

# #1579 Positive masculinity is a process.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] During today's episode, I'm going to be telling you about a show I think you should check out. It's the Straight White American Jesus podcast, so take a moment to hear what I have to say about them in the middle of the show, and listen to it wherever you get your podcasts. And now, welcome to this episode of the award winning Best of the Left podcast in which we shall take a look at the state of patriarchy for the next generation of boys.

For decades, we have been rightly focused on dialing back endemic misogyny and poking holes in the patriarchy, in the hopes of a new normal of gender relations emerging that would be genuinely healthier for everyone, not just women, but. With so much of the focus on the type of masculinity men and boys shouldn't embrace, we may have fallen short on giving positive direction to boys about what they should be and do.

Sources today include The Daily Show, The Gray Area, The On Boys Podcast, [00:01:00] Paging Dr. Nerdlove, and Swolesome, with additional members only clips from The Daily Show and The On Boys Podcast.

## Andrew Tate & Re-examining Masculinity - Long Story Short The Daily Show - Air Date 4-21-23

**JORDAN KLEPPER - CORRESPONDENT, THE DAILY SHOW:**

America's in the midst of some long overdue changes around gender and power: reexamining ideas of masculinity, femininity, the spectrum in between, and how fluid it all is. It's a difficult and necessary conversation. But luckily for us, we get to have these nuanced debates on Twitter.

Now, this cultural change is important and I'm glad it's happening. But when there is a cultural shift, it's easy to get lost within it. And even though it feels strange to say this, a group that is being left out is young boys. And I know, I know, I know. A war on men? I sound like I'm on a network that just got sued out of \$780 million. Fine. Mm hmm. I know. Jokes on you. Comedy Central doesn't have that kind of cash.

My point is, we've had a great conversation about what men shouldn't be. Men shouldn't be toxic. [00:02:00] They shouldn't be overly aggressive. They shouldn't pay a porn star to keep quiet about an affair they had right after their son was born. It's a high, high bar.

But we haven't been showing men what they should be. And that matters to young boys who are looking for an identity, for a narrative about what it means to be a man. And that vacuum is being filled by people with the worst possible idea of manhood.

**NARRATOR:** Former Kickboxer and Big Brother contestant, Andrew Tate, infamous for being the self-proclaimed king of toxic masculinity. Tate's core message centers around the belief that masculinity is in the crosshairs and he's defending it. His target audience: young men.

**ANDREW TATE:** [clip montage]

This whole idea of being toxically masculine is complete garbage.

I think the most dangerous men on earth are the weak men.

Feel, feel, feel, feel, feel. Leave the feelings to the girls, right? That's what they do. We act. We're men of action.

Empowering females is the easiest way to weaken the will of men.

Study, study, study, give up your whole life in school. Then you get to be a doctor. You can't even buy a mother fucking sports car.

The problem [00:03:00] with most of you is that I am sitting here with my sunglasses, bald head, millions of dollars, nearly unmatched fighting skills. I am Morpheus.

I need action. I need constant chaos in my life to feel content. I need to be driving a supercar and fighting, bunch of champagne and going crazy...

**JORDAN KLEPPER - CORRESPONDENT, THE DAILY SHOW:** Okay, okay, okay, we get it. You have a small penis. Even through the video you can tell this guy wears too much cologne. And by the way, not to tarnish his sparkling image, but Andrew Tate is currently under investigation for human trafficking. I know it's always the first one you suspect.

Now, maybe you don't know Andrew Tate. Maybe you're thinking, who is this porn parody, Vin Diesel. You may not know him, but trust me, your sons do.

**NEWS REPORTER:** With over 13 billion views on TikTok, Tate's rhetoric is moving from online to the classroom.

**TEACHER ON TIKTOK:** So I'm a teacher and I teach sixth grade. The amount [00:04:00] of young 11 year old boys that have told me that they love Andrew Tate is ridiculous.

**NEWS REPORTER:** One teacher says she hears blatant misogyny from the boys in her class, hearing them say that girls belong in the kitchen and only exist for reproduction. And another claiming they talk about alphas in sixth grade.

**NEWS COMMENTATOR:** Now, one teacher in South London noticed that his students were parroting Tate's ideology. About a third of the 30 students in the class passionately argued that women were responsible for their own sexual assaults. One of Tate's top lines.

**JORDAN KLEPPER - CORRESPONDENT, THE DAILY SHOW:** Wow. Times have really changed. When I was in sixth grade, the most toxic role model for boys was Michelangelo. He eats pizza for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. That turtle doesn't give a fuck. Seriously, how can you be misogynistic in sixth grade? That's like the one year in life where all the girls are bigger than you. I wouldn't [00:05:00] be running my mouth about Allison if Allison could hang me by my underwear on the flagpole.

The solution to this problem is not to cancel Andrew Tate. Interpol is probably gonna do that for us. Because even if he disappeared, even if he disappeared someone else would take his place and spew toxic shit at young boys just as well. And social media algorithms would pump it into young boys' eyes and ears just as fast, because that's really all this is about. Andrew Tate is not interested in being a role model. He wants clicks for money. He doesn't want to raise your son. He's taking dad's seat at the table, but he is really the loudmouth uncle.

That uncle who seems cool when you're a kid. But when you grow up, you realize living in a hotel is not a vacation. What we need is an alternative positive narrative for young men to follow. And it's ironic that these guys are talking about taking the red pill and using these matrix metaphors because if you're looking for a complex, emotionally available male role [00:06:00] model to

counter their bullshit idea of manhood, just look at the guy who took the red pill. Keanu Reeves. This. This is a man who is wildly considered to be kind and decent. He donates huge sums of money to cancer research. He gives up his seat to, uh, women on the subway. He bought Sandra Bullock champagne and truffles because she had never had them before. He's the perfect man. Yeah. Maybe his movies glorify gun violence, but nobody's perfect and that makes him even more perfect because our children shouldn't strive for perfection. That will only make them sad, and those movies sometimes are pretty cool. The point is, young boys need a cultural role model who is kind and comfortable in his skin, not guys who are so fragile in their masculinity they can't puff a cigar without putting it on every social media platform like they invented fire. [00:07:00] Hell, Keanu Reeves, he isn't even on social media. That's how healthy he is.

So, as a society, we have two options. We can either follow Keanu Reeves around and put everything he does on TikTok, or, probably better, we make sure that the conversation about modern society includes a role for men that young boys can look up to. Because long story short, if we don't talk to our boys, Andrew Tate is gonna talk to them. And that means 10 years from now I'm gonna be talking to 'em.

## **The new crisis of masculinity - The Gray Area - Air Date 8-7-23**

**SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA:** You know, there is a question lurking here about how, you know, this masculinity crisis intersects with class and race and who we're really talking about when we say men are in trouble. I mean, I'm curious what you think of, or when you think of the platonic ideal of the young man in crisis, what does he look like?

Is he poor, middle class, upper class? Is he White? I mean, obviously not all men are experiencing this problem equally. When I think about an incel, you know, for instance, right?, I think of a certain kind of kid: bourgeois, middle/upper class, usually White. But I don't wanna [00:08:00] reduce this entire problem to just that because it isn't reducible to just that. But does it seem to be affecting a particular demographic in a particularly strong way?

**CHRISTINE EMBA:** Yeah. Hashtag, not all men. Um [laughing]. Uh, no. I think the class distinctions are actually really important. And there's something that I thought about but didn't have as much space to go into as I wanted to in the piece. The piece, as you have read, is already quite long, but it could have

been much longer. And I do think that the crisis of masculinity is kind of cross-class and cross-racial, but maybe presents itself differently in different spaces. I think for sort of bourgeois, fairly well-educated men at the top of the ladder, it presents as kind of a psychic problem, almost. Like it's not necessarily that you don't have resources, it's just you're not really sure of how to be a guy on your Ivy League campus, and so you get really into Nietzsche and, like, intellectualize your problems.

But I mean, for [00:09:00] working class men, that's where you're seeing, you know, like deaths of despair hitting and like this job loss is really hitting there for Black men. There is, there has long been, I think, a sort of crisis of role models because so many Black father figures have been taken out of the community via mass incarceration and elsewhere.

So it's a little bit more of an ongoing thing and there's been actually more community step-in maybe in those places. But you have also seen, or saw, he is now dead, the rise of, Kevin Samuels was sort of like the Black influencer version of Andrew Tate and really popular in Black communities, and he had all these YouTube videos about being a high value man and like making fun of low value women and defining masculinity in that way. And so the anxiety about men's roles in relation to women is clearly visible there, too.

**SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA:** One of the things I hate about the culture war, at least as it's waged [00:10:00] very often by Republicans in particular, is that it's often used to mobilize resentments in a way that doesn't address any of the underlying causes of that resentment. It is so much easier to say that women, progressives, elites are to blame for your problems than it is to unpack all of these complicated social and economic transformations, some of which we were talking about earlier. And there's a part of me that just has to believe that, maybe not all of these problems, but many of these problems wouldn't be problems if we lived in a more equitable economy, if we lived in richer communities with deeper connections, if precarity and boredom and despair weren't so widespread.

I mean, how do you make sense of the lines here? I mean, maybe the problem is so complicated and diffuse that all you can really say is that there are a thousand overlapping causes and it's hard to tease it all out, but I don't know. I'm just curious how you make sense of that.

**CHRISTINE EMBA:** No, I think that's absolutely right and that's a thing that [00:11:00] frustrates me often about the conservative response to this crisis.

So, I write in the piece about Republican Senator Josh Hawley, whose book entitled *Manhood* went on sale, and unfortunately the jokes, like, really, really write themselves.

**SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA:** Yes, they do. Yes they do.

**CHRISTINE EMBA:** So, right now he's writing a book on manhood, but like the most famous picture of Josh Hawley is him sort of fist pumping outside of the January 6th uprising and then just hightailing it, like heels-to-butt out down the hall when he's confronted by people in the Capitol. So, in his book he blames the crisis of manhood specifically on liberal elites, like that is who he blames. And he basically says it's the elites have ruined manhood and feminists are taking away your manhood and what you really need to do is sort of go back in time almost. And he proposes a vision of manhood that basically is like the life [00:12:00] that your grandfather lived somehow. Like, a man should work a union job and be able to provide for his whole family, and that's the ideal. But Josh Hawley, how are you gonna get there? A) like, what solutions are you offering except this new victim complex where you blame your sadness on women and liberal elites, whoever they are. And then again, Josh Hawley, it was your party who was in favor of NAFTA and, you know, many of these policies that led to the offshoring of these working class union jobs for men. Um, are you going to do anything about that? Like, are you taking responsibility for those economic factors? There are things that we could do in America to make the economy more equitable, to make working life fairer, to make it easier to support a family. But where are the policies?

**SEAN ILLING - HOST, THE GRAY AREA:** Yeah. Where indeed. And as you put it in the piece, what this often boils down to is a misplaced desire [00:13:00] to belong. And this is a general problem in this society, and maybe it's especially bad for men, but our social lives in the real physical world are so much poorer than they used to be. And belonging is about anchoring our identities in communities. And unfortunately, the easiest way to do this now is to go online and that's a rather short road to some pretty dark places. And that's kind of what we're talking about with the Tate phenomenon and the rest of it.

**CHRISTINE EMBA:** Yeah, I mean, unfortunately yes, that is very true. So, one of the points that I make in the essay that I think is, it felt mildly controversial to be making this point, was the fact that it was notable that there, and this is something that also almost every young guy who I interviewed for this piece told me, that there were just fewer role models around, and especially father figures. You know, many of [00:14:00] the young men I talked to told me about how they didn't have a good relationship with their father, or their father wasn't around. They grew up in a single parent household. Most of their friends



maybe didn't have a great relationship with male relatives, so they didn't really have anywhere to go to sort of learn how to be a man.

And that was part of the reason why they felt kind of lost and were looking for these models online. And I do think that that has been a social shift over the past several decades that has really increased, not in, you know, traditionally marginalized communities, but everywhere. And the young men who seemed to have sort of succeeded in some way or had a better grasp on masculine [unintelligible] told me that they had found a mentor, were guys who had found someone in their community somehow.

One young guy told me about how his father wasn't really part of his life, but he became friends with sort of a priest who was a chaplain at his school who [00:15:00] sort of took him under his wing and, like, taught him how to buy nice shoes and, like, told him to ask women out on dates. And that was what helped him learn how to be a man. And, you know, he went on to talk about this and was sort of like, I think that this is a problem that we don't have these father figures around, but it's hard to imagine a policy solution because you can't mandate community. You know, like you can't just, through fiat, assign of father from the government to every young man who's looking for a model or a mentor. So what are you going to do about it?

In the past, maybe people would go to church and have intergenerational friendships or be in clubs or lodges, and even if it wasn't a relative, they might find a mentor there. But there's so many fewer male teachers in the school system that you don't see that happening as much anymore, and people just don't join community organizations like they used to.

## **The New Masculinity - ON BOYS podcast - Air Date 4-27-23**

**ALEX MANLY:** So one of the [00:16:00] chapters, I believe, starts with an anecdote from when I was in high school, in gym class, and another kid who I saw as being more sort of popular than me, saw me sort of wearing a bandaid and asked like, Why are you wearing a bandaid? To him, it just seemed, I guess, superfluous or like kind of a mark of vulnerability or weakness or something. And he kind of made fun of me for it a little bit. And for me it hadn't, you know, like, I was coming from, I don't know, a household where there was nothing, I didn't have to hide, you know, if something was wrong or I didn't have to hide a weakness. So it was confusing to me. But it was one of those things where it's like, Oh yeah, you pick up messaging, you know, outside the home. Like this is

what's okay, this is what's not. And then he was sort of telling me like, Man up, be tough. You know, like, pretend that you're not injured or power through your injuries.

It was just a kind of like a really tiny encapsulation of this overarching theme that that runs through masculinity, which is you cannot show weakness. You [00:17:00] cannot show vulnerability. You have to pretend that you're great, that everything's fine. And in this specific chapter, basically I explore how that is a killer when it comes to men's health because, in very real terms, if you spend your childhood internalizing messages about being tough and playing through the pain and not being willing to admit that anything's wrong, that doesn't just magically go away when, say, you're later in life and your body starts doing things that you don't necessarily know how to respond to. Your body starts showing signs that something's wrong and rather than looking for help, you just go, Okay, well, I'm gonna be tough. Just, the data shows men die a lot younger than women, and one of the culprits is they have a different relationship to getting treatment for stuff.

**NIOBE WADE:** As we're recording, the *Washington Post* came out with an article today about the silent crisis in men's health getting worse, and so as we're recording, the most recent data in the US is a [00:18:00] 5.9 year difference in life expectancy for males and females, and it's the largest gap in a quarter century. This gap has been getting larger. As the article points out, and as many of you listeners know, it's kind of ridiculous, especially because for years, so much of the medical research has been on men. So many of the providers are men. So it should be a system that is set up to take care of you guys and: yet. If we start with, Don't put a bandaid on it, it's pretty easy to see how things get ignored, overlooked, not tended to.

**ALEX MANLY:** I think it's one of those things that if you think about it for long enough, it starts feeling like, you know, it's a tragedy. We have sent men the wrong messages since they were born, basically. And then there are consequences to that. And there are lots of other factors going into the fact that they die younger, a lot of which I explore in the book. But the relationship to their bodies, to their physical health, [00:19:00] to the concept of weakness or vulnerability is so important. And I'm like, you can't teach someone that weakness and vulnerability are bad and expect it to have no impact when their bodies start to fail as all of our bodies will.

**NIOBE WADE:** I found myself thinking about this for myself first the other day, but you know, I am traveling through the world in this body. This is my vehicle. This is what I have. I really should be taking good care of it. Like, this is it. And then I thought of that in terms of, I have four sons who are in their



teens and early twenties right now. They take care of their cars. They take care of their dirt bikes. Like this is the stereotypically masculine thing. You know, if you've got a cool car, you are out there buffing it, shining it, taking care of it, putting premium gas in it. How can we help make that connection in translation, Alex?

**ALEX MANLY:** I mean, you're fighting an uphill battle, as am I with my book. But I do think, yeah, it starts with communicating that yourself and your [00:20:00] body are not, I don't know, like, are not a kind of narrative object as they are in masculinity where it's like, oh, it has to be perfect, it has to be, you know, tough, it has to be strong. And rather just, Yeah, okay, you're a person. There are things that are good, there are things that are bad, there... things will go well and go poorly in your life without the pressure to kind of be like a superhero or whatnot. I think that completely like reinvents, or could in any case, reinvent the relationship that these boys have with their bodies as they become men and, you know, as they start aging.

**NIOBE WADE:** So much of this seems like we all - guys, we as parents, society - need to make it okay, give permission to boys to be human. And I'm curious. This is a question that I have been pondering myself lately, and I'm not sure I have an answer, so I would love to hear your thoughts on this. Is there a difference between [00:21:00] being a decent human and being a good man?

**ALEX MANLY:** That's a fascinating question and I think it's one that I've thought about no small amount. I do think what's fascinating, AskMen's slogan, my employer, uh, is "become a better man". And so, just, you know, having that in the background of my professional career for the past decade, my ears perk up a little bit when I hear anyone talking about being a good man or a better man. And you hear it in songs and you see it in movies or whatnot, and you don't really see it for women, they think it's fashion.

**NIOBE WADE:** No. No. Nobody's telling me to be a better, I mean, there are unspoken messages like being a better woman, you know, take care of your skin and..

**ALEX MANLY:** Or be a better mom, maybe. The idea that there's a, like a moral component to being a man, I feel like is kind of like, at least from what I've seen, it is much stronger. I think that's fascinating. Generally, what I want is for [00:22:00] more men to kind of be aware that being a good man and being a decent person don't have to be, you know, vastly different concepts. You know, that I think like being good, caring about others and improving the lives of those around you and sticking to what you believe in, that kind of stuff, is both of a piece with personhood and also not incompatible with masculinity. And I get

into this a little bit in the conclusion like, this book is not a call for you to be weak or effeminate or whatever. It's a call for you to be, you know, strong enough and confident enough in your masculinity to incorporate aspects of femininity or of, just, you know, human personhood generally. The sort of fragile masculinity that we're familiar with becomes more flexible and becomes more open to possibility.

So yeah, I think like what we need is a masculinity that is not so brittle, I guess, and is not so threatened by like, you know, the concept of doing the [00:23:00] laundry or, you know, like being a really great dad while your wife brings home the paycheck or that kind of stuff. That there are ways to be strong and proud of yourself that don't, you know, that aren't just like, Oh, I'm the Marlboro Man, or like, I work in a mine, or like, you know, I'm the superpowered CEO. Because like, just the spectrum of choices that have been available to men for a long time in our culture has just been so narrow.

**JANET ALLISON - CO-HOST, ON BOYS PODCAST:** Yeah, and you talk about women are outpacing men in education. We've talked about that here before. Women now are better, kind of better trained for the jobs that of the future. This book is, um, it's about a roadmap for the 21st Century and that we need men to be nurses. We need men to be caregivers. And these kinds of jobs take a little bit more of the, what has typically been regarded as feminine. I'll say it. You know, it's the vulnerability, it's the care, it's the communication. But we need that. I think ultimately this book is about [00:24:00] being fluid, being flexible, being adaptive, and somewhere in there you said that "acting like a man", I'll put that in quotes, "is a choice".

## **Redefining Masculinity and Embracing Vulnerability - Beyond the Scenes - Air Date 3-7-23**

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** Because what's interesting about this whole discussion is that men are going through, "Hey, show your emotions. Hey, women can do it too." Meanwhile, women are cooking on the feminism side of the game and going, "We are girls, girls, strong girl power. We gonna march, we can do whatever we want." So it almost seems as if both sides are having two different types of awakenings concurrently that also kind of butt heads.

How much did the lack of women's rights in the thirties and the forties and the fifties? And even if you really want -- 'cause I'm not gonna put this solely on

slavery -- but I also wanna put it in the context that for a long time in America, the man had to go do the work and the woman was at the house [00:25:00] and you was in the kitchen, and maybe the man felt that he could never share because no matter what the burden of providing was passed on, he has to do it. And then we got to a time where we didn't have to live like that anymore, but men were maybe subconsciously passing on that rhetoric to their next generation and then their next generation. And by the time we got to the nineties, the idea of what a man should be was molded by what a man had to be at that time.

Someone said to me, something I thought was very profound: "Don't confuse the tactics you use to survive with the tactics you need to go on." How much does the history of gender dynamics play a role in a lot of these bad habits being passed down from generation to generation?

**TED BUNCH:** Yeah. So in a male dominated society, because that's what it is, and it's a patriarchal society, it's a male dominated society. And then you do have women who are seeking liberation because coming out of all of that in the same [00:26:00] way that in a White supremacist society, you have people of color who are seeking liberation. All of those things. These constructs exist. And there is an antiquated notion of manhood and masculinity that I think is so woven into the fabric of our society that when it's challenged, then sexism rears its ugly head, and seeks to put down what women have achieved or are doing and those kind of things, as if it's taking away from men, but it's not. It's not just this one pie and that everybody's piece is a little smaller; it's an expansion of a pie. It's much bigger than that.

So this allows men to really look at our authentic selves too, that we don't just have to be this rigid notion of manhood, that there's so much more to you and to me and to the men who are listening. There's so much more to who we are that we can now embrace our full authentic selves also, because there's things that you may have wanted to do or your son may wanna do, that the man box says, oh, no, no, no --you're not supposed to do that, right? I have [00:27:00] flowers in my picture all the time when I'm on Zoom. It took me years to accept that, oh, I can go buy flowers because I like flowers in the house. I don't have to bring them to a woman to have flowers in the house or to my wife to have flowers in the house. That actually, I'm the one who likes the color. I'm the one who likes the smell of the flowers. And it took me a while to really accept that. Now that's my authentic self. I love flowers. So now I'll go to the florist and I pick out what I want. They say, do you want me to put it in a vase for you, Mr. Bunch? No, I wanna take them home and arrange 'em. Because you know what, Roy and Niobi? I like flowers.

So there's so much that we're missing as men that these original notions of manhood, patriarchy, harms all of us. It really does. There's lots of wonderful things about being a man. I don't wanna not be a man. I don't want him not be a father. And this is not an indictment on manhood, actually. It's an invitation to men. It's not about calling men out for wrong behavior. This is about calling men into a healthy, respectful manhood.

**NIOBE WADE:** So what boys have taught me is that we've split our culture, our modern culture -- I call it boy culture, but we call it our modern culture -- has split [00:28:00] us into thinking that thinking is masculine and feeling is feminine, hard is masculine and fem, right? You get where I'm going, Roy? You get where I going?

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** We gotta marinate on that one.

**NIOBE WADE:** You get what I'm saying?

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** So if thinking is masculine, that's good. Feeling is feminine. It's feminine, right? That sounds like every argument I've had with everybody I've dated in my life. Goodness gracious.

**NIOBE WADE:** If you live in a culture that says basically independence, thinking, the self, stoicism is masculine, and vulnerability, emotions, sensitivity is feminine, you're gonna be messed up because ultimately, you are half hard and half soft as a human. And again, I'm not doing the human thing because it's my own ideology. I'm doing it, really, 'cause that's what the boys are yelling at us about. They're saying exactly what you just said, Ted. They're saying I am actually half what you call feminine. I am vulnerable, I'm sensitive, I'm emotionally intelligent. I like [00:29:00] flowers or I don't like, you know what, whatever it is. But things that have been associated with femininity. And you are trying to push that down at me and that's how I actually build relationships and friendships. So like, what's your problem? I mean, I feel like young people, honestly, Roy, have been yelling at adults for almost a century and saying, what is wrong with you people? That basically we get it. Young people get it, Ted, you know that. Young people get it all the time.

And so I think when it comes to the women's issues -- this is what I think, Roy -- I think that women, obviously -- and I definitely identify as a feminist and I'm definitely part of the feminist movement -- women are angry because for lots of different justified reasons. So I'm not diminishing that in any way. But the

reality is that we keep on seeing the symptom as the problem. So we keep on thinking that it's basically from women's, from a feminist perspective, we keep on thinking, well, it's men's problems, so if you fix men, then the problem should go away. But it's all of our problems, Roy. It's the culture that we have all created with obviously this [00:30:00] hierarchy that some men have been more influential than other men. You talk about white supremacy, et cetera, et cetera. And some women have been more powerful than other women. But basically we have created society that doesn't make any sense, where we've gendered basic human qualities.

So then that means is that women are getting mad at men when really what we should be doing is trying to change the culture. And the more we blame it on men, actually, the more men just feel attacked -- I've heard that a lot, the men just feel attacked -- when we have to see it as a collective problem.

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** Before we go to the break, I want to delve in for a second about your work that you did, where you essentially -- walk me through this -- you had 150 boys, ages 13 to 18.

**NIOBE WADE:** Well, I followed them over four years, so I followed --

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** You followed them?

**NIOBE WADE:** Yeah, I followed from 12 to 13. I followed them over four to five years.

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** Okay. How did you measure intimacy and see it slowly start to dissipate in their relationships with other boys of the same age, because you were essentially looking to see how they related and how they spoke to [00:31:00] other boys, and when did the dissipation of feeling and turning into creatures of action, when that started happening?

**NIOBE WADE:** When you listen to 12-year-old boys, they will use the language of love. Given a safe space, right? Not give 'em a safe space, they won't do it. When they talk about their friends, they say, I love him. I can't live without him. Or I want to find a friend that I could really rely on and be myself and be a real self.

So the language, it's right there in the language. It's literally, they're talking love. They're asking questions about love. They're thinking about love. Both

heterosexual love, romantic love, platonic love, all sorts of love. They're having questions about it. And if given a safe space, they actually ask it.

Then as they get a older, it's incredible. Because remember, it's the same kids, so it's the same kids over time. You start to hear this, "I don't care." Ted, you know this language, "I don't care. Whatever. It's all good. It's all good," you know, like, "No, I don't connect to someone that much anymore, but it's all good." You know, that whole pressure to [00:32:00] sound like you're totally invulnerable. So you hear it in the language. And then you also hear the anger, you hear the sadness. And then sometimes in the worst-case scenarios you hear the depression, and the sense of feeling totally isolated, and not knowing what to do about it, and a lot of anger at "why is not anybody paying attention? Why is not anybody paying attention to these basic human needs? And everybody's calling me" -- in some cases mass shooters, I've read the mass shooter manifestos, it's the same thing -- they feel like nobody's paying attention to their suffering.

## **What Does Positive Masculinity Look Like - Paging Dr. NerdLove - Air Date 4-12-18**

**HARRIS O'MALLEY - HOST, DRNERDLOVE:** One of the issues that comes up in almost any discussion around the subject of toxic masculinity, like I've said before, toxic masculinity does not mean that being masculine or being male is inherently bad, toxic, or something to be apologized for, nor does it mean that the way to not be toxic is to be feminine.

Toxic masculinity refers to behaviors and beliefs around masculinity and manhood that are seen as laudable or desirable yet in [00:33:00] reality, are actually harmful and detrimental to the individual and to society as a whole. And this can manifest in any number of ways, whether it is measuring your worth as a man by your capacity for inflicting violence, or deciding your value by your sex drive or how much sex you've had, or for that matter, the belief that anger, rage, lust, and stoic indifference are the only acceptable emotions for men to feel, and that love and vulnerability are considered to be feminizing and weak and associated with sexual desire. Just, you know, to name a few.

But like I said, non-toxic or positive masculinity doesn't mean apologizing for being a man, nor does it mean trying to be as gender neutral as possible.

There are a lot of behaviors, beliefs, and traits that are coded masculine that are very positive: honor, discipline, intellectual curiosity, compassion, generosity.



But at the same time, this [00:34:00] doesn't mean that masculine-coded traits equate to masculinity.

The point of positive masculinity isn't to just switch out one set of definitions for another; it's to expand what it means to be a man -- physically, mentally, emotionally, even socially. Part of what makes toxic masculinity so harmful is that it very narrowly defines what it means to be a man. It restricts manhood to a very limited definition that few, if any, can live up to, yet all men are essentially punished for never achieving.

It's ironic when Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* says, "Is this what a man is supposed to look like" when he's being played by Brad Pitt, who in this movie, yes, looks exactly like what a lot of men believe a man is supposed to look like, and quite frankly, kill themselves attempting to achieve.

But while it's easy to talk about what toxic masculinity isn't or what positive masculinity is, it can sometimes be a little difficult to actually picture it. And admittedly, whenever we talk about positive [00:35:00] masculinity, the mental images that come to mind are usually either Terry Cruz or Captain America. And to be fair, these are actually excellent examples of positive masculinity. But there are more ways of being a positive example of manhood than to be a big slab of beef with an upper torso, like an inverted Dorito chip, no matter how sensitive or caring they may be. There are more ways of being a good man than just being Steve Rogers.

So let's talk about a different Rogers for a minute. To an entire generation, Fred Rogers was a beloved figure from childhood, someone who invited children to be his neighbor, engaged their curiosity by teaching them about how the world works, took them to interesting places they might never otherwise see, and who encouraged them to be open and caring and honest.

Part of his message was that you were special exactly as you were and deserving of love and caring. And to children who might not fit in for any number of reasons, that was a [00:36:00] really important message to hear.

Despite being incredibly gentle and soft spoken, Mr. Rogers taught children how to live in a world that could often be confusing or chaotic or scary, and he did so with compassion and empathy. He would directly address confusing, even scary concepts -- concepts that some adults would not think were appropriate for children, like death or even the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy -- because he believed that children deserve to be treated with respect and not to be talked down to, and not to be hidden away from the realities of the

world. By directly addressing these issues, Mr. Rogers taught children how to be brave and how to confront their fears by taking things that children often had a hard time dealing with and explaining them in a way that they could understand.

And while his message was one of love and compassion, Fred Rogers never shied away from confrontation when it was necessary. Mr. Rogers stared down Congress in order to help secure funding for the Public [00:37:00] Broadcasting System. He would directly address social ills of the day, like racism and segregation. In fact, he enraged evangelical Christian groups because he preached a message of unconditional love and acceptance, and steadfastly refused to condemn LGBTQ individuals. But he did all of this in a uniquely Mr. Rogers way, with a smile and with kindness and a reminder to even those who he disagreed with or who opposed him that they were loved and special just as they were. He was never angry, aggressive, pushy, or stern. But in his own way, Mr. Rogers fought to make the world a better place.

Another great example of positive masculinity comes from the movie *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. Now, Jonathan McIntosh has a great video as part of his Pop Culture Detective series, all about Newt Scamander and why he's a hero that we need. And I don't wanna repeat everything he said. So instead, I wanna point [00:38:00] to Jacob Kowalski. Kowalski is almost the textbook definition of a stock comic relief character. In any other movie, he would be there to be the foil to the macho adventures of the manly action hero. Kowalski's goal in life isn't glory or fame or riches, or to get the girl, it's to open a French patisserie. He's short, he's fat, he's not traditionally good looking, and he's mostly there to mug for the camera and react with crazy expressiveness over the wacky hijinks going on around him. But it's that very emotional openness that is part of why the audience is drawn to him. He's in turn terrified, enchanted, saddened, or awed by the things that go on around him, but we are never supposed to believe that this makes him weak, sad or otherwise lesser. In fact, it's that openness and that expressiveness that draws not just Queenie, but us as the audience [00:39:00] to him. And this is part of what makes him stand alongside Newt Scamander as a great positive example of masculinity. He's surrounded by witches and wizards with immense supernatural power. He knows that he will never measure up to them. He knows that he will never be as special as they are. And yet not only is he not jealous of them, he's not freaked out or scared of them either. To him, what makes them different is what makes them amazing. And while he will never be capable of the same miraculous feats that they are, he is the first to step up because they're his friends and they need him, and he will do whatever he possibly can.

The same could be said about Newt Geiszler from *Pacific Rim*. He's not exactly the platonic ideal of heroic manhood. He's a skinny, twitchy, nervous intellectual. He freaks out at the drop of a hat. He is very clearly the kaiju equivalent of that kid who had way too many spiders and bugs and reptiles in his bedroom.

And while he may not have perfect hair [00:40:00] and abs that you could bounce a quarter off of, he is as critical to the fight against the Kaiju as Raleigh Becket is. Without his brains and without his almost reckless courage and disregard for his own safety, the war against the Kaiju could not be won.

## **What is Positive Masculinity: How Patriarchy Oppresses Men - Swolesome - Air Date 12-2-22**

**FINN - HOST, SWOLESOME:** Positive masculinity is whatever we want it to be. It is what men build together and model for boys to give them a brighter. Happier future, but far be it for me to leave it there and not provide some examples of some of the ways that we can do this.

I personally think that a good stepping off point is to actually examine what patriarchy has taught us and then ask how we can repurpose that into something that serves us rather than something we serve. So as an example, let's look at physical strength. Now, not all men are physically strong and being physically strong does not make someone a man.

But this is a pretty universal masculine attribute across a great many cultures patriarchy champions this trait specifically by laying the groundwork for violence. It asserts that male strength exists for the purpose of competition and dominance, and that violence is [00:41:00] inevitable because of this. This framing not only excludes men who are not physically powerful, but it leaves no room for cooperation.

And it sets up a framework for relationships that are inherently competitive and demand submission from other people. And let's be realistic for a moment here, boys. Is this it? Like is, is this what we want? Like let's assume for a moment that you actually are the most dominant guy. You are the most domineering person in any given room at any given time, and everyone submits to you.

But do they like you? Maybe you don't care whether or not they do, but I promise you that no amount of respect without actual affection is a remedy for

emotional loneliness. In this context, submission is defeat and there is no love to be found there. So how can we turn male strength into something that brings us connection rather than something that scares others away?

Well, let's ask ourselves what the pro-social flip side of physical strength might look like. Instead of masculine strength being characterized by power and dominance, we can [00:42:00] reconceptualize it as something protective and collaborative. One of the most common responses that I get when I ask people to name the first trait that they think of when they hear positive masculinity.

Is protection strength specifically for the purpose of helping other people feel safe. So many of us have this capacity and it feels really good to develop it and then reach a place where other people trust you not to be confused with trying to protect people who are not asking for it. Mind you, what I'm describing here is more setting a precedent that says you're a safe person to call upon when needed.

That is how strength can be mutually empowering. Pumping iron is all well and good. Personally, I'm a big fan, but regardless of the numbers on the plates, a much more impactful measure of your strength is how well you can lift the people around you. Figuratively, mind you, not literally, at least not unless you have permission, but this isn't just about fostering healthier relationships and helping the people around us feel safe.

This approach also frees us from the pressure of always having to be on, always having to be. Dominant and showing it, and it still [00:43:00] lets us embrace the idea of masculine strength, if that is something that we feel is important to our identities as men. The point here is that physical power does not have to be violent.

Ask any martial artist and they'll tell you. It actually takes a lot more strength to pull a punch than to follow through with it. You can celebrate being powerful and how it defines your identity specifically by applying it in healthy ways. Embracing dominance and violence is one of the ways that patriarchy keeps us subservient.

We have a lot less time and energy to self-actualize when we're preoccupied with some asinine competition and you become very easy to manipulate when your baseline is one of constantly having to prove your manhood. All someone has to do is put you in a situation where you feel it's under threat and boom, you're their pawn.

But you don't gotta prove all my guy. And if you do feel that pressure, it might be worthwhile to ask yourself where it's coming from and who it's serving, because another service we're told to give patriarchy goes back to the idea of being expendable, that male bodies are tools of violence to feed the machine owed to labor and war efforts.

This is usually smuggled into our psyches and a Trojan horse labeled courage and [00:44:00] dedication. It begins with encouragement of recklessness and acting out amongst boys, a sort of devil may care attitude. When it comes to self-preservation and consideration of others, it twists courage into compliant foolishness.

But courage is not the absence of fear or caution. Courage isn't willingness to throw your life away. Courage is being scared of something that needs to be done and doing it anyway, like say, challenging traditional gender constructs at the risk of ridicule, rather than simply looking for grandiose ways to flaunt our fearlessness, we should ask ourselves what we truly fear and how we can face it.

This is what I was trying to get at in my video about vulnerability. It is not easy to go against the tide of patriarchal dominance based masculinity. In fact, it's quite terrifying. To use a personal example, I have faced backlash just by being myself and talking about the topics that I talk about. I'm often scared to put myself out there because of this, but I do it anyway because it needs to be done because enough people have told me that it helps them.

That on [00:45:00] its own is reason enough. But knowing that I'm helping people and the genuine connections that come from that make me feel good more so than the backlash makes me feel bad. And this incredible thing happens when you just start focusing on doing the things that make you happy and defining masculinity as you would like it to be defined.

When you step outside of this dominance based patriarchal manhood that we're taught, which is that when you leave the competition, You crush the very idea that your manhood is something that needs to be defended in the first place. You can ask yourself why you ever felt the need to prove anything to a group of people who built their own identities around being defensive and judging others.

Once you've escaped this thinking, you have a lot more space to explore the fact that masculinity is whatever you want it to be. You unlock a whole lot of autonomy around what it can look like and how you can customize it to be more

fulfilling. And like I said, this does not mean you have to. Throw everything out and charge naked into nothingness with no sense of direction.

But it does mean that you unlock the ability to examine the constructs you've been given and to ask yourself whether or not they're working for you [00:46:00] or you're working for them. I'm not about to sit here and tell you that it's easy. It's not, but it is worth it. That much I can promise in some.

Patriarchal masculinity is the path of least resistance and least fulfillment. It is compliant, competitive, and imposed upon us. Conversely, positive masculinity requires boldness. It is active, courageous, and consciously chosen. So choose. If you've been playing the game and you're still hurting, stepping away isn't giving up.

It's breaking out, and it takes a lot of strength and bravery to do that. I will be speaking more about this because I think a key component here is making examples of positive masculinity, more visible archetypes to fill that space that is left behind when we throw away the things that aren't helping us.

## **Redefining Masculinity and Embracing Vulnerability Part 2 - Beyond the Scenes - Air Date 3-7-23**

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** What tools can men take to build and deepen and strengthen the connections that they already have?

**NIOBE WADE:** Normalize it. When I'm in classes, I will get a switch within four seconds -- I'm not exaggerating -- [00:47:00] I'll read a quote to 12-year-old boys that says something soft: "I love him so much" from my book, *Deep Secrets*. They will start cracking up. I'll say, "Why are you laughing?" They'll say, "The dude sounds gay." And I'll say, "Well, I didn't look at his sexuality. I'm just telling you that 80% of boys sound like that at some point in their teenage years." And they will say, inevitably, "For real?" And I'll say, "Oh yeah, for real. That's really what teenage boys say." And guess what happens, Roy? Within four seconds -- I'm not kidding -- they will immediately start talking about their own friendships, their desire for friendships. All they need is the permission to feel and the permission to ask. And once they know it's normal that they want friendships, then they can, then they know how to do it. It's natural. I wish the world could hear that the questions that 12-year-old boys ask when given a safe space, because they're geniuses. They're geniuses in terms of understanding how love works, how relationships work, how humans work. And so I just say



normalize it. [00:48:00] And then in the homes and teachers and bosses, you just gotta make it normal, so that you create spaces where friendships are valued.

Teachers, don't separate out kids that are friends. Put 'em together. Put 'em together. And then talk about how they can help each other learn the material that they learn better with each other than by themselves. So don't do that thing of "we're gonna separate you 'cause you guys are friends." It's like, no, no. Actually use that relationship to learn.

There's a beautiful study at UVA that has been replicated. The subject of the research stands in front of a hill and has to estimate the steepness of the hill with a backpack on their back. Okay? It's an experiment, a research experiment. They're standing next to a best friend in one condition, standing there, a stranger in another condition, by themselves or with someone they know who they don't know very well. Okay? So in each condition they have to estimate the steepness of the hill. You got it Roy? Those that are standing next to a best friend see the hill as less steep. [00:49:00] So what's incredible is that we actually see the world as less difficult when we're standing next to someone who loves us. We see the math problem, whatever you're doing as less difficult when you're next to someone who loves you.

So use that in education, use that in the workplace. Put people who are close together, working on teams together. You see what I'm saying? So you disrupt all the -- even at home, talk about friendships. We gotta think as parents to say, "Tell me about..." Thinking about our own friendships. Talk about it with your kids. I don't share the intimacies of my own friendships, but I talk about when I get my feelings hurt with friends. I talk about how that made me feel bad when so-and-so didn't return my text. And I wrote her three times that she didn't write back, and that made me feel bad. And then I asked them for advice; they're teenagers. So I'll say, what do you think I should do? What do you think I should say? And I do that with my son as well, by the way. And so what the message they get from this is, this is normal. This is normal. This isn't some weird thing that you have to get special help for.

**TED BUNCH:** You bring up a lot of great points and you're talking about your kids [00:50:00] and I'm a father also. They're between 21 and 33 now. But it was not unusual at all for me to ask, especially my boys, on a scale of one to 10, how do you feel today? Right? Or to have those conversations that were informal conversations around how they're doing and to really lean in and ask more and more questions. So that's really important.

To your question, Roy, for men, it's normalized that we are taught to not ask for help, to not need any help. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps, all those kinds of things. And when we do spend time with each other, it might be around going and having a drink, or it might be around a sporting event or watching a game. That's where the bonding happens. Right? And what we need to be able to do, and what's helpful, is that we really lean into the strength in vulnerability. Like I'm really going through something, and I wanna share that with you. And what men often say is, okay man, it'll get better. Let's just move on. They don't really lean in and process in the same way that women are taught, honestly, in our society, to use more language and ask more questions. Because I'm sure your wife [00:51:00] asks more questions about what you're feeling than you might ask her.

You just wanna know, "You okay? Good. Okay. Now I don't have to talk about anything else."

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** You don't ask enough questions, therefore you don't care. It's like, "I do care! I pay the bills. Don't you see this? You feel this warm heat in this house?"

**TED BUNCH:** We absolutely care, but we are not comfortable asking those questions because we've been told you don't go into that emotional space. You stay away from that emotional space. So much so that even when we go to -- and just thinking about your listeners, I bet if there's a woman listening to the podcast, there's a man in her life, her brother, her father, a man she's dating, her husband, who's going to the doctor -- she's gonna make sure she goes with him. Why? Because he's not gonna ask the questions that he needs to ask. Because even that for us, is vulnerability, right? Even that for us is like, "Oh, I don't, I just wanna get in and out." "You go to the doctor?" "Yes." Well, did you ask him about this?" "Well, no." It's truth, right? So vulnerability is a strength. It really is.

And [00:52:00] honestly, when men become vulnerable, they're respected for that because other men see that, wow, that was vulnerable and that's a strength. So it isn't something we need to run away from, and that's gonna give us a better sense of wellbeing, a better sense of mental health to really have health mentally and to be able to support everyone else along the way. And it's gonna really make us feel better too. And it's modeling it for our children as well.

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** So with all of that being said, let's end it here.

We've already unpacked ways that we can try and change the culture. What hope and optimism do you have for the future of manhood?

**TED BUNCH:** I have a lot of hope. [back and forth banter] It looks like you're not finished, Roy.

**ROY WOOD JR - HOST, BEYOND THE SCENES:** Well, we gonna see how this will grow up. You got to understand, my sample size is one. Y'all's the ones studying 150 people and writing books. I'm not writing books. I'm just raising one. He seems to be doing good so far. He's definitely in tune with his emotions, and [00:53:00] expressive about it way more so than I was at the same mile marker.

**TED BUNCH:** And that's what we need to allow, right? We really need to allow our children, like your son, to embrace and express his full range of emotions. And we need to do that too. When he's going through fear, we can say, "I feel afraid too, and this is what I do" and I wanna work through that fear. Because on the other side, no matter how it turns out, it's always good that I've worked through that fear.

So we're not saying don't push our children to confront things even though they're difficult. We want them to. But we don't want to motivate them by denigrating them or using girls or women or others to say, don't be like that, or don't be like this. Those are the kinds of things that we really wanna do. Have them express through their language what's going on.

So I have a lot of optimism about men, about manhood. I think that we've reached a point where it's clearly not working and we know that. And so now it's just a matter of time of how do we need to purge what needs to happen so that we can start [00:54:00] talking in real ways that really connect with our humanity. That's the real thing here, really connected, just as there's a racial awakening in a lot of ways, and it's difficult. It's painful. People are being triggered all the time, right? So it's difficult, but we have to get through it. And the same thing here around our own mental health and our own sense of wellbeing.

## **The New Masculinity Part 2 - ON BOYS podcast - Air Date 4-27-23**

**ALEX MANLY:** Yeah, and I mean, look like I was a product of, of a, an environment where like, I wouldn't say either my parents are sexist.

They both have fairly progressive ideas about, uh, about gender and. They've both been sort of so supportive of, uh, not just my coming out as non-binary, but also like the work that I've done over the years in terms of like looking into masculinity and thinking about it. Still do feel like I just because of, of the culture that we live in.

I grew up in a house where I was definitely consuming like a lot more. Art by men, you know, because there's more art by men sort of in the world. You know, every year when the Oscar, uh, the Oscars give like, best director, uh, to, to a [00:55:00] man again, and you're sort of like, oh, like, you know, Three women have ever won this or whatever.

Mm-hmm. That kind of stuff is always, I don't know, for me it's a jumping off point of like, okay, like who is telling the stories that we surround ourselves by? Because that has such an impact on how people think. And I've heard so many stories of like, oh, we tried to raise our kids gender neutral, but you, you know, our daughter saw a Disney movie and now she wants to be a princess.

Mm-hmm. It's like, well, yeah. What that tells us is like, stories are powerful. So like thinking about the stories that we surround ourselves with, the stories that we kind of. Are kind of take for granted, but are breathing in or whatever that, you know, that can be a really useful avenue to thinking about how people come to see their gender, how people come to see other people's gender, how people come to see gender generally, and how important it is to them.

How, how they feel like, oh, like I'm a boy. That person on screen is a boy. He's acting this way, so it's appropriate for me to act this way. That kind of stuff is [00:56:00] something that I feel like we haven't really thought about enough yet as a culture.

**JANET ALLISON - CO-HOST, ON BOYS PODCAST:** Yeah, as you're talking, I mean the, the director that comes to the top of my mind is Steven Spielberg and look at the movies that, I mean, he's got a range of movies, but it's still, it's Star Wars, it's action, it's that kind of story.

Mm-hmm. And then, you know, you hear the female directors are, Oh, she's got one movie or two movies and, um, so it's that. And it's it, as you said, it's just like, we just need to wake up to that of who is, who is feeding us the stories and ask the questions around that. And part of this too came out in the chapter about the bro culture.

Bro culture is a monoculture. Mm-hmm. Talk, talk about that a

**ALEX MANLY:** little bit. Yeah, so what I tried to get into in that, that chapter was just the, the recognition that, as you said, like the, the monoculture is a culture that's always kind of in danger, I guess, because, you know, if you don't [00:57:00] have any diversity, this is true in nature as well.

You're, you're sort of fragile, you're vulnerable, and I sort of, Talk about this through the lens of, of the frats mm-hmm. As being bro culture, you know, taken to its extreme or whatever, but just the idea that you put only guys in a room, or only straight guys, or only cis guys, or only like, you know, white guys or whatever, or, or, or the room is mostly that kind of person and you know, anyone who's not every one of those attributes is sort of a little bit of an outsider.

Then that ends up becoming, I don't know, just, just likely to produce kind of. Outcomes, that privilege those kind of people over everyone else. You know, when you have a room that's a bit more diverse, you can end up with a much more democratic and a much more interesting and a much more balanced, uh, kind of group viewpoint that doesn't necessarily that, where it's not as easy for kind of unhealthy attitudes and unhealthy behaviors to take root and to kind of spread.

Mm-hmm. It's tricky, I think because there [00:58:00] has been some conversation and I have, I have seen sort of some of the people who are trying to create a healthy, you know, new version of masculinity, saying like, we do need all male spaces just for guys to kind of talk through what it's like to be a guy. And I'm sympathetic to that.

Mm-hmm. But I think. It's also important that not all of a guy's spaces are all male spaces, you know? And that he feels comfortable being in spaces where he's maybe in the minority, you know, because like for white men, that's very rarely the case in our culture. You know, they're, they're so used to being in spaces where they feel comfortable.

Then other people, women and people of color, and queer people and and disabled people are so often used to being in the minority in, in a given room. And that totally changes. You know, how comfortable you feel, how you feel articulating your true thoughts, how likely you are to kind of rise up the ranks or whatever, if, if that's a, a thing.

So that chapter is definitely an [00:59:00] attempt to kind of interrogate the, the ways that having too much of one thing can definitely be problematic. Guys can

just end up in these situations where they're hearing their own perspective kind of. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Open back to them and reinforce.

**NIOBE WADE:** I like how you frame that just now as kind of a moderation.

Hmm. Because I do think, especially for young men in this age group, 18 to 25, you say you're talking to, you know, these are guys that have come up in the, the past 20 years or so where there has been a lot of shifts in our culture. Mm-hmm. And shifts regarding. Our expectations or experiences of gender and like, I don't know what you want me to be.

And there's some, you know, frustration and confusion. And so I do think for some of them, you know, they gravitate to other guys just to be like, can I actually say what I'm thinking about all of this here? And that can be healthy, as you said. Mm-hmm. When that is all that you [01:00:00] experience, it can become an echo chamber, which can be dangerous.

So there's need sometimes to be with people that are like you in a lot of ways, but when that is your whole world, that's

**JANET ALLISON - CO-HOST, ON BOYS PODCAST:** stifling. That's what we're seeing with social media. Your feed is all the things that you're already familiar with, that feel comfortable, that have the same philosophy that you're developing, and you don't see the different perspectives.

**ALEX MANLY:** The important thing, I guess, about an, an all male space that's healthy or one that's useful and necessary, like you said, to be around people who are like you as opposed to, uh, uh, sort of in these more diverse spaces is just, are you.

Capable of being vulnerable in that space. Is it a space that is okay with vulnerability or is it a space that encourages everyone to put on their row mask and, and be tough and either, you know, explicitly or implicitly lie about like who they are and what they're going through? The all male spaces that we [01:01:00] associate with that kind of quote unquote toxic masculinity, like the sort of.

Golf country club or the, you know, the, the frat house or whatever, you know, it's spaces where everyone's trying to like, outdo each other and like one up each other and show off how great they are. And you know, when I think about the spaces that are maybe more healthy, I'm thinking about like a, a group sort of therapy session, or I'm thinking about like, like a bunch of new dads getting



together and talking about the reality of being, uh, you know, a parent and the ways that it's changed their lives or whatever.

And those are situations where like what you're gaining from everyone around you being a guy is, you know, people who have been in similar situations with you, uh, as you and, and can speak to and understand what you're going through. Instead of, there's this sense of like, oh, like let's put down everyone who's not in this room or whatever.

It's, you know, how can we heal together? How can we be together? Mm-hmm. Part of the challenge that we face culturally is just sort of getting guys to shift towards those [01:02:00] kind of more healthy spaces where it's like, okay, like this is a space where we can be vulnerable together and we can explore like what it is we're struggling with as opposed to, uh, the opposite, which is far too often the case.

## **Why Allan Energy Is The New “Big D\_CK Energy” - Barbie Movie - Fashionistas - Air date 8-4-23**

Why does Alan have such limited screen time, yet feel like the protagonist we've been waiting for? What does his presence reveal about our definition of a good man? Does he represent the future of masculinity? Let's examine the dynamics between Barbie, Ken and Alan, and explore why this overlooked character might be the key to understanding the film's cultural impact.

What lessons can Alan teach us about embracing our true selves? The Barbie movie has the internet divided. While critics are raving, some men seem strangely triggered, is the real threat to masculinity, Barbie or Ken. And who is this mysterious? Alan representing a new vision of manhood. Ken embodies toxic masculinity at its most cringe-worthy, but the character of Alan offers redemption is can [01:03:00] the problem or the solution.

So who is Alan and why does he matter so much? Here are five reasons why Alan is the unsung hero of the Barbie movie. One, he's comfortable being different while Ken strives to fit in with the other Kens. Alan doesn't seem bothered by being an outsider. He stays true to himself even when the Kens mock him and doesn't compromise.

Just to be accepted, Alan shows men they don't have to conform to traditional masculine stereotypes to have worth. He's confident and secure even in his

uniqueness. Two, he respects women. Unlike the Kens who feel entitled to Barbie's attention, Alan treats women as equals. He stands up for Barbie and her friends without expecting anything in return.

Alan is chivalrous, not because he views women as helpless, but because he genuinely cares about their wellbeing. He's the ally that feminists have been waiting for. Three. He's not afraid of his emotions. When Ken starts crying over Barbie, [01:04:00] the other Kens shun him for showing vulnerability. But Alan encourages Ken to feel his feelings instead of repressing them.

Alan isn't constrained by traditional standards of stoicism. He knows that owning your emotions is necessary for growth and wants that freedom for Ken too. Four. He uses force mindfully. When Barbie's friends are under attack, Alan springs into action and forcefully defends them, but he doesn't default to violence in every situation.

Alan understands that aggression and physical strength can be useful when applied consciously. He's not controlled by toxic masculinity, but uses his power judiciously. Five. He's his own man. The narrator observes that there's only one Alan. While there are many identical Kens, Alan doesn't look to others to shape his identity.

He knows who he is and what he values without seeking external validation. Alan represents the inner freedom that comes from defining yourself on your own terms. [01:05:00] The takeaway. In many ways, Alan is the real protagonist of the Barbie movie. While Barbie goes on a journey of self-discovery, Alan already knows who he is.

He represents a model of confident, compassionate masculinity that supports women without needing their approval. His presence shows boys that they don't have to be Ken's to have worth. Alan May be a side character, but his influence reverberates throughout the film. So the next time you watch, keep an Eye out for this unsung hero.

The future of masculinity isn't about repressing emotion or dominating women. It's about embracing all of who you are. Like Alan, the world needs more men like him.

# Final comments on why emotionally stunted men are a social, not individual, problem

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today, starting with *The Daily Show* describing the problem of role models. *The Gray Area* looked at the right wing pitch for masculinity in Josh Hawley's *Manhood*. The *ON BOYS* podcast looked at the health impacts of toxic masculinity. *The Daily Show* explored [01:06:00] the damage caused by gendering universal attributes of humanity, like thinking and feeling. *Paging Dr. Nerdlove* compared various versions of masculine role models, including Fred Rogers. *Swolesome* explored what patriarchy teaches boys to be. And *The Daily Show* discussed some of the tools to help build positive masculinity. That's what everybody heard, but members also heard the *ON BOYS* podcast discussing the balance needed to create healthy spaces for male vulnerability. And *Fashionistas* looked at the Barbie movie and highlighted the positive masculine traits of Alan.

To hear that, and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support), or shoot me an email, request any financial hardship membership, because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

Now to wrap up, [01:07:00] I've been mulling over this episode for a bit today, thinking about what I wanted to say about it, and I think the quickest summary I've come to is this: we rightfully spent a lot of time and energy changing how men and boys talk to women, but almost no time changing how they talk to each other. And since the sort of stoic, unemotional, unfeeling character of a man was the norm before, and we did nothing significant to change that, the pattern is continuing into the next generation. Even among boys who have otherwise been raised to be good feminists, believing in gender equality and all that, they may not think of feminine traits as bad and shameful anymore. They may just think, They're not for me.

As we heard today, continuing to think of universal human traits, like thinking and feeling, as being gendered is destructive because of how it limits people. And as long as men and boys don't feel comfortable expressing [01:08:00] emotion and can't speak with each other with an emotional connection any deeper than a shared joy or grief over a sports game, we will continue to have emotionally stunted men who will be susceptible to backsliding into misogyny.

But not only that, they're the ones who will also end up being on the front lines of the deaths of despair of the future. Weak, brittle friendships based on the more frivolous aspects of life are the ones most likely to either break or simply wither away. And loneliness is one of the biggest contributing factors to those deaths of despair.

But most importantly, this needs to be understood as a social, rather than individual, problem. No one can solve it alone by deciding to change their behavior or their thinking individually. It'd be like being the one person at a party who's decided to not take out their phones in order to be more present and connected in the moment, try to [01:09:00] connect with other people. If no one else joins you in that way of thinking, and they all still get distracted by constant notifications from their devices, then your effort to form a deeper connection will be useless. And that's why having these types of conversations loudly and in public is important. It's a mechanism by which we change social norms across the board when they can't be changed one on one.

Now, I could be wrong about this, your personal mileage may vary, but my impression is that phone culture has actually taken a step back in recent years. Hundreds of articles and podcasts and millions of personal conversations about how distracting and annoying phones are has sort of normalized the idea that it's a bit rude to take one's phone out during a conversation. And frankly, you know, seven to ten years ago or whatever, that really wasn't the case., people would take out their phones, or go to a party full of people, [01:10:00] and everyone would be on their phones. Now, I think the culture has shifted a bit in a positive direction, pulling that back, normalizing the idea that like, Dude, put that away, we're here for a reason, we're here to connect with each other, right? So, similarly, hundreds of articles and podcasts, millions of individual conversations about how much better it is to be a man who's able to connect with other men about real shit in their lives could start to move the needle. And the 12 year olds we heard talked about today set a pretty good example for the rest of us. They were initially resistant to talk about anything emotional right up until they were given permission by the understanding that they wouldn't be the only ones who wanted to do it.

No one wants to be the first to make a move in a new direction when they're unsure how that move will be received by their peers. But these conversations get this sort of new idea out in the [01:11:00] zeitgeist so that it requires less and less bravery to be the one to step out of the old conventional way of thinking and into the new one.

That is going to be it for today. As always, keep the comments coming in. I would love to hear your thoughts or questions about this or anything else. You

can leave us a voicemail or send a text to 202-999-3991, or simply email me to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com). Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to our transcriptionist trio, Ken, Brian, and LaWendy, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, webmastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who already support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support). You can join them by signing up today. It would be greatly appreciated. You can find that link in [01:12:00] our show notes along with a link to join our Discord community where you can continue the discussion.

So, coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay, and this has been the *Best of the Left* podcast coming to you twice weekly, thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from [bestoftheleft.com](https://bestoftheleft.com).