

Elmore Community Services:

Flipping the Narrative Podcast: What it Means to be a Man

Podcast duration: 50 minutes

Co-Hosts: Liz Jones and Luke Jerdy

In conversation with: Josh Chandler-Morris and Conroy Harris. Conroy works for an award-winning charity helping young men to develop. Josh is a jewellery maker.

Producer: Ben Anderson, Sound Rebel

Podcast Episode Transcript

Luke Jerdy: Hello and welcome to the Flipping The Narrative podcast.

I am Luke Jerdy, one of the hosts. I am an actor, writer and teacher. And I have recently written a solo show about my experiences growing up, as a man in particular, with anger, and the pressures, societal pressures, of what being a man is and living up to those pressures.

So I am really excited to be able to talk to other men, and to Liz, as part of this podcast, and to be able to flip that narrative round and ask men what we should be doing to improve both our lives and the lives of everyone around us.

Over to you, Liz.

Liz Jones:

Hi. I am Liz Jones. I am a violence against women and girls worker. I have been in the sector for many years. I have also worked with perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual offending as well.

This podcast is brought to you by Elmore. Elmore is a community-based charity. They work with people with complex needs who fall through the gaps of the mental health services. So they take care of people, look after them, and help them through some very difficult times in their lives.

The reason we wanted to do this podcast is that we wanted to start men talking about issues that predominantly affect women. Violence against women and girls. Domestic abuse. Stalking. Harassment. Honour-based abuse and sexual violence. Because I think men have a role to help change this culture of negativity towards women, the misogyny.

So the podcast is called Flipping The Narrative because we do always ask women, "What are you going to do to keep safe?" Actually, we should be asking men, "What are you going to do to stop other men making women victims?"

Luke Jerdy:

So in this series of podcasts we are going to be talking about a wide range of issues, including how to be a good father, masculinity, cyber-flashing and pornography, amongst quite a few others. There are 10 episodes in total, but we will be covering a different subject in each episode.

And just to echo what Liz has said really. I think it is important for us as men to not just abide by the law. I think it is not quite

enough to just say, “Well, I would never hurt a woman,” or, “I would never abuse a woman.” I think it starts from simply how to be as a man.

And I think it is really important to have these conversations and find out exactly what we can do as men to be better men and to hope women feel safer and supported and better protected.

Liz Jones: Our first episode is What It Means To Be A Man, and we have got two amazing speakers, Josh Chandler Morris and Conroy Harris.

Josh has himself, growing up, felt under pressure about what it is to be a male for himself. He has gone through that journey. And he has a lived experience of being a man that maybe questions things that others haven't yet.

And then we have Conroy Harris, who has had a very full life and lots of different experiences. Currently he is the CEO for A Band Of Brothers, who work with young men who themselves are troubled by their own masculinity, their own childhoods, their own place in society.

So we feel that these two men are going to give us a very interesting conversation.

Luke Jerdy: We are really excited for you all to hear this. It is a really, really important conversation and we are looking forward to hearing your thoughts. So, without further ado, enjoy.

Josh, Conroy, welcome. It is an absolute pleasure to have you on the podcast for our very first episode.

I guess we should just dive straight in. Josh, do you want to kick us off? I just want to start by asking what being a male means to you.

Josh: Thanks very much for having me on.

I think I have always had kind of mixed feelings about it. I think growing up I had some very positive male role models in my life and I could see the positive aspects of masculinity. But, equally, at regular points throughout my childhood I had examples of what we probably would call now toxic masculinity.

I went to quite a rough school as a teenager, and I think you had to be fairly well versed in an element of that to get through it. And I went in there quite- I don't want to use the word 'soft'. Soft is the wrong word. But I was a child, and then I arrived at this place and suddenly you are expected to be a certain version of manhood. So yes, I think growing up I had very mixed ideas about what maleness means.

And I think as a child I was very open. I think I enjoyed what would be traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine together. I would play with dolls and I would play football. Or I would play with gemstones and do a bit of dance but also like rough and tumble and stuff. So I think for me it was always a

very mixed bag and I never quite felt like I fit in with the cultural norm of what maleness is.

Luke Jerdy: So I guess you are still not quite sure what being a man means.

Josh: I am a 33-year-old man now and I think things have changed over the last few years. I don't know what a young man's experience of that would be like. I would like to think it would be a bit better.

But if I went back to my school, like a normal, working-class school, would it be that different? I don't know. I went to school with three thousand kids and I think one or two of those men were openly gay, which kind of tells you how comfortable they felt deviating from the norms.

So I would hope that maybe some things like that would be a bit different now. Maybe that is slightly more acceptable. But I think there is still a kind of taboo around being anything but the stoic, hard, resilient male figure. And that is an aspect of most men, but obviously that misses something fairly crucial as well, I think.

Luke Jerdy: Yes.

Would you agree with that, Conroy? Are we still in that kind of traditional definition of a man, which is what Josh just described? What does being a man mean to you?

Conroy:

Yes, I have always struggled with this idea of what it is to be a man. Again growing up, similarly, in a very rough area in Nottingham, it was very conflicted about what it was to be, at that point obviously, a boy and what was expected of me.

And I also found another confliction around that because I was a black male. And there felt to be a very different sense of what it was to be a black male than what some of my white counterparts- What was open to them as being male.

And I struggled in that sense for many years. I felt I failed in both aspects. Because I wasn't very particularly physical or anything like that. And I got bullied for that at school. And I had to learn very quickly that if I needed to survive in the area where I lived I needed to find a way to be able to defend myself and be acceptable.

And then from that there was an extra idea that being a black male meant I needed to be even stronger and tougher than the white boys around me.

And there were these expectations around my sexuality and all sorts of things that, as I said, for years I struggled with. I just felt I never came up to par. I wasn't a proper man. I wasn't a proper male because I was conflicted in the ideas of what I was meant to be. I liked gentle things. I liked classical music. I liked being out looking at clouds.

And my dad told me very early on that if I didn't learn to fight he would hurt me. He would beat me up. And he often did. There was a lot of violence in our house. Most of it perpetrated by my mother.

And again the confliotions around all of this was something, as I said, for many years I had difficulty with. Leading into therapy. And leading into eventually when I joined the organisation that I am with now, A Band Of Brothers, where we have a very different sense of this idea of traditional masculinity.

Which for me is based upon thousands of years of expectations around what the male role was in society. Which right at the precept of humanity was about security. Defending and keeping the village, the homestead, safe.

And then that idea of what it was to be a male was very clear. The males were seen in society as more expendable. Their lives weren't as worthy as a females because they didn't have the children.

And looking after the children and the village was the traditional male role. Which for thousands and thousands of years is what imprinted that pattern within boys. We even see it now across the world.

So yes, that confliotion I think still exists largely in society of what we want from men. That has changed over the past 20 years or so and there is a call for something else to come through in the masculine. And that is what we work on very strongly within our organisation.

Luke Jerdy:

Yes. Incredibly important points that you are making there. And I guess it is like we are trying to find new definitions but

we haven't actually got there yet. So then the old definitions and those traditional meanings of being a man still pervade in a lot of senses, don't they?

And I think you spoke then about the man being the protector and the provider. And I think that completely still exists. I have recently become a father and in my head there are elements of, "I need to provide. I need to provide."

And that exists from probably, you are right, ingrained from hundreds and thousands of years ago, which was passed on and passed on and passed on.

And then there is this pressure, in a way, that you don't necessarily need to put on yourself. But I think it does still exist as a man.

Do you feel that, Josh, as well? I know you are a father as well now, aren't you?

Josh: Yes.

Luke Jerdy: Do you feel that pressure?

Josh: Yes, it is intense. I have got a four-month-old daughter and I felt it so intensely in the lead-up to her actually being born. The actual just nesting. Like trying to make everything-

I have been always fairly laissez faire about security. I suddenly

started buying alarms. I started wanted to go to Jiu-Jitsu. It was intense. And I wondered how much of that was deeply ancestrally embedded or how much of it was cultural. But yes, I feel it. And it is.

And I think unfortunately, as well, in the culture that responsibility does lie on men a lot of the time. My wife is self-employed, so she doesn't get much maternity. So suddenly there is that pressure to make sure that there is enough money coming in. And there is not really the safety net that I would love there to be to make sure that children are looked after. So yes, it is deep, and I think it is a real concern.

But also I think it is the role we are given growing up. "This is your role. You are the protector." I think in a relationship you often feel that as well, don't you? As a man, if you go out, you feel like you have to guard your partner against- I don't know. I go out less to nightclubs and stuff these days. But I remember that being real when you are in your early 20s. This intense role and this threat of violence.

Yes, and I think that is one thing I wanted to come back to. I think Conroy said it as well. I would love to not be involved in these things, but I think your experiences of school and stuff just mean that in order to be able to exist in society, to some extent, you have to play by those rules and you have to learn how to look after yourself. You do have to build some resilience and some strength.

And some resilience is a good thing, of course, but to that point where you are taking so much on your shoulders. I have seen my dad and people in my family take on so much that

they are on the verge of nervous breakdowns. And it is a very intense pressure.

And obviously we don't have the community that we once had. A hundred thousand years ago we would have borne that as a community as a whole. And now we are individuals trying to bear that weight, and I think it is a lot.

Luke Jerdy: Where has that come from, do you think, Conroy? I know we have spoken about the past, and we have gone back quite far of where it probably started, but where do you think that pressure comes from and why do you think it is there?

Conroy: Yes, that is a great question in some ways. And there are many ways to look at that question.

I am really connecting with what you were saying there, Josh, about this idea of a role presented, and an idea of how me as an individual is going to live up to that role and how I am going to play my part in what is expected of me.

I was in the forces for many years and again had that sense of where this pressure comes from. It felt very set by the societal roles that were put around me. "These are the expectations. You will be like this. You will earn like this." And I remember years ago-

It is really great to hear you guys are new fathers. I have been a fathers' worker, so babies and fathering is very close to my heart. So yes, good work, men. Be there for those children.

They really need you.

I was a single father myself. I brought up two of my children. And it was very difficult. It was really difficult. I remember taking my children to school and feeling really ignored in those days. I am 61 years old now, so we are talking many years ago. In those days you didn't see that many single fathers. And I felt I was ignored by women at the school gates. I wasn't in. And there weren't fathers' groups then. So I felt very much on my own.

And the sense that I was somehow failing as a man because here I was. And this was the strange thing. Often women would say to me, "Oh, wow. It is amazing that you are doing this. You are looking after your children. That is great." And I would say to myself, "You don't say that to a woman who has been left by their man. So how come I am getting this extra kind of [lauding 00:15:27]?" It also felt as though, that singling out, I was somehow different.

And all of that pressure around doing the right thing, being the right type of man. Media. The films we watched. As we all may agree, there was a heavy accent on violence and machismo in so many films, comics and all those ideas. And just that constant exposure to the ideas of where men are and who those men are and what they can do. We take that in. We become of our environment.

And it is those pressures. And again Josh alluded to it there in his earlier answer. How that can lead to a breakdown in mental health. I am a mental health professional. I have worked in mental health for over 21 years. And the amount of men who I

see crack and not be able to live up to those ideas. And the level of suicides and all those things. Homelessness. The levels of male disparity around those areas is massive.

So it is almost staring us in the face. It has been for a long time. That men do not have that resilience, as we imagine they do, to be able to cope with the idea of what they are meant to be doing in society.

It is the levels of men in prison. I work with prisoners now. I work in prisons often. And again a lot of men turn to crime because they feel they need to be doing something for their family. They don't have a good educational background. And this is one way. They can steal cars. They can sell drugs. And this is a way that they can contribute to their idea of being a provider and a male.

It has become twisted, in a way, of how you do those things in so many behaviours. As we see. As we see on the streets.

Luke Jerdy:

What I am interested in discussing and discovering is when does that all start? These pressures and feelings that we have to convey and expectations that we have to live up to as a man, when does that start becoming an all-consuming thing? Is it socialisation, growing up around other men? How important do you think that is in determining values and beliefs?

I know for me it took me a long while. I am 32 now, and it took me until probably 27/28 before I actually started becoming much more self-aware and started to ask myself questions

about what it means to be a man and how I can change to become a better man. But if I would have realised that a lot earlier I think I would have got rid of a lot of anger and a lot of situations that I have got myself into.

So was it the same for you, Josh? In terms of school, did you get dragged in to those stereotypes and those pressures and toxic masculinity?

Josh:

Yes, totally. I think I just never really felt like I fit in at all. Conroy said earlier about looking at clouds. Because I liked a lot of the blokey stuff as well. I wanted to be able to play football but then go and, "That is a beautiful flower." But as a man you are not allowed to do that. You are not allowed to say that.

It is interesting when you say something like that how that pressure, that culture comes in on you. When I was a kid if you would have said something like that everyone would just be like, "Oh, you are gay. You are gay."

Which is interesting for me because I think growing up I loved lots of different things and often that was the cultural approach to me. I would be called gay. Which I was always straight.

And I think I am very lucky. My mum is very, very open about embracing what are deemed traditionally feminine activities. So there was never anything off limits to me. I could play with dolls. I could play football. I could whatever. And so for me there was never like an inner conflict about it. I was always

pretty happy. It was just the outside couldn't pigeonhole that. They couldn't work out what that was.

There was quite a funny thing, actually, when I met my now wife. And I love my grandma. She is one of the best people in the world. But I remember saying to grandma, "I have met someone." And she said, "Oh, right. You have met someone have you? Is it a girl though or is it a boy, Josh?" (Laughter)

And even in my 20s people still had this idea. I think it just came from the fact that I don't think we have these examples of men who take on the whole array of human experience. And I think we all have it. The super-machismo blokes you see who are trying to fight on a Saturday night. I don't believe they don't have it. I just think it is so deeply, deeply repressed. And they have been taught to do it.

And I know one of the areas of interest for your podcast is misogyny, and I think so much misogyny comes from just not being able to face their own inner feminine.

I really like Carl Jung. And he has got this idea that in order to be a well-rounded human being you need to embrace your anima, your inner female, or if you are a woman your inner masculine. And I think that is something we miss in this culture.

And I don't think it is true of every culture, but I think this culture particularly just doesn't seem to allow any space at all for boys. From a very young age - I think toddler, even maybe before - there are very set rules you have to follow. And if you don't there are lots of punishments. Whether that is just jokes,

whether that is- I don't know. There are lots of things to keep you in line.

And why we are still maintaining that so heavily I don't really know. I don't know whether it is catching up, but I am not sure.

Liz Jones: There have been studies, actually, that show that men or young people, males in particular, who feel confident with their own inner self, so their own masculinity, whatever that might be, don't tend to be more violent, more sexist, more homophobic, all of that.

It tends to be men who are worried about their masculinity. They might lose it. Because it might not be them, but also they have to really try hard to be as masculine as that stereotype. That creates that massive conflict within them about how they should behave, what they should do and how they should be seen.

So it is really interesting saying about going back thousands of years. One of the things you didn't mention, Conroy, is procreation, because I think that pulls in to all of this. The protection, the providing and the procreation is very much seen as a male thing and brings with it its own conflicts, doesn't it?

Conroy: Indeed, yes.

And just going back again to what you raised, that really important piece around socialisation, my early socialisation, I

remember my mother was very, very dominant and very powerful in our house. Really dominant. It is quite common in Afro-Caribbean households. And, like I said, I was a gentle child, and I used to want to help her in the kitchen and want to wipe up. And she would push me away. Literally push me away. That wasn't allowed.

And when I was hit by a girl at school and it created this big lump in my head she was again very, "Don't let anybody do that to you, boy or girl. You hit them back. You are a boy. Your task is to be a boy and to be strong. You don't cry."

So I remember much of my early socialisation around the expectations of how I was to act was laid down to me. And again this isn't about blaming.

And this is why I take issue with the term 'toxic masculinity'. I really struggle with that term because it is really loaded. It is really loaded to say that something is poisonous and that poison kind of-

And the young men I work with, and I work with hundreds of young men, have done for years, they internalise the sense that, "I am poisonous. I am toxic," because it has been put on them. As opposed to the idea that something has twisted the idea of how they need to be on the streets.

And again working with young men and working with boys this idea of where they feel safe and where they feel accepted. They don't feel accepted in society. They don't feel as though society is speaking to them.

What often speaks to young working-class boys these days who are on the margins of education, on the margins of being able to hold their place in school, is gang culture, because at least they feel safe. At least they are a group of boys who accept them for what they are. They will mould them.

And I remember that as well really confusing me as a young male myself. I had been kind of adopted by a group of older black males. And they were really strong on how I should act and how I should be and not deviating in my behaviours.

These days I see a lot of what goes on as what we call grooming and how boys are groomed into these behaviours and these ideas.

And it is very simple when we turn that around and we look at what happens with young girls when they come into contact with older males. And there are no questions around that.

And yet the experiences of young boys and what I see as the grooming into particular lifestyles is massively pervasive and goes across society.

And I like the idea of what we are talking to here is opening up the narrative, because I believe we need to open up the narrative around why our society looks the way it does, why males are acting in the way they are acting and why there is so much violence on our streets.

And why there is such a disconnect between young men, older men and the needs of society. And this chasm that seems to be growing between the ideas of what is wanted from men

and what they are actually doing.

And the space between males and females. There is almost a polarisation in ideas about the two. And I think that is really dangerous for our society. This polarisation into, “If you act certain ways you are bad.”

Going back to what you were saying about the research, what I find so often in early male experiences is trauma, trauma-based experiences.

It took me a long time and a lot of therapy to start to admit the trauma in my life. And again I don't want to fully go into it here, but yes, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse. Those were also some of the things that set up who I was as a young male. And not being able to speak about them. Not being able to express my pain. And it comes out in a very-

That is why I don't like the word 'toxic' because it creeps out in other ways. Controlling the environment around me, which included controlling behaviour towards partners. Not because I was toxic. Because I was a person in pain. Because I was a person who was traumatised. Because I was a person trying to make sense of a world that didn't make sense.

Luke Jerdy:

Just so, so important to recognise that and to come from a point of understanding, rather than just labelling something as, “Well, it is toxic masculinity. Of course that is what is going to happen. You are a man. You are going to be toxic.”

And I completely with you with that term. It is such a

buzzword. And it is a catch-all term. Which I think we love to do with language. We can put so much into that particular box.

I have had it with my solo show, which is all about my experiences with anger and being a man and growing up as a man. I never labelled it about toxic masculinity once, but the minute people started they just wanted to put a theme onto it. So they would go, “Oh, well, it is about toxic masculinity. Oh, okay. Yes, we know what it is about then. Fine.”

And it is like, “No. The conversation needs to be a lot more nuanced and is a lot more complex than just going, ‘It is toxic. This is toxic masculinity’.” And I am completely with you on that one.

Buzzwords are always difficult, aren't they? Because again it goes towards the social media element of there is no nuance. There is no nuance there. You have just labelled something.

And you are right. Especially labelling something toxic rather than trying to understand the behaviour and where that has come from. And most of the time it has come from trauma. I completely agree.

My anger issues came from trauma as well. From an absent father and having a knife put to my back when I was younger and my father protecting me in the role of father. He very much would tell me stories about him defending himself or beating people up.

When that happened to me he went and threatened the guy that did it to me with violence, and then he left. So it was like,

“Okay, now he has gone I haven’t got him to protect me anymore. How do I protect myself? Well, I have to copy what he did.”

Then you are thrust into an environment with other men that have maybe been through similar things when they were young. So they are thinking that the same behaviours are okay and that is how you should behave. And that is where that socialisation comes in, isn’t it?

So yes, I think you are completely right. And I guess it is then going, “Okay, well, how do we change it? Why does it happen so early on?”

I don’t know about you, Josh, but I have got friends who have got a son. He is like three or four now I think. And already he is saying he doesn’t want to wear things that are girly. The shirt has got a little bit of frills on it. It is for a boy, but he won’t wear it because it is too girly. It is like, “How has that happened already?”

Liz Jones:

My sister had a party, a Christmas party. Just a quick anecdote. And a little boy of I think about four or five came in dressed in a fairy outfit, and he wanted to be called Annabelle. And he did this quite frequently.

And, interestingly, not one of the children batted an eyelid about it. They all took it on. Most of the adults were okay, but there were a couple who felt it was very odd that a little boy wanted to be called Annabelle dressed in a fairy outfit.

But I just thought, “That socialisation when they are really little, don’t really understand. Where is that socialisation coming from?”

Luke Jerdy: Yes, interesting that the kids were okay with it, because I have got a similar story of a friend of mine with her son. Took him to Frozen. And he loves Elsa. And when he was in the queue and all the girls were dressed up as Elsa he said, “Oh, can I put my dress on?” She said, “Yes,” so he put his dress on. And then all the girls laughed at him.

So very interesting that the kids you experienced didn’t bat an eyelid but the kids he experienced all started laughing at him. It is just another example of how has it come in that early?

Josh: It is deeply embedded in everything though, isn’t it? This strict idea of what is boys, what is girls.

And I think it is interesting. I do think probably kids don’t have the same connotations. They don’t have those embedded structures in their mind. So everything is just play. There is no idea that, “If I am going to be Annabelle for the day that means I have to be Annabelle forever, and now I am labelled a cross-dresser or trans or something.” It is just play, isn’t it?

And I think so many boys I know would never have been allowed to do that, and I wonder how that repression feeds into later life and what happens with that.

But it is so hard. I think even as a parent if you decide, “I am

not going to be like that,” they are going to watch television at some point. They are going to go to school. They are interacting with kids that are socialised by their parents, who may well have these kinds of beliefs, that there are very strict rules about what a boy does, what a girl does. It is so deeply embedded I struggle to see-

There is a gradual change. There is a gradual change, definitely. But I don't know. It is hard to see how it is going to be overcome anytime too soon.

Coming back to the labels, one thing that I think is really important is we do have this tendency now to just label everything.

And I think one thing that would have been great for me as a kid is just understanding that everyone is on this kind of spectrum and nobody fits into any category. Whether that is sexuality, whether that is interests, whether that is masculinity, femininity.

I think we are so keen now to fit everything in a box. Actually just telling people, “Wherever you lie on that spectrum is fine, and you can play with it, and it doesn't mean you are committing to something.”

Yes, I don't know. It is hard. I don't have an answer.

Conroy:

No, you are right. There isn't a simple answer because we are talking about a complex situation. And I really applaud you there, Josh, for not trying to come up with an answer. Anyone

that says they have the answer to this, walk away. It is not that easy. We are in a debate at the moment. Society is changing.

One of the things I really applaud from the LGBT+ community is this idea of questioning gender roles, questioning binary ideas of humanity and human beings. And although it is comfortable for many of us I find it uncomfortable myself.

I think it is important that we are in the question and stay curious about all these things you are talking about. Where these things come from, what is our socialisation around these things and how it affects society overall. Which is why debate like this are really important.

Also for me one of the big things is around racism and how that is pervasive. And, similarly, children aren't born racist. They don't have those ideas. So it had to come from somewhere. Although children do recognise difference, it is not in terms of discriminating against difference. It is in terms of noting there is difference.

And it comes later on, when it is like, "Don't play with girls," or, "There is something wrong with the darker-skinned-" It goes both ways. Or, "The lighter-skinned people." Again that is starting to be put on children and young people at very early ages, when we are just formulating ideas of self and right and wrong.

And because it is so wide it is the debate that is important and staying in the question and being open in the question.

In my role, with the young men I work with, I work with young men who have been radicalised by the far right. I work with young men who have been radicalised by Islamic ideas or other ideas.

Trying to bring those two parties together to see that what they have in common is more important than the idea of their difference, and giving them space and the tools to be able to hold themselves in those debates or those questions, is what I think is the important thing.

Society is changing. Something is happening around us. Let's stay with the idea that something is happening. There is a change. We need greater freedoms for more people. We need less sense of oppression for minorities and for women.

And I love the way you talk about that oppression, Josh, because for me where people feel oppressed in their ideas they go back to the familiar, in my judgement, and that familiar is the old way of control and violence and domination. That is the old way. We need to start moving beyond that familiar that people go back to as that safety net.

We are seeing it now on a macro scale with countries divided against each other and getting ready to war because of posturing and need and taking. And it is like, "No. What about the people who could be damaged here? The ordinary, everyday people trying to live."

If we stick to these ideas that going to control and domination is what brings survival I think the planet is what is going to suffer the most, as we are seeing.

And that is what I see is the real danger in this, that we are missing the crucial bit. That while we are entangled in these ideas of difference and wrong and right and, “Them lot need to be brought to book,” and, “These people need to be cancelled,” we are missing that collectively the planet is falling to pieces around us.

Luke Jerdy: Do you think it is about redefining gender as a whole or is it more about redefining masculinity and what that means?

Conroy: Gender as a whole. Masculinity is only one part of this.

I have lots of female friends, and again often they have been brought up in a restrictive idea of what it is to be a woman, a female, and what is expected of them.

We see that very much with pornography and the propensity of porn. Lots of young girls watch porn. Not because they want to like it. Because they want to see what it is they are meant to be doing, what is expected of them by males. And who sets that agenda?

So again this whole idea of expectations of gender roles is the thing that I believe we really need to question.

Liz Jones: Really we should be tackling also discrimination and actually celebrating differences. As a society we are not very good at that. Men who have a certain view of women don't celebrate

women. They see them as objects. And it is the same with race. It is the same with people from the LGBT+ community.

We make judgements, quick, snappy judgements to keep ourselves safe, but then we make huge judgements on everybody else. And that is what we need to get rid of. We need to celebrate more, I think.

Conroy:

If I can just go back to a time in my late 20s. I had gone through a series of really difficult relationships, and I realised there was something about me and how I turned up in relationships.

And for quite a while I stepped back and had a real deep examination of my personal attitudes towards women and this objectification, and how I as a man was turning up with expectations that you as a woman should da, da, da, da. And, as I said before, it took a lot of work, personal work, to start to unpick that stuff within myself.

And that is what I am interested in, is giving people the space where they have these unhealthy attitudes. As you have talked to, Liz. And they are unhealthy attitudes. How do we give young boys and men the spaces and environments where they can unpick those attitudes of what women are supposed to be and what they are supposed to do for you? Yes, it is not good.

I don't know what you think about that, Josh.

Josh:

Yes, I don't know. I was just thinking about judgement more generally and how- I don't know. I guess the people most prone to judging others in life generally have harsh judgements of themselves. And I think probably these expectations of what it means to be female very much come from [a sense of a 00:39:27] constriction.

But also I was thinking about what you were saying, Conroy, about everything else, race and class and everything, that feeds into this.

And I think one thing I find quite worrying is that there are so many young, particularly white men turning to things like the far right or these misogynistic- I mean I don't know much about the men's rights activism. I don't know whether any of it is legitimate. But a lot of it seems to be pretty right-wing and vaguely misogynistic.

And I guess the question that arises for me is why is that happening? And then I look at my own schooling, and it is like there are so many young men that are just left out. They are poor. There are no expectations of them.

I always think back to my careers advice. We did this computer software careers advice thing. And it said, "Your dream career is a cleaner." Which is fine. There is nothing wrong with being a cleaner. But it is like that is the highest expectation for you as a working-class 12-year-old boy.

Yes, I can't help but think all these things are deeply, deeply intertwined, and if men were somehow freer and more balanced then these expectations of women would be

different.

I think you are always going to have your psychopathic person who goes out and does horrible things to people. But it is so deeply embedded it has got to be something more than that.

So why is there this deep sense of rejection for so many people? Why do we seem to have this underclass of men that turn into these pretty hateful ideologies now?

And why are so many men so challenged by the feminist movement and the way that things are changing in that sense? What is it they feel they are losing? What power are they losing? It seems like the men that have the least power already are the ones that seem most challenged by this.

I am going off on a tangent now, but it is a bit like the Brexit thing, isn't it? A lot of people that were most outraged and most wanted us to leave Europe were these people that actually were probably going to be worse off under that kind of system. It is just this way of venting some deep anger or rejection or something.

Again I am providing no answers. I am just going off on a tangent. But I do think we have got a whole section of society that are ignored, and I think class probably ties into that somewhere. And race, obviously. I think Conroy spoke much more eloquently than I can on that. But I think they will tie into each other.

Luke Jerdy: I think, essentially, you are almost providing the start of an answer there, Josh. I think what was really great about what you said was about people that judge others are actually the ones that are probably judging themselves a lot. And I think you have got to clean your own house first.

And I think looking within and sorting your own feelings out and improving your own self awareness and how you treat yourself as a person. If you are kind to yourself you are probably going to start being kinder to other people. And I think that is really, really important.

It certainly was for me. It was like once I sorted myself out and I looked within then that had a knock-on effect with how I treated other men, other women. And I think that is really important, isn't it?

As you were saying, Conroy. How we view women. And as a young man how I viewed females has changed a lot over the years. I wonder was there a specific point that that changed for you or did it happen gradually in your relationships?

Conroy: Kind of gradually and then escalated when I realised, as I said, in relationships there was something wrong with me. I had entered the mental health field now and I saw anger issues and I saw my propensities for controlling behaviour. For all the people around me but especially in relationships. And I started looking at, "There is something unclean about how I turn up."

Luckily, I was in a situation where I had people around me that gave me the heads-up and lead as to how I could start to look

internally at where that knitted from. And again it traced back to childhood trauma.

I was sexually abused by girls, the older girls, as a child, a five-year-old child. And from there that sense of me being powerless and not having power in those situations created this kind of twist in my head that I was just a sex toy for older girls. And that really set something up in me.

And coming back to what you said, Luke, about Josh starting to provide the answer. You are right. This idea about hurt people hurt people and what happens when we look at young boys. And I have to say this. If we had the same levels of failure in education for young girls as we do for boys there would be a national outcry.

And yet I speak to some of these boys. They feel as though nobody cares that school doesn't work for them. They feel nobody cares that their psychological unwellness and issues around ADHD, bits of autism, and all these other things that affect them, their inability to stay present at school, is ignored. They are not wanted. The message they get is, "It is about girls getting to the top. It is about girls going to university. You are not wanted in this society as you are."

Blue-collar work we know over the past 20 years has slipped away, industrial work. We are going to more softer employments. And unless people reach higher levels of education they are unable to join in with this new way of working and being. Again society almost closes the door.

And they are looking for other ways to be, and unfortunately a

lot of that is criminal behaviour. That is the way out they see. And this is me just talking anecdotally to young men. “What are your attitudes based on?” “It is all about girls, isn’t it? It is all about women.”

And this idea that the powerless then look to find power where they can see it. Which is why we see so much awful misogynistic behaviour within a lot of gang culture, because the oppressed will look for someone else to oppress. And the less power people feel they have, as you alluded to, Josh, they look for ways of lashing out.

Which is part of what I see behind the Brexit debate and various other things. And turning to some of these groups because you are amongst likeminded individuals. It is a warm, fuzzy feel that, “They care. They have got me. They have got an angle on why I am a victim.” And remember most of these young men feel like victims of society, and they are acting from that place.

Luke Jerdy:

Yes, I completely agree. It is great. All three of us are very much on the same page, aren’t we? Which is great as three men.

(Laughter)

Josh, what about you and your relationships with women? Have your views changed over the years or have they stayed constant from being a young man to where you are now? You are still a young man of course.

Josh:

I think I always felt very liberal, but the older I have got I have realised that there were things embedded in there that I was kind of blind to. Do you know what I mean? I feel like there were blind spots. I am struggling to think of examples now.

But yes, especially through I think relationships generally is probably one of the most healing journeys any of us can go on if it is- Well, or it can be traumatic as well, obviously, but it can be a very healing thing.

And I think being challenged in a relationship you realise that these things are so deeply embedded that occasionally you just haven't even taken them onboard.

And certainly, yes, I think when Conroy was saying about expectations of what a woman is. Even when you don't think you have expectations. And then you are like, "Oh. I want this particular thing." And I think a lot of men have a sense of entitlement, whether it be around sex or- Yes, a lot of these things that are deeply embedded in our culture.

So yes, I think it is a continuous journey. I don't think you can navigate your way through our culture without absorbing some of those.

And I think probably similar to the discussion that has happened with race, where a lot of people who feel quite liberal are going, "Actually, is there some element of racism in my thinking?" I think men have to do the same thing.

And I think examine that inner voice. I think we have all got this inner voice. I remember thinking, "Who is that?" When it is

saying, “Oh, you have to be tough in this situation. You have to do these things.” What is that? Or, “My girlfriend needs to be this,” or, “She should be more like that.” It is like, “What is that? Who is that? Is that you?”

And I think a lot of people get to an age without ever having done that. They just assume that is truth. And actually it is not. It is deeply ingrained cultural narratives that I think we have to be aware of and unpick.

And it is a humbling experience, which I guess runs contrary to our idea of masculinity generally. None of us like to be humbled, do we? There is this prideful attitude of being right. I think that is definitely [when in a 00:48:56] relationship, being right all the time. I think that is one I have had to overcome. Not trying to win. So yes, be willing to be humbled I think is a journey I am definitely still on.

Luke Jerdy: You are right. Keep questioning. Keep learning. And I think you are right. If you are coming from an aspect of, “Oh, well, that is not me. I am very liberal, and I am very good as a man, and I know what it means to be a man.” And actually can you keep questioning that and listening to that inner voice? I think that is such good advice.

Conroy: Totally. I am not sure needing to be right is a particularly masculine thing. (Laughter) I think that is much more human.

Josh: Yes, maybe you are right. (Laughter)

Conroy:

Going back to what you said, Luke, I really like that idea about cleaning your own house up. I do a lot of work on my own sense of self.

My present partner, she has a disabled daughter. And really examining that relationship and what was going on for me about it and my attitudes I suddenly came across this whole wave of stuff. This unconscious bias I had around ableism and who was allowed to-

And I realised that ableist idea of who was allowed to in society also fed into a real sexist streak inside of myself growing up going, "Well, women aren't allowed to drive trucks. Why are there women driving trucks?" Or, "Those women bus drivers."

And just little floaty ideas that were sat inside of me and were just part of my background way of knowing. I suddenly was able to open up from this ableist point of view and go, "Ah. Bloody hell. I have these expectations that are just embedded that I don't even question."

And having the space to question and a safe place to bring those attitudes out, put them on the table, has given me the opportunity to start going, "Wow. No wonder I turned up like that. No wonder I have had this behaviour." You know?

And again having an open and willing partner calling me out on some of those urges and saying, "Do you realise how you have just been?" And it is just being open to that.

Because I really like this idea of, “I am not right. I am on a journey to learning.” And if more people can accept that around race, class, all these ideas, sexism and all these, that we need to be on a journey.

Nobody can agree that how women have been treated throughout the years has been good or right for society. So what is my part in that?

In my judgement we all need to ask ourselves that. “What is my part in upholding the power structures that are around that actually discriminate against people? Whatever they are. And actually don’t lead to my life being better.”

Because if men’s lives were so good having all this power why aren’t these figures about homelessness, mental health crisis, suicide, all those things-? Why would they be there if being on top was so healthy for us men?

Liz Jones:

On that note, can I just say thank you ever so much.

You are right. There is no real quick fix for this. There are no solutions that jump to mind. But what there is is us starting to talk, open up, feel confident that we can talk about these issues and be accountable for our own behaviour. It is really important as well.

So can I thank you both ever so much for coming today. It has been incredibly helpful and really interesting.

Josh: Thank you for having us.

Conroy: Thank you, Liz. Thank you, Luke.

Luke Jerdy: Just to echo that, I think although we haven't got the answers - and you are absolutely right, it is such a nuanced, complex debate to have - I think that we finished on a couple of excellent pieces of advice there from Josh and Conroy. And I feel like if we talked and talked and talked and talked we may well start to come up with some answers.

And I think that is absolutely right, Liz. The more we talk the more we do it. I wish we were a long form, four or five-hour podcast. (Laughter) Because that is what it needs, isn't it? But in the limited time that we have had it has been so rewarding for me. And I am sure for Liz as well. And our listeners. So thank you so much, Josh and Conroy, for your time.

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