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You're listening to masculine birth ritual. My name is Grover Wehman Brown and this is Episode 3. Today we're talking with Mac Brydum. He's a doula with the Braving Doula Collective and lives in Denver, Colorado. He's also a trans man in the process of preparing for pregnancy. Thank you so much for joining us for this conversation.

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Great. So Hi, Mac.

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Hi.

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Thanks for coming on to Masculine Birth Ritual and talking with us.

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I'm so excited about this podcast. Can't wait to learn more about you and share a little bit about me.

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Awesome. Speaking of, can you tell us a little bit about you? Maybe about your identity and how you come to this work.

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Yeah, definitely. So I identify as queer and transgender, so I'm a trans man. I came out about eight years ago or something like that. And I have been a social worker for the past decade and moved into doula work about 3 1/2, four years ago. So I've been working as a birth and postpartum doula in the past couple of years here and loving it. And my emphasis is really supporting LGBTQ families and even more specifically transmasculine folks who are pregnant and giving birth. So that's really my area of passion, for personal and selfish reasons because I am planning to gestate a human using my body, hopefully sooner than later, and have also just seen a huge need for transmasculine folks to get better competent care and support. And I've been honored to attend several births of pregnant trans guys and have loved every minute of it and I've also supported queer families that look every way that you can imagine because queers create families in such diverse ways. And so I've worked with a lot of different types of family configurations.

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Yeah, great. Thank you. And so can you tell us a little more about the families that you work with, where the trans guy or transmasculine person is giving birth? And like how you tailor your services, or more it's more like because that like this is your work, like how the care that you provide is specifically culturally competent to these folks' families.

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Yeah, I mean that's a big question so I'll try to break it down. First of all, I just I don't know if all of your listeners know exactly what a doula is or what we do so I'll just define what a doula is. Because I think, you know, a lot of people know what doulas are in this day and age, but I still encounter plenty of people who don't. So my work as a birth and postpartum doula is around emotional and physical support for families that are welcoming a new baby and that can look a lot of different ways. You know, a lot of doulas are pretty traditional in terms of the families that they serve. You know, straight couples that probably conceived the, you know, the "old-fashioned way." But most of the families that I work with have had to use some sort of assisted reproduction to actually get pregnant and have been very intentional about building their families. So that's something that I infuse into how I approach this work. Just having that sensitivity of, you know, it's just been a long journey. There aren't really any accidental pregnancies. I'm sure there are based on body parts but you know, for the most part, queer folks having families are very very intentional about that process and oftentimes it takes a lot of time and money. And you've come up against a lot of institutional barriers and ignorance and worse along that journey. So by the time they contact me they are usually pregnant, usually at least a couple months along in the pregnancy, if not farther. And usually when families contact me they are

starting to think about birth and what kind of support they may need for the end of pregnancy, for labor itself, whatever that looks like for them. And then the postpartum period of actually having a new human in the house and navigating being out in the world with that tiny human and dealing with family systems and rallying support from chosen family and community. And usually when families reach out to me, they're starting to think about all of that stuff or they've been thinking about it already and have realized that an extra perspective and, you know, kind of a nonpartisan person could be helpful in that. So families hire me to provide that emotional and physical support. It looks like education, a lot of prenatal education, a lot of in-home sessions where we're talking through, you know, what you want your birth to look like, you know, what do you need to know that you haven't gotten covered from classes. And a lot of the families I work with choose not to take your average hospital childbirth education class or whatever classes are offered in the community because they may or may not fit in. Some families feel more than comfortable going in and saying this is who we are we're going to take this class and deal with the odd looks or what have you. But plenty of folks choose not to take that route. So for those families especially we end up infusing a lot of, you know, anatomy and physiology of birth, what to expect, what your body is going to go through, so that when labor kicks in none of that is a mystery. I'm really big on education and empowerment. And the more you know about your body and what's going to happen, the you know, maybe not easier, maybe that's the wrong word, but the more smoothly labor will go. Kind of removing the mystery from all of that. And then a lot of what I do, especially with the queer families I work with, is talk about the systems that they're in. And listen. I do a heck of a lot of just holding space and asking questions and kind of getting at the heart of what has pregnancy been like for them. What do they envision for their parenting journey. How do they hope to be treated during their birth. And through that process, we kind of talk about systems that may not necessarily support them. And so how do we work around those systems and how do we make those systems a little bit more friendly, a little bit more competent.

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Can you give some examples for people of what an example of that system might be and how you might make some changes?

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Definitely, yeah. So one of the things that I've been doing here in the Denver community is working with hospitals to train their labor and delivery nurses specifically, as well as the educators that work in the hospitals, so childbirth educators and lactation counselors. Basically anybody who is working with pregnant people or new parents who just had a baby and doing workshops for those folks within the hospital system to increase their competency. It's just a lot of basic 101, you know, things that I would think of as 101 level because, you know, I'm in this world. But for folks who aren't, something as simple as learning what transgender means can make a really big difference. And then just a lot of what I say is, you don't know how somebody identifies unless you ask them. So you may walk into a room and see somebody who, you know, you think looks like a mom and you may choose to use female pronouns because, you know, let's be honest, ninety-five percent of the people who are giving birth are women and are ok with being gendered as women. But for those other, I'm making up these statistics, but you know the small fraction of people who are coming to their hospital who don't identify as women. It doesn't hurt to ask. And it definitely doesn't hurt to just have some sensitivity and kind of read some of those non-verbal cues and maybe use neutral pronouns until you know how somebody identifies. So a lot of what I do is going into these hospitals before somebody gives birth in said hospital or birth center, I've also worked with the birth centers in the area. And just chatting with them about, you know, here's how you prepare for a pregnant patient who may be genderqueer, who may be transmasculine, who may be fluid, who, you know, may or may not actually identify as a woman. So just kind of raising that awareness with them and then a lot of what I do with families is just talk about hey you're probably going to get called she at some point. How does that feel? Just to think about that and what can I do as your doula to to be a buffer, to be an advocate, and also to, you know, let's hope that that doesn't happen and little things like, can we put a sign on your door that, you know, you fold over so not everybody that walks by reads it, but you fold it up and if there's a provider who's about to enter and they just, you know, it's a very short simple, maybe a photo of your family, and hey my name is X Y Z. I just had a baby or I'm about to have a baby, whatever the case may be, and I use whatever your pronouns are. And, you know, I am a dad or I am a mapa, or, you know,

whatever term you want to be called as a parent. Just to kind of give people some basics of how to treat you. Kind of teaching medical providers how to get it right. And a lot of that is very simple stuff but a lot of it makes a really big difference. So it's kind of both/and. It's definitely working with these families to prepare them for the reality of, hey postpartum you're probably going to be on a mom-baby unit even though you don't identify as a mom. And you know here's probably some of the language that's going to be used. And there are small things we can do, and that I can do specifically as their doula to make that experience better and hopefully easier on them. And especially so that they don't have to be doing that. You know when you're birthing a baby and parenting a tiny baby the last thing you want to be doing is correcting your care providers and teaching them how to treat you. So I aim to do a lot of that so that my clients don't have to.

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How do you find that is received in these institutional settings? And as you've been doing this work, what the temperature? I'd say, is my question.

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That's a great question. For the most part, folks are really hungry for this knowledge and really eager to get it right, you know, for the most part medical providers don't want to like hurt somebody's feelings or use the wrong words to refer to them. Most providers have really good intentions but get really awkward and uncomfortable when thinking about it and don't even know where to start with how to get it right and how to change their systems or forms or even the way they speak. I've talked a lot with lactation counselors and educators and IBCLCs who work within the hospital system and are providing that lactation support in the first few days of a baby's life. And, you know, it's really mixed on the clients I've supported whether they're choosing to breast or chestfeed in the first place. But for those folks who are and who are wanting support, lactation is a very woman-centric industry. And it's a very, you know, when we think of breastfeeding, for the most part how you picture, you know, a woman doing that. But plenty of folks who also have the parts to birth a baby have the parts to feed a baby. And so changing language around that has been a bit of an uphill battle and will continue to be. But there are organizations that are leading the way in that regard. La Leche League, especially because of the work of Trevor MacDonald in Canada, has raised some really great strides to just changing, you know, breast-slash-chestfeeding. Just something as simple as that can be indicator to a family that we have done our work, we get it or at least we're trying to get it. But for those professionals who are in the lactation industry, mama is such a word that rolls off their tongue and definitely female pronouns and that just is so ingrained that it takes practice, it just takes practice to start saying lactation, you know, lactating parent, gestational parent, non-gestational parent, you know. Being able to support a parent who is not a gestational parent but who has induced lactation, that's another skill set that I think a lot of lactation professionals are still learning about.

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Can you say for a minute for listeners who did not understand a word of what you just said, what you mean by a non-birth parent inducing lactation?

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Yeah yeah. So there is a whole protocol that you can search for online involving herbs and medication that basically, you know, most people lactate, so make milk to feed a baby, because they're pregnant and making milk is a hormonal process but it's also a supply and demand process. And for the most part, you know, when you think of somebody who's breast or chestfeeding, they were probably pregnant and that's how they ended up breast or chestfeeding. But bodies are really cool. And so we can, I don't want to say trick a body into it, because, you know, you're basically just messing with hormones, but you can alter hormones to make milk. So using a drug called domperidone and a combination of herbs and then pumping, so using a breast pump for several months before a baby actually needs to be fed from that body is one way that you can make milk for that human. So it's a very involved process. It's definitely a big commitment for a parent who is not gestating a baby but wants to feed said baby to do that. So it's not something that parents, you know, just say oh let me just start pumping and taking herbs, it's no big deal. Usually there's a lot of intention and research and time, definitely a lot of time, that goes into that well before there's even a human baby to feed. But it is a really cool thing that not a lot of people know about. So if anybody is interested in looking it up

there's the protocol, the drugs and herbs and kind of that process is called the Newman Goldfarb Protocol. And if you search online you can find more info and there's tons of Facebook groups about this and kind of bootleg sources for buying some of those drugs. Domperidone, not approved by the FDA. But there are ways to get it. It's not a dangerous drug. It's, you know, when you use it to make milk it's an off-label use for it. But plenty of people have done this before. Of course, you know, I'm not a professional. Do your own research. Talk to your doctor. Don't do any of this willy nilly.

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And if I'm correct, there is a separate protocol for transwomen who've been on hormones to induce lactation that's different than the one you named.

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Yes. And I don't know much about that protocol but there are facebook groups specifically around transfeminine lactation support. I think the group might even just be called that: transfeminine lactation. And that is something, I mean, I think that's one of the really neat things is that, you know, a transwoman who doesn't have the body parts to be able to gestate a baby could nurse a baby that somebody else carries. Talk about a beautiful way to make family.

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Great. Thank you.

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Yeah.

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How did you come into this work? From whenever, I don't even, whenever you were doing in your life before you decided to become a doula to becoming a doula specifically that serves queer and trans families.

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Yeah. Yeah, I guess we kind of dove right in the deep end in a way.

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That's great, the deep end's a great place to dive into.

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That's where I hang out most of the time.

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Yeah, and we're like going from the big to the you.

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Yeah ok. I don't love talking about me but I can do it.

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We've got so much to learn from you though, Mac.

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OK. So my background is in social work so I've always been in the helping professions and I used to be a community organizer. I worked for an LGBT nonprofit that was doing like legal policy work on the statewide level for a little while and then I worked at union for a little while. So the more macro scale kind of big picture type of work and I loved it but I found after several years of that line of social - so it's a form of social work for sure, because it's social justice oriented. But I was really missing the human connection and getting to be with people during vulnerable times. And I think that's what I've found over the years through trial and error that that's really where I shine and that's where I'm happiest professionally, is being with people as they're going through major life transitions and having a baby is one of the biggest life transitions anyone can go through. And I also just have a real love and

passion and a real wonder, actually, about pregnancy and birth and parenting. And I think that stage of life for so many people is confusing and overwhelming. You hear a million different opinions and sorting through all of that and figuring out what you actually want to do can be really really complicated. So in the last few years I've found that being a doula is the perfect fit for me because it's this fusion of, you know, I think of it as a form of social work because I am supporting people through a major life change. And I also think of it as a spiritual practice in a lot of ways as well because when somebody is becoming, you know, they are taking on a new identity, first-time parents is really most of the people that I work with. And going from oftentimes living 30, 40+ years only being responsible for yourself to being responsible for a new person is a big big shift. And there's a lot of identity shift that comes with that, and as a trans person I can understand a shift in identity. While I'm not a parent myself yet, I hope to be soon, and so one thing that I'm really big on is just holding space for that shift in identity for the parent. And then also all of the mundane stuff that every parent has to deal with like figuring out is my baby hungry or does my family have gas? How do we survive a trip to the grocery store? How do we plan out our days? How do we get more than three hours of sleep in a row? So a lot of that new baby exhausted parent stuff alongside family dynamics navigating do you really want your mother in law there? How do you set boundaries? You know, it's so common. Everybody, every new parent has to deal with that. But there's an extra layer when you're queer or trans. You might have a shitty relationship with your family. Am I allowed to say shitty?

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Absolutely.

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OK good. There's extra dynamics, basically, and that varies from family to family of course but oftentimes it's a little bit more complicated for queer and trans folks. And sometimes when you have a lot of chosen family and maybe your biological family isn't around, sometimes chosen family hasn't been around babies before. I've definitely supported families, trans families who don't have biological family in their lives anymore but have created a really robust chosen family, which is what we're known for. Right, like we're queers, we know how to do that. But so many queer people don't have kids in their life or don't know really how to be around babies. So teaching those additional, you know, family figure folks, aunties or uncles or whatever non-gendered terms people prefer to use, teaching those folks like babies are really rad. And here's how you can support your friends or your chosen family member in this journey to them becoming parents and here's ways that we can envision this kid growing up with this really rich, interesting queer family around them. And that's part of the work that really excites me because I'm thinking about those things for my own family and I want to cultivate that community for myself and also be a resource for others in my in my area who are going through that right now and who will go through it in the future.

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Right. And can you give some examples of what kinds of teachings and recommendations you make to those, you know, auncles and aunties and uncles and like how to build out community from people that aren't that familiar with being around kids?

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Yeah that's a great question. I don't think I have an easy answer to it because I'm still, I don't think I'm getting it right in my life. But the biggest thing that my spouse and I are trying to do right now, just using myself as an example, we're at this trying-to-conceive stage and I'm planning to carry the pregnancy and, you know, actively trying to make this dream a reality. And one thing that we've been doing for close to a year now is just reaching out to other other queer families who are who already have a kid or multiple kids and befriending them. Just kind of like hey do you want to come over for brunch? Can we hang out do you want to go to the park? Like what's your kid into? And that's been really good for us to see how other queer families, how they look, how they function, and how they parent their kids. You know, there's such a wide range of actual parenting styles out there. And we've kind of seen some models, like wow I really love how they ask for consent every time they want to give their kid a hug, or wow I really love how much they respect their kid's, you know, imagination and ask them questions about their imaginary friend. You know, those sorts of things are really neat for us to see and I think we see glimpses of what our life might be like in the near future. And that's, I

think that's really helpful. I call it having "possibility models" for parenthood. And I think that term has been used in the context of queer and trans folks just like seeing people in the media or successful, you know, however you define success. Alive, people who are alive, and are trans and have found a way to be themselves in the world and be confident in that and have community. Just like living as a trans person. Then you add in this extra element of birth and pregnancy and parenting. And that's a really, you know, we're kind of narrowing it down even more. And so there aren't a ton of other people to look to for possibility models. So whenever I find somebody who is maybe having a similar experience I want to get to know them and understand their journey and learn from it and I hope that eventually, you know, 5, 10 years down the road like other people will see me that way too and lean on me for support as a possibility model. I think that's something I've always done as a trans guy. You know, when I came out in my early 20s, I only knew a handful of other people who were having an experience similar to mine. And it made a really big difference in my confidence and in my like just feeling valid and respected as who I am to see other people living their lives and being comfortable and happy and getting their needs met. Whether that was surgery or hormones or a friend group or education or whatever it was. Seeing other people doing that was really really helpful and inspiring to me. And so that's what I've been seeking out that my spouse and I have really been looking for other people who are on the path that we're about to go on and are doing it okay and, you know, we have this family that we are especially have been mutually building a connection with each other. I think our families just get along great and it's been really fun to hang out and they have a toddler and another baby on the way. One thing that we've all talked about is just how much we enjoy each other's company because we can kind of to speak the same language. And that's been really fun. So I'm rambling but that's a long answer to your question.

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Great. I love it. I love that idea of possibility models for parenthood. Succinct and really valuable, and your strategy I think is a good one because I think what a lot of people, experience especially queer people where I'm not friends with that many straight cis people., so it's like hard to do a comparison, but I see a lot of people who are friends of mine who have babies. And over and over again they're like, where is my community. Why is this so hard to maintain that connection and then are scrambling to find a place of other like parents for many reasons. Like I myself was living in a new town and in like a little suburban town outside of a giant city and was just exhausted and home with a brand new baby and desperate for anyone to just be like, hey is this normal? Like my baby's doing this thing, is your baby doing that thing? Like when the baby becomes like your whole world. But then you also want social connection. I started going to like straight moms groups and oh my gosh it was so... it was really detrimental to my mental health, I'll just say. It was like such a shock, like I felt like I can be down, it's okay, and then I was like oh my gosh. Just like, the cultural differences, just like not being seen at all. And, you know, and class differences and like, you know, bonding over complaining about their partners. It was just really like 100 percent not a good fit. So it took a while for me to like talk to the friends who had a kid 6 months older who showed me the Facebook group of where like the most recent batch of local queers who've had kids post and then make park dates, you know, it takes a while to build a community of other people who have babies around same age. It's just very specific to have a newborn or to have a one-year-old. And it takes some time for a lot of people so I think doing that work as you're trying to conceive is pretty wise, just here on the other end of having kids now that are finally full time in school.

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Thank you. I just want to be prepared as prepared as possible, and everybody says you'll never be ready all the way to have a baby. But I think that, yes, some of those pieces that can get set up beforehand, like building a community and having friends to call on and people who have toddlers and can kind of reflect on the infancy stage and have some wisdom to share or just who can come over and keep me company or, you know, all of those things that I do as a doula but I know I'm going to need some friends to do that for me, for my family after we have a newborn. So just trying to be prepared for that. But I think it's hard. You know, I say all of this, and I live in a metro area. You know, I live in a city and I think for, you know, I live in a suburb of the city but close enough that there's plenty of, there are possibility models here. I think for people who are in more rural areas or who are just more introverted and are not able to do some, you know, it's bold, it's nerve wracking to reach out to somebody you don't know would be like, hey want to be friends? Tell me about your life. You know,

that's kind of a big ask and I think for some people that's just not possible because of regional issues or what have you. And for those folks, some of these online Facebook groups have been a lifeline. I mean, I see people who post in a couple of groups I'm in who like, that's their main source of connections support and, you know, find it where you can, basically, and build it up well before you are even pregnant if you can.

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And so you're trying to conceive. Can you tell us about how it's going and how you're feeling and how you got to this point?

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It's been a long path. I am turning 30 in about a month. And so my, you know, my goal for myself for the past five years or so was to have a baby before or when I'm 30 years old. So I'm here and I am eager to make this dream a reality. So my wife and I, Her name is Sonny and she is a cisgender woman, so just to give some background on our relationship. We've been together for seven years and we've been married for four years and we are unapologetically out and proud queers. I think that to a straight cisgender kind of clueless eye, we might pass as a straight couple because I present as a guy, I move through the world as as a man. I get read as a gay man more often than not. So sometimes Sonny gets the, do you know your husband is a little queer types of expressions. And she's like, oh yeah I know he's real gay. So that works for us and we love each other and have a really excellent relationship and we have both wanted to be parents for a while. The interesting part about our relationship is that Sonny has never wanted to be pregnant. She's alwaysed dream about being a mom and is excited about that, and, you know, a little hesitant as anybody who's embarking on the journey is, but she's there. She tells a story about when she was a teenager kind of thinking about like, oh yeah, some day I'll be a mom but I'm going to have to adopt or something like that because I just can't stand the thought of being pregnant. And then we got together and started talking about our future together and our family and kind of dreaming about what we wanted to create in our life. And I was like, hey I really want to carry a pregnancy. That's an experience that is interesting to me and how neat to be able to use the body that I have to do something really cool. And I've never seen, for myself, there's never been an incongruence with being a man and being very binary-identified and carrying a pregnancy. I know for some people that's a huge mental struggle and for me it never has been. Other people, however society, you know, I've heard so much bullshit from other people about it that I've definitely come up with some quick responses and also just have to be very confident about that choice.

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Can I ask a little about that?

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Sure yeah.

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...strangers or care providers? Like where and how are you meeting that information that people aren't approving?

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I think it's more and I haven't truly heard any anything awful directly to my face. I think it's more a societal. I mean obviously pregnancy is a very gendered activity in our society and that makes sense to me and I'm certainly not trying to say that all president should be pregnant or anything like that. It's a very individual choice. But you know all of these systems are in place the mom baby unit the women's clinic. You know there's not room for men who are just haters and that's not something that's considered normal. So while I haven't encountered it directly it's all of those things like you know my O.B. is as I said name exactly but it's something something women's clinic right. And everything is pink and everything is mom and all. You know I had to go through therefore as I was entering their forms crossing out things and writing them words that I use and. And that's just kind of how it is. So so I guess that's more what I'm referring to is just these that aren't art haven't evolves to the point yet where people of all genders are seen as valid just haters. Yeah. So so that's that's a big

piece of. I don't know if I answered your question though.

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Oh yeah. You didn't. Thank you.

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OK. So so that was like the the process the background of house and how you got to where we are. And and then in the past year things have gotten a lot a lot more seriously than actually taking some action steps. So last December I took my last testosterone shot. I've been on TV for seven years very consistently. It was like a religious ritual for me taking a shot every week so I never skipped a shot or anything and hadn't had a period in that entire time so I didn't really know what to expect. I I stopped. I took my last shot and about ten weeks later got the period back and it was I didn't know that I could ever be so excited to have a period for this to be it used to be a very Forge experience for me. But in this case it was like I write this is a means to an end and this means that my body is doing what it's supposed to be doing and cool off. And then since that time had very irregular cycles as many people coming off of hormones do I mean it's the same for people who are on birth control and come off and try to get pregnant and it takes a little while for the body to figure it out. So it's been a lot of patience and a lot of waiting. And those are things that are not great at all. It's been hard. But the other stuff that we took in that time while we were waiting for my body to regulate was to reach out to a good friend and ask him to be our

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own sperm donor. And he was very thoughtful and you know it took a few days he took less time than we thought he would take. Took a couple of days to think about it and then came back and said You know I'd be honored to help you in this way and that what we do and he's been really game for the journey and he came to he lives about an hour away and so he has to rearrange his life and drive down when when it's obviously day ends. So we were working on a legal contract with him. We were you know all of us really just wanted to make sure that we were dotting the i's and crossing our fees and making sure that that everything was really on the up and up. He has no interest in being a parent to this kid. You know I will be the kid's dad. He will not. He'll be a go figure. He'll be around when we kids old enough we dampley want our child to feel free to ask questions of our own daughter. And that's that is really how I envision our family family working as having this person in our life who is an uncle figure and who comes over to visit and maybe babysits occasionally. But but where the were the primary parents. So all of that was really needed in the legal contract. And I think that that process took a little longer than I expected to. But it was it was a good process for us all to go through just to get it even more clear our expectations. And then from there we are working with

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the doctor and Ovie who has been really excellent to be honest. He is an out gay man himself and he is he's very he's very okay with with kind of playing the system with gaming the system to give us what we need. And I say that because we were originally working with retracted under King ologist who was very big on following the rules and you know when we said we'd like to use our known donor we'd like to do fresh UI cycles meaning have him ejaculate wash the sperm in a centrifuge and then put the sperm inside of me. That's what a fresh eye cycle looks like. Yeah. And the FDA doesn't approve of that basically because he's an. And it's a good partner of mine you know he basically she said No way. You've got to put the sperm on ice for six months quarantine it. Do testing before and after. And in all of that there's always the possibility that that they could not release the sperm at the end of it and we'd be out six months of our time and thousand dollars and all of that and at the end of the day you know we were going to go that route and then kind of decided you know what this feels really Geki. And this is not really aligned with our values. And so I found this O.B. who is just like well I trust you like you have a ok I'm pregnant I'm cool. He's had testing who you trust this guy. Yeah he's like OK I'm going to order a wash. And so he wrote a prescription and so we did our first attempt in

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July and it didn't take so I'm not pregnant right now. We are hoping that I obviously next week ish sometime in the next week or so and we'll try again. Same. Same deal for Mostue and Uy in my doctor's clinic and see if that takes so we'll keep doing that. You know I'm hoping second time's the

charm. But as you know getting pregnant is not as easy as certainly not as easy as I thought it was. The Viagra I get it all this time it's your stuff it's like wow you have to be really specific on timing and fertility charting is the bane of my business right now. You know it's all a means to an end. So every time I'm like waking up today you might have a shower and peeing on these tests and taking all the supplements and stuff I'm trying to remember that it's you know the end goal is to have a baby. And you know it's it's hard to think that far ahead right now by all of this struggle and money and time and waiting and heartache as her. What I hope will be a really really good outcome. Yes.

[00:40:36]

Yeah. Mike thank you.

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It's quite a long haul for us.

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Yeah it is. And luckily I've known plenty of other people who have kind of been through the wringer and it's taken a while for them to get pregnant as well. So I know it's not unusual but it definitely is a longer process than I expected it to be.

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Her images and birthing and stories and birthing are generally really gendered as like the pinnacle of femininity. Now like my womanhood not just like any woman right. Like a lot of us womanhood which is great for a lot of people and also doesn't necessarily map on the lived experience and a lot of us.

[00:41:25]

And so I'm wondering if you have either learned from your clients about new imagination's or images or machines. They're sort of vision of birthing is like you yourself have no hope for imagine what it would feel like to her.

[00:41:48]

Yeah that's a great question. I think a big big area where I've found possibility models and inspiration and felt less alone in this process is is a very active group on Facebook which I'm sure you've already mentioned in your podcast but it's the thing and breast or breastfeeding trans people and allies group. And then there is an offshoot of that group that's not open to allies that has only open to masculine of center birthing and nursing people. So that that group you know there are people there are people who identify as men in that group who have been pregnant and given birth or who have shared photos of their of their birth experience of their parenting journey just seeing other people doing it has been really really helpful for me. And then the couple of guys that I've supported as as Dula just being in the birther room as lingering has been majorly powerful for me and a huge honor to support those families as well. They're both friends. One was already a friend and one became a friend. Two guys because you know the world he needed to keep each other around. But I was out a few months ago when one of my friends has Naslund friends. To be honest I love that birth and I thought myself that was the most masculine thing I've ever seen. When he was like worrying that he'd be out and so determined to push the baby out. And just did it. You know like it was it's really hard to put into words but the feeling in the room was there was nothing permanent about that. And you know and he's not he's not

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a feminine person he's a pretty masculine you know a soft masculine person I will say I think he'd be OK with using that phrase right. But but he you know it was a fast labor fastidious second baby. And it was really intense but really really powerful because he was like I want to meet this kid baby. You know it moves really quickly and that everything about how he tended to that baby when it was on his chest and. And you know the vibe in the room was just very tender and loving but also not feminine. Not at all. And that was really really helpful for me to see just to see somebody who is so confident and so. And he's a very out person in his life. And so you know having seen examples of how he has navigated other people's opinions and asked for what he needs as a parent. And every Saturday he has just sent a really really helpful thing for me to be a part of and also to work from. So I think those

lived experiences for me have been had been helpful. And the same people that I don't know them they live in other parts of the country. But guys on this group who are who are posting showing pictures of the guy who had a home birth in the water and was posting about that and it was you know there's so many different ways to birth that any other. I was I was a tradesman who had a Syrian and that was you know very different type of birth. But equally equally powerful to be a part of and his family looks very

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different than my other friends and his family. So I think that's the other thing that's really amazing about working with creation's families is that there's no one one way there's not one standard way to do it to become a parent to earn the baby to have this journey and so just seeing all of the different ways that you can do things and all of them are right. That's been helpful for me as do.

[00:45:47]

And just as an individual yeah great being you know I'm so happy you had a magic mom and you can change any aspect of your clients or even their own and just trying to conceive period.

[00:46:09]

Now pregnancy and birthing to make it more affirming and take down barriers.

[00:46:18]

What when. When your magic wand do reproduce.

[00:46:25]

That's hard because it's just one aspect.

[00:46:29]

Laci if you need to Adam and Eve. Right. Also people are really hungry for these stories so just go quiet.

[00:46:43]

OK.

[00:46:45]

You know it's it's it seems like a little thing but to me language has a lot of power. So I think changing the systems that are already in place that are very gendered around pregnancy birth and definitely parenting as well. That that say that you know the societal expectations that women are nurturing and women give birth and that birth is a feminine experience to go through inherently all of those things that I've I've heard from so many people. If I could see those those that choice of words be it more expansive to hold space for more people. That's the whole point of inclusion right is to make more room for more people to be welcome not to take away from the experiences of women who are going to grow strongly identifies women are not out to to take away from that experience. And I think that birth is very visual experience to everybody copes with it differently and has different perceptions of pain and what support looks like. And you know what bodily autonomy feels like. And I. But I think that if if language shifted even slightly that would make a big difference in how how welcomed I feel to this to this this rite of passage that so many people go through and then with that parenting is also such a you know there's so much gender shit out there around parenting and you know men dads get kudos for taking the baby to the grocery store doing things that like moms do all the time. And you know that's lovely and you know great. Everybody should get a hand clap for being a good parent. Regardless of your gender. And should

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get like a lot of the smile in the grocery store when you're dealing with a fussy baby like that's everybody should get some kudos for that. But I think that I'd like to see our culture shift to where men who are sensitive and in touch with their emotions are the norm. And I think that is what they are excited about parenting as if we have a baby who is assigned male at birth that that kid is going to be raised in a way that easy pronouns for now. But if that child identifies a different way we'll respect

that and affirm that 100 percent. But if that little person turns into a man someday he's going to be raised with the right values in terms of being sensitive to the needs of other people aware of his surroundings. You know something as simple as like watch where your arms are taking up you know you're taking up a lot of space right now. Those sorts of things I think are important to teach kids about early age. So I'm looking forward to coming not appear. And I'm also looking towards the type of dad who does all of that normal average everyday stuff. You know I will be the primary caregiver. My wife will go back to work. That's already what we've decided on what works for our family. And so I don't want to get like affirming looks from women when I do something really normal with my kid. That's just a simple thing that parents do you know right now. Sure of course I'm like I can't I can't live like it'll feel good. I'm sure I've been in the

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morning before and when I take a baby to do something and a lot of people are like a house you know. Wow nurturing caregiving role. Wow. But but I don't think that that needs to be such a mind blowing thing. And I'd like to see that more normalized. And on the flip side will not have upsides all lumped in together here. There's so much stereotyping and aggression even towards women who who choose to go back to work and are more career oriented. And there is no that is a is a path that is 100 percent restaffed. And I think there needs to be a lot less a lot less judgment for that choice. And it's so it's so individual on the too. So it well it's great to see more stay at home dads. I don't think that that needs to be some mindblowing things like Yeah of course. Back to work. She makes more money. So what. Like that's how you provide for your family and you divvy up the work. However it needs to be divvied up. So I'm getting really broad with all of this but I think just that the gendered nature of birth parenting Peggotty all of it. I would like to see it all radically shift and language is one way to start. And that's what I say in the workshops that I read with with hospitals in my area is that something as simple as a language shift can really make somebody feel more welcome. And when people welcome our journeys become less unique. You know it's nice to be unique but sometimes you just want to have

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a parenting journey and not be so special. NVO when other people have resources and you talk about your baby and talk about the challenges facing and just your not so special and have had that that I'm saying that there are way that I hope you know what I'm getting at here.

[00:52:19]

Yeah. Yeah in some ways it makes me think of like the flip side of specials that were expected to be extraordinary. Oh my god yes. Yeah. And I know like you know we're parent cultures are like like there's the Mommy Wars right.

[00:52:37]

Like which are like the cultural conflicts about like how to parent in gender roles in class like they're deeply steeped in all of our systematic power dynamics and cultural groups and within our culture I know a lot of pressure from parents in a certain way that's that's more for me that shift with my class upbringing in a way that like I'm all about liberation and respect and also that was more permissive then. Then I wanted to parent my kids.

[00:53:15]

And I felt so much pressure that my because we're queer and radical that like we have to be perfect which is the flip side of being special right like that. Yeah.

[00:53:32]

That if you're were special and unique and we also have to be perfect and we can't just be a mess or like we can strive to parent one way but you know just sometimes like Paul fall down hard whenever.

[00:53:47]

Absolutely. I agree completely. There is. You know because when you're having this unique experience of like being an athlete versus pregnant and giving birth parenting like all eyes are going to be on you I expect some of that. I mean I'm very out in my community and in the Dula community here

and have already told plenty of people that I know we're trying to get pregnant and so I think there will be a lot of eyes on me and I expect to feel very similarly like Kim. Can I just have a bad day.

[00:54:14]

Can't I just like get it right like you like I know all the think that you whenever I should be wearing my baby.

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But you know I had a c section it was really fucking painful.

[00:54:30]

And so stroller it is like just these things like hopefully the dudes in your community are more mindful but like yeah there's a lot of expectations and then they are gendered. And then when you're the only one or one of the only ones in space supposed.

[00:54:47]

Yeah yeah. Absolutely. How is that one of the reasons you started this podcast set to the tables and start interviewing you. It's got to be like Why did you decide to start this I guess.

[00:55:01]

Yeah. You know I did start this podcast because I had yeah because I became very isolated and depressed threw my weight. Births were first really and then I gave birth to a second baby. And that experience was much harder than I expected in part because there were so few representations and resources. And I thought that I was spiritually ready and I found that I was somewhat spiritually bankrupt in terms of imagining this life phase within this queer masculine world that I inhabit and sense of self that I have. And then I ask I'll talk about it in a Debrett interview when I experienced active transphobia from a nurse that was really painful and traumatic.

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When I was in the ICU and and so that was three years ago and in the process of healing from that well healing from healing in that trauma just made me very clear that the kind of person I am doesn't heal in isolation and that repairing some of the conditions that cause my own pain was actually repair some of my pain.

[00:56:13]

Did that make sense. Wow. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:56:17]

Yeah it does. You're doing this partly for yourself but also a heck of a lot for other people so that they don't need to go through the same shit.

[00:56:24]

Yeah right. Yeah exactly. Because only doing it for myself would it would be fine.

[00:56:31]

And also and also there's a need for this. Yeah us out there who are masculine birthers.

[00:56:38]

Yeah like I just can't imagine like I was trying to imagine like what it would be like in 15 years to be sitting at some potluck or something next to some new bunch of trans masculine parents that just looked like all kinds of fucked up and sad and had some similar experience and I hadn't intervened to make them better.

[00:57:00]

Like what is it. What is it.

[00:57:01]

We are continually sort of learning and legal like the Facebook communities are great.

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And also you have to know somebody to know which Facebook community to and to write like it's all reliant on who you know and because parenting is such that I'm so attached to Lacey's is like I know trans guys and bitches that gave birth to kids that are now teenagers and they didn't even have social media and they your birth rate. So like all their knowledge however that was shared. Is Gone orange just with them. Right. It's not collectively held.

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So trying to create some repository that's more accessible to more people and also reliance on interpersonal networks.

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That's brilliant. I love the intention.

[00:57:50]

Cool thanks. Yeah.

[00:57:54]

I hope to do more local base. I think cast is great because anybody can just do it anywhere in the world. One thing that I'm hoping to do when I become a parent is start a group here for me to hold the language but you know dad's hair as you know it will probably be one of those like 16 words to describe who's welcome in the group. Take but you know like hey are you having the experience of parenthood that is related to being some sort of queer communist or are you thinking about having this story. And I'm waiting until I am pregnant or a parent myself to do that. But I'm doing it in stages right now. Like going to host a potluck and a couple of months for people who are currently parents were thinking about becoming parents who are somewhere in the queer spectrum specifically for trans folks. But. I think I'm I'm pretty open on who comes because I want that community for myself. And I also think you know when I said other people. So and I'm big on the face to face stuff as well. Because when we we know each other and there's trust and you know then you figure out who you like and maybe you know you don't like and and all of that is part of the dynamics that are very human as well. But I really love this podcast and I can't wait to help promote it and tell people about it.

[00:59:26]

Awesome. I'm someone thank you. And I'm glad that you're sending those groups there so my Senso it's gonna help so many people find friends and being community great.

[00:59:39]

Yeah yeah that's that's where my organizer skills come in handy.

[00:59:43]

That's right. Once an organizer always an organizer. Yeah.

[00:59:49]

I'm grateful for the chance to chat with you and to share a little bit about about my journey and about my work. Something I'm really passionate about. I'm looking forward to continuing to work with lots of queer insurance families in my area.

[01:00:03]

Yeah great. Thank you. It's great. Thank you.

[01:00:09]

Thanks for listening to masculine birth ritual. Show notes transcriptions and live streaming.

[01:00:15]

This episode is available unmasculine birth control dot com slash episode. The show notes include

links to a couple of the resources mentioned including the two separate lactation if you like what you hear please leave us a review and iTunes for Google Play and share this episode with your. If you're able to. Consider becoming a patron of the show be paid for. Your financial support covers the show fees and enables us to pay contributors. Go to a patriot and dot com slash Massenburg.

[01:00:51]

You can find us on Facebook Instagram Twitter and that masculine birth ritual dot com. I want to give a big shout out to Rachel Melodee who hosts the podcast feminist killjoys Ph.D. I'm a listener of their podcast. And they offered a Podcast production workshop this summer which made the launch of this podcast possible. I encourage you to check out the feminist killjoys podcast especially episode 96 which is a great interview with Mammone. We are legion. Thank you for listening. May you feel your deep worthiness and dignity in your body today. You are a gift to.