



# MASC

# MANDATE

CLAIRE JENSEN

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Photo by Sofia Hincapie-Rodrigo

After releasing *Masc Mandate*, I was hit with an enormous wave of feedback. Friends, classmates, coworkers, family, professors, and random people on the internet read my work. I was met with an immense outpouring of love, support, and the feeling of finally being *seen*.

A small subset of this feedback included concern and distaste for what I'd done. A community that is used to being unacknowledged was suddenly one to be reckoned with in *Masc Mandate*. I had made people like me *too* visible.

I've made an effort to sit with the reactions I received, using them to motivate a second issue of *Masc Mandate*. In some ways, this issue is a reflection of the large life transition that is the first year after college. I'm eternally grateful for the community that was more or less placed in front of me on a silver platter in college.

However, since graduating college, I've had to be much more intentional about building my community.

I draw inspiration from my masc counterparts - people who have gone through struggles and successes so similar to myself but whose reactions to these experiences highlight the vast multiplicity of our community. I feel incredibly lucky to interview and learn from these people, particularly because I know from experience the intentional and disruptive nature of our existence.

I am beyond proud to present my community in *Masc Mandate 2*. I'll let them do the rest of the talking.

Please remove your mask and enjoy.

Love,

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**Describe your style. How do you express yourself through your clothing, hair, makeup, body art, etc?**

I really like doing my hair and I like getting my hair cut. It just makes me feel cool. I feel like my style is kind of all over the place, but silhouette-wise, I really like baggy pants. I love baggy pants, and they're not functional - I love when my pants drag on the ground. It's just so silly.

**What are some limitations to expressing yourself?**

I am nonbinary, but I feel like now people look at me and they're like, "Oh, this is this is a stud or something." And I'm like, "Hmm, I don't know how I feel about that." But there's expectations for me to act in a traditional masculine way, and that's just not me. When I started going to the club and then I would be bussing it down, I'm like, "I feel like people are side-eyeing me right now, but I'm gonna do it anyways, because twerking is my pastime."

**Can you define "traditional masc"?**

It feels silly to even label things as like feminine and masculine, especially as a nonbinary person, but I feel like these are the labels that other people are using and I'm trying to figure it out for myself within that. [...] Clothes are clothes and the way that men are able to show up in the world can look like a bajillion different things - and the same for women and the same for genderqueer people.

**What do you like to do for fun? How do you spend your free time?**

I really like going to clerb. I really like dancing. [...] If I'm not dancing in the club, I'm dancing in my panties in my room. [...] Dancing being flinging myself around/twerking.

**In what ways does clubbing let you express yourself and/or decompress?**

One, if I'm drunk, I'm just silly and goofy. I think most people are. Two, if I'm in a place by myself and I'm surrounded by people I don't know and they don't know me, then I can do whatever I want, and then it doesn't have to match up with a personal narrative about me or how I've shown up in the past. It's just I'm a random person in the club and no one gives a fuck. It feels freeing to me.

And then, when I come home and people are like, "Oh, how was the club last night?" I can say whatever I wanna say and I can leave out whatever I wanna leave out. And I like that. I feel like I'm living a double life, because teachers don't go to the club every weekend... but I do.

**Describe your masculinity. How do femininity and masculinity interact in your life?**

I feel like I've definitely encountered some nonbinary people who are like, "I have a balance between my divine masculine and feminine energies" and I'm like, "What are we talking about?" So I definitely don't feel that way. I guess for me at least masculinity is, because I'm transitioning, I like to look like a man.

**How does race interact with your masculinity?**

When I looked more girlypop - even then - being dark skinned, I've just had some experiences with people that I'm like, "Are you afraid of me?" Or it feels like [they] think that I'm angry or mad or just something that I'm not in the first place. [...] People said really weird stuff or did really weird stuff around me that showed me that they had some stereotype of me in their head. And now it feels freaky, because I'm walking around and I'll smile at old lady and she's looking at me crazy

and I'm like, "Oh, I guess I can't really do that anymore." Or I'm like, "Why are people staring at me?" It just feels uncomfortable. I think it was already hard to be a Black person in Minnesota. Now it just feels extra crazy.

### How do you find pleasure in your life? How do you find pleasure in your masculinity?

I know what things bring me pleasure in my life specifically related to masculinity. Like my clothes, my hair... that that feels more masculine to me. And I do like going to my barbershop. [...] I guess my clothes make me feel my masculine. I'm really into clothes and thrifting and lowkey too much Depop. I guess me acquiring things to change my physical appearance makes me feel joy. Picking up my little [testosterone] gel from the pharmacy... that feels very- I don't know. I don't wanna say "good" because it's more than good.

Affirming[!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!]. With, like, 19 exclamation points.

### How does your sense of pleasure connect with your self-expression?

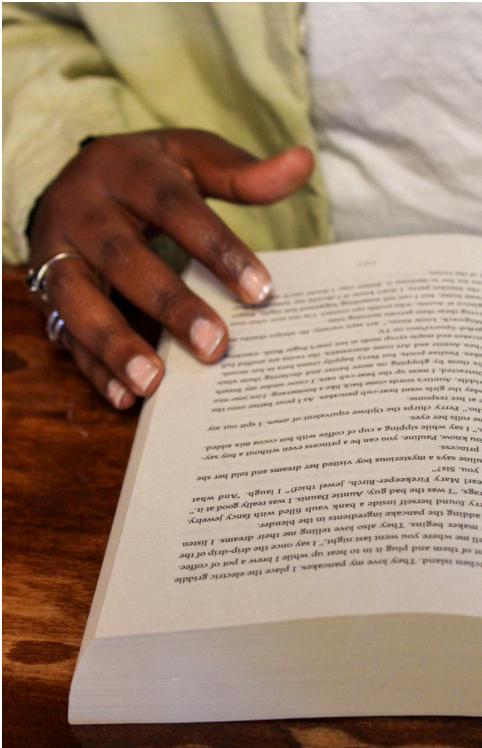
Just looking masculine makes me happy. I have a confidence that I didn't have. [...] Have you ever heard the phrase, "putting lipstick on a pig?" Not that I thought that I looked like a pig or that I was ugly, but it just felt like someone pretending to be a girl. It always felt like I was in a costume. And now I don't have that- I just feel confident.

### How does teaching make you happy?

It makes me happy because I know that my kids are seeing so much of the world for the first time all the time. Specifically, I work with students who have autism or other learning disabilities. So, I'm helping them to build social skills and interact in the world and express their feelings.

It's been so beneficial to me that, honestly, the more direct and straightforward you can be with your communication, the better it is for resolving stuff. Working with them is giving me extra skills with that, too.

But then they have questions about gender and about queer people because they're literally looking at me and they're like, "Masia why are you wearing a tie?" This doesn't make sense, cause no one told me that non-men or people could just wear ties whenever they wanted to." And I'm like, "I wore a tie today because I wanted to feel fancy." And they're like, "Oh!" And then that's it. I think that's really cool. They just have so many questions and it's fun to hang out with them. All the kids that I work with are five and six and I just appreciate them because they have so much joy from nothing.



maja



**Describe your style. How do you express yourself through your clothing, hair, makeup, body art, etc?**

I'm working on getting tattoos, and I want to get more tattoos. Getting tattoos in the past couple of years has been a fun and freeing way of reclaiming my body more and making it look how I want to.

For style, I have my work-sona and what I wear outside of work, so it's kind of hard because I'm not honestly thinking about it five days of the week. I like more baggy clothes or things that are silly. I have this cardigan that has football buttons that I wear to my brother's rugby games so everyone knows I'm gay.

**What are some limitations to expressing yourself?**

Especially with my family, me getting tattoos has not been the most welcomed thing because tattoos are pretty taboo in Japan. I think they just don't totally understand the reasoning behind it. It's a hard thing to explain. With my grandparents, I usually try to not have them see it. So when I go home I'm wearing long pants or long sleeved shirts. Sometimes they see it and sometimes they forget, which is the good part of dementia. But I try not to keep it as a constant reminder to them that I'm disappointing them.

Also getting my hair cut, I think every time I cut my hair, my mom's like, "It just keeps getting shorter and shorter!" It's uncomfortable to be going up against what they expect me to be or [how they] thought I would turn out. So at work and at home, I feel more limited in my expression.

**Tell me about your journey to finding pleasure in typewriting. When did you start? Do you share this with people?**

I made a friend from my recruitment visits for grad school and I went over to their house and they were typing on a typewriter. They let me play around with it while they were working on editing something. [...]

But, they're like, "Okay, here, try writing." And then you have to be like, "Okay, what am I going to write that's not just stupid shit?" And it was nice practice in vulnerability and putting thoughts out without thinking through them.

I was just feeling more silly with it. I think for me, since graduating college, doing things like writing especially feel intimidating because it's like, "Why am I doing this if it's not *for* something?" or "If I'm not going to do something important with it or no one's going to read it, why do I need to write these words down?" But it's something that's been a part of my life since I've been a kid, so it's nice to do more of.

**Describe your masculinity. How do femininity and masculinity interact in your life?**

Some of my masculine traits could be reversed into a feminine trait for someone. Like taking care of people- there's a very masculine part about making sure everything is taken care of and people are safe and being that protector figure. But on the other hand, caretaking can be super associated with femininity. Not that fatherhood is masculine and motherhood is feminine, but, just the ways that women and femininity has been associated with caretaking and looking after people.

So I guess I don't really know how to

define it. It's maybe more about how you approach the same qualities, and I feel like masculinity and femininity aren't necessarily opposites, but more like complements to each other.

**Where does masculinity show up in your life? Does it show up in your hobbies?**

For a while, I avoided being in my body. I feel like that's also kind of connected to thinking about my identity. A lot of the times, I let myself be distracted by other things or try to not feel my body existing in like this form. I have a hard time verbalizing all of it because I think it's hard.

Part of it was not super explainable, like why I started drifting towards masculinity and feeling a lot of comfort in that. [...]

**How do you find pleasure in your life? How do you find pleasure in your masculinity?**

I think a lot of my ideas of what brings me pleasure or joy are rooted in community or being with other people. I think I've also just found more pleasure in understanding myself better. [...] There's just a joy and peacefulness that comes with knowing yourself better and also not feeling so lost or repressed.

For a while, it was something I just ignored or pushed away. Allowing it to just exist and do what it wants and following what feels right and doing new things and doing scary things that may not look or like turn out perfect. That brings me pleasure.

When I first got my hair cut shorter, I cut it myself while I was house sitting for [my parents] and they were out of town. [...] It was not the greatest haircut and my mom told me to never go back to that place because I told her I got it done somewhere.

But that was a step towards embodying more masculinity and also brought me joy.

**Where do you envision yourself in five years? Ten years?**

I tell people that going to grad school is my five-year plan, because I can't think past that. It's crazy to think about where I was five years ago because I didn't think I would be where I am now. But hopefully in five years, I'm finishing up my PhD. I want to have even more of a solid community and sense of self and sense of security in myself. A community that reflects my values back and supports me and that I've been able to grow with and watch grow.

I mean, the dream for real in ten years is a commune- it's a lesbian commune. [...] We garden, we make art, we know science and we can use it to make a really good garden and other things. And hopefully the world isn't on fire. Yeah, I don't know. I can't really think about 10 years from now.



# CATHERINE



**If appearance isn't the biggest aspect of how you express yourself or if it doesn't change that much, what are other ways that you express yourself?**

I think I express myself mainly by presence. Instead of being a bold and ever-changing presence, I think I'm generally a very mellow and consistent individual who expresses some of that mellowness through consistency in mentality and tone. I definitely struggle to vocalize how I express myself because a lot of my focus towards being the most authentic version of myself has been mainly focusing on being as comfortable as I can be without caring too much about external opinions or judgments. And I think once I found a very safe and comfortable place where I felt safe, I no longer had to change or feel external pressure to appear better or appear different.

**What are some limitations to expressing yourself?**

I think my more simplistic methods of expressing myself through clothes and a very chill and stable demeanor means that it can be quite difficult for me to express things outside of that. And I think I'm still exploring how best to express and share feelings outside of this baseline.

I think it is a great skill to have to know how to always be expressing your truest, most unshadowed version of yourself. So I think when I have a day or a week where I feel slightly *more than* or slightly more expressive, it feels a little bit wild and hard to handle. It all feels very... almost hypothetical.

**Tell me about your journey to finding pleasure in water activities/scuba. When did you start, do you share this with other people?**

I think I became a lot more comfortable with scuba and water sports as a whole after I got top surgery because I became a lot more comfortable with some of the swimwear. [...] Being next to the water almost gives me an excuse to take my shirt off and show people that I am proud of the body I have.

In some ways, some of the uncomfortable things still persist, like locker rooms. Locker rooms are a big one that exist at pools. Still don't like those. But, if anything, my scars - my top surgery - doesn't make locker rooms feel any worse. I think, if anything, it feels like a badge of honor that shows the journey I went through and validates my presence.

**What played into your decision to get top surgery?**

The drive towards comfort. I had a lot of going back and forth over whether I wanted top surgery versus a breast reduction and, ultimately, the decision for top surgery really came down to the decision I would make for myself rather than for others. I had a lot of hesitancy on top surgery because I worried it would, I guess, label me as genderqueer and would make my future dating life or social life more difficult. But when thinking about what would truly make me the happiest, it was always top surgery.

**Would you describe yourself as trans? Do you still believe that you need to be trans to have top surgery?**

No, I don't think the 'trans or nothing' is a true argument. I think I wouldn't define myself as trans- I would describe myself as genderqueer. But in a lot of ways, I've been much less focused on labels and more focused on what brings comfort to my life. I think that was one of the things when I was trying to decide on top surgery was,

“Do I have to figure out my gender now?” And at the end, I just had to zoom in on less of this broad question of “What is my gender and how should I express myself?” and more on, “Where would I be comfortable and feel more like I truly represented myself?”

**I think it's very interesting that you say that many people have to redefine themselves and you kind of just grew up like this. Do you have anything more to say about that?**

Here's my other hot thought: I feel like I was never socialized as a woman. [...] In a lot of ways, I think that makes the way I represent myself a lot easier, especially as a woman who went through engineering. I've never struggled the same way a lot of women in engineering have with gaining respect from their peers or feeling heard. And I think that is because I will talk over a man at any moment. I will say something wrong and say it confidently. I will speak what is on my mind, and I think that is something that has given me a lot of respect, which I think people who can represent more masculinely and are AFAB struggle with, especially in a professional environment, especially around other men.

[...] But locker rooms? No. locker rooms don't count. Locker rooms are my kryptonite.

**How do you find pleasure in your life, and how do you find pleasure in your masculinity?**

Pleasure after a fresh haircut. That's fantastic. A nice fade, a new button up- that's a good pleasure. I think I do struggle to use clothing to express myself, at least in a new and bold sense. But when I do find something that I feel like expresses myself... well, that's always very exciting. [...]

Top surgery taught me you can wear button ups any day because you can't lift

your arms to take a shirt off. So top surgery taught me to just wear a button up if I want to wear a button up. And that's a pleasure. I have some of these tropical button ups. And I'm like, “You know what? I can wear this button up because it's sunny outside and I want to.” That's a pleasure.



**Where do you encounter barriers to experiencing pleasure?**

Locker rooms. Cis men. You ever stand around some really tall guys and you're like, "Fuck." That'll get you. Business casual is a rough one. Yeah, mainly the first two.

**What would your younger self think if they met you now?**

I think I would be very happy to learn that I felt comfortable and I fit in. A big worry growing up was just that I was so different, that I would never fit in or find a group. And I think part of that was just because I presented masculine so young, and a lot of people made that change when they were older. So being someone who was seven, eight, with short hair and wore boys' clothes felt very isolating- like I was a weirdo.

MACE



**Describe your style. How do you express yourself through your clothing, hair, makeup, body art?**

I tend to dress pretty masc. I like to keep my hair pretty short and, in the past couple of years, I've really oscillated. I've had very seasonal hair in that in the winter, I will bleach my hair and dye it purple and then in the spring, I'll shave my head. And then the cycle sort of rinses and repeats. But in general, I love to wear colorful clothing or patterns, and layering feels very important to my aesthetic, which comes from having had different relationships with my body. I think at this point it has to do with maximalism as part of the aesthetic.

I'm working on building up my tattoos; that definitely feels part of how I present to the world and how I want to present to the world. So, slowly but steadily building sleeves and lots of tats on my legs. Honestly, I've realized that I'm very tattooed on the right side of my body and not as much on the left, which was not intentional, but it's just sort of how things are weighted right now. So I feel more spiritually heavy on the right side of my body- there's more happening over there.

**In what ways does collaging let you express yourself and give you pleasure?**

I think what I really like about collage is that it's very decontextual. I am fascinated by the idea of taking something out of its context and how it can have new meaning as a result of that. The appeal of collage is also theft, where I'm stealing something of someone else's, be it a photograph that someone else took or a piece of art that someone else made, and I'm using it for my own purpose... sort of disrespectfully.

I have felt, historically, in my creative practice, a lot of pressure to make work that is good, or to make work that is beautiful. And that has meant that I have felt, at times, very, very restricted, as a painter or in the drawings that I'm making. And I think that the nice thing about collages that I really frees you from that, because.. it's so much more instinctual for me. I'm just playing around with shapes and the work that I make is often much more abstract. So, it incorporates that element of play.

**Describe your masculinity. How do femininity and masculinity interact in your life?**

I think that masculinity is something that I have recognized and honored in myself for a really long time. So, that has looked very different in different stages of my life. I think that part of the reason that I chose collage for this [interview] is because it feels like a very apt metaphor for me. The way that I think about gender, divorced of its context, which is just that... gender can kind of be anything. It's such a shapeshifter, depending on where you are and who you're performing it for. [...]

At some point, I reached a point in my journey where I was like "Okay, what does it mean to be masculine by myself without other people- without relationality as a part of it at all? What does it feel like to embody masculinity when no one else is in the room?" Thinking about something being divorced from its context and being able to take on new meaning and new life outside of where it comes from; that has always felt really important to me in thinking about how I show up as a masculine person, but not a man. That the masculinity that I embody is going to be intrinsically different from the masculinity of a man.

**Where do you envision yourself in five years and in ten years?**

That's a really hard question. I think that I got a version of this question asked a lot after I got top surgery initially. [...] A lot of people in my life, either from a loving perspective or from a judgmental or concerned perspective, were sort of, like, "Okay, slippery slope, what's next for you? First it's this thing, and then it's something else." My need for surgery was pressing enough that I was like, "I don't actually have the capacity to imagine anything beyond that yet because it involves a self that I don't have access to." [...]

I think I described it once as being on the top of a mountain, and having summited this particular obstacle and being able to see all the way down into the next valley and the next mountain, but not really knowing what that was or where I was going.

And I think in the time since-part of what's really beautiful about being queer and about being trans is the conception of coming out that we're fed when we first become a part of the community. It's like, "Oh, you came out and now it's over." And that's not true for anybody. So, being able to embrace the process of coming out as one that is continual. And that it's never a passive part of your life. It's always going to be changing and growing and there's always

work to do to become more intimate with yourself.

I know that I really want to change my name. I'm in this weird place of feeling pretty disconnected from the name Maeve, which was not my experience for a really long time because I feel like it's a beautiful name and it has suited me very well throughout my life. But at this point, it's just not hitting in the same way. But I don't have any clue of what I want to change my name to.

It's a very interesting psychological exercise to change your name. I'm very fascinated by it and I have been very fascinated by it for a long time before I knew that it was something that I wanted for myself. So, I'm very occupied with the knowledge that I will make that decision, and that I will choose.

I have this childish urge- that I want an auspicious arrival of a new name for myself. I want it to be written in the sky, or a crow comes and drops a piece of paper into my sweatshirt pocket and it's like, "Your new name is *this*". So in the absence of that it feels like a distillation of a lot of the issues that I've been thinking about for many years-like building a sense of self. [...]

You can think you know yourself really well and then discover that you're not a girl and then suddenly, it all gets blown up in your face.



KAREN



**How do you express yourself through your clothing, hair, makeup, body art, etc.?**

I think it definitely leans more masculine. A lot of pants, a lot of shorts, but not too much. A lot of tighter fitting clothes on the top. I try not to present too butch, but also not super feminine. Just the middle ground of being a little more androgynous in my style, but maybe just in my eyes.

**In what ways does photography let you express yourself and give you pleasure?**

What I like to take out of photography is capturing. I like to take pictures of my friends and people I know, and that's what I'm most comfortable with when it comes to people subjects. When I am taking pictures of people, I try to capture what I see in them or how I view them... and also have it be authentic to how the other person views themselves. Other than human subjects, I think photography is also an exploration into what I like to do, because I take photos of things I find, or new things I'm trying, or this adventure I've been on.

I don't really do it often, but when I do, it ends up being these chunks of time in my life where I take up photography again in spurts. And from that, you can kind of tell how my interests have changed and how the subjects change and what I focus more on taking photos of.

**Tell me about your journey to finding pleasure in photography. When did you start? Do you share this hobby with people?**

I think [not editing my photos] allows me to focus more on the moment when I take a picture and be more intentional, because I don't have to be like, "Okay, I can fix this when I get home."

And [I can] be kind of reckless with what I'm taking a photo of. [...]

I think before, I got pleasure in the affirmation people would give me on Instagram. Like, if this picture had X amount of likes, it's a good picture and I'll keep doing whatever I'm doing. But I think now I'm finding pleasure in showing somebody a picture of themselves and them being like, "Wow, this is a good picture of me! You captured me really well." Or pictures that I can use in memory books and I can show my kids or look back in a few years and I'm like, "Oh my god, that was so much fun. And these were the people in my life and they're still in my life."

I also get very sentimental about deleting pictures because I feel like I'm erasing this moment in time. And I think that's what's so interesting about photography is that this is as close as we can replicate the real world in a 2D plane.

**Describe your masculinity. How do femininity and masculinity interact in your life?**

Especially now more than ever, I'm more comfortable with my femininity, and comfortable expressing that. I think there was a big part of my life where I was so uncomfortable with it. But, I think most days, I get to pick and choose what I want to do and how I want to present. I think it's also something I think about all the time, but I also forget when I'm out and about in public. [...]

I'm not exactly super feminine, but I'm not exactly super masculine, depending on who's looking at me. And that always changes. I think I forget that that's how I present when I am walking. It is something on my mind all the time, but it's also not, which is weird. I think the example would be like, when I would walk on the street

and somebody's staring at me. I'm like, "Why are you staring at me?" But then it's mostly because they're probably trying to figure out if I'm a boy or a girl.

### **What influences your style? Where do you draw influence from?**

When I pick things to wear or how I want to present, it's always this delicate balance for me between masculinity and femininity. It's almost like this plus one minus one situation that I see in my head. So, maybe my shirt can be super masculine, but I soften it up with something that I do with my hair or something I wear on the bottom. And I think that really allows me to be more comfortable.

Growing up in New York, you can always see these fashion moguls on the streets in SoHo, and everybody's wearing these extravagant outfits. And I didn't see myself in these statement pieces, but I paid attention to how men and women and just people balance that femininity and masculinity in fashion. And it's always this play of a little bit of softness with a little bit of harshness.

### **Where does masculinity show up in your life?**

In the bakeries at home- they're ran by these older Asian ladies and they're super sweet. And sometimes when I interact with them in Chinese, they're like, "Pretty girl." In my masculinity, I don't feel less masculine. I'm almost a little proud of how I can still be within the spectrum, but still be like, "Yes, I am a pretty girl. Thank you." And I think before, I definitely would have felt a little weird about it. But because of being more comfortable in my femininity and my masculinity, I take it as a compliment. [...]

I'm going to do all these things to get me to where I am and be more dominant and in control of my life. I didn't feel that until after I was exploring my masculinity. I felt so small in the world. But I think masculinity allowed me to feel more in control. And I guess, that's where that creativity came from. That's how masculinity gave me more creative ways into looking at how I can change my life.



### **What would your younger self think if they met you now?**

If my younger self met me, she'd be like, "Oh, she's so cool." But she'd freak out and low-key hate me.

When I was younger, I think I had a lot of internalized homophobia and internalized racism. I think that's just the environment my parents put me in to have me feel that way. And the media I consumed, too. I think she'd hate me because she'd see herself in me.





*Photo by Sofia Hincapie-Rodrigo*

For mascs near and far, made by Claire Jensen