

Intentional Masculinity

I am a genderqueer masculine-of-center person who first came out as butch lesbian in high school. At that time, my role models for being butch and masculine were my butch peers, high school boys, the men in my life and the character Molly in *Rubyfruit Jungle*. There was a lot of policing in my peer group, a lot of 'you can't do that, you're butch' or 'You can't do that, what are you, a femme?', if I strayed outside the lines. And though chivalry was important to us, my butch peers also learned masculine behaviors from guys around us. So my buddies and I would make sexist, objectifying comments when our girlfriends weren't around, and hold the door/books/etc. when they were with us.

At some point in my mid-20s, I decided that this model of butchness didn't suit me, but I didn't know of any others, so I stopped identifying as butch for many years. When I came back to my masculine identity, it was because I realized that I could be masculine-of-center without being a sexist and chauvinist. I realized I had a choice. The idea for this workshop came out of that self-discovery and out of my observation that there are almost as many ways of expressing masculinity as there are masculine-of-center people. If you identify as masculine in some way, but you have 'female' on your birth certificate, you are already intentionally transgressing gender norms. Taking on masculinity is a form of rebellion, as well as a shout of freedom and self-determination. I believe the next step on that path is to be intentional and authentic to ourselves in how we express masculinity. It's hard to do that alone, often in the face of opposition from our peers and communities. That's why it's very important to respect and support others who are also working toward intentional masculinity. We can and should do a better job as a community to accepting a more diverse range of masculine expression.

Workshop Rules of Engagement: We will recognize each person's right to self-identify, identity police are asked to turn their badges in at the door; respect each other and the diverse viewpoints, backgrounds and experiences of the people here. Revel in your opportunity to learn from people outside your peer group and community.

Workshop Goal: To increase participant's awareness of the ways masculinity can be expressed; to encourage participants to become more intentional in expressing masculinity; to encourage participants to become more aware of potential responses to the ways masculinity can be expressed, both positive and negative; to encourage participants to support others as they work toward intentional masculinity

Defining Intentional :

in-ten-tion-al *adj.*

1. done with intention or on purpose; intended: an intentional insult.
2. of or pertaining to intention or purpose.

What do I mean by 'intentional' in terms of masculine expression? Making conscious choices, making thoughtful decisions, being mindful of the consequences of your choices and actions; honoring yourself as an individual, blazing a well-considered path from where you are to where you want to be. Intentional is not accidental, it's not being a copy-cat, it's not going-with-the-flow, or following a trend so you can fit in.

Defining Masculinity

mas-cu-lin-i-ty *n. pl. mas-cu-lin-i-ties*

1. The quality or condition of being masculine.
2. Something traditionally considered to be characteristic of a male.

Men and boys (CAMAB*) learn how to be masculine from their male peers, older male role models, the media, social stereotypes; The penalty for not being masculine in the right way is rejection, humiliation, even death; being equated with female, female slurs; female frequently being seen as inferior to male in traditional cultures.

Unintentional Masculinity (my definition):

Following the status quo, accepting the definition given us by society and media, doing what the guys around us are doing, without considering whether those behaviors represent us, letting stereotypes and media stars determine what masculinity should look like.

What is Masculinity if you aren't a born to a male body?

How do we express our masculine selves? Is it all about haircuts, or the clothes we wear? Can you be a masculine person with long hair? While wearing make-up and feminine clothing? Is it necessary to distance ourselves from femininity in order to be masculine? Who are our role models for masculinity? What does it mean to be masculine and also female?

Terms, activities, concepts, attitudes that are related to masculinity:

- Appearance
- Behavior
- Attitude
- Vocabulary/slang
- Ability
- Sexual activities/preferences

What are the positive and potential negative aspects of some of these words?

For example, strength can be very positive, however, if you are required to be strong all the time, how do you ask for help? Does asking for help mean you're weak? Does asking for help reflect on your perceived masculinity? And how do those concepts affect our opinions of the feminine-of-center people in our lives?

What are other terms that carry a shadow, or unintentional, aspect in addition to the positive associations?

Learning Masculinity

- How do we as people who were designated female at birth (CAFAB*) learn how to be masculine? From the same places men do, but not usually from birth. From other masculine-of-center people around us, role models in our community, gay men, media, social stereotypes.
- What are the rewards for 'getting it right'? some ideas: male privilege, respect, deference
- What are the penalties for 'getting it wrong'? some ideas: lack of respect from other MoC people, lack of recognition for your masculinity, not being welcomed into 'the club'
- Penalties for 'getting it right'? some ideas: rejection from some female-only spaces, accusations of abuse of male privilege

How do we as individuals become more intentional about how we express and embody masculinity?

- Observe yourself and observe others around you who are masculine.
- Make a list of the characteristics you want to embrace as ways to express masculinity
- Talk to friends about what masculinity means to them
- Ask trusted friends to give you feedback
- Who are your role models? What are they modeling that you want to adopt for yourself?

How do we as a community, here and at home, support each other in becoming more intentional?

- Become aware of the diversity within masculine-of-center identified people
- Become a positive role model
- Rewards for positive behavior?

'coming out syndrome'

- When people come out as queer or trans or religious or anything, they often go through a period of hyper-presentation (rainbow colored everything, hyper-masculinity or hyper-femininity, etc). They want to be noticed, seen, accepted and recognized by their

chosen tribe. After all, they've made a very dangerous decision to leave the old tribe behind, so if their new chosen tribe doesn't accept them, they won't have anyone.

- The question is, are we being intentional? Are we choosing the traits we feel suit us best, or the ones that will get us noticed?

How do the pressures and fears surrounding the process of coming out affect our desire to be accepted, and what effect does that have on our ability to be intentional with our identities?

***CAFAB, CAMAB:** acronyms meaning “coercively assigned female/male at birth”, since no one gets to choose their gender assignment at birth, it is always a coercive assignment, a decision made by others based on their superficial examination of our bodies.

About the presenter:

Kyle Jones is a parent, software developer and fiction writer. Transmasculine and genderqueer, Kyle embodies male and female identities. Living in their hometown of Olympia, Washington, Kyle looks for opportunities to open minds and start conversations on gender, identity and sexuality. They blog about their life, loves and kinks at Butchtastic.net, offering up hot erotica and posts about gender, D/s, polyamorous relationships and parenting. Jones is a contributor on ButchLab.com and was a presenter and organizer at Butch Voices Portland in 2010, and will be a presenter and spoken word performer at the national Butch Voices conference in 2011. Their short story, Asphalt, was published in the Seattle Erotic Art Festival Anthology earlier this year. Another short erotic story, Other Duties, was included in Salacious magazine edition 2.