

You're listening to masculine birth ritual, a podcast about masculine of center queer and trans people making life outside the lines. My name is Grover Waymon Brown. Today we're talking with Vanya Hollis. She's a birth parent and a high school science teacher. As we talk you might hear a little background noise- Vanya was recording in her classroom at a public high school. And I was recording in my apartment as a child decided to play hockey on the patio below me.

These are the background noises of people living a life, and of grassroots media. If you would like to support a sound engineer or recording this in a studio, head on over to [Patreon.com/masculinebirthritual](https://www.patreon.com/masculinebirthritual) where you can make contributions to funding the production of this show.

Without further ado here is my conversation with Vanya Hollis:

What gender words do you generally use to describe yourself?

So generally I identify as a genderqueer butch woman although I prefer female more than Woman. I don't even like either of those terms that much but I generally butch is the main one. And genderqueer as well.

Yeah. Are there other things that you think are important about how you move through the world and generally informs your life?

Yeah I know I have a beard that I grew in puberty and a lot of my transmen friends sort of have been jealous that I heard when I was, you know, a kid and I didn't take hormones or anything I just come from a hairy family. So, I go in the world... I often pass in a... well, as a cisgender man and... I am white, anti-racist from a mixed class background working class on one side more middle class on the other side. My mom's side is more working class/poor, my dad's side is more middle class. Multicultural Family my dad married an African-American woman when I was a child so raised in that environment of race awareness and anti-racism.

And where did you grow up? And where are you living now?

I grew up in Ferguson Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. Many now know it as where Michael Brown was shot. I currently live in Los Angeles California.

And, how many children do you have?

I have one child. He's 4 years old. He identifies as a boy and he has a penis which is what most people want to know when they ask. The child's gender, which I find strange. Why do you want to know what my child's legs? That's what I ask, anyway he does identify as a boy and I am a school teacher. A high school teacher.

Awesome, what do you teach? Biology to 9th grade students. And I teach anatomy and physiology to 11th and 12th grade students.

And you carried a birth your son. Yes.

Can you tell us a little bit about what can you tell me how you decided to carry your child and what your pregnancy or birth experience was like in as little as much detail as you like?

I always wanted to get pregnant even from the time I was a kid. I always wanted to have kids as well.

And I always find it fascinating this idea that people can grow a human in their body.

And I as a biology teacher I also find it fascinating.

From a biological standpoint and one of which is that growing a fetus is kind of like growing a parasite. So when I got pregnant I made a T-shirt that said Grow Your Own PARASITE! GET

PREGNANT!

And I just love that that concept that we are growing this is other being that you know takes from you you know that it takes your nutrients and you know just takes all the stuff from you and I just found it fascinating. So I'm partnered with a feminine identified woman and she had no interest in getting pregnant. But I did. And I just again from a biology standpoint I find it fascinating that you can take two cells and they can join made some sperm and egg this line and then you can grow into a trillion celled being from that you know with the with the right equipment inside your own body. Um, parenting. I really wanted to experience that particular type of relationship. I feel like we all know what parents are and have parents in our lives. And you know know people who are parents. But to be a parent and to have that kind of relationship with another human to be responsible for their growth both physical and psychological. You can't really have that relationship unless you have. You just have to really experience such a human experience so I really wanted to have that experience.

Yeah.

So that's why I got pregnant.

great.

What was that question. No that's fine I just ask you three questions at one time. So how was your pregnancy for you. How was that experience?

So medically it was pretty uneventful. Everything went pretty well. I didn't have any big problems for that.

But it was really interesting for me from a sort of a gender standpoint. I have...in my 20s I went through a lot of identification questioning right. I thought I might be a trans man. I went by he and his with a lot of people others I went by she her hers and before I got pregnant I spent about six months preparing myself in lots of different ways one of which was getting really fit trying to be as fit as possible. And for me that also coincided with sort of feeling more masculine than I had for the previous few years. And so getting pregnant was in some ways a bit of a mind trip around. You know this is the archetype of femininity right there the pregnant female or pregnant woman is this archetype. You know, the ultimate thing you can do as a woman. And here I was a sort of non-woman type person very you know presenting as masculine and being super hairy and... short hair and having a beard. And so going through the world especially when I was further along in my pregnancy you know obviously pregnant was really interesting people would look at my face and... you know call me he or him or Sir right in public and then see my belly and be like I'm sorry you know ... Miss you know. And that happens to me in general all the time. Right. Pregnant. And I am generally fine with it sometimes feels annoying but was really interesting when I was pregnant. Because I was sort of figuring out where am I gender wise right now. Right. Am I more masculine... am I more feminine... you know, all that. I don't really identify as feminine but know am I more female or woman-like. right now and most of time personally I didn't think about it or go into as much detail with it in my mind because I was just me you know growing a human. And that was freaking cool. So... that was interesting it was really interesting being pregnant.

Yeah.

Do have a sense of words for how you felt in your actual body like... like aside from navigating all the ways socially that our bodies are bred.

Yeah I mean I feel great in my body I wanted to be pregnant. You know I put a lot of effort and work into being that way. I had spent a lot of years... I'm 40 now.

So I was 36 35 when I got pregnant 36 when I gave birth.

So from teen age you know teenage years adolescence on particularly through my 20s I spent a lot of

time and effort on my own self-esteem and self love loving my body as it is. And so actually getting pregnant was this amazing feeling of like I can do this I can do this thing that I was born with I was born with his uterus right. And I can grow a human. And so I felt great in my body in that regard. And see you know pregnancy has all of its issues and downsides of you know indigestion and not being able to sleep and all that. But in general I felt like all great. Those were terrible things to try to figure out but stuff women or every pregnant persons.. you know... problem.

Yeah. Well... I suppose, though there is a whole section for people of a certain gender and size for clothes shopping and..

Trying to find something that just wasn't feminine. Oh yeah! I forgot about that. I was such a nightmare.

Yeah what did you end up doing. What were your solutions?

What did I do?

I found is just sort of like legging-like pants but that weren't really leggings but were kind of loose. I wear jeans that I just left open.

You know and with it I tried to use of those old belly bands but it didn't really work. I wear lots of t shirts just as many loose t shirts as I could.

I'm trying to remember what else I wore I can't I can't really remember but I remember being in a what does it call the room where you try things on chat room. Thank you. Changing room and at a store and crying because you know things but they weren't they just didn't look right. They looked too feminine everything had a little frills and just just terrible for someone who doesn't identify with them that way. I read this little graphic novel called Pregnant Butch which made me feel better. I wasn't the only one out there now dealing with that. I actually just remember that last night when I was thinking about this interview because I know what I do to prepare myself.

Yeah. So how was your birth experience itself.

My birth experience was interesting. I ultimately labored for 54 hours. I had a midwife and wanted to give birth at home. That did not end up happening because after 36 hours at home laboring with my birth team. I.

I could not stand the pain anymore. After 36 hours I was about where it was was 36 hours that I decided to go to the hospital and get an epidural and I was so grateful for modern medicine. When I did that because it was just really rough especially the last 24 hours of that 36. So once I had an epidural it was hosed and I was able to take it actually crawl asleep while I was contractions get a little rest because in that 36 hours I had not even a separate Kracker here or there. I didn't sleep at all. So I was exhausted and so my birth experience the actual childbirth I had my partner in the room my mom and I and then my partner's best friend who was also a friend of mine was a gay man who also took pictures of everything and was a bit of a decision to figure out what the campground and my sister wanted to be there. But I can only have three people and so since I was my mom my partner chose her best friend who was chosen family. We live on the same property and he's one of our chosen family. You know the experience of birth was bizarre because I couldn't really feel much you know I didn't since I had epidural. I didn't feel pain I felt pressure but I was. Super excited just a this little human who was going to know who had been growing inside of me. For nine months and I wanted to see me who they were.

Yeah when you transferred to the hospital your midwife didn't stay in the room with you. You transferred over to the care.

Yeah that had been agreed upon. You know I had I had been seeing a O.B.. His Name was Dr Dwight. He was also a gay man very queer friendly very trans friendly and genderqueer friendly. You know he

asked me about my pronouns and it just is very open and perfect and great with my midwife she was amazing she was. I was simultaneously seeing both of them. My partner didn't really wasn't really into the whole midwife thing. She was a little more concerned that something could happen and so she said OK we can do the midwife as long as we also do that OB and so we did and it worked out well. So I ended up wanting to go to the hospital. And the moment that I met I told her OK we need to go to the hospital. She was like Wait is this one of those moments where I'm supposed to tell you know that know that you know you told me No we can't go.? I said no. I told her no you have to go. Happy I just can't deal with this pain anymore. I think I threw my back out or something because I was.... the contractions were actually easier to deal with than the pain I had between contractions which was the pain that I had between contractions was my back like muscle muscular pain and the contractions were predictable right like they were well but then this back pain was terrible so that's why I ended up going and the midwife did not stay in the room as she did not come with me which was fine and we had agreed to it and

so I had a lot of the pushing of the birth I had the nurse was there and the doctor you know was seen in the last 15 minutes kind of getting there to the end.

Yeah. And your birth was healthy and your child was healthy. Did you have any birth injuries?

Well I mean I did have some tearing and you know it was that that that aspect is pretty traumatic in the what childbirth does to one's nether regions quite...Quite interesting. So I did some tearing and had to be sewn up my child was totally healthy. Initially he was healthy but then within within 24 hours they realised that he needed to be placed into the Billi lights he was a little jaundice. So we did that. You know we stayed at the hospital for about a day or two and.

But no, everything was it was really really healthy and very lucky.

Great! How does your support system after birth and in the first year after your child was born?

Well not great honestly. I had several years prior to trying to get pregnant...I had talked to some of my closest friends at the time about this whole project of bringing life into the world and you know wanting to sort of have a community around here. Right? And several of my friends at that time were on board and like hey we'll be part of the community and you know help raise a child not not in any sort of real response you know I mean a lot of responsibility type away but just sort of being supportive. Well after the child was born Milo my child was born the day they sort of disappeared a little. And that was problematic. It was very difficult. It was just really difficult that first year life and you know they don't have a lot of my friends don't have kids and kind of just don't comprehend the degree of labor and exhaustion that particularly new parents go through. And so it was stressful.

You know it was only for a year.

I also personally had a lot of problems with breastfeeding. I wanted to breastfeed. So I. I had a lot of concern before I got pregnant that because of my masculine body I would not be able to get pregnant. The fact that I don't have tits and don't look very feminine. It just made me worry like oh I'm biologically I'm too masculine or I have too much testosterone and I won't get pregnant.

Yes. That's that...I resonate with that. I had those fears too.

Yeah. It's so weird and I had never taken any testosterone or any kind of hormones. But but just my own genetics I was worried. Right. And so I got pregnant on the third try and I was you know really lucky that used a friend's sperm and he's a friend of ours. He's now considered an uncle to our child. And but when I got pregnant nothing happened to my breast. You know you read all these all these books and articles and they tell you what's going to happen right. When you're pregnant nothing happened you know a lot of people have that you know Mardi Gras and you know nipple changes and all this and nothing happened. And so I was really really worried that it wasn't going to be able to breastfeed. And I talked to my this is the one concern I have with my doctor my O.B. even the midwife I talked to both of them about it and was like Look I'm really worried. Is there anything I need to be

doing? You know I really I really wanted to be able to breastfeed. I wanted to be able to do that you know along with being able to grow a child. I want to be able to feed this child right with my body. Anyway the midwife and the doctor said don't worry about it. No. Some people don't have a lot of changes during pregnancy in their breast. But then when the child is born you know your legs down you'll be fine. Come to find out child was born. We go and you know he latches on just right. I start breastfeeding but his... I think it was his second day of life or third day of life. No actually even at the hospital. Yeah. Even in the hospital he he wasn't getting enough he wasn't getting enough milk. And so they had to supplement. And at the hospital I was you know I read a lot about that and he's frustrated I was frustrated that they even suggested it I was like No I want to breastfeed.

But then when we finally went home he wasn't peeing.

And so I realized... I called a lactation consultant and I talked to a friend who was a doctor and basically realized that my kid wasn't getting enough liquid or you know nutrition and general and so I ended up having to supplement. After a lot a lot a lot of research and I met with a lactation consultant I did a supplemental nursing system as did as I did. I took Dom Peridom. I rented a professional great breast from all this stuff. Anyway I have something called insufficient glandular tissue where I just don't have enough like... no glands. I just don't make enough milk. And it was exactly what I was worried about. And so I ended up having to supplement with this SNS, these little tubes they fill with milk and you put it on your nipple and feed the kid with you know breast milk and also some things the formula. But that was really rough because I really felt sort of this inadequacy right as as a person who should be able to feed my child with my body. And I couldn't. Right. I found some support on the Facebook group and IGT support group on Facebook and got GTA scaling for a site insufficient glandular tissue. And so that's really where I got the most support that. But the problem was with breastfeeding. As far as Yeah. So that's that's the biggest problem I had in that. I ended up breastfeeding you know with the with the supplementation for seven months and then finally I just it's like I can't do anymore.

Yeah. Yeah. Well good work feeding your kid.

Thank you. There's so much around just like there's a lot of shaming. You know of people who don't breastfeed. Right. And I understand where that from from the history of the formula companies trying to encourage people not to breastfeed. And a resurgence you know about the benefits of breastfeeding. But some of us just actually physically can't. And then what about women or people anybody who don't want to? Right. What's wrong with that. Why are they these horrible people anyway? I have a whole... spheel on that.

Well thank you for sharing that.

So what kind of things did you do to prepare for birth and pregnancy either like books you read things like that or any spiritual or emotional preparation and some other way?

Yeah well I first of all I read lots of books one to one one of which was Lesbian Conception and Birth, but I took a class my partner and I did with Kristen Tali this woman in the Bay Area Oakland who teaches people about how you know faertility how to get pregnant. I tracked my fertility for about six months. So I did. You know I took my temperature every day for saying I woke up I checked my cervical mucus I checked my cervix. Right. And I recorded it faithfully for months. I drank fertility tea. I went to like a gem store you know like rocks or crystals or whatever and I bought you know fertility rocks and I carry my pocket like I did all these things just like make myself heard on my theme for the year. This is 2013 and they got me... my theme that I wrote my journal in January 2013 was fitness and fertility. I was like everything I can do it should the to be fertile and to be fit, right. I am an atheist so I don't have any sort of religion or spiritual connection to the word spiritual doesn't really resonate with me. But I love nature. I love trees I love rivers. And so I get a lot of spiritual connection you know from a better word from that. Right.

And and so actually I remember the weekend I ended up conceiving which was July 2013.

I there was a full moon that weekend and I happened to be I was in Oakland when it happened when we inseminated and then we were driving back down to L.A. and we stopped in Santa Cruz to see a friend. And I just remember being on this little cliff overlooking the ocean. It was a beautiful moon just sort of feeling this feeling of like OK I think this is going to be yet you know and connecting with the moon and sort of this woo spiritual sort of way. So that was really it was kind of powerful for me is very personal. I don't really talk about it that much.

Yeah yeah yeah sure. Yeah. But you would also ask about birth preparing for birth as well. All of it birth.

I mean we took lots of classes we did a birthing class at a relatively Queer friendly place in the valley in L.A. and while they were very very friendly it was... we were the only queer couple. You know it was somewhat biased towards you know mixed sex couples. And I you know I read I read articles I read books I watched videos of birds. I took a class... my partner and I took a class at the hospital as well. I was on one of those sort of weekly BabyCenter lists email isn't right. You know how big is the fetus now. And yeah I had a lot of funny. I mean... I'm a teacher, right? And so I had a lot of funny interactions with my students I mean the biggest one of course the my students when asked "what is it," right? And I said I hope it's human. I think you know and then they would like "no, miss it's like when you know like we mean like you know what's its gender." And I'm like. And then I would say well we won't know that until about three or four and and they tell us like you don't need a boy or girl. I would say well I don't know. And we're not finding out until this child is born and so then they would say well well how are you going to know what to buy. You know I was like What do you mean you know what to buy it like boys and girls need the same things right. Like any any human. Pretty much the same thing. They're like no like what color. Yeah. So then I would say to them because I work with teenagers you know I would try to joke with them and say So wait a second are you saying that if I happen to have a boy and I dress them in pink that his penis will fall off? You know and so we were just having this discussion about you know society's expectations and gender roles and you know that kind of thing. So. I consider that actually a little bit of a preparation right because my goodness all the ways in which we deal with gender on a daily basis with children with intense. I mean I was with my 4 year old you know at the playground at his preschool with other parents that are kids it's just you know with him personally.

Yeah. Yeah like that.

Right. Yeah. It's like the what is a question that starts when you're pregnant is like like all things in pregnancy like training. Yeah. You ready for all that's going to come after. Right. Right. It just keeps coming right the whole time.

The baby's a baby. People are projecting gender step onto it. Sadly then they start talking and it gets even more weird in my experience.

Oh yeah. Our daughter told us the other day that she had boy president hair.

Awesome.

I was like I think what she means is like the colonial wigs. she has like curly blondish brownish hair. But like to think like... the president when she was born was Barack Obama right.

And see.. she has in her mind that like a girl president is a possibility but it is a boy you know like....

So much!

See. She's 5. My gosh. It's amazing. I love the stuff they say.

It's really hilarious.

It sure is. And sometimes not hilarious. Other times I'm like what? Yeah.

Did you do any kind of community ritual in preparation for the new baby? A baby shower is one example that people often do.

We did do a baby shower. We didn't do anything else other than that although our baby shower was a little different. It was it was an adult party. We called it the last gasp. You know as the last gas. Yeah. And you know even though was party was just an adult party. We partied all night. Well everyone else did. I obviously didn't do any alcohol or anything like that.

And one of the things that I wanted to have some little game type things so I have three stations in the party. One was a microscope in the bathroom where I had two little parts and one said you know it was for men it said you know are you fertile.

You can go ahead and masturbate and get some of your semen and put it on this microscope slide and look at it under the microscope and see if your semen you know are fertile you know are there two tails or you know purple or you know it is just kind of you know, jokey. You know, for females there was a sign that said you know are you fertile. Check your cervical mucus and you know take some of it and then put it on this microscope slide and if it does this ferny thing which I can't totally remember exactly but you know I was really into it at the time because it's burning in your honor. You know you're fertile you know. So that was cute.

Yeah. So it's like bringing community along in your deeply scientific experience of pregnancy and you're a science teacher.

TOTALLY. Yeah and a lot of my friends are kind of nerdy arty type people that you know appreciated it so yeah. What were the other stations Oh I had a station that was like votes will Vanya poop during childbirth.

The other station was what should what should we call that we call the baby. We called who was now our child we call him baby fetus.

While I was pregnant so what should Brad who is who is our donor or friend who's a donor sperm donor. What should Brad call the fetus. And then people could write stuff down you know like Dunkle donor uncle or you know uncle or I don't know. I can't remember what other ones there were so that was it really was just a party and little stations. You know I talked to my community a lot. I talked to my friends my best friend at the time was it was my birth coach and my partner and so you know we talked a lot about what I wanted my birth to look like what the laboring would look like because it was I didn't plan her it all to be equal. Natural Childbirth in my home you know and didn't go that way but so we talked a lot about it but other than that we didn't really have any rituals.

I kind of want to dig into the friend thing. Yeah. Are you open to that? Because I think it's really important that our community isn't talking about it. Yeah you know.

Like you said you had like a close friends that gave verbal buy in at some point. Like being around to be supportive and then like you said your best friend at the time. And I'm wondering if you could give a sense of like ways in which it was challenging to connect with your friends after you had a newborn. And like what you could have needed or could have been done differently to maintain those relationships. Not necessarily.... I mean you can take as much accountability for whatever you might have been able to do differently and also not to like publicly go on blast on your friends but like what other people's friends might think about as their friends are preparing for a new babies.

Right. Right.

I think it is just an exhausting process to be a new parent. That's the number one thing and any support that a friend can offer is. unbelievably helpful. So that could include things like bringing over dinner coming over to cook for you coming over to play with your child or hold your child while you shower. Things like that. And we did get some of that for sure. You know we did have our son we live

on the same property as our close friends. Particularly my partner's close friend and his partner and they know they cook for us a lot. You know architecture extra here have some. Actually we're really fortunate and have been very fortunate because the monitor. the baby monitor would actually just barely extend to their house. We could put our child to bed. This was after about 4 months. We see Crane and everything so we put him down put him to bed. He went to sleep he was a great you know after we said he was great at staying asleep and then we could take him monitor them and they would watch. They would watch the monitor and as soon as he cried if he did which only once happened. No they couldn't run over there and he was in his crib so he couldn't get out. That was great. No. But other friends are. You know you just have struggles around people without his really truly getting getting just the degree of work that goes into you know being a parent and you know we certainly had one off for those you know. Oh here we probably food, or Oh

here there's this of that but it's just really it's ongoing it doesn't stop right. Like yay you brought me food. That's a great thank you thank you and that's so helpful. Okay now that was one one time you know out of it in three months. You know so yes. Have to figure out how to maintain my life and my child's life, You know every day and it just you know it's just part of the process of parenting is figuring it out. Neither of my partner nor I have family that live in L.A. and but we're queer right. And so we're like chosen family is family right but it's there's something about having children that I don't know if this is true for adoptive or foster parents as well or if it's particularly when a child is biologically related to somebody that biologically related family members even ones that are 2000 miles away that in some ways can come through in ways that you know chose that family doesn't. And it really makes me mad. It really pisses me off because as a queer person who touts the beauty of the chosen family you know to have sort of that traditional concept of you know biological family being the ones who are there for you. Wow. No your chosen family isn't always.. It's really frustrating. You know and no you know me like you said a lot of are a lot of our friends did do things and were helpful they just don't totally understand the degree in which you're exhausted and it's just very very very difficult.

Yeah. So do you think that difference that matters is like how they were approaching you to spend social time together, or just a really non understanding of like what it's like to have a new baby? So like the way in which people might not have been around babies in the way that your biological parents had you. Right. So they know.

What are you when you have a sense of you know I think it was more about just like oh you're a parent I guess you know we can't hang out anymore. I'm not a parent. And so I'm not going to invite you to things because I just assume that you're you know you're busy because you're a parent and my partner and I both were very clear with all of our friends on multiple occasions. Like I before we had the child you know before the childbirth when I was pregnant. I mean I talked to my friends a lot about just basically saying to them you know I know that my life is going to change drastically and my friendship with you is super important to me and you know my partner and I are on the same page about helping each other right. So if I want to hang out with the friends so that I can maintain my friendship with them then she'll you child care and the care of the child on her own and vice versa. Right. And that spending quality alone time with the friends to grow important and you know paramount to maintaining the relationship. Right. And so I was very clear about wanting to do that. Now of course you know like gets in a way having a baby is very difficult. You know maybe I didn't do that enough. Maybe I didn't propose you know one on one hang out enough right with some of my friends. But in some ways they are a couple of them just sort of faded you know from that from my world a little bit right. And I think it was because you know it just it was like oh it's like I don't want to be a parent. I don't like I don't really want to be around kids so you know there was a bit of that and then also just this feeling of like yeah like I don't I'm actually sure what it was for them. But it definitely was challenging Yeah.

GWB: Yeah yeah. Thank you. Thanks for sharing that. Yeah I think we need to have a lot more conversations about that especially in queer communities where we have like big stories about queer family and what that looks like in practice is sometimes really disappointing.

I want to hear about your experience to0. It's like ask you you personally. Like, tell me what you were.

Yeah. Yeah we'll have an episode about my birth experience on later. it's long and complicated but yeah I mean my social experience is a little different because I had moved to the city that I live in now Alameda outside of Oakland. Right. When my wife was three months pregnant or four months pregnant she grew up here and she's from here. She lives here almost all of her life except the couple years here and there. So she had a big community and I didn't. So in terms of like my own personal friendships and like who showed up and when and how it's a little different because I didn't have friends that I was already in a routine with in the city. And some people showed up who were like we weren't even that close with them that made us closer to them right because they were showing up and like.

And also like I found like I... I often am frustrated and I feel like I have a class analysis of this like I grew up rural and in the Midwest where people have kids younger and people are just around kids a lot and people hang out with their kids around a lot. But I feel like queer people often have kids later and we you know go to big cities and behave and have like these young urban lives and then have kids who were older and and so there's like a separation of like there's kids space and not kids space. And I just really needed I needed friends and community to just like change the way we hung out because I was with my kids most of the time and alone during the day a lot because of some of my kids multiple days a week. So so I really maintained and built deeper friendships with people who would come like Meet me at like Chipotle in the mall you know like really not cool like not hip places but like that's where I could take a walk with my kid in a stroller and show up with my kid asleep and start eating and then she could wake up. You know it was amazing to be there with a kid and like my one friend who would come out and hang out with me and she and I are now really good friends just because she did that and she doesn't have kids doesn't want kids. Yeah or friends who would just come and take long walks or whatever things at kid speed and at kid hours because we couldn't afford childcare at night very often.

So, I would love if you would participate and some like imaginary dream making where you arrive like 30 years into the future and sit down on a rock next to somebody whose gender expression is similar to yours. Surely it will be called different words. Thirty years into the future. And like what do you hope for their birth experience? What do you hope is different and this doesn't necessarily have to be about gender.

Just like wide open Yeah.

You know I I would like to change the language the English language to include a pronoun other than they in them that signifies a human and doesn't gendered people or you know assume what's between people's legs. I think that will happen in 30 years. I would like to maybe. Well you know I. I would love the literature and you know articles and books and videos and everything out there about pregnancy and birth to automatically not assume that someone who is pregnant is a woman or identifies as a woman. Right. And that someone who is pregnant you know might not go by she, right.? Similarly you know I would like there to be less assumptions around just the heterosexual nature of the relationship that that person might have with a partner. And also maybe not refer to a partner too. Because there's a lot of people sort of cisgender women and you know just straight women and people who just get pregnant because they want to on their own, right. Don't have a partner. I would like to being would really just love for her to be less focused on what this human has between their legs. What is it that what what genitals are going to pop up when they come out you know and I would see a lot more awareness around variety and biodiversity of sex and gender. You know in a biological way to begin with I am part of this like Facebook group called NGSS as biology teachers. Yes this is next generation science standards. And I actually recently just posted an article about how basically how biology teachers and schools in general but particularly biology teachers and health teachers need to do a better job at teaching students about just the facts around sexual diversity in humans and in other species as well. And so I I for that article out there on the on this page and said said you know I would hope that most of us are doing this anyway because you know this is basic biology and it was a really really interesting responses from other baldies the Jersey teachers all over the country. The majority of which were like yeah totally. We talk about intersex conditions Yeah we talk about x y and x x y and these different you know genetic variations. And

there was only one person that that expressed concern around it. So that kind of made me happy going into the future. You know of our students.

Yeah. So as a science teacher what do you see or what what perspectives do you have about how the wide spectrum of science and biology can broaden the way we think about gender. And Conception and birth and nurturing that whole range.

Yeah there's there's a lot to that and I mean to start off I would say that there is there is this assumption that our society makes that you are either male or female. Right. And that's one sex. And as we all know the boxes you know that you have to check out. Right. And that's an example. Right. And people always ask What is your child as a boy or girl etc.. But the reality is that sex along with gender but specifically sex is a continuum. Right. And so what determines a human's sex is it there's multiple things right there and there's genes. So X X chromosomes usually female X Y usually male. But there's hormones that's about that that contributes to the development of genitalia as well as. You know gonads which are like ovaries or testes hormones in the fetus are what determine what genitals show up what makes us male or female. This this idea is essential is that that our society has isn't even accurate right that there's a variety in the way that sex is determined right and that sex actually shows up on humans and then you go into the animal and plant world it gets even crazier. There's way more. There's a ton of examples like sequential hermaphroditism of clownfish you know Finding Nemo . Now the clownfish there born male all are born male and about four years into their life they they all they they turn into females they literally change sex. And this is just the opposite is true for a different fish called Ras fish and they are born females. Now any turn into males several years into their life and this is all evolution at work. And so there just a wide variety of ways that sex is expressed and determined in nature. And I would love for all students of biology to not all of our teachers do reference those things. But I believe more and more are at least from my Facebook post with the biology teachers right. That's just a quick wrap on that. I mean I can say more but I know we got to go.

Yeah. Well thank you for even that beginning Considerations of the wide world.

Biology and sex and gender. Yes really. Great grounding I think in some conversations that we're going to get into deeper later on in the season and who knows maybe we'll sit back and talk about clownfish more because they didn't know that.

That's amazing. Is there anything else that you want us to know or you want to say to people.

Yeah I mean to general listeners I would I would say don't make assumptions about people based on their appearances. Right. Their secondary sex characteristics that seem to to show up and be open to people's experiences. To people who are the you know parenting and you know getting pregnant giving birth. It is this exciting experience. It's it's really wild to be able to grow a human your body and to be responsible for their life their psychological well-being. And it's a really fascinating experience. Great thank you. And I didn't ask you what parental MediaNews. Oh I called my mama and that was a big like oh that was a long decision because I thought I was like very almost 100 percent sure I was going to go by the or Baba my partner's Greek. And she she calls her father Baba. And I felt like OK it's different enough right it's not Dad or papa. But I ended up deciding to go with mama. And I'm happy I did it. But I sometimes feel like it Miss appropriately gender's me with my child the other day he told me you know that I had to be the female let you go because I'm a girl and I'm like wait a second with whoever told you I was a girl. Why are we right this time even if I was. Can I pretend to be the boy. Does it matter. You know anywhere. So yeah.

Yeah but I actually started when my kid was first born. I thought I was going to go by ma-pa. I found the name thing very torturous. And what I found which is interesting it's like you've learned lessons over and over again. When I was deciding on a pronoun usage when I was younger in my 20s like I made like I was just like my friend and I made this diagram that I hung on the wall or my roommates that was like I want 40 percent he.

And 40 percent she and 20 percent they and they were like "Oh that's adorable. We're not doing that."

Not really. They are great people and they tried and they were also trans people so it wasn't like... it was just like you are being a lot right now. And. What I what I found was that I would say he and she pronouns and that people who were invested in me being trans identify like trans masculine trans guy identified me as "he" all the time people who were invested in me being like not-trans and as a cis lesbian called me she all the time. And like a very small sliver of people would go back and forth.

And so what I found with trying to introduce myself as ma-pa was that are like closer inner circle not queer family would call me Mama and other people like queer people would try for ma-pa but it doesn't flow out of the mouth. And I was like oh I'm not doing that again you know like where I give people choice and it just goes to their comfort zones. So I landed on Baba. I'm glad I did it.

Yes I like that. What pronouns do you go by now.?

I get used she/her. Why is topic for a different podcast. Yeah. Thank you so much for this conversation. It was like dreamy dreams come true. Exactly. Um, the great kind of conversation I was hoping to have say thank you so much for talking so openly.

Yeah totally. So I'm really glad you're doing it and I'm really happy to hear of other people's experiences as well.

Awesome. All right we should go. Great.

Nice chatting with you. Yeah you're really great.

Make thanks so much to Banyen for talking to us for this first full episode of masculine birth ritual.

If you'd like to share your story especially if you're a masculine of center or gender queer black indigenous or other PEOC parent I'd love to talk to you and if you are a masculine birth parent who gave birth or had children in a different era as in more than ten or 15 years ago. I'd really love to talk with you if you are part of a project or collective organization or researcher working at the intersections of racial justice and queer and trans reproductive justice. I would love to speak with you. You can find us at masculine birth ritual dot com on Twitter at masculine or Instagram and Facebook. Masculine birth ritual and of course you can listen to us on iTunes Spotify and dreaming on our Web site. Special thank you to Sarah Nichols who volunteered to transcribe our first episodes until we have the funding to pay a transcriptionist. And if you or someone you love needs transcription of this show instead of listening to it with ears you can find that mesclun birth ritual dot com under the episode page. Thank you to everyone who's become a patron in this past month. Supporting the work. And to everyone who's shared with their friends and networks. Please continue to do so. So this can reach the people it needs to reach. May you feel the full dignity of your existence as a human on this earth today. Thanks for listening.