

Transcript of Episode 1: Introduction to Masculine Birth Ritual

September 2, 2018

You're listening to Masculine Birth Ritual, a podcast about masculine of center people growing, birthing, and tending to life. Thanks for joining us today for this introductory episode of Masculine Birth Ritual. This podcast is created to be a conduit for stories and conversations about masculine people making, bearing, birthing, and caring for human life. Each episode of this podcast will be a conversation with either someone who is on the masculine of center spectrum who is sharing a birth story, or a conversation with a community leader, spiritual leader, or artist, about past and present representations of nurturing masculinities, fierce conceptions of birth, or fantastically gender queer stories of creation. Hello botanist!

We'll also be gathering best practices, tips and tricks for supporting masculine, queer, and trans people to survive and thrive through pregnancy and parenting from midwives, doulas, birth workers, and parents that have been through it. The goals of the Masculine Birth Ritual podcast are that this podcast will help gender queer, non-binary, transmasculine and gender nonconforming people all over the spectrum of our communities feel less isolated and have more tools to support a healthy, safe, embodied, community supported birth and parenting journey. We hope that the podcast will help expand people's network of support and community by engaging with each other online and in conversation, and that this podcast will help all people no matter what their gender identity or expression, their status as a parent or not, or how parents came to be with their children, expand our vision of what parenting, pregnancy, and nurturing do and can look like.

My name is Grover Wehman-Brown, I'm a parent, writer, liberation seeker, and a transmasculine butch. This podcast is an offering to community, an attempt to fill the void of stories, imagery, and collective imagination about what it feels and looks like for masculine of center people to conceive, carry, birth, and nurture humans with and through our bodies. Because mainstream conception, birth and parenting culture, is still dominated by very limited representations of what an ideal birthing parent should look like, I also anticipate that our conversations will also be valuable to people with a wide range of genders and sexualities. If I can find some value from the birth narratives of an Ina May Gaskin book, I'm betting that you, dear listener, can find value in the conversations we'll have here, even if you're not masculine or even a little bit queer. Masculine Birth Ritual is going to ask questions in this public sphere that tend to circulate only in the private or semi-private spheres of closed social media networks and one on one conversations.

Sometimes these questions are deeply practical. What did you wear when you were pregnant? As a pregnant trans guy with a beard, did people in public recognize you as pregnant? Did you want them to? Did anyone give you a seat on the bus? How did you communicate your gender identity words to medical staff? Other times these questions delve into the social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. What rituals did your family or community use to celebrate this giant transition in your life? What images did you draw upon when imagining yourself giving birth? How did you find community with other parents when you were at home with your newborn? What did you bring with you from your cultural or spiritual traditions into your birth and parenting preparations? We'll be asking spiritual leaders, birth workers, artists, and academics to help us recover, scheme up, or elevate rituals and imagery of nurturing masculinities, birthing outside the gender

binary, and embodiment in spite of dissonance or trauma. I'm here to facilitate these stories moving through, and also, as the person curating the content and initiating the conversation, I'll be in the mix. So please, let me briefly introduce myself and let you know how I got the fire in me to produce this podcast happen. You deserve to know who I am, and how my experiences inform my approach to the conversations we'll be having in the coming episodes. What do I do with my days? Who are my people? How am I situated within this community that I am speaking with and to?

This year marks my twentieth anniversary of being out as a queer person. I came out as a teenager in a small, rural, working class town in northwest Ohio. I've always had a masculine identity as a butch lesbian or as a transmasculine queer person, and these days I call myself a transmasculine butch. I feel anchored socially to both trans, lesbian, and queer women's communities. Transgender best describes my experience of embodiment and my experience moving through the world. I consider myself in the gender, cultural, and political lineage of Leslie Feinberg. I'm a poet and an essayist, and I earn dollars as a communications strategist, freelance writer, and part time organizer for social justice work in the Oakland, California area, **territory of the _____Aloni people (5 mins, 50 sec)** I'm white, descended from Protestant German steel workers that emigrated in the late eighteen hundreds and English, Irish, and Dutch colonizers that were many generations of farmers and ranchers on the lands of the **OOti Miami people in the** West and Midwest and New England. I was raised stable, unionized, working class and was homeless or inadequately housed for four years of my young adulthood—one of the many queer and trans youth that experience the higher than average rates of homelessness and housing insecurity in their lifetimes. This has deeply shaped my politics and my perspectives. I am now married to a smart, old, silver fox cis-gender femme woman who has a great laugh and is deeply kind. She has magical social skills that glue a diverse community of humans together across place and time. My wife grew up in Oakland California, and we recently moved back here to be nestled among that web of community and friends. We have two small children that are currently preschool and kindergarden age. My wife and I each carried one baby using our own eggs and the same sperm bank sperm. Since the oldest was born, I've been the primary at home caregiver while working part time. My wife is the primary income earner, which dictated this arrangement. In the first three years of my life as a parent I was working at finishing my PhD, which I did. I researched homelessness in the US, and a lot of my work outside of this podcast is centered on housing, racial, gender and economic justice. This is my general positioning in the world. Who my people are, where I come from, who I am in relation to others socially, how I earn my money, and little about how I juggle parenting and all the other aspects of my life. I will also say that it is a brief introduction that my pregnancy and birth were really challenging for me. They were challenging in terms of how I felt in my body and my gender experience moving through the world while I was pregnant, as well as the lack of trans, queer, and masculine representations in preparing for birth, and a really difficult birth experience in terms of medical and health outcomes. It was challenging because of transphobic harm I experienced while I was in the ICU after my gnarly birth. I will give a more detailed account of my birth story later in this season, for now I think it's enough to know why I'm invested in sharing a wider range of stories about birth and pregnancy, why this podcast focuses on the cultural and spiritual resources that can be leveraged to increase representations and imaginations of what masculine pregnancy and birth can look and feel like, and rituals we may draw on or create to support this life phase more holistically. I have emerged from the thaw of that pregnancy and birth very clear about two things:

One, I come from a legacy of queer and trans people who left roadmaps of how to survive for the next generation, which means I am called to leave roadmaps of how to survive for the generation that comes after me. And, my body holds an inherent dignity, and to recognize my inherent dignity I need to see myself reflected in the world around me, to fight for people like me to be a part of the cultural archive of existence, which means that your body holds this inherent dignity as well, and you have the right to see yourself reflected and your stories documented as well. I hope this podcast can bring some extra tools and support for current and future masculine of center, gender non-conforming, non-binary and gender queer people who are pregnant, birthing, trying to conceive, and parents, as well as those that support us. I don't know if my ancestors or your ancestors had a history of masculine people who gave birth with rootedness and dignity, but it's our work to unearth those stories and images if they exist, and it's our work to make new stories and images for all the sea horse dads, butch mamas, pregnant babas, **non-binary taties**, and stud mommies that come after us. A masculine birth ritual. We can recover, we can design, and we can pass around the tools for our collective survival and dignified embodiment on this planet at this time. While each birth story is unique, and each cultural or spiritual tradition we talk about on here might not be my own, or your own cultural or spiritual tradition, I hope the collection of this podcast will expand our sense that masculine and gender queer people have a place in the cosmos of human production in a way that is not isolated, but collectively held.

If you'd like to see Masculine Birth Ritual grow to bring new stories, to bring these stories up, there are a few ways you can help to make this happen. One, go to patreon.com/masculinebirthritual to become a monthly patron. Even three dollars a month really helps us reach our goal of at least \$500 a month to pay contributors, musicians, and production costs. Most of our contributors will hold at least one, if not more, marginalized identities, and we will compensate them for their time and their knowledge. Two: hit the subscribe button in whatever podcast delivery format you are listening in, such as Itunes or Spotify. If you're a masculine of center, queer, or trans person, especially a Black, Indigenous, or POC musician, and would like to have your music featured on this podcast, we are looking to pay you for the rights to use your music. Please be in touch at masculinebirthritual.com/podcast. If you're a masculine of center, queer, or trans person, especially Black, Indigenous, or a person of color, and you'd like to share your pregnancy, conception, birth, or parenting story, I'd love to talk with you. You can contact me through masculinebirthritual.com/contact, or message me on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. For people with organizational and institutional connections, we welcome institutional sponsors to the show that are aligned with the mission and values. Are you part of a queer liberation organization, small business, or school with a marketing budget? Go to masculinebirthritual.com/contact, or check out our sponsorship rate on patreon to build a sponsorship relationship. Finally, spreading the word helps so much! Please leave a review in iTunes and give us five stars to bump us up in the algorithm machines. You can follow Masculine Birth Ritual through your social media and share with your networks on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Thank you for helping shepherd this project with me. May you be safe, may you shine, and may you thrive this week in your persistent existence.

(background music)