

MASC

A portrait of a person with curly brown hair and a blue surgical mask. The person has a small tattoo on their forehead and is wearing a white tank top and a chain necklace. The background is a blurred green field.

MANDATE

CLAIRE JENSEN

VOL. 03



Last winter, I spent eleven weeks in Antarctica. I was doing field work there, studying partially metamorphosed snow, or firn. I spent four of those weeks camping on the Antarctic Ice Sheet at a remote field site called Taylor Dome, where I helped deploy four firn monitoring stations.

Antarctica was, as one might expect, a bit brutal. Small tasks took an incredible amount of effort and time to complete and the 24-hour sunlight really messed with my circadian rhythm.

Despite the challenge of being in this environment, I found immense peace in Antarctica. On calm days, if I turned off my snowmobile and stood still, the world was completely silent. If I looked up, I'd see tiny rainbows floating in the sky above me as the sun reflected off the suspended ice crystals. In these moments, there was nowhere else I would have rather been.

In a sense, there was nowhere else I could go. I was stuck in Antarctica and forced to sit with myself for weeks on end – something I had never done before. This was incredibly humbling. I had endless time to think about the person I was before Antarctica and who I wanted to be when I stepped back on U.S. soil.

Every day, I wrote, reflected, listened to the silence, and squinted at the sun. In a place where I was entirely out of my comfort zone, I think I became a little bit more *myself*. Being self-made in a world that wants to put you in a box is a formidable challenge, and the interviewees in this zine can attest to that.

Please remove your mask and enjoy.

Love,

Chris Jensen

chloe



What are some limitations to expressing yourself?

This feels related to my thinking on gender in general. Where I'm like, "Gender is a construct, so I get to redefine it." But ultimately, the words I'm using to define it are still rooted in the socially constructed definitions. So then I'm back at what masc vs. femme looks like. It just gets kind of confusing... I think sometimes the limitations are getting stuck in that cycle versus being able to feel more connected to *myself*.

Tell me more about your journey to getting into art initially and finding pleasure in it. When did you start and do you share this with people?

I had a really shitty high school art teacher who was very traditionalist; she did these oil paintings of this neighborhood in D.C. called Georgetown. [...] She had such a clear definition of what things could and should look like and I think I was trying pretty hard to release myself from that at that point. I just got really bogged down and art was the only class I wasn't turning in my homework for, I was skipping... it got kind of bad. I had a hard time, even though there was this deep feeling of "I know I'm an artist," I had a hard time claiming that for most of my 20s. Over the last three years, I have continued to try to make a commitment to knowing that art is really important- creativity exists in everyone.

You mentioned that you work with kids. How does your experience differ when working on art with kids?

I really like working with kids. I like supporting them and their creative process and trying to get into their thinking. There's a way that doing that helps me with my own creative process. As a young learner myself, I was very results-oriented. Like wanting the thing to look good or get a good grade. Something happened where I wasn't as interested in the process of being curious. So there's something really cool about getting to kind of rework that in myself through the process of supporting a second grader's thinking and the stuffie that they want to make. And that ultimately looks however it looks, but them being pleased in what they did and not having to follow a certain process is cool.

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

A way that's been sweet to think about it is: [I'm] getting to be connected to all the men and women that have come before me in my family. I embody all of them; I'm not just the generations of women, I'm also the generations of men. There's a way that I think about my identity through my elders and my ancestors that feels easier to understand than to be like, "There are certain characteristics or tendencies or features that are associated with being feminine or masculine..."

I say all of that, and I'm definitely working with these definitions in my head.

I think there's something harmful about being like, "Being powerful or strong is associated with masculinity," that feels like it strips it from femininity... But, those could both exist together. It feels

scary to perpetuate the ways that these things are being defined that are stagnating people's thinking.

In safe spaces, there are ways that, when you're connected to people [and] when you have a baseline of understanding of the hurts that exist in the world that have landed us where we are, you can claim these more cliché things in a way that feels good. But then it feels scary to do that not in those collective, safe spaces because it feels like people could get the wrong message.

I think I have this deep feeling of sadness for people who were raised male and all the ways that they've been abandoned.



Where does masculinity show up in your life?

[...] There are also ways that it shows up in relation to other people where there's that confusion that people experience with my identity or something... I don't know if that's my assumption of their definition of masculinity being predicted back onto me or something. It's kind of fun, or funny, or interesting.

I've had lots of conversations with kids where they're like, "Why don't you shave your legs? Why is your hair so short?" And they're working through their definition of [masculinity].

How do you find pleasure in your masculinity?

I think I take pleasure in the freedom to self-define. When I'm creating, things don't have definitions the way they do in our world. The thinking that happens for me is so different... and if I'm doing that, then that's my masculinity. And I'm taking pleasure in that.

Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?

In five years, I want to have done an artist residency somewhere. I'd be deeper into the world of defining myself as an artist and either getting work opportunities or just creative opportunities because of that. I want to have a more regular practice of creating. I want to still be active in my body.

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

I think they'd be pleased.

I feel like they'd be surprised at how hard it's been. I don't think I knew when I was younger, how hard it is to go for shit and still think it's valuable, and try to not do it alone.

I think they'd be proud that the things that brought me joy then are still the things I'm trying to hold close.

CILLIAN



What are some limitations to expressing yourself?

I grew up almost being sent to conversion therapy when I was a teenager. The way I got around doing that was [that] I signed this contract when I was 16 with my mom. It was basically like, “I’m gonna be recruited to a women’s rowing team, and I’m gonna try to make a U.S. national team (for a women’s team), and I’m gonna do all of this stuff in the women’s category of the sport, and that will be the only thing that allows me to be respected by her and allowed to express myself how I

that I do as an individual is somehow going to impact my team as soon as I step into a boat. Even when I’m alone on the erg, it’s the middle of winter and I have to do this two thousand meter test as fast as I possibly can and improve on my time that I had the last time, just for the sake of improving upon myself. It’s not just that improvement upon self that matters for me. It’s the improvement upon self that impacts my team three months after that.

[...] Eventually, you’re gonna step into a boat that’s either eight or four people, and you have to know that you gave every single thing that you could to be



wanted to without getting sent somewhere.”

So, that was kind of the start of all of that inner turmoil because I had to advertise to [athletic recruiters] that I was this person who was very masculine and [...] I needed to sell to them that I was trans so they bought it, and so that was something that they could easily point out about me.

How does rowing let you express yourself and give you pleasure?

When I’m training on my own, even in the environment that I have at the University of Washington, everything

in the position that you are, so that your teammates can trust that you belong in that position. All that individual hard work, then stepping into a boat and feeling that impact, feeling that team trust – that’s what gives me pleasure in this sport.

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

While I was in high school I spent every day fighting. Every day, I felt like I had to push everything that I could towards being recruited for college, towards making a U-19 national team. The

stipulation of the contract that I had signed was basically, if I ever illustrated to [my mom] that I stopped trying or that I wasn't caring enough or that I wasn't doing all that I could, the rug could be pulled out from underneath me and everything could just go to shit– I could be sent away anyways.

That was a struggle for me because I didn't feel like I even liked the sport at the time. It was just this way of me being able to get to the point of like, [...] "I'll be able to express myself and live as an individual at some point soon, and I just need to get to the end of this tunnel."

At the end of my freshman year, I got top surgery and it felt like a lightbulb went off in my head. From that point forward, I was able to really start enjoying my sport because it felt like I finally did something for myself, and it felt like I finally was able to express myself in this way, and I felt like I was finally comfortable in my body.

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

My mom comes from a quarry family and isn't a super feminine person, but she loves being a woman. And I think that's a really beautiful thing. My dad was also somebody who got a degree in music and was a little bit flamboyant even for somebody that grew up Irish Catholic. That was something that was really cool to see growing up because I didn't feel like I had this super hard and fast rule about what masculinity and femininity needed to look like from my parental figures, which was nice.

Ultimately, those expressions of masculinity and femininity in my parents made me abandon defined masculinity

and just try to stay rooted in myself.

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

When I go out, I don't want to be someone who's like, "I had like a six-figure salary and I was on Wall Street," or whatever. I want to be like, "This person on this street in the middle of nowhere remembers that I really love this type of bread and will still make it sometimes because they think of me." It's that sort of impact and connection in life that gives me joy.

Where do you encounter barriers to experiencing pleasure?

I'll still definitely catch myself constantly worrying about how other people are perceiving me from the standpoint of, "Do they think that I'm trying to cheat by staying in women's sports? Do they think that I'm not authentically trans– that I'm lying about it? Do they think that I'm the scum of the earth? Do they think that I'm a horrible human being? Do they think that I'm taking opportunities away from other people?" I think that has kept me from being able to entirely enjoy what I do at times.

Experiencing male privilege outside of my boathouse and then also experiencing misogyny inside my boathouse is a very strange thing. [...] It just crosses the wires inside my brain sometimes that makes it confusing to operate.

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

"That's the person that I drew in my sketchbook two days ago. That's the person that I always saw that I never thought that I could be."

xander



they/them | trans, grunge, community-oriented, at home, skater boy | 29

What are some limitations you find when trying to express yourself?

The mens' clothes are sometimes so boring and plain and the womens' clothes are usually see-through and would probably fall apart if I put them in the washing machine. [...] But, if you find me at a hardware store, I will *absolutely* get the floral clogs and I'll go get the men's double-knee Carharts, you know? Catch me in a garden in floral clogs, absolutely. [...]

In terms of expressing myself, in general, the limitations I find are [that] I don't know how people perceive me and I try really hard not to care. But when I go into the bathroom and there's a bunch of women in there - obviously cis, straight women - I'm like, "How do I show you that I'm not a threat and that I belong in the bathroom?" [...]

I try not to care, but I get nervous about my safety, especially if I'm with my partner or with a group of other queer people; I definitely have this low-level hum of fear. [...] I get nervous that my existence is a problem and I always have to fight that little voice in my head. It doesn't stop me from going to do things and finding pleasure in everyday life. But, I do get scared and sometimes that fear is debilitating.

How does your home let you express yourself and decompress?

Growing up, my family's house was not a place that I felt like I could truly express myself because I didn't know who I was and I didn't know that being genderqueer was even an option.

Emotional depth was not something that was celebrated or accessed by anybody but me in my house. So, now that I am an adult and can make adult choices and pick the apartment that I want and move my furniture around whenever I feel like it, I can leave stuff out and nobody's gonna make a comment. I can spill something and nobody's gonna yell at me.

I love being in my house. I like the community in my house and in my apartment building- I know everybody. [...] My house is an inner child thing because I let myself *be* myself in my house. If I don't feel like myself in my house, I don't feel like myself anywhere else. This is the place where my altar is, this is the place where I connect with my spirituality, the place where I come and cry. I feel like there's nothing more myself and more beautiful than sitting in my nest and appreciating my space that I've cultivated to be the complete opposite of what my childhood home was like.

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

Well, growing up as a girl, I didn't understand femininity at all. The closest thing I got to femininity was wearing dresses on "special occasions" with my family and feeling so comfy... and not knowing what to do with my hair; I didn't know that short hair was a thing that I could do. The closest I got to makeup was my friends putting it on me because they thought it was funny, or because I thought it was funny.

When the pandemic hit, I was stranded alone for, like, a month in my house. We all got on TikTok, okay? I found a lot of inspiration from people that I saw on [TikTok] and I started to dive into my

masculinity. [...] I started to notice that people online - women - were wearing certain cuts of masculine clothing. They would put the recommendations of where they got that online, and I would start to go through the men's section more in thrift stores or online. I finally cut my hair for the first time at the end of 2020 and I was like, "Yeah, absolutely, short hair is for me." And it was horrible. The first baby queer haircut is bad.

My friend told me that I'm the transmasculine Miranda Priestley from *The Devil Wears Prada* - my favorite movie. I just wanna sit at a desk and tell people that they look great or not. [...] I find pleasure in my masculinity by enjoying my friends' masculinity, my partner's masculinity, and through my clothes and through my physical expression the most.

I feel very much myself when I talk to my masc friends about clothing, 'cause I think it's fun. I even put my cat in clothes. I think it's hilarious.

Where do you find barriers to experiencing pleasure?

I'm really aware of the fact that my existence as a masc person is an act of resistance just by existing. Sometimes it's hard- that feeling is debilitating sometimes. That's why I feel proud of myself for building the space that I have- because I can see all the joy that I have in my life.

When I feel stuck at home or I feel like I don't deserve to go outside and experience joy, I read things that I put on my wall or I look at a little note that my partner left me and that gets me out of that funk. But, I feel that every day and it's really hard to exist in a society that isn't built for you.

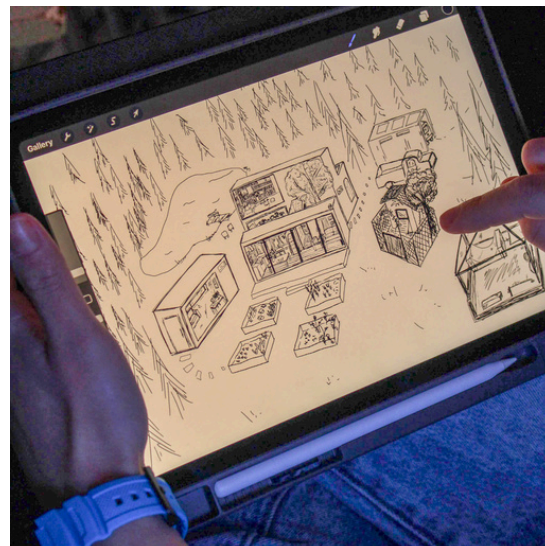
Where do you envision yourself in five to ten years?

I would love this [homestead] to either be in the works or I would love to have bought the land. Skate ramp, activity center, a shipping container office/guest room, garden, little Jurassic coop (tiny dinosaurs, obviously). We're gonna have a lake, we want a tree in our house really bad. We're not gonna have a TV in the living room, there'll be a movie theater situation.

I want to live in a little queer haven and I want to grow my own food, like really badly. I'm tired of paying two hundred fucking dollars for groceries. I want to be able to have our friends come stay for two weeks because their life is stressful. I basically want to turn my apartment into a giant homestead on an acre of land.

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

She'd be mind-blown, intimidated for sure, scared, but in a "holy shit, I want to be you so bad and I don't know why." She'd be like, "What the fuck, you have tattoos? What?"





ALI

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

I love to box. [...] I just think there's so much family within boxing because it's so intimate. You're punching someone in the face. It can be either extremely aggressive or it can be a learning experience. What I love about it is that I'm never trying to actually hurt the person I'm boxing with. It's more like, "Let's test our skills and see how we can grow and be better." Every boxing coach I've met has always been the most expressive, loving, *go do it* type of person, which I love.

What are some limitations to expressing yourself?

I just don't care. At what point does this matter? Any way that people are gonna take you, they're always gonna be that way. Everyone's gonna judge you, regardless of what you are or who you are. You could be the most normal looking, straight, white man, and *I'm* gonna judge you. So if I'm judging him, then who cares about who judges me, or who perceives me? I don't care. As long as I'm happy with myself, and I'm a kind person, and I'm giving, and I'm able to reflect on mistakes— that's all that matters to me. I just want to be a good person at the end of the day, you know?

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

I'm a hobbyist, so I like to do a lot of different things. I host things that I want to do, and that's fun. But also, I have to step out of my box and do things that other people want to do, and that's been interesting— learning the different stuff that people want, and learning the niche experiences and hobbies that they have. It



Who does *Lezztalkaboutit* cater to and what does it mean to create a community?

My [Instagram] bio says "Seattle affordable lesbian & queer events." There are no limitations to that. I'm not the lesbian police, I'm not the queer police. I'm not going to choose who's able to come to my events and who's not (except if it's a cis man that is negatively impacting the community).

I just want people to be themselves. And I think that's why I've been able to create such connections with people— because I'm coming from a place of open arms. I just want people to let loose. It's so rare to have a lesbian-focused space where everyone's loose and able to be themselves. You don't find it often, so when you're in that [space], you feel this high. It's a crazy feeling, and I feel it every time I'm there.

What was *Lezztalkaboutit* born from?

I'm from [Seattle] but I lived in New York for a bit. I was moving back to Seattle and I realized I don't really have many spaces to hang out with people. All my friends were queer-adjacent, but not lesbian. That was hard for me, because all my friends in New York are lesbian, and I felt like myself around them. It was really hard to know I was moving back to no community.

So, I posted on TikTok talking about wanting more friends, and, "Hey, if you're in Seattle, I want to make more friends and do these events," but I never expected it to be any of this. I posted those videos, and they got, like, 100,000 views— they blew up.

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

There are no bounds. I mean, I wear boys' clothes, but I feel very feminine. There are so many different ways to present yourself. [...] It's hard to be pushed into a box and it's hard to step out of that box after you're put in. I hate when people are like, "You have to be a butch, or you have to be a stud, or a dyke." [...] What if you want to step out of that shit? What if you don't want to be called anything?

I feel very much in between both. I don't necessarily know too much about how I present my femininity. I just know that I feel it. I'm so half and half, 'cause obviously I wear masculine clothes, but I feel like a babygirl most of the time. It's hard.

Was there a point in time when you realized you had created something special with *Lezztalkaboutit*?

I think it was my first few craft nights,

'cause that's what I started doing. I didn't start with parties. [...] Packing that full — having 45+ people in the lesbian/queer community there.

Oh, my God. I remember, for the first few times, I was in the back crying. Nobody knows that but I was [crying] tears of joy. It was cool to see people express themselves and be able to create and not worry about anything else. I've seen people make friend groups from this community, and it's beautiful. I hope that keeps happening. I hope people continue to step out of their way and get out of the box and talk to new people.

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

Oh, shit. She'd be like, "Dude, hell yeah."

I grew up always wanting to have more masculine-presenting friends like [me]. My best friends are masc-presenting and I have a lot of beautiful friends here that are some of the coolest people I've ever met. It feels cool to get closer to people— femme, masc, in-between, whatever you want to be. It feels really beautiful to meet people that also grew up here, struggled similarly, felt kind of out of place, and are now making their friends. That's so special to me. That's the whole point— to have a place to be.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

I'm excited to do more things. I have so much planned. I'm excited to share it and do more fun shit. [...] I really want to do the most crazy, rambunctious shit. [...] And I promise it won't be a million dollars and a half, so don't worry, wallets will be safe.



NINA

*they/them | androgynous, loyal, explorative,
community-oriented | 24*

How does making music allow you to express yourself and give you pleasure?

Music allows me to express myself because it's very freeing and kind of always has been. I started making music with my friends in college, in this tiny little studio that our college had. It was a really safe space- we could always make a beat and just freestyle over it, make vocals. I wouldn't say that I'm super good at singing or even freestyle rapping, but it was just a fun place to have fun with my friends.



Especially when we would freestyle, sometimes things would come up and we'd be like, "Oh, I didn't realize that was on my mind." It was just an authentic train of thought that people would have. So that really allowed me to be expressive of things that were on my mind in a creative space with people who were safe and really caring.

We'd make music and we'd perform it at different little shows around campus. [...] All different people would come into the studio and hang out with us. So that felt

very gratifying and allowed me to express myself in ways that I felt less comfortable doing in a bigger space as I was exploring who I was.

What are some limits to your self-expression?

Not having that many queer, masculine-presenting role models and having to pave that path for myself – which is really lucky – but I wish there were more role models for young people. I didn't feel a lot of effects from heteronormativity and from hetero-female stereotypes, but I'm still trying to work through that. [...] I feel really grateful

to have a community that's trying to help me figure that out.

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

I think the more that I've been around queer folks and the more I've been thinking about who I am as a person, the less I want to be seeing masculinity as a

limitation of solely what it is structurally seen as within heteronormativity.

[...] I want to arrive at intersection where I can personally work on deconstructing how being a man or being a woman isn't necessarily masculinity or femininity– those all can arrive within me.

Why is safety a large part of masculinity for you?

The men I've been around are some of the most supportive and caring people in my life.

As I grew and learned who I was, these men around me were who I looked to, to see what aspects of masculinity they were exhibiting.

There are a lot of spaces where having masculinity is a privilege. Having the awareness and that ability to care for other people can allow for those privileges and that safety to be extended in ways that can allow for specific people to feel able to be authentic. But if you don't use those privileges that you have, [...] [they] get neutralized or even actively used to make people feel less safe.

I think using the privileges that come with masculinity to care, to be supportive, and to be loving of communities that experience violence— that care becomes so essential to masculinity and to humanity.

How do you find pleasure in your masculinity?

Recently with Pride, I've been trying to find ways to involve myself in queer spaces. [...] Being around people who are a multitude of different queer experiences—that's just so pleasurable. I feel such joy and appreciation for the fact that I know people in my life in all different queer experiences and identities.

I feel like sometimes, my straight friends would pigeonhole me into the stereotypical — what they see queer masculinity as — versus, when I'm around queer folks, it feels like I can just be myself and they're also themselves. Everyone's accepting of the fact that all those terminologies aren't as stagnant because they understand that they've also experienced the fluidity of [queerness].

Where do you encounter barriers to experiencing pleasure?

I exist in a space of privilege in a lot of ways. So, sometimes that makes me unsure of what steps to take in trying to do my best every day to support organizing movements to support mutual aid, to support friends. The recognition that I hold a lot of privilege sometimes can make me feel like I'm just one person. Like there's really not that much I can do, like rights are being taken away from people, and lives are being taken around the world, and it feels like there's very little I can do.

In terms of pleasure, I think that's been a very big obstacle, but it's also partially self-imposed because there are a lot of people who have whatever degrees of privilege or lack thereof that are still doing things.

Where do you envision yourself in five or ten years?

I would love to be doing work for queer youth and queer sports. I think that would be sick. I've always want to be involved with young people — queer young people — or just youth sports in general.

I think it would be really cool to do contract negotiations for female sports, or female organizations. [...]

I would love to be a photographer. [...] I would love to be able to travel the world and do photography in different places surrounding the queer image and states of becoming for people around the world.

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

I wish I could talk to my younger selves. I hope they would be really happy. I see myself in so many young people that I coach or work with that it feels nostalgic. [...] Hopefully, all my younger selves would be cheering me on.



Photo by Dylen Swan

For mascs near and far; made by Claire Jensen
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