



# PREVENT. RESIST. SUPPORT.

## Episode 15: Masculinity, Masculinities

with Wil Prakash Fujarczuk



University  
of Windsor

Office of Sexual Violence Prevention,  
Resistance, and Support

### **Prevent Resist Support Podcast**

### **Season 2 Episode 14: Masculinity, Masculinities with Wil Prakash Fujarczuk**

Anne Rudzinski: Hi everyone, I'm Anne and this is Prevent Resist Support, a podcast by the Office of Sexual Violence at the University of Windsor.

Music: I got your back my dear and I know that you got mine. I feel that hope and fear but I know we'll hold the line. Keep your head up. Keep your hand out when your breath is feeling short. Prevent, Resist, Support.

Anne: Hey, everyone, so today we get to chat with Wil again. Wil has already visited us for one podcast episode in Season One. Wil's first episode with us was about men and sexual violence, and specifically male survivorship and how sexual violence affects men and some of the myths we have about sexual violence and men. Today, Wil has returned to chat with us about masculinity and masculinities. And what does that mean? And you know, what is how do we think about masculinity? So just as a refresher, Wil is basically the me at McMaster. Wil does all of the sexual violence prevention education at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. And again, this is Wil's second episode. So listen to Wil's first episode if you haven't already.

Awesome, welcome, Wil.

Wil Prakash Fujarczuk: Thank you. Thanks for having me back.

Anne: We're so excited to have you back. Our last episode that we did with you was so wonderful. And we're just really excited to have you here again today. And today we're chatting about masculinity.

Wil: So much to unpack, so much to talk about, I'm really looking forward to our conversation.

Anne: Me too. So let's start with just like a definition. How would you define masculinity? What is masculinity?

Wil: Yeah, that's a tough one. And I sat and thought about my answer to this question before and didn't come up with anything beautiful, or succinct or inclusive. I know, obviously, a lot of us know that masculinity is not necessarily synonymous with men. So all folks can experience masculinity or have masculine elements. But this is something you know, this is a question I've thought about for a long time, what is masculinity? And not that it's the same question, but also, what does it mean to be a man? These are two questions I've thought about basically my whole life, even before I guess I could put them into those kinds of sentences. And I remember at one point, even, I think it was like 2013. So we're coming up to a decade ago. And I went around and asked a bunch of guys like, what does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be masculine? And no one had answers for me that were satisfactory, because anything that they said, I was like, well, anyone can be those things. And why is that this or that? So I'm sure if we look into, and I'm not a historian or a history scholar, but I feel like if we look into history, we can see like different notions of gender. And for me, it's a lot of the time just what's arbitrarily determined to be masculine or feminine and a given time. I mean, if we look into things like high heels, that's considered very femme and not masculine. Right? But if we look into the history of that, we know that high heels were invented for men, right, so let folks look that up if they're curious. So sometimes, I wonder is masculinity? Are we just defining it as not femininity? Or is it its own thing? And I think if you ask different people, you'll get different answers. So I'm excited though, for our our conversation to get a bit more granular and explore different aspects of masculinity because this like big question of what it is, how do I define it? I have a really hard time with to be to be totally honest.

Anne: I just love that you asked all these people and all these men specifically, like what is masculinity to you? I feel like I would watch that as a short, like, I wish that was recorded. And I want the answers. I want to know.

Will: I want Billy on the Street to do that. I don't know if you've seen Billy on the Street, but he's hilarious. And he just goes up to people in New York with a microphone and get goes, Miss for \$1, and ask the question, and he's quite comedic. I feel like he'd he'd do a really good take on on that. So we can look at Billy on the Street. And let's let's do it. Let's do it.

Anne: We can make a Canadian one, we should just do Wil on the street.

Wil: I love that. I love that. I'm just gonna go around Mac and do that. So.

Anne: I love that. So then, in my class, because I teach the 3500 Bystander class here at the University of Windsor. We've had this really interesting discussion about the terms that we use to describe when masculinity is unhealthy or negative. And I know in our question list, we use the phrase toxic masculinity, but we've also tossed around the phrase hegemonic masculinity, which I think means something maybe slightly different. So toxic masculinity, unhealthy masculinity, hyper masculinity. Which of these terms do you like? What does it mean to you? And you know, what does that look like for masculinity to be unhealthy?

Wil: I don't know if I have a preference one way or the other, and I sort of calibrate the language that I use to who I'm engaging with. And so, on a podcast I have, you know, it's like who's listening to this, I have no idea where this might end up. So it's hard for me to make that calibration call, right? But I know that in some, in some cases, based off, you know, an initial interaction with someone, I might know that talking about toxic masculinity can be done without me saying the term toxic masculinity. And sometimes it's a lot more helpful to not actually name it. Often naming things is really helpful, so I think there is so much power to that. But it's a loaded term in that people have expectations around what it means. And then a lot of my work engaging men, I'll sometimes just be upfront about asking, like, what are some blocks for other men to come to a session like this? Like, why did you choose to

come today? And why did other men choose to not come today?, and a lot of folks say that they think that when we talk to men about masculinity, that it's automatically going to be about shaming them as people. And so I think sometimes there's an, I'm going to call an incorrect association with toxic masculinity and shaming men. Right? That's not what I mean by that. But that's where people's minds go. And so as an educator, it's always important for me to have that calibration piece and go, is this gonna help or hinder the learning process? What's my goal out of this interaction, because we need to explore unhealthy modes of masculinity and, and for me, all of those pieces are about expectations, often based on our gender, about how we should be what we should like how we should react to things, the emotions we are or aren't allowed to have, that oftentimes result in us diminishing, belittling, closing off parts of our own selves, and then closing off ourselves to other people. And that can often then translate into some some real harm, some real violence. So that's, that's what I think we mean, we're talking about in general with all of those terms. And then yeah, which one's my favourite? Or which one do I use? Again, it sort of changes moment to moment.

Anne: No, that makes so much sense. I feel like that's the answer we arrived at in class. But I knew that my students would probably like to know if you had a preference or what you thought. So thank you for answering that. I think one of the things that's really helpful when we talk about masculinity to highlight that, you know, we don't hate masculinity, we're not critiquing all men. It's to talk about positive masculinity. And what are some of those examples of like, positive or healthy masculinity? So what does positive or healthy masculinity mean to you?

Wil: For me, and this is, you know, kind of a little nitpicky thing, but I really like actually pluralizing masculine to masculinities, which maybe sounds..

Anne: Oh yeah!

Wil: ...[inaudible] to some, because part of to me what is harmful or toxic about certain kinds of masculinity, you know, and that's going to change context to context, culture to culture, is is like the way that it's defined, right? So a lot of folks are familiar, perhaps with the man box. And I'd encourage folks to watch Tony Porter's TED Talk, A Call to Men, if

you're not familiar with it, or just Google Man Box, there's some interesting stuff out there. But it's a lot of what we're supposed to be as men in this, you know, box that's very clearly defined. As soon as we step outside that box, often we get called names, typically associated with women or queer folks, that push us back inside that box, right? Where people react in certain ways when we step out, to make sure that we're staying in that box. And oftentimes, the things inside that box aren't themselves inherently terrible. It's not terrible to like sports, it's not terrible to have a beard or, you know, be muscular. There are some things that are harmful in there, of course, like the idea of violence against women or violence against queer trans folks. But a lot of those pieces aren't themselves harmful. What's harmful is that box on the outside and saying that this is what you have to be. And so for me, I like masculinities, because it kind of liberates that idea where it's like, it's up to you to like, define what masculinity might look like for you. And how I want to be positively masculine, I suppose, might be different than the next person. And that's totally fine. So it's not about redefining, it's about like undefining, if that makes sense. Right? It's about getting rid of that box completely. There was a great movie. What was it called? Ferdinand I think, it was like an animated kids movie about a bull. And you can see it was such an obvious metaphor for masculinity because you see the dad bulls telling their son bulls to like, like bull up or something, which is obviously a play on like, man up. And then there's this one bull who loves like flowers, right? And like it's not like wanting to be aggressive, the way he's supposed to be as a bull. And at the end, the sort of like, villainous character or villainous bull is like, what? So I'm just supposed to go around smelling flowers now? And Ferdinand, says like, no, that's my thing. Like, you can do what you want. It's just that you don't have to be all of these things that we were taught to be. And so I think that demonstrates this idea of masculinities that, that it's different person to the next. And that's totally fine. And more than fine, it's actually kind of wonderful and liberating.

Anne: Yeah, I just I like that it's about choice. That's, you know, you can still choose to like sports, because you like sports, but you shouldn't have to like sports, because it's this rule that you have to like sports to be masculine or to be manly. So I love that distinction. Awesome. So I think that one of the things that I would really love to chat about is what are

some of the rules that we see for men or things that align with, you know, a masculine presentation? What are those things that are inside of that man box?

Wil: I think there's a lot of stuff that we see. And it's something I've been thinking about so much these days with, with my new nephew, who was born just a couple of months ago, and just seeing how folks interact with him, right? And how often so many of us don't even know how to interact with a baby, unless we know what sex it was assigned at birth. Right. And so for folks who often don't think that there are these rules, I kind of point to that direction that like folks get frustrated or angry or just don't even know how to relate to this human without knowing essentially, what genitals they have, right? And so we see those rules put on us from such a young age. We see, you know, parenting is such a highly gendered thing we see, like, still the blue pink dichotomy. I kind of thought that was like starting to be over, and then look at like, items for babies, and you still see it quite a lot. We see this expectation that, you know, you can't express any emotions, except maybe anger or hunger, right, or being hangry, I guess it for merging them together. We see expectations around the way that we can or can't be vulnerable, right? And a lot of a lot of men, as soon as they start to be a little bit vulnerable, get shamed for that, get mocked or belittled. Right, we see things like that we're supposed to, like, you know, the obvious sports, beer, like all of those kinds of pieces. And I think what's important to note is that these rules are put on from everyone, from folks of all genders often I know, in my own life, I can think of a lot of a lot of women in my life who impose those rules onto me.

Anne: I just think it's so interesting to think about, I have a co worker, and she's a queer woman, she's been really trying to raise her daughter without a lot of gender. She's got this one daughter who's in school now and these two new little babies, and it's very exciting. But it's funny, because you know, they have these twins, and one is a boy and one is a girl, and they'll dress them kind of interchangeably in whatever they want to. And they've noticed that their their older daughter who I think is four now, I'm really bad at knowing how old children are. So if you're listening friend, I'm really sorry, I don't your child is. But she is delightful. And I love this story that, you know, she was really kind of okay with the

babies wearing whatever. And then she was in school more and more. And now that she's in school, she's coming home and saying, well, he can't wear those, those floral pants because he's a boy and boys don't wear flowers. And so I think it's really interesting that, you know, she was really accepting of it when it was just them in their home. And now that she's going out into the world and getting more of those influences, that's showing up.

Wil: And what's interesting there too, is like, you know, for for me, for example, I have this really nice snapback like flat brim cap that's like very floral, and I get a lot of positive comments on it. And I always wonder like, what if I was wearing pants with this print? And how would that be accepted or not? I mean, the thing is, it's not even an option really because unless I'm going to maybe some like high end boutique in like Toronto or Montreal like I'm not finding pants with that pattern anywhere in Hamilton, I don't think, right, so it's not even an option and so often there's like when there is room for those kinds of things, it's through very specific socially acceptable manners. You know, I used to wear ties everyday when I was a science teacher, and I have this like hot fuchsia pink tie that I would get so many compliments on and I would get compliments on it from a lot of like the straight guy teachers, and it was so interesting because again, I wondered if I had a shirt that was this like bold hot fuchsia pink or if I had pants or another article of clothing that was like this, how would that be received? Would it be told that it's too much? But when it was through this, like, masculine approved garment, like a tie, it was okay. Right. And so there's like, sometimes flexibility, but only in like, really restrictive kind of ways. And so that's something that I've picked up on a lot in my own life.

Anne: Yeah. And I think in some ways, there's also like more flexibility for young children.

Wil: Mhm.

Anne: In some ways, young children that are that are girls, because I think girls are allowed to play with the trucks and you know, all of those things. But when the young boy plays with dolls, or plays with like the kitchen set, there's pushback.

Wil: Yup.

Anne: And so I think there's a little bit maybe more policing of young boys than there is of girls.

Wil: There is. And so that makes me think of a couple of things. One is that like, it's okay, like, at first when they're like newborns, and then there's an age where like, there's a comment made by a family member, or like, it's like, okay, you're a certain age now. And like, this is no longer acceptable for you to play dress up in a dress, even though it's literally just fabric cut in a different way. Right. And the second thing it makes me think of is a quote, who I can't remember who said it. But it was really brilliant about how achieving gender equality or gender equity, it's not something we'll reach when we start to treat our daughters like our sons, but our sons, like our daughters. And it made me think about my friends who have little girls who push, like, don't push, but encourage or support them if they want to do something like science or this or that. Right. But what is it like for boys to navigate wanting to take dance class, for example? Right? And so we're starting to see not that we're in a perfect world, obviously, with what women are and aren't allowed to do or what kinds of harassment they experience in certain domains, for sure. But I think you raise a great point there about like, yeah, about the lack of choice there for a lot of men, and how we get so shamed for taking on traditionally feminine roles, or jobs or hobbies.

Anne: Yeah, so I think that leads nicely into our next question, which is, how do men experience masculinity? What is that experience like to be told that you can't express emotions, or that you can't play with certain toys, or that you have all these roles that have to exist inside of this box?

Wil: So when I think about this, I think about all of those external pressures that come to us. And even if we have really great parents, like, it sounds like, you know, the way your friend has been raising their children very intentionally, then we see those pressures coming from school or from media over time, just interacting with the outside world, right. And often, those pressures and expectations become internalized. So for me, I remember, you know, one day being out shopping with my mother and my sister, and I picked up a pink shirt. And I had one pink shirt,



literally one pink shirt already at home. And being told that like, Oh, don't you already have enough pink shirts? And I go look at my wardrobe, and they just like, even to this day, I see like so much blue, and black and grey. And I think of myself as a pretty colourful person. And so the way that I've internalized those things, and the way that I choose clothes, and the way that I express myself day to day, has been so influenced on those kinds of comments throughout my life. You know, for for me, and I won't speak for others. For me, the way I experienced masculinity as a guy growing up, as a queer guy growing up, I think about compensation a lot of the time, where when we deviate from expectations, we feel this need to compensate in other aspects of our lives. So when I was in grade 12, I had a couple of things going on, I was coming out to friends and family for the first time, I was also deciding on a career path, or at least what I would study in post secondary. And I was thinking about biology or voice. And I remember a phone call with one of my best friends at the time, we would sit and talk for hours. And I said, I think if I go with the whole gay thing, then I'm going to go into science. And she was like, Wil, you can't, that's not how it works. Like you're not choosing to be gay or this or that and like you're allowed to choose, you know, a path based on what you want to do, or or it can even be on other factors, but it doesn't have to be this compensation factor. Right? Like it doesn't have to be this like, well, I'm already deviating from masculinity or breaking the rules in this one sense. Therefore, in any other sense possible, I need to to compensate, I saw that in the way that I just started wearing, like jewellery and rings. And that's something that I pushed away from myself for such a long time because I was like kay I'm already so obviously not masculine in certain regards that any opportunity to be more masculine, so accessorizing or not accessorizing, was an appealing thing to me because it was like, okay, at least that's giving me a couple of points on the on, like the masculinity chart or expectations, right. And it starts I mean, as we've already discussed from such a young age, I remember doing a boy box activity. So basically the man box with a group of 8 to 12 year old boys many years ago when I was working in nonprofit, and I asked the boys how they might respond to a guy friend if he's crying. So going outside of that box, right? And this one, boy, he must have been 9 or 10. He just like lightly punched me in the arm. He said, I would go up and punch him and tell him suck it up princess. And I was like, whoa,

this young boy at like, like, you know, 10 or under already has gotten the message, even if it was a joke. Like he's he has that message. It's in his head that like if a boy goes outside this box, or demonstrates any kind of vulnerability, I as a friend, I'm not there to support him. I'm there pushing back inside that box, using physical violence and putting down women in the meantime, right talking about suck it up princess, right. Like, there's so many things going on in that one story that I think demonstrate the way that like boys experienced those expectations of masculinity. One thing for me that's been really liberating. For almost three years now I've been growing out my hair. And so I know folks won't see it. But I've got like, pretty like, decent length, like, curly lock hair going on. And that's something I wanted to do since I was a child. And I saw in my own life, women who had short hair, medium hair, long hair, and I didn't see any men who had long hair in my life. So it was something I thought I wasn't allowed to do. And actually, when I was young, I thought it meant I wanted to be a girl because that's the only way I could make sense of wanting long hair. But it's like no, this stuff literally just naturally grows out of my head. And so growing it out has been such a wonderful journey, I feel like I can talk about my hair for a long time so I won't. But that's something that for me has been like an act of, I guess, rebellion against, like, these expectations around really rigid norms. And I do experience some resistance I get told by some folks that it's uh, you know, it's not professional for me as a guy to be like wearing my hair that long. And if I want to work my way up, I need to look a certain way. I will say in general, I get a lot of support around it, and a lot of great comments. So that's been really nice. But it's been an interesting journey for myself as a guy to to grow out my hair. And again, as someone visibly queer, who I feel like I'm already breaking a lot of those rules of masculinity, taking those steps to even more visibly break those rules has been an interesting experiment or point of reflection for myself.

Anne: I think that's so interesting, because every time I see you, and I know our guests can't see you, but you just always look so professional.

Wil: Thank you.

Anne: I've never like had a meeting with you where I was like, oh, Wil doesn't look professional today.

Wil: Yeah, yeah. And there's so much to unpack with like, like, you know, my grandfather sometimes gives me comments about, you know, when he says, I need to look like the people at the top if I want to work my way up there. I tell him, like, [inaudible], that's what keeps, like women out of those roles. That's what keeps people of colour out of these roles. Like all of those, there's so much wrapped up in that, right. So it's quite interesting, for sure. But yeah, like I, you know, take care of my hair. It's a it's a point of pride for me, right? So.

Anne: Yeah, I have so many conversations with women about hair, because I used to have very short hair. And a lot of women that I knew were like, I could never cut my hair short, it would look so masculine. Like I would look like a guy. And I'm like, first of all, I don't think that's true. And second of all, you know, if there is a short hair cut for literally every man out there, like most men have short hair, and it suits them, right. Like then there's also a short hair cut for anybody else. Like it's not, it's not just that men are the only ones that can pull off short hair, that short hair is inherently masculine, like there are so many ways to have hair of every length. And so I'm hoping that we're moving away from that dichotomy. And I like when I see salons have you know, just like short hair cut price, long hair cut price, it's not a men's or women's cut. It's just is it a short hair cut? Is it a long hair cut?

Wil: Yes. Right. And so ya realizing like, sometimes in these conversations when they talk about like, how does this manifest in day to day and how do we unpack these systems, often, it's like calling out things like gender and talking about gender more and sometimes it's like de gendering things that don't need to be gendered like a haircut. Right? And yeah, that's short, long hair. I think that's a brilliant example of that.

Anne: Absolutely. Okay, so what are some of the myths about masculinity that we want to chat about today? Because I think there are some, some myths that float around that are really harmful for men. And I was just curious if you had any in specific that you wanted to touch on and maybe debunk.

Wil: I mean, I think the biggest myth, or when that maybe even like captures all of them is that it's that masculinity is static, or objective, or that it's not, like arbitrary. But as I touched on at the beginning, like I would really encourage folks to look things up, look up, like the history of high heels, look up the history of the colours pink and blue. Understand that through time and across cultures, that diverse genders existed, and that the expectations of men in certain societies has been and or continues to be different than what it is for maybe the way that you were raised. Right. And so I think once we start to learn more about history, learn more about different cultures, we see that masculinity is culturally and temporally subjective, right? And I think that can feel really uncomfortable for folks. Because oftentimes, we build our identities based on those expectations, often not even knowing it, right? Like I was sort of, like forced to examine myself and rethink those expectations as someone who is queer, which is like, I think a huge violation of of these, like harmful toxic masculinity rules, right? Some folks don't actively think about those things. So I'd encourage folks to also be okay with sitting in that discomfort, and unpacking that, and just learning more about yeah, history and different cultures. I think another myth that we've already sort of touched on is that when we talk about toxic masculinity, or when we have any of these kinds of kinds of conversations, is that we're shaming that and, and I think there is something to be said about, you know, accountability and responsibility, and what's our role as men in working towards a better world, and a world free of violence? And I think we can have that conversation grounded in love and care and support and like, we're not here to shame men, we're not advocating for a world without men. I know, sometimes there can be memes or jokes that maybe take it to that level. That's not, that's not my feminism. That's not my practice or my belief. I think that I have a lot of belief that men can and should do better. And I think it comes from a place of compassion, and understanding the harms that like these patriarchal expectations have put on them. Like, that's a lot. And we need to like, acknowledge and make space for that pain as well. Right. And so I think that's another big myth that really prevents men from engaging in these conversations, they're worried that they're gonna get shamed. And so I would say that if anyone's shaming you for being a man, that's not okay, that's different

than being held accountable for individual actions or behaviours that are harmful, right? Shame versus maybe guilt over a behaviour. Shame is rooted in like ourselves as people, and we're not here to do that. Right. So distinguishing between shame and guilt can be really helpful in unpacking that. So I think that's a another big myth.

Anne: I love that, you know, we're talking a little bit about accountability and how that's different than shaming men and how talking about things that people are doing is, you know, a part of that accountability process. How does masculinity relate to sexual violence? I know we talked a little bit about violence against women being maybe a part of that box that exists the man box. Yeah, what are your thoughts about how masculinity and sexual violence are related?

Wil: So often when I talk, you know, when I used to do more work with younger folks, high school age, for example, when I was in nonprofit, and have conversations about gender or about sexual violence, sometimes the girls in the class would raise their hand and share an experience about sexual harassment on the street and like the first time that happened and how young they were, and how often it's a group of men that do it. I know not exclusively, but it's interesting to me because a lot of us can we can see and understand that as not necessarily expecting anything sexual from the woman or, or girl in many cases, unfortunately. But it's often done to like prove one's status, one's masculinity, to the other guys that are there. Right? So we're seeing an obvious link there. I think under very sort of, you know, cis normative heteronormative patriarchal gender roles, if we're talking in that like binary of like, man woman that, like, patriarchy would like to impose upon us. We see men as the initiators of sex. And we see women as the withholders of sex. And so when we have that, this means "no" is seen as an invitation to push harder, right, because that's the goal. And that paves the way for harm. I often refer to the scene in the Notebook. And I know it's a little bit of a dated reference now, I guess. But like, I don't even know how old that movie is. So probably need to update my my media references, right, but, but we see this movie that's hailed as ultra romantic. And the scene where Ryan Gosling's character asks out Rachel McAdams character at this like County Fair kind of thing. And she says no, and she ends up going on a ferris wheel ride with another

man. And he ends up like, running up onto the ferris wheel with them. And the operator says only two to a cart. So he climbs out and starts dangling from the inner structure of the ferris wheel, and keeps asking her out. And lets go of one hand, and says other hand is getting slippery, and that he is not going to reach up with his other hand unless she says yes to going out with him. Right? And so eventually, of course, she says yes, because he's literally harassing her and threatening his life, if she doesn't go out with him. Right. And so we see that idea that like, the goal is to get a yes. And that's totally not how we need to think about consent. How we need to think about consent is actually hearing what the other person wants to say. And like, being in tune with their desires and our desires, and how we can, you know, collaborate to have a great experience or not, right? Instead, masculinity will teach us that the goal is to get a yes. And that's, you know, a really important difference. And so if the goal is to get a yes, we're harassing, and we're not giving space for a no, that's how I often like to frame consent. Sometimes it's like, am I creating space for someone to give me a genuine "no"? And that's not something I learned through traditional masculinity, right? It's something that feminism taught me. And so I think that there's a lot of those links there in terms of media portrayals that we see. And the way that we are socialized into our genders.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. And I think also, like, we're just not good at rejection. Like we're just it's not something that we're taught to be like to to handle rejection with, like grace, or humility, or any of those things. Like I think rejection is very shameful in our Canadian culture. So I love that we're, love that we're starting to talk about that. Like, it's about hearing what the other person wants to say not trying to get that. Yes. And like maybe a piece of that is knowing how to handle a no.

Wil: Yeah. And unfortunately, there's a lot of incidents of a lot of pretty extreme harm in many cases, from men who didn't know how to handle that no. Right.

Anne: Yeah.

Wil: And maybe the the woman that they were asking, did not say yes, in the way that it happened in the Notebook. And so how do we sit with that

"no"? And how do we be okay with that "no"? Because again, that violates that man box of like, gets with a lot of women that's like out there, right? That expectation, that assumption, that we're able to have sex with women whenever we want.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. And I love the the Notebook example, I've used that one a bunch of times. And he also makes her lay in the street. There's like cars, and there's this whole like...

Wil: Oh yeah.

Anne: ...dangerous element to that. And I'm just I don't know how to categorize that. But it makes me very uncomfortable that part of the like courting process is putting her in literal danger. But I would love to know like, what are some positive examples of masculinity? I asked my students this in class last week, and they were really excited about Ethan from Euphoria. I haven't watched enough of euphoria to know if Ethan is like a good example of positive masculinity. He's the one that dates Pat. He's in the big play. In the end.

Wil: I stopped watching Euphoria, because it was so stressful for me and I was like, You know what.

Anne: Me too!

Wil: I'm good. There's a lot of like, other things that are stressful right now. And I need my TV time to be like unwinding time and not more exposure to sexual violence and not more. Like just Yeah, I was really stressed watching and so I cannot comment on Ethan unfortunately, and I know that that makes me...

Anne: No that's okay.

Wil: ...out of touch with the student population that I want to work with, but it's worth it for my own.

Anne: Yeah, no, I feel the same way. I've been watching a lot of like crummy reality TV, like Love is Blind, and I think that As you know, probably not a lot of great examples of healthy masculinity on Love is Blind.

Wil: Yeah, I haven't watched that one either, actually. But I basically just watch Drag Race these days. So that's my go to. Yeah, I think when I think of positive masculinity, the first person that came to mind and I got consent to talk about him, I won't name him. But I think of my work husband, who is this like cis straight dude. And we just have such a beautiful relationship, honestly, he's one of my absolute closest friends right now. I've literally told him I was like, our friendship is like healing for me as, as someone who, you know, still when I, you know, just the other night, I was going out for a walk, there was some game going on, I don't know, there was a lot of people in Leafs jerseys, walking around Hamilton, don't know what was happening. But I was going for a really long walk at night on Sunday. And there was a group of like, loud men in jerseys. And I know it's, like, harmful for me to make judgments or assumptions about them, and how they might treat me based on my appearance. But I changed my route and like, dipped out a couple blocks early on to a side street to avoid interacting with them. And I just like, again, I'm, I don't even know if they're all straight. So I'm making so many assumptions here, right. But like, I still have a fear often, especially like, at night on my own, of engaging with straight men. Every time I meet a straight man, it's like this, there's a bit of a block there, right. And that's something that I think is going to take some time. And it's built off of years of the way I've been treated by by a lot of guys. So seeing a straight cis guy, like my work husband is so wonderful. He is someone who, you know, last week came to work with nail polish on that his three year old daughter painted and he wore it for like, a week straight. And I he sent me a photo as it was happening. And I was like, Oh, you wore it to work? And he's like, Yeah, of course, why not? Like that kind of attitude is amazing. Our vulnerability, we've actually both experienced a close loss of a friend in the past couple of years, myself more recently, and him at the beginning of COVID. And so we've been able to grieve together and have, you know, late night conversations, and it doesn't have to be facilitated just by alcohol. It can be just like sober conversations, right? Where we're open and honest about how it's impacting us. Right? I think about grief a lot. And how men who don't



have those connections must grieve and like, that feels really tough to me. I can't even imagine. He's someone I can you just call if I'm having a terrible day who just like validates my emotions. Yeah. So that's like, that's the first example of positive masculinity to me that comes to mind. I think of all of those friendships that I have that are just open and vulnerable. And they remember, you know, a few years ago, I'm going back to my nonprofit days yet again, going to a conference in Toronto for a couple of nights with a straight colleague, and we had a hotel room not far from Church Street. And so I said, Steve, have you ever gone to a gay club before? And he said, No. And so I took him to Woody's, which is sort of this iconic gay bar in Toronto. And he was just fascinated by the whole experience, right. And he was just like, watching the interactions. And he saw all of these older men going up to each other, and like kissing each other on the cheek or going and hugging each other and from behind, sitting and chatting over a beer or watching a drag show. And he said, Wil, like straight guys don't don't have this, like, we go to a bar and we maybe sit shoulder to shoulder not face to face. And we don't make that eye contact, we're looking at the TV, we're not giving each other a kiss on the cheek. We're not like embracing each other, like that to me, that's such a beaut- like having a guy friend who I can just like hug for 30 seconds. I'm such a hugger. Like, I love that if I can just hold like, hold you and physically embrace you for so long. Like, that's so beautiful to me. So, you know, I think of a lot of folks in my life. And I feel so lucky to have so many men in my life, who are demonstrations of positive masculinity. And again, masculinity is in those in those different ways. It looks different for each guy. And it's really wonderful.

Anne: Oh my gosh, I just love all of those stories. Those are so beautiful. Thank you for sharing those with us.

Wil: Yeah.

Anne: So my last question for you is how do we move towards a more positive model of masculinity or masculinities?

Wil: It's tough. I think for me, what I've been very intentional about is who I spend my time with and think about my boundaries that way. Like my

time boundaries, I guess. And there's some folks in my life who I really love who I think make me feel a sense of shame, perhaps for the way that I express my gender and my masculinity. And so I'm mindful of how much time I spend around those people. I'm mindful of developing connections to others, to support the way that I am and the way that I want to be. And that's really wonderful. I think it's important to realize that we all have a role in this. As I've already mentioned, I have women in my life who have sent me some hurtful messages, intentionally or not, that have pushed me back inside of that man box. So recognizing that all of us regardless of gender, regardless of if we identify as more masc or femme, or if that changes, like we all have a role in how are we responding to men who exhibit vulnerability? You know, my, my work husband, who I heard, he mentioned, some folks, when I bring him up and talk about our relationship, we'll go like, Oh, yeah, he's like, a little bit gay, isn't he?, as a joke. And that's a joke that I used to kind of, like, lean into with a lot of guys, like, say that a guy's a little bit gay. When I'm like, why do we have to? Like, aren't we just doing the exact same harmful patriarchal nonsense when we do that, that like, no, he's straight. And he's emotionally mature and vulnerable. He's not a little bit gay. Right? So I'm, when I do that when I make those kinds of jokes or laugh at those jokes, I'm reinforcing that gender box, that man box, because I'm saying the only way that he can be emotionally vulnerable is if he's a little quote, unquote, a but little gay, whatever that that means. Right? So like, realizing how I've been upholding those harmful pieces as well, has been a really interesting journey for me. And yeah, just finding finding those folks in our lives who can support us, I would say, that's the biggest thing, always engaging, always being open to learning more, and being called out and being called in is another really key piece, and just supporting each other in the awkwardness of it all. And like, a lot of the times, it's just us experimenting, figuring things out. For me, you know, I've had a recent, in the past year experimenting with drag, and like, that's been a whole reflection on my own sense of masculinity. And my makeup is not the best in the world, but finding people who support that journey and like having into like, intellectualizing it, and having conversations about what it means and how I feel about it. And like, that's been so wonderful. So for me, it's, it always comes back to connection and relationships in this work. And so,

for me, we can move towards a more positive model of masculinity by cultivating those kinds of relationships with others.

Anne: All of that sounds so wonderful, and we will absolutely link Youneeda Ask...

Wil: Amazing

Anne: ...in the episode description in our in our social media posts we reshare from you a lot already so. So yeah, just thank you so much for joining us today. And for having this thoughtful conversation. I hope it's helpful for folks to just listen and think about and you know, kind of, like reflect on some of the stories and messages that you've shared with us. So thank you for your time today.

Wil: Thanks so much for having me, Anne.

Anne: So that was Wil from McMaster University talking about masculinity and masculinities. Again, it's our second time chatting with Wil so go back and listen to the first episode with well if you haven't already, and hopefully Wil will visit us again in the future.

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