

Dem Bois Podcast Ep. 107
The Complexities and Phases of Gender Awakening
with Taj Taylor

Shawn Aaron: 00:00

2026 marks 10 years of Dem Bois Inc. That's 10 years of community care, 10 years of leadership rooted in love, and 10 years of turning visibility into possibility. And so, to honor this milestone, we've launched our 10 for 10 campaign. You're like, Shawn, 10 for 10, what's that? So, we are inviting you, our listeners, our supporters, our allies, and other folks in the community to give \$10 a month to help sustain the care, leadership, and visibility that trans men of color deserve. And so, 10 years is a very long time, right? That's a decade. Can you imagine raising a child from birth and then looking at them at their 10th birthday party and being like, wow, you've watched so much of their growth within that 10 years, right? That's the same for us. And so, Dem Bois Inc. over the 10 years, we have done a lot. And so, we have provided gender affirming surgery grants to trans men of color to obtain gender affirming surgeries. We started this podcast.

We are now in season four of the podcast in 2026. We created our "Visibility = Possibility" merch. We partner with Emilio and Zyon, both trans men of color to design what visibility equals possibility means to them. And it's reflected in our merch. We also partner with the black trans man Mo La Flo to create our theme song. And that's the music that you hear every time you tune into Dem Bois Podcast. We've done merch, we've done partnering. We have delivered care packages to trans men of color in need of personal hygiene items within our community. We have done a lot in 10 years. And so, imagine what the next 10 years would look like.

Donating \$10 a month says I believe in this work. I believe in the future of trans men of color, and I believe in what comes next. And so, if this call resonates with you, join us today. And we've even made it easy. You don't even got to go anywhere. Whatever platform you're listening to this episode, go ahead and open up the show notes and from there, you will be able to click the link to start your contribution to our 10 for 10 campaign. Your monthly support helps ensure Dem Bois boys can continue showing up for our community with intention care and impact. So, thank you for listening and thank you for believing in our mission. Okay. And I'm going to get out of here so you can listen to this episode. Take care.

[02:33- 2:45 Musical Outro]

My next guest I had the privilege to sit down with is an advocate for love, and trusting in the divine. Their mission is to hold space for transformation and remind others

that they are always worthy of a life that feels aligned and deeply loving. Within this episode, we talked a lot about transitioning in different phases. And so, this episode is jam-packed with a lot of great gems. And we also talked about romance and love and just really finding who you are and taking your time in doing that. So, this is a really great episode. I hope that you enjoy.

[03:24 - 03:42 Musical Intro]

Dem Bois, Dem Bois, amplifying trans men of color voices, yeah, we here making noise. Making noise visibility equals possibility. You know, we Dem Bois yeah, Dem Bois yeah, amplifying trans men of color voices yeah...

Shawn Aaron: 03:42

Welcome to Dem Bois Podcast. I'm your host Shawn Aaron he/him/his. My next guest is a content creator a tattoo artist and a spiritual medium. Their work blends intuition storytelling and art to help their community feel safer and more rooted in who they are. Welcome to the show.

Taj Taylor: 04:02

Thank you so much for having me. I'm super, super excited.

Shawn Aaron: 04:05

Yes.

Taj Taylor: 04:06

Ready to yap your heads off.

Shawn Aaron: 04:06

Yes, yes, yap away, yap away. You want to let folks know who you are, name and pronouns before we get started.

Taj Taylor: 04:14

Yes, so my name is Taj Taylor, and my pronouns are they/them or he/him.

Shawn Aaron: 04:19

They/them and he/him. Beautiful. And so where are you located, Taj?

Taj Taylor: 04:22

So, I'm actually currently like right outside New Orleans. I just say New Orleans because it's like easier for people to realize, specifically I'm in Metairie.

Shawn Aaron: 04:31

Okay, and how long have you been there?

Taj Taylor: 04:33

I think it's been about five going on six years now. Yeah, wow. Okay, yeah. Five going on six years. I'm originally from New York, so I moved down here.

Shawn Aaron: 04:41

Okay, we brought you to New Orleans? Well, near New Orleans?

Taj Taylor: 04:44

My boyfriend actually.

Shawn Aaron: 04:45

Okay, so you moved for love.

Taj Taylor: 04:47

So, he was actually originally from New York as well. And then he and his family moved down here. Then we had met a couple of years after that. And then I was like, you know what, why don't we just, you know, just cut the distance and just jump.

Shawn Aaron: 04:58

I love that. Was it worth it the move?

Taj Taylor: 05:01

Yes, absolutely. The city, maybe I don't really vibe too much with the city down here, no shade, but just not for me. But I'm still happy because we were a long-distance couple, so I couldn't handle the long distance anymore. So being able to close the gap definitely, yeah, 100 % worth it.

Shawn Aaron: 05:16

Yeah, I love that. And I definitely want to get into that a little bit later because I'm an Instagram stalker. So, I stalked you a little bit and I just see that love.

Taj Taylor: 05:25

I'm honored.

Shawn Aaron: 05:26

Yeah. And I see the love and I'm like, yo, we got to tap into that. Right. And so, I definitely want to tap into that a little bit later. But first I want to ask you the name, Taj, how did that name choose you?

Taj Taylor: 05:36

So, it actually is a shortened version of my government name. And I have no problem saying it. So, my government name is Tajhara. It's actually an Indian name that my parents, I don't know what compelled my parents to name me an Indian name because we are not Indian, but I guess they saw the name, and they thought it was so beautiful. So, they were like, yep, that's the one. And then growing up, my nickname was always just Taj for short. My family actually, because they're` Jamaican, they pronounce it Taj, but it's still pretty much the same thing. Yeah. So, either or my family calls me Taj, but so I choose a pronunciation Taj going forward because I like the association between Taj Mahal.

Shawn Aaron: 06:08

I like that. Taj is how they pronounce it? I love that. Actually, and I've never heard anybody... I've met and known a lot of Taj's in my life, but I've never heard it pronounced in that way. I love that. Yeah. So, you wanted it to sound more like Taj Mahal. Was that just the reason or you just like you wanted something totally different from what your family would normally pronounce your name? Was there reason behind that?

Taj Taylor: 06:34

Yeah, I'd say it was probably a mixture of both because growing up hearing Taj, it didn't feel like... I think Tajhara didn't really resonate at all, like growing up. But then my nickname, it felt really nice to have it just shortened to that. But I'm not going to lie, I didn't really like the pronunciation. Not that there's anything wrong with it. Like that's literally like a dialect, but I think I resonated more with Taj. And then also just looking up like the meaning of my name, when you cut it in half, like literally the T-A-J literally represents like crown or light. So that's what the word Taj and Taj Mahal means as well. So that's why I was like, okay, I think I really like emphasizing that meaning so I'm to go with that pronunciation. So, it was a mixture of me wanting to align more with that meaning, but then also wanting a little bit more differentiation from like the name that I was used to hearing growing up.

Shawn Aaron: 07:22

I like that. You know, and speaking on that growing up and so like when was it, you know, like what age or what point in your life when you got to a deep understanding of like who you were?

Taj Taylor: 07:36

Ooh, honestly, that's such a journey. Honest answer, recently. Like I would say probably; because I'm 29 now, I think when I finally started to step into who I was, it probably about 27. But my journey of like starting, like my entire gender queer journey probably started when I was about 13 or 14. But it's been like a continued... Like I've constantly gone through these phases, these cycles. And after each one, I

learned a little bit more about myself. I take another step forward and it's just kind of brought me to where I am now. So yeah, think that's the long story short answer.

Shawn Aaron: 08:08

Yeah, I like that because I talk about that all the time of like, I've been all of the letters, LGBTQ, all of them, right.

Taj Taylor: 08:18

Period. Period. Period.

Shawn Aaron: 08:19

But I've been okay in every step that I was that I've been in now going from. L to G was a little bit difficult at first because it was something totally different and I was, you know, getting rooted in my transition and it was just a lot for me. But the same for me. I was comfortable in each phase, and I feel like I'm the sum of all the parts, right? Because I never had this feeling of like, you know, growing up of I'm a boy. I knew I was always a masculine person, but the term I'm a man or I'm a boy didn't come 'til much later in my life as well. So, I began to transition to my early 30s, so we're kind of similar in that way. And so, I want to ask you, the steps, if you want to talk about the steps, what were these steps and this gender journey that you went on?

Taj Taylor: 09:07

I actually think it's been a while since I've actually like gone down this journey. So, I'm happy to do this here, too. Let's see. Okay, so I think my first like queer awakening was honestly I had a crush on a girl. That was my first queer awakening. So, I really resonated when you're like I went through all the letters like I feel like I did too. Just each phase just lasted, you know, like a different time like some lasted longer some lasted shorter. This phase definitely didn't last that long only because

I grew up in a very Christian, very conservative household. So, I mentioned earlier my family is Jamaican and the religion that they practice is Seven Day Adventist Christianity, as you could say that. So, SDA, that's what they call it for short. And I feel like SDA is probably one of the most strict Christian divisions out there. It holds a lot of roots. It shares a lot of cultures and like rituals with Judaism as well, like in a lot of things that we would do like Passover, for example, something that we celebrate.

So, it's like, they kind of took the Old Testament a little too literal sometimes. So, growing up was very difficult in terms of, you know, I felt really restricted in my freedom of expression, especially in how I chose to dress, not just at church, but even in my regular everyday life. So that is what kind of spurred the next phase. So, my first phase was just this like innocent crush that I had on a girl at church. It never went anywhere because I didn't think anything of it.

It's funny because at the time I wouldn't have clarified it as a crush. I would have just said, oh no, she's just really cool. I just really look up to her, and I just always want to be around her and like she just got this energy and this aura, but no, we're just friends. And I'm like, nah, you were gay as fuck. That's what that was. And I just did not want to acknowledge it. So, I just think that's so funny. And even now I remember what she looks like. And even now I think that, yeah, she was gorgeous. That was a crush for sure.

But again, because of my programming, because of wanting to be a good Christian child, there was no way in my brain that I saw that as a viable option. Didn't even think. That's what I'm saying. I didn't even see it as a crush. But I was still a very, I'll say, eccentric child. I was really into things that I guess other people weren't at the time. I was really into anime and Asian culture. And that was a whole other layer of being a black child of an immigrant family into stuff like that. So.

the accusations of being labeled, oh, like you're just acting white or like you don't know. Yeah, like that's a whole other layer. But that didn't really deter me because I was able to find other people like me in high school who also like anime who were also into these things. So, despite the outside pressure, especially from like friends at church at the time. I definitely got bullied. At the time. Again, I wouldn't have considered it bullying for me being different. But looking back at it now, it was definitely a soft form of bullying, but they would pretend to be my friends at the same time.

So, at church, it was a completely different life and then at school is when I truly felt like I could be myself a little bit more. So that's where I found community. That's where I found people who were like me, like I said. And me being into anime actually opened up an entire world of me being interested in Japanese culture. And there's actually a specific fashion style called danso, and it's their version of like, I guess the transmasculine community over there. It's not a complete one-to-one because our cultures are just so different. You know, they definitely face different types of oppression, especially the trans community over there too, even now to this day. So back then it was, you can imagine it was completely underground. And this was their way of expressing that was just, oh, it's just fashion.

Oh, we're just dressing up like men. It's nothing more. But it was really actually like a whole like community for them. They had cafes, you know, like you could go in and they would dress up almost like in cosplay, but it was actually not cosplay for them. This was their lives, but this was just how they would express it. You could say it is very similar to like drag bars, basically. And so, when I found this style, oh my God, I fell in love. Like I absolutely fell in love. I was like, whoa, they're so cool. It's like they're women, but yet they don't look like it. And like they're able to be all fluid because they were still very beautiful in the face because, you know, the aesthetics and the fashion over there is very similar to like K-pop, for example. So, I was just so

attracted to that mixture of femininity and masculinity and being able to play with that. And so, I just dove headfirst into fashion.

This is why I'll say I definitely had a little bit more privilege because my father was a lot more lenient than my mother was. And my mother worked a lot more than my father did. So fortunately, I didn't have my outfit judged as often every day before school. And my father eventually just gave up because I was literally a very rebellious child. I was like, no, I'm wearing this or I'm not going to school. And so, he just wouldn't fight me on it. If my mom was home, obviously I'd have to like wear what she wanted. But most of the time I was able to kind of be free to wear what I wanted.

And my father would just buy me whatever clothes he felt. He was like, okay, if this is what makes them happy at the time, then whatever. So, shout out to my dad for not being 100 % in, but not being 100 % against me either. He just kind of let me do me. But me being able to explore this fashion it really opened my eyes. It was the first time I ever felt, I guess, gender euphoria. When I was actually dressing up and looking at myself in the mirror, I was like, wow, damn, I look pretty cool.

It was just a really nice, almost like alignment because before then I hadn't really thought much about my wardrobe, didn't really think much about what I wore. I just kind of wore whatever my parents bought me up until that point. This was probably around when I was like 14, yeah, 13, 14, 15, somewhere around this age. So, I guess that's the second phase is experimenting with fashion. And then the third phase came the gender awareness. So, thanks to the age of Tumblr and all of the nonsense that goes on in there, I was able to learn a lot that you probably wouldn't have if you weren't on that website. Definitely a whole can of worms on there. But I was still very much into anime. I was still very much into just Asian culture. K-pop at the time became a special interest of mine too. So, in doing so again, I found community online as well.

So, up until this point, I'd only ever had like my high school friends. And I wouldn't say all of them are great, but I'm even still friends with some of them to this day. So, it's like they were like a really good group. And even when I had come out later on to them, they were still very accepting. So that's what I mean by like they were like the OGs. Again, another privilege that I know a lot of trans people don't have, especially in high school. Shout out to like my spirit guides, whatever, for protecting me because I know how difficult that is for other people. But being able to go through this,

I was able to find this online community. I was able to learn a lot more about just like queerness and just like at the time the language still wasn't 100 % there yet. And it's funny because I don't have this screenshot anymore. But when I first like went on Tumblr, there is literally a tweet, I think. I don't know what they're called at the time, a tweet, guess, of me saying like, oh, you know, I have no problem with gay people. I

just could never be one. Literally, I think I found it like five years later, I was going through my old accounts and I was like...

Shawn Aaron: 16:09

That's cute.

Taj Taylor: 16:09

...oh, poor sweet gay child. You have no idea.

Shawn Aaron: 16:13

That's how it starts.

Taj Taylor: 16:14

You have no idea. You're going to be so hella gay. You have no idea. Gay in all the ways. But yeah, it's just funny because I look back and I'm like, oh my God, there were so many signs. There were so many. And at this point, I was still in denial. So, it had not crossed my mind that I was like, oh know, you may not be cis. It had never crossed my mind. It wasn't until I came across a cosplayer who was an FTM cosplayer, never had seen that before in my life. Even with me coming across the danso community, it still wasn't a hard line of transition. For them, it was still just aesthetics, fashion. It wasn't to the point of actually physically transitioning.

So, it wasn't until I found this cosplayer that I was like, my God, this is possible? Like, holy shit, he looks great. And he documented his entire journey on YouTube, literally all the ins and outs, all the details, all the docs appointments, the surgeries, everything. So, it was my first time actually seeing, well, it was my first time hearing of the word trans, and then it was my first time even seeing that a transition like this was possible and that you could actually look the way that you wanted, you know, there was an actual possibility. And yeah, like I'm trying to remember... Twin Fools actually, that's his cosplay name. He has no idea what he's done for me. Literally just living his life, but you know, that's what it is when you're a creator, right? You have these impacts on people and that was that impact for me. Because honestly,

I probably would have gone much longer in denial if I hadn't had seen that one cosplayer. Cause I don't know, there was something about him that finally made it click and say, Hey, this is possible for you too. Cause I'm pretty sure I'd seen trans people and obviously queer people before then, but it never resonated that I could also be a part of that community until that moment. So now this is what began the third phase. The really difficult trying to accept myself phase. This was really difficult because I was fighting against, again, my Christian programming, wanting to be a good kid, not wanting to be a disappointment because my cousin at the time, even though it was my cousin, still we grew up as like siblings. He was the problem child. He was always causing issues, not doing everything right. And I was always used in

comparison as the good child, the one that always got all the good grades, the one that, you know. So, it's like, I felt like I had like something to uphold and that by accepting this or exploring this, would be, you know, like disappointing or letting down or just being another problem child that my cousin was.

Again, really shitty of my parents or my family to compare us like that, cause now you created this like almost competition between us that didn't even need to be there and then ignoring whatever he was going through and putting me on a pedestal when I was also going through shit. So, that's a whole other separate story, but it caused this feeling of not wanting to shake up the status quo. But something about me, I'm always going to be myself, even when I don't want to. That's something that I've noticed even throughout all of this, even when it was hard, even when it was difficult, I still couldn't stop myself from just exploring. I'd always do things like, oh, well, I'm just dipping my toe in, I'm just exploring and then that would just lead me further down to who I was meant to be. So, in this case, was battling between the idea of could I actually be a man?

So, at this time, the concept of being non-binary was not, like I hadn't heard of it, it wasn't a thing. And this is what kind of like led my journey down in a way because I thought that you could only be one or the other, right? So, it's like you're growing up in this strict binary world, you know, I'm being raised as a woman and now I see this first potential of being trans and he's a binary trans man. So, I'm thinking, okay, well, you know, if I'm really being honest with myself, I don't feel like a woman. Like this was the first time when I actually started to like sit with myself and acknowledge these feelings and say that like, well, you feel better when you dress up as a man. You feel better when you wear these things. You feel better when you see yourself like this. So, if you don't feel comfortable being a woman, you must be a man.

Not true. I was almost there at the time, but you know, the language, the culture wasn't as expansive yet, and that was the only example I had at that time. So, it was all I had to go off of. I still think it was a really good catapult into it because like I said, if I hadn't seen it, I probably would have waited much longer, probably till college before I started experimenting. So, in doing that, in trying to like understand myself and accept these things, I explored a little bit more in altering my physical appearance. So, I was really into makeup at the time too. So now I would do makeup to see like, oh, what would I look like with like a mustache or like I would fill in my eyebrows, make them look like a little bit darker. I did the ACE bandage binding thing that you're not supposed to do. I was a true and true baby trans at the time, making all the mistakes, doing everything like that, just trying to learn and feel what feels good, what doesn't feel good. So, I'll say this phase lasted from like 15 to 18. It wasn't until, I think, 18 is when I finally am just like, you know what, this is me, right?

But during that time, when I was about 17 going on 18, this is when I accidentally came out to my parents. And I say accidentally because it was not planned. I was

definitely put on the spot. And one thing about me is I can't lie. So, if you ask me something about myself, like I said, this is what saying. I can't even hide myself if I tried. Because if you ask me about something, I'm going to tell you straight up what it is. So that was basically what happened. What I would do is when my mom was at work I would walk around the house with my ACE bandage on, because that was the only time I felt free.

She wasn't watching, wasn't scrutinizing me. She came home early one day, and I guess she happened to just notice that my chest was flatter than normal. And she asked me, she was just like, what do you have on your chest? And like I said, maybe it's the neurodivergence, but it's like, I'm going to tell you straight up. I said, a binder. Straight up, I was like, ACE bandages. And she was like, well, why are you doing that to yourself? But I was like, because I like it. And then that like sparked something in her, but she was like, okay, no, you need to sit down. We need to talk about this. And in my brain, I'm like, oh my God, here it comes.

Shawn Aaron: 22:10

Thank you for tuning into this week's episode. So, from whatever platform that you're listening to this week's episode on, please be sure to give us five stars. And if there's something within this episode, whether it's the guest or something that I said, or maybe the guest said that resonated with you, be sure to go and leave us a comment on this episode or leave us a comment on the show. So, what happens is, if you feel like it resonated with you, I'm sure there's someone out there who hasn't even heard about Dem Bois Podcast. It may resonate with them, and actually it could save someone's life to hear these stories, right? Because we believe that visibility equals possibility, but there isn't any possibility if we aren't visible. So, if you go and leave comments, the more comments you leave, the more five-star ratings you leave, then this podcast will be available to more folks to see. And so, we want to be visible. We want to be out there. We want folks to know that we're here and that our stories are out there for them to listen to. And so, if you could do me a favor, please go ahead and rate the show or leave a comment. Until next time, see you on the next episode.

Taj Taylor: 23:25

So, that's basically what happened is that we had that conversation. I was just telling her straight up, like, eventually it led to me saying that like, I don't feel comfortable as a woman. I feel like I would be more comfortable as a man. There were tears mainly on her behalf, the whole nine works. Like my father had come home and like came in the middle of the conversation. I had to catch him up. Again, he's just sitting there quietly, just listening. Again, my mom's having a whole tantrum, a whole waterworks thing. And like, of course I'm crying, but not for the same reason she's crying. She's thinking that there's something mentally wrong with her child. And then I'm crying because I'm like, fuck, my life is over. Because up until this point now, the examples

of like trans people have always been horror stories. There's always been like, especially on Tumblr, it's always been, I came out to my family and they kicked me out. Or like, I came out to them and now they beat me or they abused me. Or like, now they won't help me with college. Now they won't do this.

So, my goal was literally as I was figuring this out, my goal was literally to keep this under wraps until I was in college, until I was like, okay, I can stand on my own two legs. And I was going to use college as a leverage point against them because again, that strong immigrant mentality, they think that school is everything. They literally sacrifice everything for it. So, I knew that they wouldn't jeopardize my future even for something like this. So, I basically was going to use it as like, okay, well you either let me finish college as I am or I de-transition and there's no college. That was the goal. So, like I literally had it all planned out and stuff like that, but obviously it did not go that way because I ended up coming out earlier than I wanted to.

I mean, it was going to happen at some point, like me coming out. So, it was just kind of like the catalyst for it, but it was annoying what ensued after that because again, my parents were literally operating from the mindset of there's something wrong with my child. We need to get them help. So, they brought me to this pastor/therapist which if we're going to call it what it is, it was conversion therapy. They just didn't want to own up to it. It was just a really soft launch into it. Like it wasn't a camp where I was locked in the bars, but it was very much like you're not actually here to hear about my gender dysphoria. You're trying to figure out what's wrong with me so you can wire me back to what you all want me to be. And I could tell then the questions that he was asking. It was so long ago that I can't remember exactly what he asked me, but I do remember times where I thought the questions were very inappropriate. Like, borderline, like you should not be asking these type of questions of a child. Like, yeah.

So, it was a very uncomfortable experience. Like, fortunately, nothing more happened, it was just a conversation. But like, I remember leaving there feeling like I am never going back here again, they will have to lock me up and drag me to this therapist if that's the case. And they tried again, they tried, they were like, okay, well, maybe that therapist didn't work. Let's take you to another one. I was like, no, let me stop you right there. This is this is not going to go the way that you think it is. And I had to have a second conversation, a second sit down with them. This time, my sister and my brother were involved and getting the whole family on the same page and basically was just letting them know that this is who I am. It's just like, it is what it is.

That was pretty tough too because out of everyone, my sister was the only one, the only one who truly saw me. And she was just like accepting, and so it's like to this day, she's the only one who respects my pronouns, who actually uses my name, the only one in my family, and she's my half-sister, I think. Something like that, she's not

even like full blood. I know that shouldn't matter, but I just think that's really interesting in the context of things of how, you know, they place family up on a pedestal, but you know. And then my brother has always been violently and aggressively against it. I've had to cut him off because he's threatened violence against me.

So like, yeah, that's kind of like a sore spot for me too, but like I've come to forgive him because I understand that he's operating from his limited understanding of the world. He's also been programmed the same way that they were trying to do for me, he just didn't get out. Like he tried, like there's so many times where I could see him trying to understand and like there were times where I thought we had reconciled and then would slip back in and I'm just like, you know, so like now it's like, you know, you do you, I'm going to do me over here. It is what it is. If we ever reconcile, okay, if not, it is what it is. But that was a really tough conversation because I'm having these conversations like as a teenager, as a kid, I'm having to have these grown-up conversations with adults that are projecting all of their fears and all of their emotions and energies onto me. And in that moment, I could not understand it.

Now at my big ass age, I can look at it and see like, damn, that was really fucked up. You deserve that to like younger me. But I feel like I held my own and I think that's something that I'm really proud of myself that even when it's afraid, even when it felt like, oh my God, I could be kicked out or whatever, I still couldn't not be me, like I was saying. So, in that phase fortunately, it didn't mess up anything with like schooling like my parents just had to just accept it, But it wasn't really an acceptance of like, you know open arms. It was more like begrudging me more like okay. I guess this is the way you are but we're never going to talk about it speak of it acknowledge it we're just going to pretend like it never even happened and now I think it's been... How long has it been? Like ten years later. We're still in the exact same boat.

Nothing has changed They still pretend like I'm still their daughter. They still use like she/her pronouns for me. And even when I try and educate them on issues, it's crickets, it's silence, yet I will get a Bible verse from them every other day, and I'm expected to show the same type of respect. And that's what I mean by that religious indoctrination, it runs so deep. So, it's like I also hold space for my parents too, because they are also just as trapped as my brother is. And when I was a child, when I was younger, you can't see that, I was so filled with rage.

Like literally when I look back at myself, I was so angry at them. Like at the time I was like, oh, I hated them. Like they're the worst parents ever, not realizing my privilege, the fact that they were still willing to pay for my college and do all this stuff. So, it's like, had to balance a lot of duality between accepting myself, but then also holding space for my family and trying to figure out the boundaries and the lines of where I could still be myself, where they don't take over. like, even now I'm still like battling it to some extent. It's a lot easier now because I don't live with them. I'm not

in the same area as them, but that's what I was battling while at the same time struggling to accept that I was a trans man.

So, I was dealing with all of those things of like, like I'm so feminine looking, I'll never look like whoever, whatever, like I'll never get that masculine or like I'll never look the way I want or like my body will always be this way. So, a lot of limiting beliefs, a lot of things of like, I'll never get there so why even try? And while I was in college, I ended up going to a therapist who I would say generally like I did... There was a first time that I went to a therapist that wasn't trying to change me, that wasn't trying to conform me so that felt really nice. I was very scared going into it obviously because I had already like therapy trauma before that.

So, it was still nice because I was able to actually talk about all of these fears in a place where like there was no judgment. And even though she didn't have like one-on-one experience with trans folks, I still commend her because even looking back, like she was still able to hold space despite not having first-hand experience despite not being able to put herself in my shoes, she was still able to acknowledge my feelings. And I think that alone is what helped me come to accept myself and be like, you know what, it's okay for me to take these little steps. At the same time, I was also able to find a queer community there, which when I say queer community, it literally saves lives. It really does.

So, my college had gender neutral housing. So, for the first semester, I didn't know that was a thing. So, the first semester I just went in, I had a regular roommate and in the second semester, that's when I transferred into the gender-neutral housing. But even though for that first semester I was still in the all-woman housing, I made amazing friends. Friends that I still kept even when I moved to gender neutral housing. There's even actually like, I don't know if you'll ever listen to this, but Luanne, she was my first roommate. Shout out to her. She was so respectful. I came out to her, and she respected me despite the fact that I still look straight up like a woman at the time. Love her to death.

She was my first introduction to Taiwan, which is a country that I had studied abroad multiple times and actually plan on going back there and moving soon. So, it's like, she had a huge impact in my life. So, shout out to her for being super awesome. And like, there's this recurring theme of just people just being there for me at the times where I really needed them. And it was never my family was never anybody related to me. It was always just strangers, people who I just met and like, you know, they were able to just be there for me in ways that like, I didn't even know I needed, honestly, because I'm here thinking, going into college thinking like, you know what?

I'm going to handle this myself, like I got this. And then in comes this community and I'm just like, wow, I can actually like put my walls down and I can be myself. And then, you know, that occurred even more when I moved into the gender-neutral housing.

Now this is when I actually got to be around queer people in real life. Because up until this point, my community has always just been online. And even with that, it wasn't the strong connections, you know, that like, I guess I really wanted. It was more so just like passing conversations, you retweet a couple of stuff of it, you know, whatever you post. But this was the first time I'm actually having like, I'm actually having conversations, I'm learning, I'm expanding about knowledge. I'm actually learning about the queer community past just what's online. And that is when I truly stepped into myself. And this is why I always big up trans women. I don't care what discourse is going on right now, but trans women are the ones that saved me.

The trans woman drove me to my first HRT appointment, which is over an hour and a half away. She was there for me for the entire thing. Even though it's like I'm not in communication or contact, just because you drift apart, but it's like, I still love those people to this day because of the impact that they've had on me. So, it's like crazy to look back and it's like, wow, like this was the community that was there for me, and this is why I was able to figure out who I was. So, they helped me with my shot. They were there for me. Like even before they helped celebrate and like afterwards we went and got like ice cream. It was literally like it was like a little family. It was so nice. Like I truly, truly loved it. And like, oh my God, I don't think anything could like ever replace that.

Like I ended up transferring from that college and that was really sad. It was just because I was studying art and the school was just not equipped for the number of art students that they had. So, if I had stayed there, I would have had to do like an extra year just to graduate. So instead of doing the regular four, I was like, that's stupid. Let me just transfer somewhere else that will actually have the space. like, but I'll get to that because that's a whole thing as well. But at the time, so that was me finally coming to the terms that like, okay, you know what? I guess I am a trans man. You know, like I want to start testosterone. Like this is what I want. And I actually did start a YouTube channel specifically because I was so inspired by that guy that I started my own YouTube channel. I started, you know, oh my God, what's the word? Like filming all of my process and like, you know, giving updates. Like I was giving basically testosterone updates like every couple of months. Those were like popping off. Like eventually I stopped. I don't know why I stopped. Like honestly, if I'd kept going, I would be YouTube famous right now. Back then it was like, I was like gaining traction. was like, wow, this is so cool.

At the same time, was a cosplayer, so I was also growing my account on Instagram. So, this was actually my first step into content creation, was my gender. Because before then, it was just random photos or whatever things I was interested in. But with me now being more present and more visible on YouTube, I was like, hey, I cosplay a lot in the background. Let me start posting that too. So, I originally posted that on Tumblr. Stuff did pretty well on there. And then that's when I started posting

on Instagram. I actually made an account and started focusing on that. So, at the same time that I'm kind of like learning to become a bit more comfortable with myself, I'm also like dipping my toe into the content creation world. And then I'm sorry, this is probably going to take up the whole thing. Just this one journey.

Shawn Aaron: 34:53

Hey, this is the point, right? The point of this podcast is for you to share your journey. And I got a lot of questions, but I want you to continue on what you're saying.

Taj Taylor: 35:03

I know, I can imagine. I am all over the place.

Shawn Aaron: 35:06

No, you're good. You're good.

Taj Taylor: 35:07

So that was, I guess, what phase are we on? That's like the fourth phase right there, is me coming into like, okay, I'm a trans man. And I feel like after that, like the fifth phase is when I truly like blossomed. Like that's when the T started to kick in, like my voice dropped, I was starting, finally starting to grow like facial hair. I was working out a bit more. So, it's like my body was finally starting to kind of like match more of like the vision that I had in my head. And I was living out as a trans man for a good couple of years, like all throughout my college years, I think right up until like grad school, that's when I started to question like, maybe I'm like non-binary. But during that time, that taught me a lot because on one hand, there was a lot of euphoria, like finally hearing he/him, finally being able to go into the bathroom and nobody like looks twice, right? And then fortunately enough, I did transfer.

So, I went to another college. And at this college, I was actually around like other arts. It was a better art department. So, a lot more liberal, a lot more open-minded, had no issues being respected by anybody didn't really experience transphobia like at all. So again, another privilege just being in that environment. So that gave me a lot of confidence. It made me feel really good in like who I was and what I was feeling. But then whenever I was outside of that bubble, like outside of that college, like in the actual world, that's when I started to face the true ramifications of what it meant to be a man, a black man in this world. And needless to say, I was like, whoa, okay, hold on. I didn't sign up for any of this.

Yeah, yeah, like it's really like heavy. I think that's something that I don't think a lot of like transmasculine maybe talk about enough is that that transition of like when you are like seen or like viewed as female like for whatever portion of your life there's these expectations that are tied to it that now when you transition, and I'm sure the same thing happened for trans women too that now when you transition it's like you have

to find your footing again because you're like whoa I'm being perceived differently, being treated differently like and there's so many different branches between that and I think that's when it truly made me realize, wait, I don't think I'm actually a man. I'm not identifying with a lot of these things.

And it wasn't just the negativity. It wasn't just the, oh I don't want to deal with this. It was more so of like the responsibility; I guess like there's these things that you like have to uphold in order to be a man that as a woman just weren't the same. It really wasn't like not saying that it's like harder or anything like that. It was just a different type of struggle that I was just not used to, that nobody and nothing could have prepared me for. And I think that's what really made me sit down and think. And I'm just like; I don't like that I can't wear makeup and somehow I'm gay. Or I don't like that I can't do this one flamboyant thing and it's a problem. Or now you start questioning my gender because I want to explore femininity. So, there was that side of me that was always drawn to that mixture of femininity and masculinity that up until this point I'd suppressed because in my brain, okay, if I'm going to be a man, I got to play the part.

But the cracks were showing, it was literally just breaking through and I was just like, I can't live this lie anymore. That's literally what it felt like. And it honestly felt like a betrayal too to my friends, because I felt like I fought so hard to be seen as who I am, that now expressing any bit of femininity would almost be like going backwards. And here's the ingrained misogyny as well. And then also being afraid of like, well, now my peers aren't going to respect me. Like, who's going to call me he/him when I look like this? And they'll, oh my God. Funny enough, I also went through the whole thing of like, I think it's cool that people go by they/them pronouns. I just couldn't do it myself. I literally have a post of that too. Like I would really just be telling on myself.

Shawn Aaron: 38:41

I need you to stop projecting these posts. Just don't say nothing about it. Don't say nothing about being gay. Don't say nothing about none of it. Just go with the flow.

Taj Taylor: 38:49

For real, like I'm here saying all this, I'm really just scripting my own future. That's literally what I've been doing. So, I think that's so funny because like I look back and I'm just like, yeah, all the things that you were trying to push away were exactly who you were always from the beginning. You've always been trying to run away from it, trying to take these detours and it felt nice every now and then, but it really wasn't who I was at the core, like at the end of the day. And that just became apparent. But again, surrounded by such amazing community. So, like the people who I eventually... When I transferred to this new college, I was starting off in a dorm and somewhere they had gender queer, gender-neutral housing as well. So, I was able to meet yet another amazing queer group of people. And one of my roommates, again, was a

trans woman. Again, helped me out again through all of my shit. Like love her to death, still friends with her to this day.

So trans women have always done a lot for me throughout all of this journey. Always shout out to them. And so, it's like having this community again now helped me figure out myself again. So now I'm like questioning like, okay, and this is when I finally start to learn more about being, you know, genderqueer and non-binary. And I went through it all. I was like, am I bi gender? Am I agender? I went through probably every single label and identified as it probably like a couple months at a time. Sometimes I would let people know, sometimes I wouldn't, because I'll just be trying it on. And again, it wasn't until funny enough, I studied abroad to Taiwan for the second time. The first time I did it was at the first college before I transferred. And the second time was for grad school.

And it wasn't until then that I truly, like, I don't know what it was about, like, being over there that kind of, like, forced me to just be like, hey, you know, like, I'm in this whole new place. I can just be me. I can just do it, like, nobody knows me here. I think maybe that's kind of like the inspiration behind it. But up until that point, I was still struggling with the perceptions of masculinity and, like, the balance between femininity and, like, how much is too much or whatever, all that nonsense.

But at the same time, I was also able to... You know, college, you have a lot of parties, a lot of house parties and things like that. And so, what I would do, it's funny, is kind of like drag. During the day, I would present strictly masc, like as a man. And then at night I would go party with my friends and be in full drag. Like just full on drag, like, and I got in for free because you know, they have the whole thing of like, girls get in for free. And I had nothing changed on my ID. So, I just didn't speak. Like I was up in the bouncer like and just being let right in with all, and then all of my friends were girls. So, it was like, literally not an issue. So, I think that was funny because they loved it. They were just like, they literally, called me like their little pretty boy. So, it was very gender affirming too. And think that's when it finally felt like, wow, okay, I can still be seen as, I guess like guy adjacent or like a boy or whatever and still present femme. Like that doesn't diminish like the respect that I should be getting.

Joël Simeu: 41:37

Hey, this is Joël Simeu, Production Assistant for Dem Bois Podcast. Love visual storytelling, then you'll want to check out our YouTube channel. We're bringing you exclusive interview shorts and taking you behind the scenes with content you won't find anywhere else. Find us on YouTube at Dem Bois Inc., or click the link in our show notes.

Taj Taylor: 42:03

Still, it wasn't a 100 % smooth transition into accepting the non-binary label. And this is partly due because of my study abroad over in Taiwan. Culture there is just very

different. And I love Taiwan, so this isn't me speaking down about it. This is just the stark differences between, I guess, American culture and Taiwanese culture. So, for example, over there, the word for gender and sex is the same word. There's no distinction. The way how I can say gender and sex, it would be like me saying sex and sex in like their language. So, it's like, that already is tough because now I'm learning Mandarin. I was already studying Mandarin beforehand, but it wasn't until I actually moved there I was like, oh shit, I got to get my skills up there. I was taking classes, taking intensive classes, was getting good. Eventually I started to like date over there, trying to like use dating apps and stuff like that. And that's when the real kind of struggles came because obviously I'm presenting femme and the Taiwanese men over there are only seeing me as a woman, but I didn't like that.

So, I was like, let me make sure I explain who I am. So, now I had to learn how to describe my gender in Mandarin in a language that didn't even really have the words for that. And it was very difficult. I think it was the first three months, three or four months of me being there, it was really, really difficult. I was trying to find my footing. And then on top of that, I wasn't prepared for the cultural differences. I wasn't prepared to be the center of attention 24/7. So that's another thing too is being a foreigner and then being black over there and then being eccentric. So, it's like my fashion style, everything like that is, it's just all eyes on me 24/7. And again, I wasn't prepared for that.

I'm an introvert similar to you. So was like having to deal with all that attention. gave me, I had my first panic attacks over there. Like I fell into like a really deep depression. Like it was like, there's all this bittersweet because it's like, I just wasn't prepared. That really all it was. I just wasn't prepared for the challenges that I was going to have to face. And at the same time, in order to protect myself, I kind of retreated back into femininity. It's almost like I de-transitioned while I was over there as a means of self-preservation. And I don't ever look back at it and go like, oh, how could you do this to yourself? Because it was the only way I knew how to kind of like shrink myself as a way to seem more normal, like I stand out less. Like I'm just here to go to school and go home. Like, don't talk to me. Don't ask me questions.

But the culture there is just so different. Like I would literally have people stop me on the side of the road and ask me if I was a boy or a girl. That's what I mean by like the cultural differences. And like for them, it's not rude. It's generally like, you're a foreigner in my country. I've never seen anybody look like you. What are you? The same way how they'd be like, oh, where are you from? Or how do you speak Mandarin so well? Or like, what did you learn? Like these are the questions I was getting 24/7. Like I could not go to the grocery store without a Taiwanese person stopping me and be like, Hey, how did you, blah, blah, blah. And looking back at it, it wasn't knowing primarily because I was dealing with all of this other stuff. I was already dealing with the sense of being perceived so heavily. And then the judgment, because clearly

people are noticing my androgyny to the point of asking. So, then that made me even more uncomfortable with that being perceived. So, it was a little bit of a mess. But throughout all of this, it still reaffirmed who I was at the end of the day.

I think I only stayed there for two semesters, and at end of the semester, the second semester, I basically was like, no, I'm non-binary. That entire experience told me that I can't swing too heavy femme, I can't swing too heavy masc. It's not for me. I'm somewhere smack dab in the middle. So that's why I say, like, I think I really did need that experience. I needed to, I guess, live as a woman again to really reaffirm, hey, is this for you? And no, the fuck it isn't. Like, it really was not. And I did not enjoy having to hide myself. Like, now that I know what to expect, and this was with me even having queer community over there. But there's a difference in the programming. Because I had found a non-binary group there. I was able to make really good friends, foreign, but most of them were Taiwanese. But even though they were non-binary, it was so obvious that they still stuck to this binary. Nobody ever ventured out. And I use these terms just because they're easier for me to associate, like AMAB and AFAB.

So, you would have like AFAB people who you would just think that they were women based off of just solely presentation and how they view and perceive women in that society. And same thing for AMEB. You'd have no idea that these people were queer in any way, shape or form. Everybody was stealth and even if they were out in the group, I could not relate to them because I did not have the privilege or the option of being stealth as they did because I was not, you know, a part of their culture. You know, I stood out already just like how I looked. So, it's like, even though I had community, I could not speak about these issues with them, so I felt really alone, and that was part of reason why I felt like a lot of depression. But da-da-da, in comes Teddy my boyfriend.

So, during all this while I'm literally at my fucking lowest he sends me a message on Instagram and that's literally where like the rest is history. So, it's like as I'm battling and dealing with all this I'm also building this long-term and long-term relationship with Teddy just strictly online through video calls, through messaging and stuff like that. And yeah, he definitely saved me because I was in a really dark place over there. I don't know, like, I generally don't know, like, how I would have made it through or like, maybe I would have left even sooner because I did decide to tough it out for like yet another semester. Originally I was like, you know what, I'm just going to do this one semester and go back home. But I ended up doing that semester and then the winter semester and a little bit of the spring semester too. But yeah, so it's like throughout all of that, you know, he flew over there after us by talking for about six, seven months.

He flew over to Taiwan. That's where we actually met in person was actually there. So, Taiwan has a lot of significance for me. That's why I'm like, even though I've been

through a lot, I love it. It's like a second home for me. And then, yeah, our relationship from there just kind of like buttered. I eventually moved back home. So, he flew over. He stayed for a week. He helped me pack up my shit. He was like, you're not staying here. You're depressed. We're going home. Like that's pretty much what it was. So, he helped me pack up my shit, flew back home. But at the time, like I said, he and his family had already moved down to New Orleans whereas me and my family were still up in New York. So, we were still long distance for like a couple months after that and I could not handle it.

So that's why I was like, fuck this, I'm moving down to be with you. And so that's why I'm down here now. And then throughout all that, you know, reaffirming my non-binary, because he as well helped me because again, being like seen by somebody who you wouldn't... Again, because I have all these walls up again I guess. Cis men particularly and all the trauma and all that. There's a whole story, like whole laundry list of issues that I've had. So, it kind of took me by surprise that like there was somebody out there like a cis man, no less, who could truly see me. And he did struggle at first because I was his first queer person, first trans person that he'd ever dated.

So, there was those like red flags. was just like, hmm, is this even really like a good idea? He's only ever dated women, but he's always been queer. He just fell into the trap of, oh, if you're a man, have to be straight. That's, that's the look. So, like we were kind of like helping break each other out in different ways, like helping each other out in our own queer awakenings in different ways. So, I think that's also really beautiful too if I look back at it. But yeah, I think that's pretty much the journey. And then that brings me back to like now where I am who I am. And yeah, just fully, I know I'm 100 % non-binary. I know my identity still leans towards trans masc. I just know I'm not a full-on man and I'm not a full-on woman. And that's just who I've been for the last couple of years now.

Shawn Aaron: 49:36

First of all, I thought I was a good storyteller. That was fucking amazing. I'm not going to... Yes, I was literally sitting here looking at you, but I was on this journey. I was in Taiwan. I've been everywhere just from your story. I literally can visualize everything that you said. And I love that. That was beautiful.

Taj Taylor: 49:57

That makes me so happy. Okay. I'm here thinking I'm rambling.

Shawn Aaron: 50:01

No, like maybe that's just who I am in general how I'm able to tap into those. I'm just able to you know, I just have that ability, but I was really there I'm like damn, okay, I

can see you, you know getting stopped on your way to the store 15 times. Everything is like right here. I saw everything.

Taj Taylor: 50:20

I love that.

Shawn Aaron: 50:21

And so, I want to say first of all a beautiful story, and I want to say second the go through each of those phases in such detail was fucking amazing. And to know like you went through these phases in life and voila, now here you are, right? And I want to also acknowledge that you said multiple times that you realize that that is a privilege. And so, that's something also in our journeys when we realize that yo, we go through something that other folks don't have that benefit of going through, right. There's a lot of things. Right. Education. Traveling abroad. Multilingual. Having community. It's just so many things. Right. But I love that you are sharing your story because other folks can say, hey, that's me. Right. And so, folks might be listening to this episode, and they may not resonate with shit I say, but to hear you come on here and everything that they're going through, right? Just like the person that you was watching on YouTube, right? And you like, somebody might say, damn, Taj, that's my story. Like everything you just said, I visualize it, I can see it. Like that's my story too, right? And so, it's something beautiful in us, right?

I say visibility equals possibility. And so, it's something so beautiful in being visible because other folks that are just stuck somewhere in between and can't figure it out, they can see that possibility, right? Just from you sharing your story and taking us on this visual journey, right? And so, some folks may not you know, watch this as a video. Some folks might listen to it, right? And so, you taking folks on a journey of like, yo, I see that, and this could be possible in my life as well. And so, I really love that. And I want to go back just a tad bit.

Taj Taylor: 52:19

Yeah, of course. I know you have probably a lot of questions.

Shawn Aaron: 52:22

Yeah, so one of the things that you said that resonated. This was like way back. You said your first crush was in church.

Taj Taylor: 52:30

Yes.

Shawn Aaron: 52:33

Which is so ironic that you in church, you're supposed to be praising the Lord. And you over there.

Taj Taylor: 52:36

Listen, she was so beautiful.

Shawn Aaron: 52:40

I think it's so funny because that's where all of my crushes were when I was in church. Man, I loved the whole soprano section. All of them. All of them.

Taj Taylor: 52:53

That's funny because I was in the choir too so, yes I didn't give a shit.

Shawn Aaron: 52:56

I was in it too and I hated it. I hated it. I hated it. I just hated church. Church took up 90 % of my childhood. I wasn't allowed to do anything. My mother was very strict. We went there six goddamn days a week.

Taj Taylor: 53:07

Oh, you did the damn... You see, I only got locked there three days a week.

Shawn Aaron: 53:07

Nah, I had the choir rehearsing, the Bible study, the prayer meeting, all of that.

Taj Taylor: 53:16

It's those damn prayer meetings because they had them like three times a week.

Shawn Aaron: 53:18

Yes. God damn, I'm seven. I don't want to pray no more. Shit, I ain't even done nothing in my life that need all this goddamn prayer.

Taj Taylor: 53:26

You don't even know what they're saying at some point, like you're there to be there.

Shawn Aaron: 53:28

Yeah, pretty much.

Taj Taylor: 53:29

I drew a lot in church to help pass the time. Like I would doodle and like sneak in on the side. I was not paying attention.

Shawn Aaron: 53:34

I slept a lot. I slept a lot because during the prayer meetings they would have you turn around and get on your knees on the pew. I was like, yes, thank God, I can take a goddamn nap. And my mom be like, we done, we done. you know, I'm wiping my slob off. I was like, oh shit, that was a nap girl for me. Amen. Right. That was me. And so, I remember it's funny because when I came out later, not when I came out as lesbian to my mom, but when I came out later as trans, she would always be like, oh, because I tell her now I don't do church. She'd be like, oh you used to love such and such and such and such. She would say, Tina, you always, you always talked about Tina, Tina, Tina. I'm looking at her like, yeah, because I had a fucking crush on Tina. That was why. God, girl, get it.

Taj Taylor: 54:18

It should have been obvious.

Shawn Aaron: 54:19

Right. Exactly. So, I really love that you said that. And also, about religion in general, religion is so fucking rigid.

Taj Taylor: 54:29

It's a prison.

Shawn Aaron: 54:30

It's a prison, but it's also a control thing, right? If you don't think outside of what we're telling you to think, you're easily controlled. And I remember it was a time when I asked my mom, okay, I get that. I get you saying what did God say. Actually, I don't know what God said. You tell me what he said, right? Because I was asleep. I didn't read that part. But not only that, but it's like, but what do you think? I kept asking my mom, but what do you think? Well, God said...

Taj Taylor: 54:58

But in the Bible... Like, can we not think for ourselves.

Shawn Aaron: 55:03

Yes, what do you think? And that would break my heart. just like, she just don't get it. She has no critical thinking skills outside of what has been taught to her. And for us also to think outside of that in order to be who we want to be, who we are, I won't say want to be, but who we are, and to go on this journey like you did in these phases, you have to think outside of that box, right?

Taj Taylor: 55:29

You have to think of the possibilities, the what if.

Shawn Aaron: 55:31

Yeah. And it's not the what if, it's like who you are. It's just figuring it out. Right. And having that space to figure it out and allowing yourself to figure it out. Right. Yeah. So, all of that. And so, I you know I really love that you went on this journey. Right. Because you know I always say you know trans men of color you know this podcast about amplifying the voices of trans men of color.

But I identify as transmasculine and that's just my own journey, right? That doesn't fit everybody's story. This gender journey is not linear, right? You have a different...

Taj Taylor: 56:11

I think it's just like you just wake up one day and you're like, okay, let me just transition to a man and that's it, like there's layers to this.

Shawn Aaron: 56:17

It's multiple layers and phases, right? And my journey is not your journey and vice versa, right? But we have the freedom to go on this journey on our own and come back and share with each other what we've learned, right? And so, you identifying as non-binary and also as a femboy, right? And this is not for me to take away from you. This is your journey. This is your story, right?

It's not mine, it's yours, right? And people would say, well, I don't understand. You want to be like this? No, I'm just being who the fuck I am.

Zyon: 56:56

The visibility equals Possibility Collection has new designs and a new designer. Me. My name is Zyon pronouns, he/ him/ his, and I was on episode 53, if you want to go back and check that out. But I am the second trans man of color to design for the "Visibility = Possibility" collection. Dem Bois believes visibility equals possibility and so do I. I'm honored to take part in this groundbreaking collection and look forward to seeing what else the collection has in store. My designs represent having confidence and courage to be bold with your visibility. The design in my mind says take the caution you need, but I am here. I hope you all enjoy the designs and be sure to purchase some designs from me or Emilio to support gender affirming programs by Dem Bois. Find the amazing designs of the "Visibility = Possibility" collection and other merch items that I've designed on the Dem Bois Shop at dembois.org. That's D-E-M-B-O-I as in igloo-S.org. And remember, visibility equals possibility.

Taj Taylor: 58:09

And I just think it's so funny, because people can't take that as an answer, it's like not enough for them. Me just being myself is not an... They need an explanation. They

need a whole dissertation on why I am the way I am. And I'm like, I don't know what to tell you. Ridiculous.

Shawn Aaron: 58:23

As human beings, we are not meant to be the same. We're not. We're not designed that way. The universe didn't have it that way, right? That's why we are different heights, different weights, different proportions. You know, you have hair, I have none, right? And my eyes, you know, like all of these things, I wear glasses. I don't know if you wear glasses or contacts, but it's like all of these things were not meant to be the same. Why would I want you to be like me? I don't want you to be like me and I don't want to be like you, right? And so, this idea of allowing people the freedom to venture out into, you know, that's how you get different foods, different music, different genres of movies, right? Anime, right? I'm not an anime guy, but you are, right? But that's something for you, right? We're not all meant to be the same, right? You might like rocking country music. I hate country music. I like listening to other things, right? I might listen to some jazz or some other things, right? We just not meant to be the same. And that brings just some rich culture in life when you get to absorb all of these different people, all of these different experiences, right? Like, I don't get it. It ain't meant to be explained. There's nothing to explain. Be you, do you. That's it.

Taj Taylor: 59:40

It's that simple. It really is that simple.

Shawn Aaron: 59:42

It is that simple.

Taj Taylor: 59:44

One thing I've learned and even with my spiritual journey and everything like that, it's the biggest thing I've learned about our human society is that we over complicate every goddamn thing, everything. There is so much shit in this world that we have added 10, 20, 50 steps to, and it only needed to be one. And like, as a result of that, that's why we go through all these phases because society is like, you have to be this. So, then you go through that and you're like, wait, hey, that's not me. Then you go through this and you're like, wait, that's not me. Instead of just being you, instead of just existing as you. So, it's like, we all suffer at the hands of this rigidity. that's why it's like; I think that's why being truly authentic to yourself is how you break free. That's how you break free from this matrix, from this world that they've created, because that's what they don't want. There's a safety in having everybody be the same because then it's easier to control the collective.

I mean, I've been saying this forever. This is why they've been attacking trans people because they know what the fuck we represent. They know, they see it. They see the

freedom; they see the potential. They see us breaking free from you know, these rigid structures and things like that, and they don't want it. So, there's like, they try to control the population, say what you can or can't do. And it's like, you can't stop the movement. You can't stop people from being who they are. Like, you literally cannot. It is impossible. And the sooner people wake up and realize that the sooner our society will heal, honestly.

Shawn Aaron: 1:01:07

Yeah, I don't have nothing to say because I don't understand it. I was always told you don't understand it because you wouldn't do it. I can't imagine. I can't imagine controlling somebody, right? We give kids the freedom to say, I want to wear this tutu the school three days out the week, right? But we can't allow a child to say, this is who I am as a person, right? It just makes no sense. Yes, it's about control, but just like you said, how free would we be if we just were to be able to be? And that's just it.

Taj Taylor: 1:01:40

That's where all of our problems, like most of our problems, stem from that is people not being able to be their authentic selves because they don't think it's possible. There's a lot of people who don't even realize that they're running on autopilot and have no idea that they're not actually being their authentic selves. So then when they see somebody who is, it triggers something deep within them because their soul knows. Their soul knows exactly who the fuck they're supposed to be. And they're out here playing pretend and then blaming other people for their shit and getting angry at us like we're the problem.

And I'm like, you got to focus inward. Like if seeing somebody live their authentic self-trigger something in you, there is something broken inside of you that needs to be fixed. You need to look inward and be like, where am I not being myself? Where am I betraying myself? Where am I giving myself to the world? Where am I choosing the world over myself? And a lot of people have been doing this their entire lives. And this is why I hold so much space, and this is why I forgive my parents and my family and everything like that, because that is what they're operating on, on top of being an immigrant and having to work three, four jobs when they first came over here, just so that I could go to college. So, it's like these things that it's like I acknowledge and it's even with just like the family, I have a very complex relationship with them because it's like, I see this duality of how much they sacrifice, but yet they still refuse to see who I am. So, it's like, it's not a situation where I'm like, I'm going to cut you off, fuck you guys. Because you know, like it's such a weird situation to be in. There's so many times where I've got to that point, but there's another part of me that's just like, they don't know better.

Shawn Aaron: 1:03:03

Yeah.

Taj Taylor: 1:03:04

I don't think they ever will.

Shawn Aaron: 1:03:05

Yeah.

Taj Taylor: 1:03:05

And it's not me making excuses or anything like that. It's just when you reach a certain age in life, you know, and you're just so set in your ways. Like they say, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. You absolutely can, but it's very, very, very difficult. And the dog has to want to first.

Shawn Aaron: 1:03:19

Yes, I was going to say that the dog has to want to learn those tricks and I also think like and I was just talking about this other day to somebody I can't remember who it was but the one thing that we have the advantage that we have over our parents and as generations go on, you know, what future generations will have that we didn't have for one is language, two is resources, right? And your parents immigrated here. So, their mind was set on survival and so we have a generation of folks, our parents, our grandparents, they just wanted to survive. Let's help these kids survive and hopefully they make it better for future generations. And they didn't have the resources; they didn't have the therapy. They suffer from mental health issues, even the ability to be medicated or to have therapy, or groups, or chosen families.

Taj Taylor: 01:04:13

Or social media, right? Access to information like that. Like that's a big thing because without social media... Like I said, without YouTube, I don't know if I ever would have found out or how soon. Right? So yeah, there's a lot of differences in our generations. And when you're younger, at least for me, I didn't see that. I didn't care. I literally didn't care. I was so angry that they just couldn't see me, that I was blinded by rage. And now that I'm older and like a lot more wiser, more mature, I can look back and be like, I can understand that anger. But at the same time, they're hurting too, but in a completely different way that I will never experience. So, it's like, I don't know, like I am able, so I have the privilege of being able to hold space for my parents. A privilege that they probably have never been able to do for themselves much less me in that same capacity. So, that's why it's like I forgive them and my brother as well because it's like, I don't know.

I genuinely do take on the mantle of generational curse breaker in my family. Like I am the black sheep. I'm the one person that has broken out of the mold, not only in

gender, but even in career, like what I choose to do. Like, you know, I've gotten the whole like, got to be a doctor, you got to be a lawyer. And like, I'm a yapper. I love to talk. I'm very good at arguing. I don't know, you could probably tell that from this, but I can argue somebody down with logic down to the bone. And so, they saw that and were trying to push me to be a lawyer, but I was like, no, that's not for me. Like I'm an artist, I'm a creator. And like even sticking through that has been difficult because there's always been that pushback to fall back to what's safe, what they know is safe. Even now, I'm living on my own, able to make my own money through content, through my own art, and they're still just like, so you don't want a job? Like you don't want to, I found this nice new career and I'm just like, trust me, I'm fine, but that's the survival.

Shawn Aaron: 1:05:51

Yeah, yeah.

Taj Taylor: 1:05:51

Like you said, they're not used to seeing somebody exist in the way that I am. Like even a part of it, like I'm able to recognize it now, but there's a lot of fear. Like in the tears that my mom was shedding, not only them, but even as every consecutive conversation we've had, she knew that there would be a target on my back. And she even said it, she was just like, well, what if you get hurt? What if somebody sees you and, you know, they don't understand? And I'm just like, then so be it. I would rather be myself and that happened than live an entire life a lie. Like for me, that was a tradeoff. And for her, it was just the fear of like, well, now my child is going to stand up. Now my child is not normal. Everybody's going to know my kid is this, that, and the third and blah, blah, blah. And it's going to put a target.

And then the church community and how gossipy they are, that was a huge thing. How my mom was ashamed of me because I was the black sheep and everybody else's kids were good Christian kids and always went to church even after college. That was the huge deal breaker, right? Whenever you went off to college, if you came back and you still went to church, they'd be like, ah, yes. You got another one, brother. Like, you know you won.

Shawn Aaron: 1:06:51

My mom said the same thing.

Taj Taylor: 1:06:52

When I went to college I never step foot in that church, at least in that church again. Yeah, so there's like a lot of shame on her behalf that was projected onto me that I no longer claim, because it's not mine to claim. It's not mine to deal with.

Shawn Aaron: 1:07:06

And college brings education and brings awareness. it just...

Taj Taylor: 1:07:11

Diversity.

Shawn Aaron: 1:07:12

Yeah, diversity and you start to realize, hmm, I don't know. I mean, we already kind of have a hint. You're like, hmm, I don't know what they saying over there is correct. And I didn't.

Taj Taylor: 1:07:20

Yep, we getting confirmation.

Shawn Aaron: 1:07:22

Right. It was a movie I watched right after high school, "The Village." And I was like, fuck religion. I don't know if you've ever seen "The Village." I'm a little bit older than you, but it's called a village. But it's about these people, this group, like this founding family that took their families off into the woods and told them all of these things. And they lived like it was like the 1800s. They was like, you know.

Taj Taylor: 1:07:48

I think I know what you're talking about. It was like really dark though because somebody woke up and they was trying to escape but then escaping meant death or something like that.

Shawn Aaron: 1:07:56

Yes, because they were told there was something in the forest so they couldn't leave. It's something to watch. But after I watched that and I realized that this one person left. I ain't going to spoil it for folks that want to see it, but "The Village", I'll put a link in the description so folks can go check that movie out. But that was my eye-awakening experience of like, that's what religion is. They telling me that I can't do this, I can't do that, I can't do this. That's just to keep me in this little circle with their asses. They don't want me venturing out because it's something better on the other side of this fence. Anyway, so first of all, I did say earlier that I stalk your Instagram, and I see all of the love you and your partner. said his name is Teddy, right?

Taj Taylor: 1:08:36

Yes.

Shawn Aaron: 1:08:37

T.T. Taj and Teddy. I love it. First of all, I want to say folks think when we go on this journey, this gender journey, one thing that I've heard parents say, my mother didn't say this to me, but you're not going to find nobody to love you like that. Right. And I've actually had someone tell me that it wasn't a parent, but it was someone and I forgave her because she was somebody that I still love and care about. I think she was just upset in that moment that she said something really harsh, but it stuck with me. One of the things that she said was, if I met you right now and you got all this shit going on, I wouldn't fuck with you. That stuck with me because I'm like, damn, I'm un-fuckable. Nobody would fuck with me. Not fuck me like that, but I mean, not fuck with me. And so, this idea that when we transition or we're going through this gender journey or we're non-binary or we're transmasculine or, know, we didn't with or without surgeries or whatever, right? Because your journey is your journey, whatever you choose or what, right? That no one will love us. But here it is, Taj and Teddy just looking just amazing. Because when I was scrolling, I was like, I'm just sitting here smiling. I'm like, oh shit, I'm just sitting here smiling?

I was just smiling that you all love just the tender touches. Right, the hugs, I'm touching your neck, the carousel of videos of love that you all chose to share with the world. Because you could just be in secret, you don't have to share that shit with people, right? But you chose to say, no, I am in love with this person and here you go. You can look into our world and I love that. And so, what would be your thing to say to somebody going through their journey now and saying that somebody will not love me, nobody will love me. I won't find love, I'll be alone. What would be your message to someone like that?

Taj Taylor: 1:10:22

I really think that it starts inward. Not that loving yourself is a prerequisite to finding love. It isn't, but it goes hand in hand. Because, for example, you can find somebody who does love you, but if you're empty and you still feel and you still hold on to this belief, it doesn't matter how much love they pour into you, it's always going to fall out the bottom. So, I generally feel that it does start with self-love. You have to find the little bits of love in your life. And if you can't see it, you have to create it. You have to be your number one. You have to be the person you can go to, the person you can trust. Because when you kind of become that type of energy, I feel like it's a lot easier to see these possibilities, a lot easier to operate at a standpoint of, well, this is possible. Because now you see things about yourself and you're like, hey, I do that thing pretty well. Or like, I like the way that looks on me. Or like, I feel quite good when I say X, Y, and Z. And it's like these little subtle shifts in energy. Because like I said, I'm a very energetic, very spiritual person.

So, it's like these little shifts in energy it raises your vibration to a point where you can now believe in what's possible. Because when you're operating at this lower level of survival, of limiting beliefs, you can't see shit. You got these walls of like, I'm

unlovable, nobody will love me, like I'm weird, I'm not going to find this or whatever. And I get these comments day in and day out. That's literally why I created my Queer Love Manifestation Journal. It's to guide you through breaking through these limiting beliefs, helping you understand that yes, you are lovable, you just haven't been trained to do it because society doesn't want you to love yourself. Because with that comes power, with that comes liberation, with that comes I don't give a fuck, I'm going to do what I want for what's best for me. And that's scary to people who want to control and divide. So, as I say, love really is at the center of it all. Love and authenticity, that's why I'm so big on these two things, because this is what sets us free as a community, as a society. Because when you start to love yourself, you start to do these little things, it's so much easier for you to love others, for you to pour into them.

It becomes easier for them to pour into you because now you're not recoiling at the love. You're not like, oh, I don't deserve this. You know you deserve it because you love yourself. So, I think that's really just kind of like the advice I'd give is one, get my journal.

Shawn Aaron: 1:12:27

Yes, get the journal.

Taj Taylor: 1:12:28

Two, even if you're not getting the journal, do something that shows love for yourself, a ritual. It could be something as taking yourself out for ice cream every week. It could be getting dressed up even if you're not going anywhere. Just these little things, they start and they snowball into bigger actions to where you can now accept love for yourself. Because it's possible for everybody. And like, no offense, but if somebody like Trump could bag a baddie, anybody can find love in this world. Okay. Imma just put it out there. I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't be like that but, literally, you're not that bad. There is love out there. Trust me.

Shawn Aaron: 01:12:56

I was not expecting that shit. Oh, my goodness.

Taj Taylor: 1:13:07

I think about that.

Shawn Aaron: 1:13:08

You know what? To be honest with you, he was the one getting played. She thought she was getting a rich, white man. She didn't sign up to be no goddamn first lady. Let's be real.

Taj Taylor: 1:13:16

She got swindled.

Shawn Aaron: 1:13:17

Yeah, she got sucker punched for real. But you're right. My mom always taught me if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.

Taj Taylor: 01:13:26

That's what I was going to say but I hate saying it. But...

Shawn Aaron: 1:13:32

I was going to go towards his physical attributes, but I'm not. But you right.

Taj Taylor: 1:13:36

That's what I was thinking as well, but that's what I mean by like, you know, let's focus on just the spirit alone. If a man with that type of spirit.

Shawn Aaron: 1:13:43

There you go.

Taj Taylor: 1:13:43

Because clearly she's not there for money. Let's be honest if there is money.

Shawn Aaron: 1:13:46

She don't look happy. Yeah.

Taj Taylor: 1:13:49

So, it's like, maybe at first, if that can be a thing, you can definitely find something genuine, true, and blue that actually lasts.

Shawn Aaron: 01:13:56

And that's another testament of choosing yourself first. You got to love yourself, because I feel, if she loved herself, she wouldn't be there for that bullshit. Hey, I'm packing up.

Taj Taylor: 1:14:07

What she is worth.

Shawn Aaron: 1:14:09

Yeah. Yeah.

Taj Taylor: 1:14:10

That's another key thing too, so that you don't settle.

Shawn Aaron: 1:14:12

Yeah, and what somebody has been telling you about yourself that you start to believe in, that you end up staying longer than you should have. So, I'm going to just leave that there. Mic drop. So, if that person can find love, you can find love too with your beautiful selves. Anybody listening out there in the community, you can also find love. We're going to make sure that I put your link to your journal in the description of this episode so folks can go pick that up.

And so, this is the part of the show that I love to ask the guests random ass questions I'm not going to ask you all the questions, just I have a long list of questions that us always growing. I just added one this morning, so I'm at 83 questions now So I'm going to ask you to pick from number one to 83 and I'll read you that question.

Taj Taylor: 1:14:58

Number 24 shot in my head like this I don't know why.

Shawn Aaron: 1:15:02

Number 24. You know what, folks pick numbers and it just fits. So, let's see what number 24... Number 24 says what are you afraid of?

Taj Taylor: 1:15:14

Oh, God damn. Oh my God, why did they hit me with this? Damn, I know my guy is up there having a grand old laugh, aren't you? Not achieving my best potential. I think it's the one thing that I've been battling. I guess you could say the final boss of my evolution, at least for the phase that I'm in, is finally coming to the terms of you don't need to be afraid of that, but it has been a recurring thing. Because I feel like I have started and done so many things, so many businesses, so many ventures, and they all haven't gone anywhere. So, it's created this limiting belief that I'm a failure or that I'm not ever going to be where I think I want to be. So, it's like, yeah, on the flip side, you know, people see my content and then they don't know that this is what I'm kind of dealing with on the inside. So, I think that's kind of like interesting that that's the question. But yeah, I think that's really it is that like the fear of not meeting my true potential, which I can say now I am winning that battle like 100 % as of lately I can say I'm winning that battle.

Shawn Aaron: 1:16:18

As long as you keep showing up to the war, you're going to win that battle. And I feel like these questions are for reasons, right? Like I just woke up out of my sleep this morning and was like, ah, this is going to be number 83. Right. So, I feel like the universe is telling me, leading me towards these questions to put on this on this list.

And I also feel like the universe steers folks towards certain numbers that you pick, because who's to say why you pick that number? I mean, if you've never...

Taj Taylor: 1:16:44

It shot into my head like once you said like one to 83 it was just 24 and I was like, all right, I guess that's the one.

Shawn Aaron: 1:16:49

Yeah, and so that spoke to you. So, the universe is telling you, don't be afraid of that. You are moving in your purpose. And so, I think that's just what it is for you to take away from that. That's why you picked that number. That's why that was your response. And the universe is telling you this is why. So, I don't know. I'm just a messenger. I just felt like I was just messenger for that. So, I want to say, Taj, thank you so much, and big ups to Teddy.

Like Teddy, thank you for getting Taj from Taiwan. Thank you for helping you pack your shit and bringing you down to close near New Orleans, but Louisiana. And now you're on this journey to doing big things. I see that for you. And so, I appreciate you for being a guest on this show. Is there any last words you would like to say before we get up out of here?

Taj Taylor: 1:17:40

Just be true to yourself. If I can do it, anybody can.

[1:17:44 - 1:18:05 Musical Outro]