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You're listening to Masculine Birth Ritual. My name is Grover Wehman-Brown. Today we talk with Ryan who tells us about his experience with pregnancy and Birth. This conversation reckons with gender identity and embodiment during and after pregnancy, as well as how Ryan felt isolated from social support that's generally provided to birth parents as well as from access to post-birth Medical services.

[00:00:28]

Here we go.

[00:00:32]

Hi Ryan. How are you doing? I'm doing OK today. Thank you. Can you tell us your name and the pronouns you like to be called.

[00:00:45] - Ryan

Sure my name is Ryan I'll leave it at that. Pronouns have always been very complicated for me.

[00:00:56]

And I say most people who love me use him pronouns or just don't use pronouns okay and are he him pronouns the ones you like to be called.

[00:01:10]

I...what you like to be called is a weird phrase. They are better than the other options.

[00:01:15] - GWB

OK. Yes I resonate with that. So it sounds like also like not being called with pronouns is good for you.

[00:01:24] - Ryan

Yeah. If it's better someone can do that comfortably. It Doesn't feel gross you know like it's bad.

[00:01:36] - GWB

Yeah.

[00:01:37] - GWB

Okay great thanks. Yeah. And what kind of gender words do you use to describe yourself?

[00:01:48] - Ryan

Generally I just use trans or trans masculine.

[00:01:54] - GWB

Great. And are there any other cultural or social things about you that you think we should know about to help understand where you're coming from?

[00:02:05] - Ryan

Yes. Whiteness is sort of central. I think having a lot of education privilege impacts from coming from I think being fat impacts where I'm coming from being queer to me is rolled into being trans. Yeah I think those are the ones that I move through the world thinking about the most.

[00:02:43] - GWB

Great. Thank you. You have a child. How many children do you know what grade and how old are they.

[00:02:53] - Ryan

My daughter is 17 months.

[00:02:58] - GWB

And you gave birth to your daughter. Am I correct?

[00:03:02] - Ryan
I Did.

[00:03:03] - GWB
Awesome. And to talk about that.

[00:03:08] - Ryan
Yes.

[00:03:10] - GWB
That's what we're here to do and why don't you start and tell us about how you not pregnant and why you decided to carry?

[00:03:25] - Ryan
Let's see. I've never wanted to be pregnant and I never thought like kids were a necessity for me. And then I ended up in a relationship and married to someone like for them. If I'm going to be that this person we're going to have kids and then we hit an age at which I was thinking like right around 34 35. I was thinking like we don't know how long this will take. You know regardless of who tries to get pregnant and for medical reasons at that exact moment my partner couldn't try to get pregnant and I could and as much as I've never wanted to be pregnant I've also never been one of those folks who is dead set against that either. So I was like All right I'll try. I offered basically... are you asking him about like like the real details like how we did it?

[00:04:26] - GWB
If you want to share it. I think it's helpful for people because just in terms of normalizing this experience and also a lot of queer people it's just like just a lot of technical information that people have to really dig into the Internet to find somewhere to just be read along in our current hearing it is helpful.

[00:04:45] - Ryan
So we decided to... we've...we've gone with like Low support pretty much the whole way. So I didn't do any sort of fertility testing or I hadn't been on testosterone at that point and I had like my mom got pregnant really easily and I sort of thought like maybe I would too. And so we decided to try for a year without any sort of help just kind of on our own and just kind of doing what our friends had done and sort of doing what they told us they did which is what I'm about to tell you. OK. So we had a donor on KDR, Known Donor Registry. It's kind of like Craigslist for donors and 95 percent of it is sort of Yeah it's basically like trying to internet date for a donor I guess. So we ended up talking to there are a bunch of people we end up not wanting to talk to but we ended up finding four or five guys and we had sort of a set of criteria in our head around what made us feel safe and OK and a lot of it was around there politics and kind of personality like wanting someone kind wanting someone with social justice values. wanting someone who would be willing to be known to this little person and also ideally wanting someone was married and had kids and like wasn't you know interested in being involved in a father or parent way to ours.

[00:06:23]
And we ended up finding a donor we liked driving three hours into rural road Vermont and having dinner with him and his wife and their two kids which was kind of a weird and awesome experience. And then I'm going through this process once a month of like driving up getting a hotel really near where he works. Like he would knock on the hotel room door and like we'd give him a soft cap that he'd go into the bathroom and turn it into it. And then like put on his little hat and leave and then I'd just insert the soft cup and that was that.

[00:06:57]
And we tried to do it like like 24 hours apart.

[00:07:03]

So like two times and then we'd leave. we tried five times with that donor.

[00:07:09]

And then just he lived three hours away and it was too too far you know because we couldn't spur of the moment if I figured out that I was leaving or whatever dropped stuff and do a 6 hour round trip.

[00:07:22]

So then we look for a different donor close to the home found someone who, you like, broke all of our rules like younger single no kids like this very very very sweet gay guy. But his whole motivation was that he knew he would need help one day too.

[00:07:38]

[00:07:41]

And just... same thing, like I drove to his house. I gave him a bunch of soft cups when we met. And so I sent him a text that was like I'll be there in ten minutes and me and me back it's actually OK I'll get to work I just like walk into its house and grab the soft cups and insert it and leave like it was like a drive to Boston for five minutes and then drive back kind of thing. And we got pregnant we tried three times in like 72 hours and got pregnant on the first try with him.

[00:08:11] - GWB

SO GREAT. Congratulations.

[00:08:13] - Ryan

Yeah it was fast. It was. Even though it was fast it was like surprisingly demoralizing the first five times. Like I didn't it usually takes almost a year and like I didn't think it would be a big deal. You know it took a while but it was still like way harder than anticipated to not get pregnant when I was trying to. But yeah. So that's what we did.

[00:08:37] - GWB

Yeah. OK. And then after you were pregnant how did you feel.

[00:08:44] - Ryan

Like weird...

[00:08:47] - GWB

How so?

[00:08:47] - Ryan

I need more words.

[00:08:49] - GWB

No, that's good! That's how I felt in the first two weeks

[00:08:55] - Ryan

I'm a tasks accomplisher, right? So like when I was trying to get pregnant I wasn't like... doing. I was just like I'm going to do this thing. And once I get got pregnant I was like All right I'm going to try to stay pregnant. You know and I just sort of get the thing that I wanted to do next. But it was just this odd like.... oh shit this is really happening and I'm really carrying this kid. And like I don't know I didn't really want to talk about it and I didn't really want to talk to anyone.

[00:09:25]

I would get like this little funk around it which is hard because like my wife is jealous that she wasn't pregnant. I'm like pissed off than I am. You know it was like a very like rough dynamic and like we were like excited to have a kid like that dynamic in our relationship was really really hard. I think.

[00:09:48] - GWB

Yeah yeah. And so that was happening.

[00:09:53] - Ryan
Yeah

[00:09:54] - GWB
I have more questions about that. Let's finish how your pregnancy was so you felt task oriented to have the baby stay viable in the early pregnancy that was like your next task.

[00:10:09] - Ryan
Yeah.

[00:10:11] - GWB
And how did you approach that?

[00:10:14] - Ryan
I think just tried to take. I mean there's not a lot you can do. Right. Like except sort of get anxious and obsess over it if you're me.

[00:10:27]
What did I do? I mean I did what I did. I teach I taught my classes. I finished my doctoral coursework... I tried to get stuff out of the way. I was you know like I continued pretty much my regular routine which is I'm a doc student. I teach writing courses. I'm a potter. I teach spin classes at a gym. And so I kept doing all of those things.

[00:10:52]
And then otherwise just sort of sat. I'm trying to keep myself like not stressed like I so I kind of let myself do what I wanted and I really let myself kind of engage in my vices as long as they were unhealthy for you know carrying a baby know just try to stay sort of... I retreated a little bit I think.

[00:11:14] - GWB
Yeah. Did your friends know you were pregnant?

[00:11:17] - Ryan
Yeah. Slowly over the first 13 weeks some people knew right at the two week mark and some people knew six or seven weeks and some people knew. You know once we like told Facebook in the world.

[00:11:36] - GWB
Yeah.

[00:11:37]
And how did you feel in your body when you were pregnant and as the pregnancy is progressing?

[00:11:43] - Ryan
weirdly... Ok so I've been fat for most of my life and I carry almost all of my fat in my belly. So like I don't think I looked that different for a really long time. And actually like my belly just got like really hard and I kind of thought it was cool. I was like I had a really good like aesthetic and it was good and I thought that like feeling the baby move was cool. It was actually like I didn't have a rough pregnancy around carrying. And it did it change much about how gender works for me in the world. I think like birth messed it all up but I think the actual like carrying of the kid I really liked my belly.

[00:12:29]
I pretty much lived in like basketball shorts and sweatpants and I teach at a university where I can do that like I taught for a semester in my sweatpants and I was like...

[00:12:40] - GWB
you did? Where did you teach?

[00:12:43] - Ryan
Oh I teach at UMASS Amherst.

[00:12:45] - GWB
Wow. I taught at UNC Chapel Hill. Maybe it's the difference between north and south. Maybe I ever shown up in sweat pants....

[00:12:53] - Ryan
Oh no... I spent the whole semester and like joggers and basketball shorts. Teaching writing. It didn't even occur to me that that would be a problem. But also teaching is really political for me and teachers Bodies are really political for me and that's what my doctoral research is on and I've always really purposefully dressed down as a teacher because I think like bodies can disrupt in a lot of ways just based on how they exist in the classroom. So yeah I...

[00:13:25] - GWB
So you were already pushing against class norms teaching at the university.

[00:13:31] - Ryan
Yeah but also that class I teach like I'm trying to think there's probably 100 TO's who keeps that class and we all just kind of... They probably dressed more nicely than me but not by much. OK. I'm like your tenure track professors. Like they're not wearing sweat pants. But the Doc Students I think are wearing the clothes that we also wear at a class so interesting and the other class I teach is on the road bodies play in the classroom and that's the class I really like dressed down for and try to like queer what it means to be a teacher and what pedagogy can look like like via our bodies.

[00:14:12]
So it didn't even occur to me that it would be a problem.

[00:14:16] - GWB
That's interesting.

[00:14:18] - Ryan
Probably like a lot of layers of privilege. Like why that works fine for me. But it did. So yeah semester I tried really hard to like I was tritely like close up my comps before I had my kid.

[00:14:35]
I was sort of pushing like

[00:14:36] - GWB
that means you were trying to finish your comprehensive exams.

[00:14:39] - Ryan
Yes. So trying to finish my pilot study wrote my lit review, defend my comps. Yeah. Wich I didn't quite do but get close. And I stopped pretty early in my pregnancy I stopped the pottery classes like it's just too uncomfortable. And then I stopped teaching spin when I was around six months pregnant. I just like... it wasn't even the biking was so bad it was just like I didn't want to get up early to teach a class like I just wanted to sleep. So I kind of nixed all of my other activities except for teaching at UMass and finishing my own coursework.

[00:15:17]
And then my partner got me this recliner and I basically decided that... it was actually really isolating honestly. Yeah it was it really really isolating.

[00:15:30] - GWB
in a negative way?

[00:15:32] - Ryan

I guess so... I just... I had had a complicated year prior to getting pregnant. I think some of my friendships have changed.

[00:15:46]

And I just I think people didn't really like people. My friends don't treat me like a woman and I don't think they really had a script for how to treat someone who was pregnant who wasn't a woman and I just I mostly spent the time by myself.

[00:16:02]

I spent a lot of time honestly like sitting in a recliner and watching Netflix and like eating macaroni and cheese and like sort of being by myself it was like... my body wasn't the hard part.

[00:16:14] - GWB

Yeah right

[00:16:15] - Ryan

It just didn't change a ton... I just like pretty much went back to this as I had been and then my belly was like harder and that stuck out a little bit more.

[00:16:25] - GWB

And do you have breast tissue?

[00:16:27] - Ryan

I had top surgery about ten years ago and My chest looks like any guy who is my size so it's not totally flat but it's not like contoured in a way that looks like breasts either.

[00:16:50] - GWB

Was there any change in that because of hormones?

[00:16:54] - Ryan

Oh like I could tell that my chest got like a little bigger but it still didn't like read as like anything other than what it was anything other than my chest. Yeah like and I still could just like wear t shirt and shorts. So now I think had I not had top surgery like it would have been an utterly different experience for me. I don't think I could have done it and been OK. Without having already done that. Because of the change in the breast tissue would have been so overwhelming. Just like having breasts at all.

[00:17:30]

Like... too many uncomfortable things at once like I think. I think it just would have been really bad in a way that it wasn't.

[00:17:41] - GWB

Yeah. Can I ask about the social stuff what you think would have been good to happen differently. Like if there was a trans masculine pregnant folks group. Do you think you have gone through it?

[00:18:00] - Ryan

I mean I... I live in a super super queer area like I live in Northampton and there's nothing for people in my position and I feel very connected to trans and queer circles. And the closest I sort of came was knowing a few queer femmes whose transmasculine... who carried kids who have trans masculine partners. I think I would've. I think I would've. It didn't even like occur to me to... wish for that it just didn't I didn't do anything like I didn't read baby books. I didn't do like baby crap I didn't go to like baby groups because like I just couldn't do anything that was womanizing like it's just... and there wasn't anything that wasn't.

[00:18:48] - GWB

Yeah.

[00:18:49] - Ryan

So I did like one maybe five hour one day training around birth and my partner did a lot of the legwork around like emailing people around their comfort with gender and the language they use and we finally found someone who just talked about births in really technical ways and talked about the people who are giving birth as birth parents.

[00:19:12]

And she never had a pregnant trans person at her training but she'd had someone come with a trans partner once but she was the only one who was like yeah I'm down. Please can everyone else is like let me refer you to someone else. All these really really experienced midwives and doulas in frigging Northhampton were like NOPE NOPE NOPE. Let me pass you onto someone else like in the entire Green River Dula network. We found one Duala who like on her Dula profile mentioned gender in a way that made it okay for us to work with her.

[00:19:46] - GWB

Wow.

[00:19:47] - Ryan

It was actually like a little surprising.

[00:19:50] - GWB

Yeah I just I just moved back from living in Northampton for 2 years and I am both surprised and not surprised to hear that. And it makes me sad that you didn't have that.

[00:20:02] - Ryan

I didn't expect it but I also like... when it was incredibly hard to find. And then just like the names like we found this clinic that was really like the main doctor of this midwifery clinic like made serving trans pregnant people kind of her business. So the midwives were really well trained but the name of it was still Pioneer Valley Women's Clinic. You know there was no getting away from it. Like absolutely no getting away from it. But it did look very very little as a result and I don't think I would've done anything unless it like could kind of hold some amount of trans masculinity and the space yeah.

[00:20:50] - GWB

right. So it sounds to me like- please correct me if I'm wrong- that the lack of pre birth preparation and birth workers that were skilled in trans masculine birth really impacted you socially and the process of preparing emotionally and physically. And we don't yet know what the outcome of your birth was but it sounds like you missed what most people have as a very intentional communal preparation process.

[00:21:23] - Ryan

I think it just like didn't even occur to me to seek community around it except that I knew I wanted a doula and I knew I wanted like a tiny bit of birth class and when those things happened. But yeah when you said it has shown communal I thought like wait what I was supposed to do that.? You know it's just like wasn't right.

[00:21:45] - GWB

I'm not saying you did anything wrong. It's like you.... predicted that there was not many options and you were right.

[00:21:58] - Ryan

Yeah there was wasn't any resource for it. Yeah.

[00:22:03] - GWB

And do you wish that more friends had been active in the process?

[00:22:14] - Ryan

I mean I didn't know that I had had a few friends who like couldn't get pregnant themselves and like

you know sometimes when you're trying to get pregnant and someone else is pregnant that's not the person you want to be around which made sense to me. And it's not like those people stopped hanging out with me but there was like a little bit more space taking but I think for the most part like I had just had maybe the hardest year of my adult life. Socially and personally and emotionally. Like right when I got pregnant like shit was like hitting the fan all over the place that had nothing to do with pregnancy.

[00:22:45] - GWB

Yeah. So it sounds like it was coincidental? It was a time that you were pregnant and pregnancy just happens to be a time when some... most people want people to talk to them about it.

[00:22:59] - Ryan

Yeah and I really didn't like what I did find at UMass was like all these cis women wanting to tell me about pregnancy or about their birth or about their whatever. and I'm pretty good at setting limits and boundaries and I'm pretty outspoken and I could be like you know I don't actually want to talk about that. And then they'd be like OK just let me tell you this one more thing. Or like oh my god I can't stop myself from talking about it and I'd be like I really don't want to talk about it and then be like Okay so let me tell you the other one more thing. And I just like I couldn't get away from it. Just. Like.

[00:23:34]

Especially with like with cis woman doc students or I'd be like out to dinner like somebody would be like yeah you know it really helped me at birth was just like visualizing how strong we are and I be like I just don't want to talk about it and they be like great. So it was this magical like blah blah blah. Like it didn't even matter what I said.

[00:23:52]

Like if someone was going to tell me about their birth they were going to me I just could not shut it down and I'm really good at being direct and I'm sure like that is not a trans specific thing. I'm sure that people get that shit all the time

[00:24:09] - GWB

right. Well there's something about pregnancy in general about just all kinds of normal social boundaries dissolving.

[00:24:19] - Ryan

Yeah yeah.

[00:24:20] - GWB

OK. And how was your birth then?

[00:24:26] - Ryan

Long. Like my body was like very agreeable like my body my whole pregnancy has done everything it was supposed to do without giving me much trouble like I never threw up but never... Like, my labor was long It was like 30 plus hours long.

[00:24:46]

But like I didn't have any complications I didn't have a c section. I had the people there who I wanted there had a really great doula I had the Midwife there where I wanted I had... my wife was there and then kind of a mutual friend was there. I wanted someone else in the room because somebody told us and maybe this was my birth class that they were like. Think about how you feel when you're sick and then multiply that by a thousand and that might be how you feel when you're pregnant.

[00:25:22]

And I thought like when I'm sick I don't want anyone near me. I don't want anyone to touch me.

[00:25:27]

I don't want anyone to talk to me like I just get in this highly independent place. And I thought like fuck

I'm going to kick my wife out of the room. sort of like picturing myself being like nope. Everybody out. and so, in case I kicked her out I wanted someone who could sit with her because I think like that would have been hard for her. But I also wanted it to be someone who had like already seen me naked and like I could have a kid around.

[00:25:57]

And the only person that like fit all of that was this acts of mine who I'm still really good friends with and I been with for about three years but my wife knew because like we've maintained a friendship.

[00:26:12]

So she was there. And she ran just like a ton of interference like talking to the nurses. Anytime there was a shift change just like pronouns language. I also wanted someone who was just super self-sufficient wasn't going to need anything emotionally like could just take care of themselves and also helped my partner if I kicked her out which I didn't.

[00:26:38] - GWB

Okay.

[00:26:38] - Ryan

I legitimately thought I was. But I didn't.

[00:26:43] - GWB

Yeah. And were you in a hospital setting?

[00:26:47] - Ryan

Yeah. Yep.

[00:26:51] - GWB

OK. And so you had one friend you had a doula you had your wife you had one friend running interference and doing it sounds like a lot of the gender maintenance that's required when you're in a setting like that?

[00:27:05] - Ryan

Yeah. I mean the doula too. And My wife all kind of just held it down as needed. Like yeah.

[00:27:15] - GWB

And did you find that the hospital staff was able to get it?

[00:27:21] - Ryan

Half. like I said this particular practice which I will name, which is Bay State Franklin is kind of known for being pretty good with trans folks.

[00:27:32]

That said there's always visiting nurses so like we have this one visiting nurse who is from the South and she just like "honey sweetie darling" like all over the place which that actually wasn't bad it was terms of endearment. But she had like a hard time with pronouns but they ran really good interference like I did not feel like womanized through people while I was like giving birth.

[00:27:58] - GWB

Yeah. OK. You said that as if you implied you felt womanize through other other mechanisms....

[00:28:07] - Ryan

I think it was like the first. I think it's really traumatizing and I havent talked about that time because I don't think there's like a space to talk about it. I think it's the first time I've really felt... and I didn't have this language for it at the time but I really felt really like intense dysphoria around my body and I didn't I didn't like know to name it that. I just like you that I was having like just a really hard time dealing with my body like post-birth. The actual birth part was just like doing thing like like kind of like your

brain at least for me like my brain sort of shut off and then it was like all right like the same like I'm going to deliver this kid.

[00:29:01]

I didn't want to plan a C section because I didn't want the recovery and in my head I was like I can deal with up to 72 shitty hours more than I can deal with a two month recovery and trying to like really rebuild my abdominal wall. So like, I made that tradeoff choice

[00:29:21] - GWB

Yeah. So your actual labor. It sounds like your body was an auto drive.

[00:29:27] - Ryan

It was fine like it was like 30 ish hours. I had an epidural after like 18 ish hours and like four or five hours of active labor like it was long but that part was just what it was. It made me feel sort of tough and sort of bad ass to like do it. Yeah I think it was just like everything that came after the hardest parts for me around being a trans guy and giving birth have been like since... I think.

[00:30:05] - GWB

yeah. So can you say specifically which parts of the post birth period have been really challenging.

[00:30:17] - Ryan

Yeah. Part of it is physical just like physically having changes in my body that probably I should seek medical support for but like not wanting to use the language or go to the services that requires like I would have to do to actually get that support. So just not doing it... which is still a problem.

[00:30:40] - GWB

Do you mean... Can I ask the more specific question about that? You mean something having to do with your womb or genitals and like how everything is after the birth?

[00:30:52] - Ryan

partially Yeah. And that part's just still super uncomfortable for me. Like I just I'm having a hard time with language I'm having a hard time talking about like like a lot of people who get birth have things that happen after that are different from before. And there are a ton of services for that and the like. I don't want to access any of them. So that part's really rough. I think the other part that was hard was just like as soon as....

[00:31:26]

People didn't treat me like I just had a kid. People treated me like I'm not gestational parent.

[00:31:33]

I remember my in-laws like in front of me kissing my wife and saying thanks so much for making us grandparents and I just... like I'm still mad at them for that. They're good people. But like I think people just immediately treated me like a non gestational parent.

[00:31:54] - GWB

Wow.

[00:31:55] - Ryan

And there's like a lot that happens emotionally around birth and around gestation and it's just like I think that like as much as it's really hard for mothers.... I'm not a mom that's part of it... but as much as it's really hard for mothers who have just given birth there's also like sort of a cultural expectation that you get to have community and you get to cry and you get to sort of flip out and like be messy and like I couldn't go to mom groups because they were just like then I was just either misgendered or invisible and I couldn't... people didn't know what to do with me like they treated my wife and I like we had a new baby but they didn't treat me like I just had a kid.

[00:32:37]

If that makes sense.

[00:32:39] - GWB
Yeah it does.

[00:32:41] - Ryan
It just was really rough.

[00:32:45]
So when my in-laws said that did your wife say Oh you're welcome but Ryan did most of the work.

[00:32:57]
I don't remember. I don't think so. But that's like particular comment has stayed with me because I think it's like representative of kind of a lot of what like people definitely treat me like a parent but not like a birth parent.

[00:33:15]
And I think like it definitely... birth definitely like wratched up some anxiety stuff for me like I had a hard time and there's just really nowhere to go with it. And like people I expected to show up mostly didn't. I have one friend who just like there was always food in my fridge she was at my house basically every day like we never talked about it but she just like showed the fuck up and it was nice. Unexpected but like really really nice just to have a person who is like I think she operated from the like. "Until Ryan tells me he doesn't want this I'm going to do it." Which I think was more what I needed. Otherwise I think people probably might have like. Dumb things if I asked. And there was. The. Traditional stuff like when a meal train. So that people could come meet the baby but I just.... I. Don't know what I'm envisioning it's like for. cis women who have Kids but I'm just envisioning like a type of community that I had no idea how to access.

[00:34:22]
I'm not envisioning being easy I certainly can't envision like raising a kid with someone who has male privilege being like fun and like like my partner does so much more than like what most cis women's straight cis women's partners do. From what I hear. You know like there's like a ton more support. We were formula feeding right away so we could kind of share that. There's a ton in terms of like what was happening in my relationship that was just way more than like what I expect from most ciswomen who have just given birth.

[00:35:02]
But It just was like nobody talked to me about it. Nobody knowledged it like it was just this big weird thing where there was no way to engage in it.

[00:35:11] - GWB
Yeah

[00:35:11] - Ryan
it really hard.

[00:35:13] - GWB
Yeah. Did you have people when you were having your meal train who had given birth you came and sat with you and was like "tell me how that was"?

[00:35:23] - Ryan
Not really. It was not people who wanted to come hold their baby and like were happy to bring us food. Like I feel like the entire fact that I gave birth got erased about a week after I did it

[00:35:36] - GWB
yeah. Wow. Well I'll just let you know that that's not what happens for most straight cis women and even queer cis women that are red as women.

[00:35:48] - Ryan

Yeah I think was the hardest part. Really was like the aftermath of just I don't know what it's like to be treated like you've given birth and maybe this is what it's like and I am being treated that way but it certainly does feel like it.

[00:36:05] - GWB

Yeah I think generally people feel like they get inducted into a new club.

[00:36:10] - Ryan

Yeah. And even like the small groups I sort of felt bad for my kiddo because all these new parent groups. Well there was only one that was for parents and not just for moms and it was still totally for moms like all the posts were hey ladies blah blah hey mamas hey whatever and there's... I mean, being a mom is a tough thing to be like. There's nothing wrong with it. it's jjust not me. And I just like didn't go to them you know so like my kid doesn't have like age mates like I know people who had a kid you know within a month or two of me and They have this community now. and they have these friends and these like little people are growing up together and my kid is like a little bit isolated from that because I couldn't access those groups.

[00:36:56] - GWB

Yeah. And those people who gave birth who were in your social worlds didn't say Hey Ryan you just had a baby. You want to join us?

[00:37:06] - Ryan

I mean they did. But like then I go to this group and it's like mamas mamas mamas breastfeeding breastfeeding breastfeeding like there was no escaping it. Like even if they wanted to include me just a feel good time to be there.

[00:37:23] - GWB

I also experience when I went I went a long longer than I should have. To many of the groups just because I was like alone and I was bottle feeding our first baby because my wife gave birth to her but she had to go right back to work.

[00:37:37] - Ryan

Yeah.

[00:37:39] - GWB

The day that somebody in like I live in this like... in this community where middle class people take up most of the space. And so I was in this mom's... it was supposed to be a parents group meetup but it was only moms and everybody my name and my whatever my parental gender names and stuff. And somebody leaned over to me because everybody was talking about buying these million dollar houses because just a regular house cost million dollars here. And she whispered to me "we rent." Like. I was like OF COURSE YOU RENT. a house is A MILILION DOLLARS. I was just like I'm done. I've endured so much mom-ing. And so much just staring because they have no idea what to say to me for me to be like "well my wife's birth went really well. You want to tell you about that?" as a way of bonding. I was out at that point. But yeah this is a lot of mom lady bonding.

[00:38:46] - Ryan

Yeah. And even when like I could be included I don't want to be in a picture with like 10 other CIS women that's captioned with our kids like I don't want to deal with that caption and deal with the comments. There was one non gestational parent who came to this group who I read as Butch but who definitely like came and came and came in came and came and she went by she and like seemed to like use the group as a place to process and is definitely part of the community. And I don't know if just because I have given birth like I was sort of resentful like I just was... Part of me was really sad and part of me was really angry.

[00:39:32] - GWB

Yeah. Yeah. Well I'm sorry that group wasn't there. No, I am! I am. part of why I'm doing this podcast is like... It's just like unacceptable to me at this point that I like trans masculine and Nonbinary people just continue like... that Year after year after year a new group of people who don't get the social emotional support that they need and don't get the health care that they deserve. Over and over and over again like how long are we just going to let this go? Collectively as a community.

[00:40:10] - Ryan

Right. It's hard. And it's. Yeah it's really really hard. I just like there was... even online like that I'm a pretty savvy searcher. It was really hard to find people in my position like the closest I came was finding like a more binary trans masculine that I am like somebody you like with a full beard... like that pregnancy story that was like as close or kind of like nonbinary folks who like sort of pass as ciswomen and still go by mom but have like a more complicated relationship to gender than being a cis woman. I sort of found a little bit of that but I never found anything that I felt like reflected who I am in this story.

[00:40:56] - GWB

Yeah wow...

[00:40:59] - Ryan

and I think there was very little of even what I did find like I'm sure what I found. Like those folks probably were not getting much by way of support or community

[00:41:11] - GWB

Mmm hmm. right. The couple that you found of bits and stories didn't necessarily mean that there is a big community behind them.

[00:41:19] - Ryan

Yeah exactly.

[00:41:24] - GWB

Whew. Well.

[00:41:25] - Ryan

I think I sound like I think I said touched on this but I just the part that people aren't talking about that I would have wanted to hear someone talk about it was just like how much dysphoria came up as a result of giving birth.

[00:41:40]

And like how to deal with that and I still have yet to find really anything that deals with that.

[00:41:49] - GWB

Mmm hmm. say can you say more about like.

[00:41:53]

What that ideal conversation or resources might look like like like particular techniques in resolving that dysphoria? Or some kind of resource or stories just so that you feel like your experience is not isolated but shared?

[00:42:10] - Ryan

I think some of it might even just be a language around the experience. It was hard to talk about something that there's really language for and I think I just had a really hard time relating to parts of my body and I had a hard time talking about it. I had a hard time knowing how to talk about it. So like it's like it's rough work like need someone else to be the person who tries to like talking about the thing that's really hard to talk about. you know at first when you messaged me I was like No no I'm just like not going to have that conversation.

[00:42:44]

You know like it's hard. I value vulnerability a lot but it's like rough work to try to have a conversation you haven't seen being had before.

[00:42:54] - GWB

Yeah. Yeah. And do you feel like in the year and a half since your daughter was born like does that dysphoria still cling to you in the same way. Has it changed over time?

[00:43:14] - Ryan

No it's still there and it's still there in the same way. I think it's just like it's really hard for me. It's like I simultaneously don't want to be made invisible as a birth parent but I like the idea of someone thinking of me as someone who has given birth and what that could have been like like my body of relationships that is just really uncomfortable for me.

[00:43:40] - GWB

So the idea that you want to be seen as the birth parents and you don't want people to think about your body in the anatomical details that are associated with birth.

[00:43:51] - Ryan

Yeah.

[00:43:53] - GWB

Yeah. That makes sense.

[00:43:55] - Ryan

And so it's really hard. Like it's hard to talk about because there's the type of attention that just gets really bad to me like this just like I have I felt myself like there's just a lot of silence. I didn't used to... like I never really felt at odds with my body except for my chest and I dealt with that. But now I kind of do in a bigger way than I expected and ah... it's one of my friends. Actually. I was like talking to her about it a little bit. She's like You know that's she's like so how long have you been feeling dysphoric or something like that. She asked me that question I was like what? Who mentioned dysphoria? She's like she works in a queer center and she's like you know when trans people talk to me about dysphoria they say the same things you're saying and I got kind of like pissed at that. That She had to sort of name that for me.

[00:44:52]

You know like it was nice that somebody knew enough to you know, say something. You know. But um... yeah.

[00:45:00] - GWB

And when you first heard her name that were you pissed in general or that you didn't have the tools to be able to name that for yourself?

[00:45:06] - Ryan

a little bit of both but mostly the latter. Like I wasn't like actually annoyed with her I just like I hit this point where I was like like I don't know how to talk about this I didn't even like I have a really great like queer fat femme like savvy as shit therapist and I didn't want to talk about it with her. I didn't want to talk about it with like... my trans friends had no idea I have trans friends who said like... actually this person is not my friend-- Like "man, if I ever had to get pregnant I'd kill myself" and I was like that's not useful.

[00:45:40] - GWB

No. No.

[00:45:42] - Ryan

Not my friend. But you know the partner of a friend of mine. And just like.

[00:45:48]

There's sort of an expectation in my community is that the less masculine person will carry whether or not that person is trans and so I don't even know how to deal with it. I just feel like there is a language and there it's like there aren't models. Like it would be lovely to see some people doing the work that feels harder for me and then like I feel ready for.

[00:46:11] - GWB
Yeah

[00:46:12] - Ryan
but so far I don't see it.

[00:46:17] - GWB
Right. So it would be nice if there were some trans people or trans competent care providers that were holding space and developing the language that you can utilize.

[00:46:33] - Ryan
Yeah I'm part of like they would like to be on the podcast just like I need to be doing the work. It's like someone who has like a lot of privileges a white person like good health insurance life strong education strong awareness of the resources around me like a relatively stable situation like I have a lot of things that made it make my position in the trans community like not particularly tenuous.

[00:47:03]
Yeah makes sense.

[00:47:05] - GWB
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah it does. Thank you for talking to us about it and I thank you for bringing this up because this hasn't yet come up in the interviews that I've been doing. And so this is a great first start of talking about something that I also think... I also experienced some dysphoria during and after birth that still continues because my body permanently changed. And I was like Yeah I was like you know like I didn't have the economic means for top surgery before and like now I'm so I didn't even allow myself to consider it. And now I'm like yeah that seems real nice right now. After breastfeeding for two years I'm like where's my exit on that.

[00:48:01]
And so so yeah, naming it and I personally feel a pressure like the pressure of being a "minority" like that language is really problematic. But in this sense it makes sense. like if you take on the task of doing something that is considered kind of taboo.

[00:48:21] - Ryan
Right.

[00:48:21] - GWB
For men or trans masculine people to carry babies is fairly taboo which is why people assume the more feminine person is going to carry them. I have to present or act like it was all great and fine and like we can do anything and that it wasn't unnatural and that wasn't disruptive.

[00:48:44]
Do you know what I'm saying? Like it's my job to weave this narrative that like being trans doesn't... it's like an anti-religious right thing and also just like an anti gender binary thing like being pregnant and being trans doesn't mean that my pregnancy is going to be terrible and being trans doesn't mean that I'm ... like I have so much skill, like skills in navigating my own gender dysphoria that like it won't even touch me right?

[00:49:15] - Ryan
Yeah it's hard. I feel like it's still like I'm talking around stuff like I know exactly what I could be saying to you that I still have just like. I'm not in a place to say. you know like I think people will sort of understand what I'm saying but I know I'm still talking around it.

[00:49:36] - GWB
Yeah.

[00:49:37] - Ryan
And that's just like as close as I can get to it right now. And I think that's part of what dysphoria is like that feeling.

[00:49:50] - GWB
Well thank you for talking to us and bringing us there. and I like you have been brave in talking up to that point and like people can fill in the gaps for people that have no idea what you're talking about. They can just... pick up a book you know.

[00:50:10] - Ryan
It's not for them!

[00:50:11] - GWB
And hopefully collectively we can as we talk to more people we can get more tools and more language.

[00:50:27]
Thank you for listening to masculine birth ritual.

[00:50:30]
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[00:51:09]
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