1] The medical-industrial complex “is a system about profit, first and foremost, rather than [quote-unquote] ‘health,’ wellbeing and care” (Mingus, 2015, para. 3). The state comes in as a buyer and regulator of medical services. Chicana decolonial feminist Clarissa Rojas (Rojas Durazo, 2016) describes how the medical-industrial complex enforces coloniality:

Medicine arrived in the Americas, and throughout the world, as an integral arm of European colonial invasion: land grants were given to doctors who settle[d] areas and develop[ed] medical institutions [including psychiatric hospitals. These institutions] ... served as sites where indigenous communities were actively subordinated, regulated, tracked, and counted.⁵ (p. 183)

Through to the present day, the medical-industrial complex violently imposes colonial values from diagnosis through treatment (Rojas Durazo, 2016). Under this system, “Indigenous ... approaches to healing are debased as barbaric and dangerous, whilst the violence inherent to neo-colonial

⁴ Audio from Harrison (2021).

⁵ Read by Clarissa Rojas (A. C. Rojas Durazo, personal communication, September 3, 2025).

psychiatry remains obscured” (LeFrançois & Diamond, 2014, pp. 40–41). [Sound of a tape being ejected, marking the end of the quoted section]

So, to sum up, diet culture is made up of three parts: healthist stories about body size and eating behaviours; the anti-fat assignment of moral value to bodies based on size and shape; and racist, colonial systems and structures like the medical-industrial complex supporting and spreading these violent stories and hierarchies.

Growing up in the early 2000s was kind of a nightmare in terms of diet culture and our societal expectations of what bodies should look like. Following the medical industry getting on the body mass index train in the ‘90s (Strings, 2019) – we talked about this in the first episode, too! – the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention published a shoddy report with bad numbers that became the basis for declaring the quote-unquote ‘Obesity Epidemic’ in 2004 (Harrison, 2021). Da’Shaun Harrison (2021) shares that “The diet industry, at the time, was already well over a century old. ... But with this war waged on obesity, the early-to-mid 2000s are a pivotal moment in history for the creation of this modern diet industrial complex”⁶ (p. 73). They define the diet industrial complex as “the written and unwritten pact between food, medical, and health care industries and billionaires with a vested interest in building and sustaining a socioeconomic system under which fat people are stolen from and harmed through dieting”⁴⁰ (p. 40). This cesspool of anti-fatness is the backdrop for my whole childhood.

I’ve started with stories of my family’s relationship with food and eating because they were among the hardest to write. I feel so much love for my family members, who are also just trying to navigate this cesspool of diet culture in the only ways they know how, and so much responsibility to present our stories with nuance and care. In a recent visit, my parents and I chatted about my thesis project. Even though we’re close, I couldn’t talk to my parents about food and gender and

⁶ Audio from Harrison (2021).

fatness for a long time. I didn't have the language, I didn't feel comfortable, and my family didn't talk about a lot of hard things growing up. Even though family members accessed eating disorder treatment, no-one ever talked about it. Writing this thesis gave us permission to talk about these challenging topics in a slightly more removed way, trying to figure them out together instead of just having big feelings with no way to understand them. [Background drone fades in] Over patio coffees on a sunny spring day, my parents and I talked openly about how diet culture impacted our family for maybe the first time. My mum apologised for not having more open conversations about food and eating when I was younger ^(love you Mum). I told her that she had nothing to apologise for – that having these conversations now was making all the difference.

Remember my Gran's WeightWatchers® materials, and my Nanny O'Brien's comments about fat bodies? I wish I could say that I had these kinds of restorative conversations with my grandmothers, too. Unfortunately, that wasn't possible. My Gran died when I was 15 years old. She was 67. The following year, my Nanny O'Brien died, at 70. When I had that conversation with my parents over coffee, I felt a fresh surge of grief about my grandmothers dying so young. In *A Sentimental Education*, Hannah McGregor reflects on her relationship with her mother, who died when McGregor was a teenager. [Background drone fades out] They note, "it's so unfair how someone, once dead, is frozen in their opinions. She would have changed her mind a thousand times by now, I am certain"⁷ (McGregor, 2022, p. 32). I wish Gran and Nanny had had the opportunity to have changed their minds, too.

[Theme music, "3am," starts playing in the background] I'm Katie O'Brien, and you're listening to TRANS FATS, a podcasted thesis exploring the research question: **How is my experience of trans corporeality mediated by pathologising logics?** Last episode, we talked about autoethnography and podcasting, the methodology I'm using for this project. If you didn't

⁷ Audio from McGregor (2022).

listen to that episode, it explains how we're doing what we're doing in this one. As you might have guessed, this episode, we're diving into stories. [Theme music ends, with some silence before the poetic artifact]

Stories

the first time I described puberty to a lover I told her it was a bodily betrayal⁸

I mentioned earlier that I felt like that conflict between women's socio-cultural and corporeal relationships with food helped to explain *some* of the complicated feelings I had around my family's relationship with food and eating. The other part of this complication, for me, is the woman-ness of it all. Shall we take some time to meander through my gender together? I'm afraid it'll mean returning to junior high for a bit...

[Background drone fades in] When I was in junior high school, one of the most popular apps you could add to your Facebook® profile was called Honesty Box (Gershon, 2017). The app was developed by a Zionist settler (O'Neill, 2009; Tobin, 2009) and was pretty short-lived, peaking in popularity in 2007 before going defunct in 2011 (McGauley, 2015). If you had Honesty Box on your profile, folks could ask you questions or make comments anonymously. The only thing you knew about the questioner or commenter's identity was their gender: messages were coded pink for girls, blue for boys, and grey for everything else. It was a nightmare, for obvious reasons. This was the app that classmates used to pester me about my sexuality, constantly asking if I was a lesbian, or telling me that I was a dyke. What does it mean, as a preteen, to be seen as a lesbian? I'm sure some of it is that I was pretty obviously crushing on girls, but some of it also feels like gender failure. [Background drone fades out] White queer academic Jack Halberstam (2011) argues that "*lesbian is irrevocably tied to failure in all kinds of ways*" (p. 94), and, in their literary and linguistic

⁸ Orange text indicates a poetic artifact, interpreted musically in the recorded episode.

analysis of the term ‘dyke’, white linguistic and decolonial gender scholars Helena Hanneder and Sarah Best (2023) found that “dykes more often position themselves in-between, neither identifying as femme or butch, incorporating an ambiguous gender performance” (p. 324). So, while lesbianism and transness aren’t the same thing, there is a gender piece that those junior high assholes were picking up on in their conflation of the two in my Honesty Box. What do I mean by failure here? Well, for Halberstam (2011), failure is a performance, a way of critiquing and refusing to comply with the mainstream. He muses that “failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing, may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (pp. 2–3). Performance is a pretty key concept when it comes to gender. Invoking the work of queer, white, Jewish feminist scholar Judith Butler, Da’Shaun Harrison (2021) notes that “gender is a performance defined by our commitment to upholding it”⁹ (p. 87). When I talk about performativity in this way, I mean that gender is “determined and reinforced by the repeated performance of socially prescribed acts and behaviors” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) – meaning that we *do* gender in the ways we dress, cut our hair, walk, and talk.

I didn’t know how to do gender, ever, in the ways I was expected to do it. I was raised by progressive parents in this moment in the 90s where it was okay to raise your kids kind-of gender neutrally, where things weren’t hyper pink or hyper blue, so I got to grow up not thinking about gender too much. A few years back, I came across a picture of myself at my sixth birthday party. In the photo, I’m sporting possibly the most nonbinary getup I’ve seen in a while: long hair, a homemade pirate eye patch, a face-paint handlebar moustache and five-o’clock shadow, and pink nail polish. (You can check out the photo in the show notes. It’s pretty great.) That was kind of my vibe, and I liked it, until my body started doing puberty stuff. When puberty hit, that’s when the world started forcing me into a gender that didn’t feel quite right.

⁹ Audio from Harrison (2021).

[Background drone fades in] One night in sixth grade, I was talking with my mum, getting ready to go to bed. I don't remember exactly what we were chatting about, but I was probably advocating for a later bedtime, and maybe complaining that I wasn't allowed to watch the TV show *LOST* even though it felt like every other kid in my class was watching it. The part of the conversation that I remember with crystal clarity is this bit: my mum, laying out my clothes for the following school day, saying off-handedly,

“It’s probably about time for you to start wearing a bra.”¹⁰

My stomach dropped. I think for a lot of people that’s a value neutral statement, or maybe even a positive or exciting one. For me, it was neither. I remember crying, thinking that a bra sounded like the last thing I would ever want. I didn’t have language about gender at the time, and I don’t think I had the words to explain to my mum in that moment why this seemingly innocuous sentence sent me into such a spin. I just knew it felt really, really bad.

A few months later, I laid out my own clothes for my first day of junior high school. I was way more excited about hand-me-down skater tees than the uncomfortable girl clothes passed down from my cousins. I paired one of those prized shirts with a long brown corduroy skirt and new skate shoes, despite never having stepped onto a skateboard. Getting ready for school the following day, with fresh, new red and orange extensions in my hair, I felt so cool. When I look at pictures of me in that outfit now, my gender expression feels so playful. Walking into junior high school? That felt decidedly *unplayful*.

Grade seven was my first real exposure to the confusing world of preteen girlhood. In elementary school, there had been some girls who cared about makeup and giggled when boys talked to them, but it had felt like a funny quirk of theirs. Walking through the sticky hallways that first day of seventh grade, it felt like *all* of the girls in my class discovered makeup, boys, and trendy

¹⁰ Read by Mum (P. O’Brien, personal communication, September 8, 2025).

mall fashion over the summer. It felt like my classmates were professional actors in a play that I didn't even have the script for. I remember many firsts from that year: borrowing my aunt's tweezers and overplucking my eyebrows after being teased for my unibrow one too many times; peeling a layer of skin off my shin the first time I tried to shave my legs; poking myself in the cornea when I tried to figure out mascara and eyeliner.

Flash forward to the end of the school year. I was poring over a real-life script, not just trying to understand a metaphorical one, preparing for my role as one of the fairies in our school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare, 1600/2025). (It's too good. I promise I'm not kidding.) I had a grand total of one line and was painfully worried I'd screw it up. As I re-read my scene for the millionth time, I ran my hands nervously through my fresh buzz cut. A week earlier, I had shaved my head in a cancer fundraiser in solidarity with my Gran. I don't remember much about the performance anymore. I just remember feeling ridiculous in my costume, a bright pink, flowy spaghetti strap top and tight jeans – and the soothing feeling of that fresh buzz cut.

[Background drone fades out]

All of these stories from junior high school point to really embodied senses of bewilderment and frustration in my gender. You might remember me talking about gender dysphoria in Episode 1: [Rewind sound, prefacing the following quoted section from Episode 1] Gender dysphoria refers to a person's discomfort or disassociation with these socially-gendered aspects of their body. Not all trans folks experience gender dysphoria. Some of us feel like gender euphoria (Jacobsen & Devor, 2022) or gender pleasure (Fielding, 2021) are better markers of transness, the elation, satisfaction, or enjoyment we feel when we're gendered correctly. Still, dysphoria is an important concept to understand. [Sound of a tape being ejected, marking the end of the quoted section] I went on to chat about how gender dysphoria is defined in the DSM, and how trans folks being defined by this interaction with the medical-industrial complex is crap. With all that in mind, if I've been talking

about gendered discomfort this whole time... have I been describing memories of gender dysphoria in these junior high stories? Even if I think it's crap? Well... kind of. I know, I know, that sounds like it doesn't make sense. But here's where a more critical understanding of gender dysphoria, as articulated by white trans philosopher Penelope Haulotte (2024), comes into play:

The critical concept of gender dysphoria I propose is the following: gender dysphoria is the phenomenological experience of alienation from cisgender forms of life. ... It is worth noting several features of this definition. First, it begins with and answers to the phenomenological experiences of trans people. Second, it replaces the psychological concept of 'distress' with the critical concept of 'alienation.' Third, while the medicalised concept of gender dysphoria claims that trans people live in the 'wrong-body,' the critical theory of gender dysphoria claims that trans people live in the 'wrong-society.' ... All these features of the critical concept of gender dysphoria are a result of a transition from a cisgender perspective on gender dysphoria to a transgender one.¹¹ (p. 3)

Okay, so in plainer language: a critical understanding of gender dysphoria is that it's a trans experience of alienation from cis society. Alienation is "a central concept within decolonial theorizing" (Moosa-Mitha et al., in press, p. 7) that describes someone's sense of self coming up against dominant society and being found lacking. It's the viscerally painful experience of being told by a group that has power over us that what we know to be true about ourselves is incorrect or not allowed. For trans folks, the dominant society we come up against is cis society, and more specifically, cis society as governed by the colonial medical-industrial complex. After all, "the framing of transness as defect, an abnormality to be corrected, didn't start with trans people but with the medical-industrial complex"¹² (Clare, 2017, p. 178). When I think through these stories of

¹¹ Read by Penny Haulotte (personal communication, August 31, 2025).

¹² Read by Eli Clare (personal communication, September 3, 2025).

my junior high gendering, I don't see gender dysphoria in a medicalised sense at all. I see gender dysphoria in the sense that I felt completely alienated from cis society. In this way, the poetic artifact you heard as the intro to this section is inaccurate. I wasn't experiencing a bodily betrayal. I was experiencing a societal one.

[Short version of "3am" plays before next section starts]

little more than ghosts in / my skin

I've pretty much felt complicated about my chest since that bra moment with my mum in sixth grade. I like my chest! I *don't* like how people take one look at my body and assume my gender based on my shape. If you're trans, or you've been around trans folks, you've probably heard something like the terms 'assigned female at birth' or 'designated male at birth' before. These terms are used to remind us that sex is assigned or designated, rather than some innate or biological truth – that it's a social construct. If we were honest as a society about the biology of sex, we would describe the vast constellations of physical possibilities: sex chromosomes; hormone levels; hormone expression in our body, sometimes called secondary sex characteristics; internal genitalia, sometimes called gonads or reproductive organs; and external genitalia. Instead, someone takes one quick look at our external genitalia when we're born and puts us into one of two boxes. This reductive and violent act is why some folks describe sex assignment, and the whole project of binary gender, as coercive (Spade, 2003).

Queer Argentine philosopher and activist María Lugones (2007) used the term "the colonial/modern gender system" (p. 187) to describe this reduction of gender to a binary understanding of bodies. She proposed this concept to help explain how patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, capitalism, and race "are impossible to understand apart from each other" (p. 187). Lugones argued that colonialism "introduced ... gender itself as a colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies and ways of knowing"

(p. 186). She reasoned that “gender is the socially necessary regulated version of sex, necessary because sex needs to be regulated as the case of the colonized and enslaved makes clear: without regulation sex is wild” (Lugones, 2020a, p. 29). The colonial/modern gender system considered white folks to be human, and therefore able to be gendered, while all folks racialised as *not* white were designated subhuman, and therefore denied gender (Lugones, 2007). Like animals, they were only sexed (Lugones, 2020a). Mixed, nonbinary, disabled scholar Brooklyn Leo (2020) provides a trans intervention into this idea:

If one of the goals of the colonial/modern gender system is to assimilate bodies of color into a strict gender-sex binary (even if as failures of such binarized gender categories), then ... [trans of colour] bodies that refused the reduction of gendered roles to naturalized sexed statuses faced elimination rather than assimilation. ... Transness, then, becomes an excess in the flesh that does not gain value within the economy of a sexed/gendered binary except through its disavowal and disposal. (p. 464)

In other words, the existence of trans folks, particularly trans folks of colour, is a fundamental threat to the colonial/modern gender system. Leo warns us that “decolonial feminisms, without an awareness of Two-Spirit wisdom, will continue to enact modes of erasure, will reinforce cisgender privilege, maintain practices of unknowing, and uphold the coloniality of gender” (p. 470). They argue that “when we add Two-Spirit, Black and Latinx trans voices to our coalitional spaces, gender becomes a powerful way to resist and reclaim one’s own body from the intimate terror of the colonial/modern gender system” (p. 471).

A decade or so ago, before I fully understood myself to be trans, I tried using a chest binder as reclamation, to see if that would help reduce some of this complicated feeling – to see if I could lessen how often strangers make the immediate assumption that I’m a woman because of my shape. Chest binding is the act of “wearing a tight garment to flatten chest tissue for the purpose of

gender expression” (Peitzmeier et al., 2021). You can bind safely in a lot of ways, *and* if you don’t bind safely, you can really hurt yourself. (If you want to learn more about safe binding, I’ve linked white genderqueer cartoonist Maia Kobabe and racialised, cis public health researcher Sarah Peitzmeier’s (2024) brilliant graphic guide, called *Breathe*, in the show notes.) [Background drone fades in] After doing some research, I ordered a chest binder online from a company based overseas somewhere, which meant the sizing was different than I was used to. Every model on their website was thin, with very little chest to begin with, and very clearly masculine-presenting. I carefully wrapped a bit of string around my chest, measured it, and checked my measurements against the company’s size guide. I ordered a 5X. I remember thinking it must be pretty much impossible for fatter folks to access safe binding materials.

I had the binder delivered to the queer space on campus where I spent most of my time. I was so excited when it arrived, and opened it while friends were around. I expected folks in this space, pretty much all queer and trans, to be excited with me. Some of that support was there, for sure. But the comments I remember most were the ones from thinner trans folks, remarking that they didn’t know binders even came in such a monstrously large size. When I tried out the binder, it offered some compression, but it didn’t give me the flat chest that the models on the website had sported. It felt hard to breathe after wearing it for a few hours, and it was sweaty, and ultimately didn’t work for me. These days, I either go braless, or I wear the softest sports bra I can find. I’ve found this helps me think about my chest as little as possible. [Background drone fades out]

My experience of binding and anti-fatness in queer spaces is shared by lots of folks in my community. Da’Shaun Harrison (2021) talks about how thinness being the norm for nonbinary folks is rampant and harmful, particularly for Black nonbinary and trans folks. They maintain that:

Fat trans people are finding it nearly impossible to find binders that feel affirming for them; many are being forced to engage an inherently anti-Black and anti-fat medical system that

uses body mass index as an indicator for whether or not they deserve to be affirmed in their bodies; we are being engaged as the Other, even in spaces that, in name, were created for our comfort and safety.¹³ (pp. 103–104)

Remember that thing we talked about in Episode 1, where coloniality depends on and is sustained by the creation of hierarchical binaries (Mignolo & Schwiy, 2002)? We talked about the gender binary as one example of this kind of colonial thinking. Othering, the act of drawing a line between a powerful Us and a deviant Them, is another example (Spivak, 1988). The experience I had of being othered in a queer space, realising that othering happens in already-othered spaces too, was a pretty fundamental shift for me in developing my critical consciousness.

When I think about how the stories I've shared so far relate to my research question, **how my experience of trans corporeality is mediated by pathologising logics**, I'm starting to understand that this piece around social construction and alienation is pretty central to my experience. I'm starting to understand that coloniality has impacted my life by divorcing me from my own knowledge of my body. It does this using the pathologising logics of diet culture and gender essentialism.

We talked a bit about the 'bodymind' idea as a key decolonial *and* disability justice concept last episode: [Rewind sound, prefacing the following quoted section from Episode 2] Colonial perspectives on knowledge only care about the body because that's where our brains live (Ng, 2018). In contrast, decolonial feminists care deeply about the body, *which is always a target of colonial practices of violence*, as a site of knowledge (see Moosa-Mitha et al., in press). Disability justice advocates also reject the idea that we can, or should, meaningfully separate our minds from our bodies. The term 'bodymind' highlights this rejection (Clare, 2017; Price, 2015; Schalk, 2018). [Sound of a tape being ejected, marking the end of the quoted section] Disability justice and

¹³ Audio from Harrison (2021).

decolonial feminism both refuse to treat the body as unknowledgeable or unknowable, recognising that our bodies are “sites of cultural meaning, social experience and political resistance” (Harcourt et al., 2016, p. 149). Embodied knowledge – knowledge based in the body – is central to decolonial thought and disability justice. Why is it important that we treat the body as a site of knowledge? Latina decolonial scholar of disability Carolyn Ureña (2019) can help us here. She says that decolonial embodiment:

invites the rejection of dualist thinking, in particular the false binaries of health [slash] illness, mind [slash] body, and body [slash] world that form the heart of Western hegemonic thought and which serve to perpetuate Eurocentric notions of health and healing. In so doing, the study of decolonial embodiment draws our attention to the stigmatized, dehumanized body as an important source of devalued or otherwise overlooked knowledge regarding both coloniality and its effects, as well as strategies to dismantle it. (p. 1642)

As my committee member Gaben commented, “the body holds our memories, history, and experiences. The way we feel, move, and act all carry knowledge that cannot be understood just through abstract thinking or reasoning”¹⁴ (G. Sanchez, personal communication, August 4, 2025). Syilx Métis Elder Sheila Nyman describes this as ‘blood memory’, wisdom passed down from previous generations (Nicholson et al., 2022; Smoke & Semeniuk, 2025). Paying attention to embodied knowledges can help us better understand the systems of oppression we live under, and dream up ways to exist otherwise. Eli Clare (2017) reminds us, though, that under the colonial medical-industrial complex, “listening to our own body-minds is almost impossible” (p. 161). Let’s talk a bit more explicitly about interacting with the medical system to figure out how that fits into this whole mess.

¹⁴ Read by Gaben (G. Sanchez, personal communication, September 16, 2025).

[Short version of “3am” plays before next section starts]

dietary restrictions what an apt description that is for fuck’s sake

I don’t remember a time when going to the doctor was a good experience. [Background drone fades in] At 13, I wanted help for my acne and digestive issues, so I suffered through the phone call to book an appointment. When I arrived at the doctor’s office, I smiled hesitantly at the irritable receptionist behind the desk. She checked me in, and I sat down in the waiting area, relieved that the interaction was over. A younger kid played with one of those bead maze toys – colourful beads running along a jumble of wires that loop and spiral. An Oprah rerun about weight loss hummed on the TV mounted in the corner. My mum came in from parking the van, and sat down beside me just as a nurse yelled out my legal name from the hallway.

I followed the nurse to the scale in the hall across from the nurses’ station. My cheeks burned as she told me to take off my shoes so she could take my height and weight. I remember the shk-shk-shk noise that the weights on the scale made as the nurse slid them into place, followed by her voice reading the numbers out loud where everyone could hear. She wrote my height and weight on a slip of paper for the doctor, then directed me to follow my mum into the appointment room to wait.

Inside the appointment room, the fading mural of zoo animals was plastered with posters about quitting smoking, travel vaccinations, and losing weight. I hoisted myself up onto the examination table and sat on the crinkly paper, anxious not to move much in case it ripped under me. My mum sat on a chair in the corner. When the doctor knocked on the door, my mum and I called out at the same time to let him know it was okay to come in. I told him about my acne. He said he could prescribe Accutane®, which would clear up my zits but had the potential side effect of suicidal ideation. As a kid with intrusive thoughts, that was right out for me, but I wasn’t about to talk about *that* with my doctor. I said I’d think about taking Accutane® even though my mind was

already made up against it, and mentioned my gut trouble. At that point, my ten minutes were up. The doctor smiled blandly and sent me and my mum on my way with a requisition for blood work. I remember realising in the van ride home that I didn't really get any answers or treatment for my acne or my digestive issues, which would prove to be the case for a long time. A year or so later, my doctor would put me on hormonal birth control and diagnose me with irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS – a frustrating diagnosis, since it didn't lead to a treatment plan.

(Quick content note: I'm going to be describing my relationship with food and eating for the next four-ish minutes. It's important to me to be really careful in how I'm doing this. The National Eating Disorder Information Centre (n.d.) in so-called Canada and the National Eating Disorders Association (n.d.) south of the colonially-imposed border both argue that it's best practice not to include detailed descriptions of specific behaviours, numbers, or measurements in stories about eating disorders. This is an accepted practice in the communities I'm part of, too. I don't want to sensationalise my stories, or pretend my experiences are the only way to have a fucked-up relationship with eating, or give anyone a blueprint to cause themselves harm. In an autoethnographic context, though, I feel like I need to share *some* details in order for these stories to make sense. Here are the details I think are necessary. In the next episode, I'll talk about my experience accessing professionalised eating disorder care in my early twenties. I needed to access that care because throughout my teen years, I restricted my food intake first through cutting out food groups, then through an obsession with eating quote-unquote 'healthily', and then in WeightWatchers®. I also ate in a way I used to describe as 'bingeing', meaning that I ate lots of food, and mostly in secret. I'll talk a bit more about this language next episode. Okay. I think that's enough caveating. Here we go.)

By my mid- to late teens, my gut trouble hadn't gotten any better. In fact, it felt like it was just getting worse – and after the IBS diagnosis, my doctor basically told me there was nothing else

he could do. I figured it was probably genetic or something, since my mum also had a rough time with digestion. I started fixating on food, cutting out entire food groups that I thought might be triggering my IBS. My anxiety around not eating these so-called ‘bad’ or ‘dangerous’ foods made my digestive issues worse, which made me more anxious about food, and the cycle would continue. For me, that kind of dietary restriction ended up playing really well into straight up eating less.

When I was trying to remember details of the story of my relationship with food and eating, I called my parents to see if they remembered anything from my teenage years. My dad said he couldn’t remember much, but was in the middle of going through literal decades worth of emails, so he promised to send along anything he found in his inbox that might be helpful ^(love you Dad). Fifteen minutes later, I had a link to a blog that I had kept when I was 16 in my *own* inbox. I vaguely remembered this blog being an important part of my life for a few months in high school, but had figured that it was long lost to the internet. (I posted religiously for a few weeks, sporadically for a few months, then never again – just like the journals I talked about keeping in the last episode. And no, I’m not linking the blog in the show notes. Some things should stay lost.) I guess at some point I had sent my dad a link to a post I had written, and it lived in his inbox until now.

I had forgotten pretty much everything about this blog, but it all came roaring back when I clicked on the link. I had made a header image in Microsoft Paint® featuring lyrics from *Rent*: “to days of inspiration / playing hooky / making something out of nothing / the need to express – to communicate / to going against the grain / going insane / going [M]ad” (*Cast of Rent, 2005*). I was taking a lot of inspiration from the lifestyle blogs I was reading at the time. I posted deeply self-conscious photos of my outfits in my parents’ backyard, monologues about chopping off all my hair and getting a second ear piercing, and lots and lots of recipes and food logs. Through the food logs in particular, I was performing what I thought was ‘healthy’. Remember how we talked about gender performance earlier? I would argue that diet culture is also a performance. [\[Background](#)

drone fades out] Performing cisgender girlhood, performing quote-unquote ‘healthy’ eating – these were both attempts to fit into a society that saw me in some ways as deviant. This connection between my gender and my relationship with food jumped out at me when reading my tenth-grade blog.

I also think the idea of health could do with some more unpacking. Remember when we talked about ableism/sanism in the first episode? *[Rewind sound, prefacing the following quoted section from Episode 1]* Ableism is kind of the bigger umbrella term for assigning value to bodies and minds based on colonial ideas of normalcy ... but is sometimes used only to talk about physical disabilities. Sanism focuses specifically on assigning value to people’s minds. Now, folks who have been oppressed specifically because of sanism, including people who are psychiatric survivors, service users and consumers, ex-patients, and folks labelled as ‘mentally ill’, sometimes describe our cultural experiences collectively as capital-M Madness (Sharma, 2023). This use of the term Mad, capital-M, is a reclaiming of a word used to harm us, kind of like the reclaiming of the term ‘queer’. Mad folks do not all consider ourselves disabled, which is why I think it’s important to identify ableism *and* sanism together. *[Sound of a tape being ejected, marking the end of the quoted section]* Part of ableism/sanism is healthism, the socially constructed “moral imperative to be healthy and pursue health” (Saguy, 2013, as cited in Mollow, 2015, p. 206). You might also remember it as the first part of Jovanovski and Jaeger’s (2022) definition of diet culture from earlier in this episode. Now, if this is the first time you’re coming across this idea, it can be kind of a brain-bender. Let’s turn to Da’Shaun Harrison (2021) for some help understanding how the concept of health is... pretty fucked up:

Health, in name and in action, has always existed to abuse, to dominate, and to subjugate. The medical industry, the health care industry, and the diet industry all exist to maintain a culture intended to ‘discipline’ those whose bodies refuse to – and, for many, simply

cannot – conform to the standards of health. Modern society enforces exercise as a punishment for this very reason. We are not taught to exercise for the sake of enjoyment, nor are we taught to enjoy our bodies in motion. We are taught, per contra, that we exercise so that we can be healthy, and that health must look opposite of fat. This means that health is punishment. ... These industries lead to real psychological harm, physical pain, and death.¹⁵ (p. 37)

The binary of health versus illness, healthy versus unhealthy, is another example of colonial binary thinking (Ureña, 2019) – there are so many ways to live well through sickness, disability, and Madness that are somewhere in between the binary of healthy versus unhealthy. Diet culture, because it's so invested in this binary, is super colonial. (We knew this already, because the anti-fatness behind diet culture is colonial and racist, but it's important to say it again.) Focusing so much of my energy on eating quote-unquote 'healthily', and documenting it in my tenth-grade blog, is evidence that colonial diet culture was firmly rooting my way of thinking at the time.

[Short version of "3am" plays before next section starts]

measuring myself with a yard stick when I only learned metric

Let's back up about a year, to my final year of junior high. It was the last week of school before summer vacation, and one of the hottest days of the year. [Background drone fades in] I generally wore jeans, no matter the weather. On this particular day, though, I felt like I'd physically expire if I wore jeans because it was so uncomfortably hot out. I put on a long-sleeve black top and denim shorts, and stared at my reflection in the full-length squiggle mirror I had in my bedroom. (For fat white culture critic Gina Tonic's (2021) thoughts on this mirror, check out the link in the show notes.) I pulled at the hem of my shorts awkwardly, worrying that my thighs would chafe

¹⁵ Audio from Harrison (2021).

against each other in the heat. I triple-checked that my shorts passed the fingertip length dress code rule (Gray-Tyghter, 2021) before sighing and picking up my backpack to head to school.

I was already sweaty by the time I made it to first period. We had already finished our ninth-grade provincial exams, so we were just biding our time until summer hit. All of the kids in class were wearing shorts. Some girls were wearing spaghetti strap tops, even though that was technically against the rules. I noticed my classmates' skinny legs as my thighs stuck to the melamine of my chair. Our English teacher breezed in, pushing a TV cart and letting us know we'd be watching a movie instead of working on a lesson. She looked over at me, and asked me to chat with her quickly in the hallway. When I left the classroom, my teacher looked me up and down, sighed, and then asked if I knew I was breaking the dress code. My stomach sank. I had triple-checked the shorts! And I was wearing a long-sleeved shirt! And had she not seen my classmates' outfits? I was wearing the same thing as everyone else – covering more skin than other folks, even. Embarrassed, I didn't say any of this to her. I stared at my sneakers, trying not to cry. My teacher asked if I had anything to change into. I could have worn my gym strip, but it was so ugly, not to mention an immediate flag to everyone around that I had gotten told off for wearing the wrong thing to school. I said I didn't. She sighed again, then told me to call my parents to come pick me up.

[Background drone fades out]

My teacher's gaze, and the idea of the gaze more generally, is something I've thought a lot about since this moment in ninth grade. You might have heard about the male gaze before. The male gaze is an idea coming out of 1970s feminist film studies that describes how movies created in patriarchal societies have a heterosexist and misogynist undercurrent (King, 2021). This idea is "the foundation for considering multiple gazes that structure power relations through the acts of looking and being looked at" (King, 2021, p. 120). Queer Black author and theorist bell hooks (1992) defined the imperial gaze as "the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize" (p. 7). In a

comment on my very first draft of this episode, my supervisor Mehmoona noted that “the gaze as othering is an important part of decolonial thought”¹⁶ (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, June 18, 2025).

Black Martinican physician, psychiatrist, revolutionary, and decolonial theorist Frantz Fanon (1952) tells an important story in his book *Peau noire, masques blancs* about the gaze. Retelling his response to being repeatedly called the N-word by strangers, Fanon describes an intense disorientation:

[Fading into the background] Ce jour-là, désorienté, incapable d’être dehors avec l’autre, le Blanc, qui, impitoyable, m’emprisonnait, je me portai loin de mon être-là, très loin, me constituant objet. Qu’était-ce pour moi, sinon un décollement, un arrachement, une hémorragie qui caillait du sang noir sur tout mon corps ? Pourtant, je ne voulais pas cette reconsidération, cette thématization. Je voulais tout simplement être un homme parmi d’autres hommes. J’aurais voulu arriver lisse et jeune dans un monde nôtre et ensemble édifier. (p. 90)

[Translation spoken over the original French] That day, disoriented, incapable of being in the world with the White stranger who, pitiless, imprisoned me [with their language], I transported myself very far from myself, and made myself into an object. How else could I describe this experience, if not a detachment, an uprooting, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with Black blood? After all, I did not ask to be mischaracterised in this way. I wanted simply to be a man among other men. I would have liked to enter, young and sleek, into a world we could build together.¹⁷ (p. 90, my translation)

¹⁶ Read by Mehmoona (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, September 29, 2025).

¹⁷ Read by Ro (R. Averin, personal communication, September 9, 2025).

Ureña (2019) analyses this story, saying that the “relationship to his body [Fanon] wishes to have comes up against the body he is presented with by the colonial gaze, and this discrepancy results in the psychological damage wrought by colonialism” (p. 1650). The main thing to take away from this idea is that there’s no way to have a gaze, to look or to be looked at, that isn’t political. Thinking through getting dress-coded, it feels clear to me that there’s no way for the gaze to be objective. My teacher didn’t measure the length of my shorts, or check everyone’s outfit – she saw my thighs sticking together and decided that my outfit didn’t *look* like it followed the rules. That my *body* didn’t follow the rules.

When I think about the gaze, I’m immediately reminded of a photograph of me from high school, attending one of my first Prides. [Background drone fades in] A friend was obsessed with photography at the time and documented the whole day. A few weeks later, we got together to look at the slideshow in another pal’s parents’ basement. I remember the moment when this photo flashed across the screen. In the picture, I’m standing on a downtown corner, looking over my shoulder at my friend’s lens, away from the parade. I felt a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, because I saw a fat person looking at the camera. A few years later, I found that photo again, and saw a thin person looking at the camera. I don’t have a copy of this photo, and I haven’t seen it in years, so I can’t confirm what I would see today. This complicated way of seeing the same photo is really interesting to me. It points to the social construction of fatness, and the anti-fatness in my own gaze – that I haven’t been able to trust my own perception of my body through the haze of racist, colonial diet culture.

It’s been fascinating and kind of horrible to watch clothing trends from junior high school come back into vogue over the past few years, particularly since so many of them were rooted in anti-fatness (Jagani, 2022; Zirimis, 2022). Remember, I went to junior high in the era of ‘nothing tastes as good as skinny feels’ (Alderton, 2024). I recently went jeans shopping in-person for the

first time in nearly a decade. After watching some folks on Instagram® talking about how to mask quote-unquote ‘feminine’ curves using clothing cuts and tailoring, I went looking for straight leg jeans, which have long been elusive for me. I have enough sensory memory of perpetually-damp bootcut jeans with absolutely demolished hems from the early 2000s that anything massively wide-leg was right out. My thighs have only gotten bigger since getting dress coded in junior high school, and I have muscular calves, so finding jeans that actually drop straight from the hip is tricky. Add to that a refusal to ever wear low-rise pants again, and we’ve got a thorny set of requirements in today’s jeans landscape.

I started my search in a department store that I knew was iffy on sizing, and nothing came anywhere close to fitting on my body. It was so interesting to me to feel the same self-consciousness in the dressing room that I felt as a teenager, and to be able to name that as a reaction to the hyper-gendered anti-fatness of the mall space instead of internalising it so much. Next, I went to the Gap®. After trying on 13 pairs of pants, I left with two new pairs of jeans that I felt pretty good about. Feeling brave, I finished my shopping expedition at Levi’s®. I entered the store and found a cut that sounded promising. When I started rummaging through the pile to find my size, a salesperson came up to me and asked if I was finding everything okay. I said yes, this cut was what I was looking for, and asked him if Levi’s® had it in the size I usually take. He took me to a completely different part of the store, fished out a completely different cut in that size, and suggested I try them on. Slightly baffled, I took the jeans to the dressing room. They got stuck halfway up my thighs. When I emerged and told him the size was too small, he shrugged and told me he hoped I had a good rest of my day. I guess there were no other jeans available in my size or bigger, but I was so confused by the interaction and exhausted after trying on so many ill-fitting pants that I didn’t think to ask. I just left. When thinking through this experience with a pal months later ^(love you Julie), they highlighted that many fat folks they love can’t shop at a mall in a mainstream

stuck, frustrated. And yet! I was refusing and resisting this shame and discomfort by starting to speak about it through this poem. In one of our conversations about this project, my supervisor Mehmoona identified this as an early sign of embodied knowledge:

Colonisation, foundationally, is telling you that somebody knows about you and that their knowledge is superior and it's right. It's authoritative. But then we're not ever victims of this colonization, this colonial language – we always resist. We always know otherwise. It never gets entirely eradicated. And so you know otherwise, and much of what you know otherwise is also embodied, which is very interesting. They're reading your body and telling you things, and then your body wants to gag... so the resistance is also embodied.¹⁹ (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, April 23, 2025)

Like I said at the very beginning of this podcast, I've often wondered about the interactions between my transness and my relationship with food and eating. For years, I've felt frustrated that my transness is left out of the conversation when I talk about my relationship with food and eating, and vice versa. Including a slur used against queer folks in this poem about my feelings about eating refuses the neat separation of these topics. I still didn't have the words to explain this embodied knowledge at the time of writing, though. Let's think that through together now.

[Short version of "3am" plays before next section starts]

queer and fat and failure embroidered on my stomach lining

How do we move from embodied knowledge to expressing that knowledge in words? I'm not really sure if I've got a coherent story to explain this part. Andea Gibson (2025), a white, nonbinary spoken word poet, shared this about writing from what they called the 'messy middle':

¹⁹ Read by Mehmoona (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, September 29, 2025).

Neatly resolved stories signal that the exploration is over. Sometimes it's not about knowing the answer, but being inside the question together. Being inside the hardest winter together. Being beside each other in the cold when, finally, the first brave sprout pushes through the hard earth, and a smile breaks the surface of our faces, and another season of our lives is upon us.²⁰ (para. 12)

When Mehmoona first read a draft of the story I shared earlier about chest binding, she understood that story to mean that in trying on a binder, I had embraced my transness. That would be a neatly resolved story. The truth is that when I decided to try binding, I was still trying to figure out what my gender was. I'm still learning about my gender every day.

[Background drone fades in] I first tried out they/them pronouns in the bios I would provide to journals that published my poems. I think it felt like a safe, relatively anonymous way to try them out, and I liked the way they looked on the page. In person, I started by telling folks in my life that she or they pronouns worked fine for me – whichever was easiest for the person talking about me. That generally meant that everyone kept using the same pronouns they'd used for me since I was born. Once I started floating the idea of they/them pronouns as an option, I noticed that it kind of irked me when folks chose to use she/her pronouns for me instead, even though I had nominally consented to both. The hair on the back of my neck stood on end. My eye started to twitch.

So, how did I move from that twitchiness to being able to express which pronouns help me feel at home in my body? How did I figure out that 'nonbinary' describes me, and claim transness as mine? It feels a bit... earnest to say this, but it was through friendship. I was working at a summer camp for queer and trans youth in Treaty 7 territory. I remember it as a sunny day, with the kind of endlessly blue sky you only find in the prairies. Campers and workers were encouraged to wear nametags the whole weekend, trying on new names and pronouns to see how they felt. I sat next to

²⁰ Read by Viv (V. Wilson, personal communication, September 10, 2025).

a dear friend of mine as we were each making the nametags we would wear that day ^(love you Laura). I grabbed a marker, and froze. Laura asked if everything was okay, and I said I wasn't sure what pronouns to write down. She asked which pronouns felt good to me in that moment. After a pause, I wrote they/them on the nametag. [Background drone fades out]

I know myself as trans because I have been given the opportunity to explore my gender in safe, loving relationships with other trans and trans-affirming folks. Coming out isn't a one-time thing. Every time I meet someone new, I have to choose how much of myself to share with them. This reminds me of something we talked about last episode: [Rewind sound, prefacing the following quoted section from Episode 2] María Lugones (2010) argued that

One does not resist the coloniality of gender alone. One resists it from within a way of understanding the world and living in it that is shared and that can understand one's actions, thus providing recognition. Communities rather than individuals enable the doing; one does with someone else, not in individualist isolation.²¹ (p. 754) [Sound of a tape being ejected, marking the end of the quoted section]

I don't think it's just gender that works this way, either. I have grown to understand fatness in community with other fat folks. I have grown to understand coloniality in community with racialised and Indigenous folks. The language for these embodied knowledges was passed on to me by folks who figured some of it out before I did, and we keep exploring the words together.

[Short version of "3am" plays before next section starts]

to the leers from the passenger's seat window

This past fall, I accidentally drowned my laptop on my way to a conference. (Pro tip: don't put a full water bottle in the same carry-on as your computer on a flight. Just don't risk it, friends.)

²¹ Read by Kéka (M. Guerrero-Quintana, personal communication, September 11, 2025).

[Background drone fades in] It was super stressful, particularly because I was really worried that I would lose months of thesis work. When I got home, I found a computer repair guy who said he could fix it. I brought the laptop, now dried out, to his home office. I was wearing my usual cold-weather gear: jeans, Blundstone® boots, and an oversized denim jacket with a patch that says ‘the future is nonbinary’. The computer repair guy, while unscrewing something in my computer, looked over at my patch and said,

“That doesn’t exist.”²²

I could feel the hair on the back of my neck standing up. I was by myself, in his apartment, and he had my laptop with all my info in his hands. I told him, calmly, well, I exist. I’m nonbinary, and I’m right here. He followed up with a long list of incredibly inappropriate questions, trying to ‘gotcha’ me into revealing my quote-unquote ‘true’ gender.

“Okay, so what’s on your driver’s license?”²² An X.

“Okay, but what’s on your passport?”²² I don’t feel comfortable telling you that.

“Do you pee sitting down?”²² Do you ask other customers how they use the bathroom?

“Can you have children?”²² I don’t see how that’s relevant.

“Okay, but can you give birth?”²² Still not relevant.

“Are you attracted to men?”²² Again, really not relevant.

“Do you believe in God?”²² How long do you think it will take to finish this repair, exactly?

I called Viv as soon as I was back in my car with the repaired laptop, hands shaking. This particular computer guy might have just been playing devil’s advocate, or improbably unaware of social cues, but a different one might not have been. [Background drone fades out] Hil Malatino (2020), citing white trans scholar Eva Hayward, argues that “being told we don’t exist—despite all the obvious indicators that we, in fact, do—operates as an ‘attack on ontology, on beingness’”

²² Read by Dad (S. O’Brien, personal communication, September 8, 2025).

(p.14). Further, he affirms that “the encounter with the stranger has always held the real weight—and burden—as far as the conferral of gender goes” (p. 36). Just because I feel mostly comfortable in my gender and my body now – just because I have words to describe my experiences and frames to understand the way the world works – doesn’t mean I don’t still rub up against cis society in a way that’s painful and violent. (There’s that alienation thing again.)

This feels so different than another misgendering I experienced while writing this thesis.

[Background drone fades in] A few weeks ago, I went on a walk with my dog Louie. Some neighbourhood kids were playing on the corner. As we passed, they did that whisper-yell thing kids do to each other, where they were trying to be quiet but I could still clearly hear what they were saying. It went something like this:

“What is that?”

“Is that a boy?”

“Don’t be an idiot, he’s a girl.”

For a moment, I thought about stopping to explain my gender, or whisper-yelling “I’m nonbinary!” back at them. They were clearly picking up on something without having the language for it – just like I hadn’t had the language to understand my own transness, when I was around their age. I felt the sun on my face, and Louie pulled on his leash, clearly more interested in whatever he was sniffing at than any human interaction going on. I realised I actually didn’t care what language those kids used for my gender, and kept walking. In a strange way, in their awkward language, they saw me. When I shared the anecdote with Viv after getting home, we laughed.

[Background drone fades out; demo version of “3am” starts playing in the background]

Closing

Thanks so much for listening to this episode of TRANS FATS, a podcasted thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work in the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria. Many thanks to the folks who sent in voice recordings of their work for this episode: Clarissa Rojas, Penny Haulotte, and Eli Clare. My pal Ro read the Fanon quote, Viv read the Andrea Gibson quote, Nahomi read for Audre Lorde, and Kéka read the María Lugones quote; my mum and dad also did some voice acting! Thanks so much to each of you for lending your voices to this project.

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[Background music swells before ending]