

LBS4E1 Man, It's Alright... A Co...bout Masculinity and Blindness

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SPEAKERS

Paul, Deanna, Naomi, Deborah, Jeff

Naomi 00:06

Hello and welcome everyone to living blind, today is going to be a little bit of a different show in a few ways. First of all, we are on video as well as being on audio. So this show will be on YouTube, or maybe we'll see another video provider, but we are visible and audible. So looking forward to the new format change. And another thing we're doing a little bit differently is we're having a bit of a roundtable discussion this time. Today we are talking about masculinity and blindness. My name is Naomi Hazlett. I am the podcast host and today I am joined by Paul Mack and Jeffrey Rainey. And I'm going to hand it over to Paul, if you can introduce yourself, tell the folks a little bit about you. And then why masculinity.

Paul 01:07

Hi, I'm Paul Mack, I am a life coach. I just started my business quite recently. And in my coaching, I focus on a couple of different areas. They're called "Life Purpose" coaching, "Goal" coaching and "Happiness" coaching. So I usually with clients end up combining those three things, because you start off with, you know, okay, you know, we talked about what, what is your purpose in life, because often people, you know, aren't clear on that. And then we talk about goals and how to set goals, and how to how to, how to get through that process, that that journey of getting from deciding on a goal to achieving it. Because we all know, it's about the it's about the journey, not just the destination. And, and happiness is important too, because I think, as I'm sure we'll talk about later on in this discussion as well. I'm a big believer in, in finding the joy in one's life and joy in the journey and finding the humor in it as well. And in terms of the masculinity, I was approached by BALANCE and asked if I was interested in coming on and talking about it. Because there were a lot of people who said a lot of people in groups at balance, were feeling some vulnerability, some some issues around there, a lot of like minded men were feeling vulnerability around their masculinity. And it's always been an issue that that I've thought about a lot myself and struggled with. And I've recently gotten involved in a men's group where I've done a lot of work around that.

Naomi 03:02

Thank you so much, Paul. And Jeffrey, if you don't mind if you could tell the folks at home a little bit about yourself. And what brings you to this conversation today on masculinity.

Jeff 03:13

Sure. So my name is Jeffrey Rainey, I live in Aurora, Ontario, Canada, which is just a short distance south from Toronto, where balance is based. And I'll take the blame for being one of the voices behind behind the BALANCE's decision to reach out to Paul regarding this podcast and the topic of blindness and masculinity because I was one of the I was one who was was someone who was fronting that conversation. It and it's been a conversation I've been having with some of my peers as well through various stages of life. And when we did some research on it, this being myself and other members of the organization and particularly in their in their pre employment and community outreach programs. There really wasn't a lot of discussion publicly. There was some there was some discussion on the sexual side of it regarding consent and disability and also and disability in general blindness and being wheelchair bound having other having other disabilities as well. But there wasn't really anything more broad on the topic of growing up as a blind man and the topic of masculinity and how it is portrayed and how you perceive it and how the world perceives it sort of in general. But as per myself, I am currently just doing some volunteer work in the community. I have also been probably a familiar voice to some listening. I've worked as the Podcast Producer for this very podcast, and it's really nice to be sort of behind the bike. Normally, I'm behind the scenes, pushing buttons, you know, getting guests like Paul on here and putting things to air, but now it's nice to be, you know, to come out from under the shadows and be on mike and on camera a little bit.

Naomi 05:24

I think both of you already touched on some interesting points or jumping off points for our discussion. Essentially, you both have talked about how it seems like there is this need for either disabled men or men in various backgrounds to to address you know, what is it... what is masculinity, right? And then when we talk about disability and blindness, how does that threatens understandings of masculinity, or I guess, challenge preconceived notions of masculinity? Either of you have any thoughts so far on on just taking it from the beginning? You know, why is there this tension, I guess, between disability and masculinity?

Paul 06:10

Well, certainly speaking from my own experience, and probably, probably, Jeffrey would say the same thing that I mean, growing up, and in my youth, I've had a lot of experience with, with feeling vulnerable. Not that I grew up with that, that stereotypical belief in in, you know, men are this and women are that, but I certainly did experience, like, for example, I, I grew up partially sighted until I was 29. So 24 years ago, my my retina on my one, half good, I detached and I've been totally blind since then. So that, that was a big adjustment. And I went through the whole thing that I'm sure a lot of listeners have experienced of, you know, cane or a guide dog, and, you know, in which one would be more empowering for me. So I definitely, I know what it feels like, to, to feel like, like all the things that are so many of the things that are typically thought of as masculine things, whether it's driving, you know, not being able to pick up a girl for a date, in my car, you know, that even that was like, that was an adjustment. I mean, again, I didn't have those stereotypes in my head, but even for me, you know, it was like, like... am I really do I really deserve, like, when I was young anyway, you know, but so it as do

I really deserve this girl, you know, when I can't, you know, when she has to drive. Somehow that just from the the brainwashing from society at that, that voice in my head, you know,

Jeff 07:58

You actually stole part of my answer, Paul, but I'll start from the beginning. So I was born completely blind, I was born with retinopathy of prematurity, and was born almost three months early. And so I didn't have didn't grow up with sight. And for a lot of my childhood and upbringing, masculine, like, what was masculine, what was feminine was kind of nuanced. I mean, sure, on what and in some ways, I kind of feel like I had a foot in both camps. You know, on one hand, I was big into, you know, I was a car guy, I grew up in a car family, you know, collecting cars going to shows I had, but at the end, I also, you know, enjoyed some, some rough play outside with friends. And, and some, and some jokes and everything, but at the same time, which are stereotypically masculine things, but at the same time, I also, you know, I had a foot in both camps on the school, you know, on the playground, for example, you know, one on one moment, I'm playing tag and, and, and play wrestling with some with some, some guy friends of mine, and the next moment, you know, I'm playing house with some of my, some of my friends that were girls as well. And there were certain things like certain shows, or certain artists that I liked to listen to musicians that they picked up on, and they would tease me because we'd be around some, you know, some, some other some other boys and they would bring that up and I would kind of blush like, don't don't let's, let's not talk about that, you know, like, still, you know, like still watching the show Arthur at age 10. And, you know, being around I don't want the guys to know that, you know, that's, that's not supposed to be on the kid to like that show anymore. But, so, that was kind of, in some ways, I guess it was not really a factor but at the same time, it did get brought up in a more nuanced way and in some ways, kind of not explained very well. There were all these little hints of like, here's some, here's some things that you should move on from maybe in terms of what I was wearing. Or some of it was just blind habits that everyone goes, if you grew up blind, or if you, there are some things that you because you don't pick up on visual cues, you don't know what everyone else is and isn't doing physically. So there are just certain habit habits or stimulants that you are stimming stimulants, is that what they call it stimulus that you do, that you aren't necessarily aware of? So that is, that's one thing. But then there are just other things nuance wise, oh, don't, you know, don't wear that type of hat. But, you know, because everyone else is wearing baseball caps when you get older. And on one hand, it was like, Well, I would go along with it. But on the other hand, I was like, Why, what what is it about that and it was never really explained. And to Paul's point, once you get older, I think that the there's definitely the the relationship side where the traditional masculine role, you are the chivalrous gentleman, you pick up the woman on your first day you pick up your girlfriend on the first date. I can't think of any sort of visual cues. But I think in terms of like, there might be jobs that you that you are required, you know, if you have you're working right away, it's tough to find work in certain areas. Like you might not be a mechanic. It's tougher to get jobs like that, if you can't see. And if you've not, if you haven't really had a lot of exposure, no one's been comfortable enough to teach you those sorts of things, and show them and show you how to do them, like, you know, for example, working with tools or, or using, you know, grills or cooking and stuff. Because it's hot, and you have to make sure you don't burn yourself. But okay, that's not impossible, but there are just a lot of things that you are supposed to do, and you aren't really, it's just expected. You know, this isn't really something that is, this isn't an instruction manual, but at the same time, it's like you're raised, you know, in a sort of environment in a nurturing environment. And then just thrown into the deep end, like "go"! And there's

everyone else around you, that is giving off a vibe of you know, nature first, you know, if you have these kinds of things you are you are not desired by the opposite sex. But without kind of explaining why.

Paul 12:41

Right, right. No, I I agree with that completely and an example coming to mind for me, in terms of like, people, not like society and individual people and society in general and sort of not knowing how to how to help you reframe things and, and not see things in a negative way. Where I had to kind of teach myself was with was with driving. Like, like, I had to teach myself, you know, that... like, it took a lot of sort of, like self analysis, soul searching, you could say, to say, "wait a minute", you know, like, it's like, not being able to drive is a good thing. I mean, now I'm able to say to people, you know, when they say "Oh, I bet you I wish you could drive. I'm like, like bleep no man, like, like the insurance and the parking and in the cost and the gas and the uck!"

Jeff 13:42

Like being able to fall asleep in the passenger seat is quite fun. You can't do that behind the wheel. More than once. And, I feel like driving has been one of the big things here. But I think also just physical attraction. If you've never had vision before, and you're say for example, at a crowded place, let's say, you know, you're you're now an adult and you go to a bar and you're supposed to or you're at the mall or somewhere outdoor in public where there's a lot of people and you're supposed to scope a crowd out, you know, scope someone from the crowd that you're attracted to, well, if you can't see you have to then... oh and if someone's staring at you, for example, you don't know that! There has to be that extra layer of connection there. And yeah, it's it's it's a very it's a very, it's fun water to try and navigate

Paul 14:37

I never hear "I smelled her from across a crowded room. We almost met, and we just knew."

Jeff 14:47

You know, if you walk up to someone and compliment them on the way they're, you know, the way their voice sounds and it's attractive to you it's isn't really seen as the most... it's seen as a little invasive at first. Yeah, but in reality, when in reality, that's one of the key things, that's, that's brought you to them.

Naomi 15:05

I'm listening to both of you go back and forth, and there's just so many things to unpack. Right? And I hope you don't mind if I kind of give you a bit of a recap of what I've been picking up so far on, you know, the connection between blindness or disability and masculinity. I think one point that came up is well, throughout, we were talking about how, you know, nobody, I guess maybe some people are sat down until this, but generally, you're not sat down and told, "Hey, you're a man, or you're a woman. And this is this is how men, what men or women do," right in every situation. So we're kind of left at some point as, especially as we get older, to fill in the blanks. And the blanks are usually filled in by society. But then some are not. There's a lot of questions around, well, like, how am I supposed to act? And then what how, what do I want to do to your point, Paul, around around driving? I mean, as a sighted person, I, I don't, I drive very regularly, right? Like, for example, I take the subway, I like to walk. But I, I felt this tension at some point, you know, until like, got old enough to not really care. But this idea that oh, like you're not really an adult, unless you are an independent adult, unless you learn how to drive.

And I can imagine that perhaps, as a man, like, to your point, Paul and Jeff, that feeling might be stronger, and also stronger with other things like you're saying, learning how to grill or how to use tools or things like that. So am I on the right track so far?

Jeff 16:48

Absolutely. And sometimes, like if you're, I feel like transit, public transit, is a lot of times ascribe to being poor. And so one, yes, you might not be able to drive, being able to drive is seen as a signifier for adulthood. Two, if you can't, well, you have a you have different options, some of which are very tenuous or expensive if you're talking about cab fares, or... But then, once you add a disability onto that if you had blindness, well, now you've got to be really good at "O and M" if you're going to work around the transit system, that your city or town may or may not have in place.

Paul 17:33

Yeah, yeah, I totally agree with you. Yeah, some, like, if you're lucky enough to be in a in a, I think that's what you're kind of saying, if you're lucky enough to be in Toronto, like I am, or, you know, in a bigger city, you're more likely to have more, more accessibility. But of course, that has its own challenges. Like, like, for example, some of the times, you know, when when I struggle with, you know, feeling vulnerable and not confident, is just, you know, when I'm at a big subway station and trying to figure out where the buses are, and, and they're just like, I, in that moment, where, like, you know, that there, like you can hear people all around you, you know, you're in a big crowd, but it's like, "excuse me, excuse me," and nobody notices, and it's like, I'm, you know, that cliché of I'm in the, in the middle of a huge crowd all alone.

Naomi 18:34

Yeah, and I mean, I was, I'm thinking about, you know, the, how it feels to ask for help. As a man, I'm curious, as a blind man, how does that feel? I guess I can't, it's not fair for me to ask you like, how does it feel versus being a blind woman? Because, you know, you don't have someone with that experience. But do you think there's that connection of needing or wanting assistance and how that kind of maybe clashes with ideals of what it is to be masculine?

Paul 19:07

Well, again, it's something that I've kind of had, I feel like I've had to teach myself. And now I feel I feel privileged that I have the opportunity, you know, in coaching through coaching to, to hopefully guide others around this, but just that, that, again, it's about, to me, it's about mindset, it's about redefining independence, and in in assistance and seeing it not as... like that I'm asking the fact that I'm asking for help means I am help-less. No, it means that that I am empowering myself. I am making myself less helpless by using the tools available to me, to you know, to do what I need to do in order to do do what I want to do and get where I want to go. I mean, you know if that means so yeah, that means, like, asking for assistance? How is that any... does that mean, does it make me helpless, that I use a guide dog to help me get around? You know, it's just, it's, that's a it's a tool. So I'm using what's available to me, and you know, instead of shying away, and I mean, I could just stay at home. And but no, dammit, I'm, you know, my, I'm using my, my confidence in my in myself. And, you know, maybe you could you could call that the masculine side of myself that I think that I think everybody has. I mean, maybe we'll get more into that esoteric stuff later, but... that everybody has to, to have the confidence to say, "you

know, that I'm, that I'm still okay, it doesn't make me any less of a strong person to do whatever I need to do and get support." Because everybody needs... everybody needs help with something. Like nobody does everything themselves, right?

Jeff 21:11

I think it's a little bit of both gender, but, but also disability. So starting out, I don't like growing up for me, it was never a gender thing. But I did struggle, I know that it's going to be hard for people to believe by, you know, by my presence here. But I did struggle with speaking out and asking for help and even just approaching people when I was younger, and especially into teen hood. I because I just knew one dimension. I only saw so I only saw sort of straight in front of me figuratively, I wasn't thinking about being resourceful. So I'd say that was more of just a shyness thing. And I was definitely talkative. But I really had trouble just asking for help and knowing how to ask for help. One of the big turning points that really nailed it for me was when I was learning how to walk home, get home rather using the bus from school. So getting home from school using the bus to home. And while there was construction going on, during my normal normal route, I had to take a different route which involved a regional bus that only went so far. And then I had to cross a small street where there isn't a lot of people around. And when I was first learning it, I realized very quickly, okay, my options are if someone comes around, either I ask for... I put my pride aside and ask for help, and get where I'm going or I don't ask for help and then I sit there for another half hour waiting for someone else to come by. You know, in the I guess there is that... in the sense of in the name of self self confidence and being weak, and asking for help. And I realized very quick, it's more of a pragmatic thing than there is a gender thing. But I think gender is the the basis for that.

Naomi 23:13

There's another piece of this as well, but I'm wondering. So, you know, both you, Paul and Jeff, you talked about asking for help and how, you know, there's that there's, I feel like in a conversation about gender roles, we're going to touch on stereotypes, so the stereo, you know, the stereotype that's coming to mind is, you know, "not asking for direction." So to as you were saying, Jeff, that's not really it's honestly not really an option, because you've got places to go. And Paul, I think you said something similar, you could stay at home, or like, well use your guide dog or, you know, every so often, perhaps ask for assistance. So that's one dimension, it sounds like where these things kind of collide. But there's not just a gender issue. It's an issue of pragmatics. I do want to shift the conversation, though. And I don't know if we're going to talk we may talk pragmatically. But something that both of you mentioned that I want to learn more about is the piece around dating and physical attraction, because, you know, it's true. Like from my perspective, I got the sense pretty early on that, in our society, men are supposed to make a lot of moves and do a lot of that initial work to get a you know, a relationship going. Not that that's really been something that has worked for me, but I kind of got the gist that many, many women would kind of say, "Oh, well, you know, does he is he going to text you back? Is he going to call me back?" And me, I mean, I'm a little oblivious. "So why don't you just just texted back?" But I know it doesn't really work that way for everybody. So I don't know if like Paul, if you want to start, can you speak a little bit more to how, you know, blindness has changed that conversation around dating or attraction or, you know, smelling a woman from the other side of the room as you put it earlier?

Paul 25:13

Well, for me, my experience, first of all, what was as I said earlier, that, in my youth, I did have some vision in one eye was able to see a few feet away. So while I mean, it was kind of weird, because I like, on the one hand, I couldn't make out detail quite enough to tell facial expressions. So that definitely, like, cut down on the, on the cues that I could get, but I, I, maybe I need to say confess, but I confess that I did, I did have just in a vision to, to be to be a little superficial about, like, there were certain physical traits, like, you know, I could see a woman's hair, you know, so I, you know, she has great hair, you know, like that, that would draw me. So, but... but then, as I said, when I, when I lost my vision, as a young adult, there was definitely an adjustment there. And in in I was that, I think that kind of helped me, I think, mature and get beyond the... beyond the look of women. But in terms of what was going to say, in terms of society, yeah, I certainly got a lot of those messages. Even from people who in even from, like, parents who were pretty liberal, and in a lot of ways, there was still a bit of a message of, well, you know, women need to feel safe, and, you know, so you need to, to know that, that that was like, you know, you need to be a rock for them, you know, kind of idea. But I think two things happened that that helped me. One, it's kind of complicated, but like, I learned that that is true to an extent, but not as much as society thinks. So part of it was, was, was realizing that, that okay, you know, there there are, you know, women need that to different degrees, there are women who don't need that at all. So you know, it I can, I can find... so it's about finding a partner, who can, who also sees beyond that, you know, and doesn't need that so much. You know, who, who is confident and strong in themselves. But the other part of it was that, that I became confident enough, that, that I realized that that, okay, you know, it's like it's not, it's, I may not be, you know, like, society's, you know, Mr. Masculine, but I do have in, you know, like, my blindness doesn't keep me from being a person who can, who can make a partner feel safe, when they need it. There are other ways other than those stupid superficial things like being able to drive or, or being able to, to do whatever, to see danger from across the room or whatever it is, I can, I can help them feel safe with with words and caring and love and, you know, things that, that that blind people can do just as well, at least as well as, as "sighties".

Jeff 29:00

Yeah, this is a long conversation, and it's really tough not to get sociological with it. Because I think this is going on... it's a topic of "Where's masculine, you know, what is the future of masculinity", on top of on top of blindness on top, you know, including blindness within that. Yeah, it is tough. not to get sociological with this question, because there is the topic of what is blindness, you know, where does the blindness factor come in and also what is the future of masculinity in general? By the by the traditional scopes of masculinity, there is that... that is that or of strength, protection, in you know, sort of brute force or being protective, you know, spotting danger on a in a very sort of a primal sort of way, can be regarded as safety. And if you're good at that, then like if you are if you're good at self defense, which, you know, doesn't hurt regardless, but if you are naturally good at that more power to you. But to Paul's point, safety, you know, being a woman feeling safe around you comes in many different ways, outside of just physical strength. And I think that if it's someone who is genuinely interested in you, as a whole, as a human as the 3D, wholehearted and even vulnerable self that you are, then that won't be a factor. It's, uh, you know, I don't think the right woman would say, you know, "I would love you so much, you know, you would be Mr. Right if you were just a tad bit stronger." And if they did, you might want to look elsewhere, if that's not your type. Sort of speaking from experience on the dating, dating side of things I remember, just on the personal side, when I when, when a relationship ended, I struggled with I did some I did some some soul searching in terms of, you know, where to go from here. What worked,

what didn't work, and you're always going into the "woulda, coulda shoulda" of you're always ruminating on things and where to go forward. And what I would look at coaching advice. There were aspects of it that weren't described that that didn't depict who I was. And that was almost like, well, if I'm not that, then, you know, am I desirable? The whole I think clinginess... I think being, you know, not being the first to text back or making the first move gets is a way an ill explained way of avoiding being clingy. Because if you're not supposed to give off a vibe of interest, and you leave it up to the other person to want that if mystique is supposed to be the driver here, you run the risk of the risk of not getting what you want.

Naomi 32:21

I think the bigger point being that, yeah, I mean, I think that a person who says "well, like no, you got everything else is is great, except you don't drive", is missing out, right. And there are people who have those standards. I mean, we haven't touched on this subject, but, you know, in the visual world, one thing that just baffles me, is the whole "I only date men who are taller than me." You're, you're you're cutting out so many people who could be such a good match for you. So I think maybe looking beyond those individual things, like, you know, "if you can't grow, you can't show." I don't know, right? Like, it's it's just one of those things where people are so much more than the things that they can do. And then I think both of you made a great point around safety, and how safety isn't always looking for threats around in the world and protecting somebody from them. Safety can be being somebody you can talk to and share your feelings, emotional support, you know, helping be behind somebody as they pursue their goals. Like it can look very different. So I guess again, to kind of summarize there's the take people as a whole beyond masculine traits or feminine traits for that matter. And and yeah, maybe don't be so quick to judge and it's okay just to be yourself and communicate in the way you want and maybe just don't get so caught up in what how it's all supposed to work, right.

Paul 34:05

It's not like like, like any woman who deserve to be with you is going to is going to sit there you know, Oh gee, I can't I can't go with I can't be involved with you because because "if I ever if I ever had cancer or something and I need someone that's helped me through that, you're not gonna be able to do that because you're not tall enough." Right? But if I can expand on on Jeff's point about vulnerability, and and quote unquote, masculinity i and this is just actually a connection that I just made in my in my head. One of the things that I always told my son growing up, you know, when he's said talked about being scared, you know, that the house... the idea that courage doesn't mean not never being scared. It means being scared but doing it anyway. And The connection I'm drawing here is that is that, quote unquote, masculinity or, you know, being confident as a blind man isn't about never feeling vulnerable. It's about feeling vulnerable but knowing that, that you're, that you're still strong anyway. And in fact that that being able to connect with a vulnerability I think makes... just makes you stronger. And if I can just tell a quick story to illustrate that from my own life experience... a couple years ago, right at the beginning of COVID, actually, I had one day, I I decided to go out for a walk. And I heard this guy kind of yelling and sounding weird, you know, out in the hallway of my apartment building. You know, so I waited a minute, and then I went out. And oh, this was and this was before I got my got my new guide dog. So I was with, I had a cane. So I went out, went out of my building, and there was this guy out there. And he starts kind of following following me, you know, being aggressive, like, like, "oh, I know, you're faking it, you're not blind," you know, this, you know. And, you know, and I, I, luckily, you know, I

was more confident than I used to be, you know, so I started by, you know, I kind of took out my phone and said, "okay, you know, I'm gonna, I'm gonna call 911 now." So and so he backed off, and I went for my walk. And, you know, I didn't hear him anymore. So I figured, okay, I scared him off, great. And I walk a couple blocks. And just as I get across a street, the next block I, I start hearing, you know, you know, like this heavy footfalls behind me, and I'm like, okay, whatever, somebody's jogging. And I'm standing there, and all of a sudden, I feel like the guy comes up and grabs my cane out of my hand, and runs off. And, you know, that's sort of deer in the headlights, you know, like, like, you have that moment, where you're just like, "huh? What just happened?" My, I just froze, because it just like, "did this just happen?" Like what? And, like, I'm telling you, like, I just, you know, full disclosure, this I, and again, I'm sure people can relate, who are listening, that I've never felt so vulnerable and weak, and, and childish, childish and whatever, you know, in my life, at least as an adult. And, but I, I stopped and reminded myself that, okay, you know, it's okay to feel weak and vulnerable, you know, like, managing that is, is true strength. And I just said, Okay, I'm gonna, I'm gonna get out my phone. I called 911. And, you know, and I explained to them, and then I called, I called my girlfriend. And, and, again, I was lucky, you know, that I'm with a partner, you know, who I didn't have any concerns about, you know, she's not going to think any, any less of me or anything. And, and she came, and the police came, and it was all framed out. It was just, it was somebody who had some mental health issues in the neighborhood. And, and I, you know, I got my cane back and everything. But, but, yeah, like, I guess, my, my moral here, the takeaway that I want people to get is that, again, that that idea of that it's, it's okay to feel vulnerable. And but you learn from it, and you manage it. And that's, that's true strength, and I think she would never come out and express it, you know, in so many words, but I think that, that a piece of that was was moving forward from there was that my that like, my girlfriend was even that much more confident in me as a, as a as a partner.

Jeff 39:08

Can we if we just touched on the sort of core qualities of masculinity or perceived masculinity, traditional masculinity? These are things that everyone can think of when you put them on the spot and say, Tell me what you think of masculinity. And everyone has a common list of traits you know, strength, being courageous as Paul said, competence... yeah, you know, sort of fear, you know, no fear. Almost a go getter, attitude sort of thing. These are things that everyone can you know, everyone can point these out. These are very broad and very common answers, but the definitions of which are almost individual so there isn't really a true definition of masculine roles, that also just leaves that subtext of vulnerability not being a factor because it's perceived as weakness. But again, to Paul's point. Let's plays devil's advocate. Paul, what if you didn't take action, didn't call 911 didn't inform your girlfriend, and just stood there, flailing your arms and was was, were just completely dazed. And you stood there for hours. And then eventually, when you came home, and explain to your woman what happened, and the fact that you did nothing? I think there would be a very different reaction than the fact that... So I think self awareness is a huge part of it. And if that gets introduced to the textbook of, of masculinity and femininity to be, quite frankly, because these are both genderless we would have a much, much easier time navigating this world.

Paul 41:11

And if I may go back to talking like a coach for a minute. That sounds like you're talking about it sounds like you're trying to build intentionality. And that's an important concept for me. And give a quick plug,

people can go on on Facebook and look up my Facebook page. And I did a recent post, while it's not recent anymore now that people are that by the time people are hearing this, but I did a post about intentionality. And my point is that yeah, like, first of all, there's that cliché of of... but I do believe it's, it's like, sometimes clichés are true that, that "not choosing is still a choice." But it's about it's about, like you said self-awareness, being aware, okay. Yeah, and that's kind of that was on some level, I think that was kind of what was going on in my brain that, okay, you know, I have that option, I could just sit here and cry or whatever, you know, just wait for someone to rescue me or, or whatever. And that would be that would be okay. Like, that wouldn't mean that I'm suddenly not a man anymore, or whatever. But I just, you know, I could do that, or I could take, take action and this and, and but taking action feels better to me. Like it like it wasn't about it wasn't about you know, I have to act like a man or this is acting like a woman or this is acting like, but it's just it was it was I want to be intentional. I want to make a choice. So okay, here are my options. You know, what, what feels right to me? And that's what I did. That make sense?

Naomi 42:55

Yeah, and I was gonna say, I think this is a good time to talk about, you know, what, what you've done with your experiences, Paul. So we've, we've talked a lot about, you know, growing up, navigating adulthood, relationships. But you know, Paul, from what I understand, you've taken this experience and your experiences, maybe being in men circles, and turned it into a career for lack of a better word for as a life coach. So can you tell us a little bit more about what that looks like for you in everyday practice?

Paul 43:36

Well, I think I can start answering that by by talking about another concept that's, that's, that's big for me with my coaching which is that, that, quote, unquote, failure, there's no such thing as failure, like failure is, is good, because that's how you learn. So, like, that, and that was, I think, the only way that I was able to get where I am today, in the end was, was that realization that, that the negative experiences that I've that I've had, I mean, you know, I went through, I mean, just all the stuff with, you know, losing my you know, going totally blind and, and then having a very, a very high what's the term, like, very hostile breakup with my, with my ex wife, and a custody battle and I mean, it just it it just, it just made me stronger. Like it just like that I learned, like I, I took that as a learning experience. I mean, I'm not saying it was easy. But you know, I learned from that and that's what allowed me to get to the point where I was able to connect with the person who who connected me to the person that connected me to that called MDI stands for "mentor", "discover", "inspire" the men's group that I got involved with. And it was through getting involved with them. And seeing that, because I should say, that I, I grew up with, also with with issues around shyness and, and isolating my myself not being comfortable around around other people a lot of the time. And especially, I mean, I found I, growing up, I related more to women than men. But, you know, I learned that I that through this group that I can also get along, there are also men that I can get along with, because they're not all stereotypical cavemen, you know, I can relate to them. And, and through that, through through their support and getting to know them, and learning from them, that helped me get to the point where I realized that, that my, that my true passion and purpose was helping others to be to become their best selves. Because this group, like in my experience has helped me to be close, not my best but closer to my best self, because I see that I see it as being one's best self as kind of kind of like approaching the speed of light, you never quite get

there, but it's about getting closer and closer, you know, as you go along. So that, that, so getting closer to being my best self taught me that, that what I really want to do, what really matters to me is helping others on that journey.

Naomi 46:55

Yeah, that I so relate to that idea. I think that might be a bit of a misconception or a misunderstanding that, you know, like, if we're, if you're a helping professional, you're supposed to have your whole life together, right? You have this ideal, you're living this ideal life, you never make mistakes. And I think that it sounds like your approach, like very much like mine, is, you know, we're human beings, we have experiences that we can share with other people, but we're on this journey. And like you said, it, I don't think there's ever a point where you're done, but you can get closer and closer to hopefully living the life that you want to live.

Paul 47:38

Right? Because for one thing, I mean, coaching isn't, isn't about, you know, I mean, you can get into the discussion of how, to what extent this happens with, with actual, like mental health professionals, but for for, for coaches, it's like, it's not about we're not, I'm not there to tell you tell you, "okay, this is what you're going to do, you're going to do this, and then this and that, you know, because I have the answers and here's the answer." No, it's I don't have the answers. I have things that I've learned from my own experiences. And maybe, maybe you can relate to those and learn something for yourself from that. But it's more like, like, you know, I, I'm here to help you to help yourself, I'm here to help you access the tools that are within yourself. And I guess that we can relate that back to blindness and masculinity in that I know, it's easier said than done. But, but if if as a as a blind man or woman, you know, the more that you know, that when you're struggling, you know, remind yourself that, that it's not that I don't know what to do, it's not that I'm useless. Like I have the tools within myself, it's just about remembering how to how to access them. But they, but they are there. And that's what I'm there for. That's how I see my role helping people to, to, to access and learn how to use those tools within themselves.

Naomi 49:06

Yeah, I mean, you know, I think that there's a discussion to be had, I don't think we need to throw femininity and masculinity out the window and say, you know, like... well, I think the good takeaway is, yes, do what you're good at, play to your strengths and don't worry too much about what the label is. Because I think if we kind of put ourselves in these boxes of what men and women are supposed to do, we limit ourselves from reaching our potential contributing, having meaningful relationships is the takeaway. I guess, you know, there's, we've covered so much ground today, and I feel like we could just keep going, but I want to end today by go going back to you again, Paul and Jeff and just, I guess, asking you to do the herculean task of I guess, summarizing or telling our listeners, what is, what is the biggest takeaway that you want people to have from this conversation? Like, what's the message for people who are listening to the podcast right now? And thinking like, wow, I never really thought about this before, or maybe, you know, men who are listening in and mulling it all over all over the thoughts. So all it is to say, you know, starting with you, Paul, what's the biggest thing that you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Paul 50:41

I guess the way that that I would sum it up, maybe is something like, yes, there is masculine and feminine, but they, but they both have their their have a good side and their bad side. There are advantages and disadvantages. There's, there's a time for both, I think everybody has a certain amount of masculine and feminine in them inside them. You know, men have a majority masculine women have majority of traits, that are feminine. But like, yeah, like just like, celebrate, you know, whether you're male or female, celebrate your masculine side and your feminine side, embrace them, you know, love your, your, I can get a little hippie here, you know, love your whole self, you know, masculine and feminine. You know, just like just like we, you know, like we, you know, heart and head have to work together masculine and feminine side, us have to work together. And it's all good.

Jeff 51:50

Paul, you keep stealing my answers here. I wish you wouldn't do that. Just to build on Paul's point, I think everyone, it's fair to say that everyone goes through self discovery growing up. Everyone wants you know, everyone thinks about, you know, all there are things about me that are more masculine, there are things about me that are more feminine. Gender aside. And once you add disability into that, that does throw in a, you know, another factor into it. But I think that the ultimate, the ultimate trait of masculinity. And I mean this strictly towards the men is embrace your whole being. Be proud of who you are, and wear it like armor. Because if you wear like armor, then no one can use it against you, man or woman. They might not agree with you, they might not see eye to eye with you. But they respect you because they can't, they can't pull you out of that self confidence. There's nothing they're going to say or do that will that will make you switch your convictions. And they'll respect you for that at the very least. And it only goes up from there.

Naomi 53:21

You know, for all of you saying that Paul stole your answer. I think he came back with a pretty good one there, Jeff. I think that if there's anything I'm taking away from this conversation is that we're not having enough of them to be honest. I feel like, right, like, I think that there's so much to explore with this topic, I think it's important that we hold space for masculinity or discussions of masculinity and all of its forms. And I think that we all benefit from from having that conversation. As a woman, it was interesting to me to hear are very helpful for me to hear both of your journeys with masculinity and realizing how complicated it can be. How, you know, some of that is, you know, are these messages from society are things that you really had to grapple with, but ultimately, in the end, you got to define what it was for you, as you know, blind man. So I just wanted to thank both of you for your insights. And before we wrap up for today, I would just like to invite you to share how listeners could can get in touch with you if they want to learn more about your work.

Paul 54:43

Absolutely. So as I say I have a you do a search online I have a professional Facebook page. My I call my business, "Out of Sight, Into Mind". And you know, the multiple meanings there. And you know how I get into the mental aspect of things. So it's called "Out of Sight, Into Mind". If you look that up, you'll find my Facebook page. My... you can reach me by on there or by email, which is OSIM with Paul. And that's because the blind screen reader users will know that or at least with JAWS, it says it as

"awesome with Paul". So I couldn't resist using that. So OSIMwithPaul OSIMwithPaul@gmail.com. And I have a LinkedIn page as well, you can look that up

Jeff 55:54

So I am on the internet at large you can Google me. So Jeffrey J E F F R E Y, Rainey R A I N E Y, like the climate but with an E involved. I'm on Facebook. I'm on Twitter, I'm on LinkedIn. My email address is JeffreyRainey94@gmail.com.

Naomi 56:20

Awesome. Well, again, I can't thank both of you enough. And like a special thank you to Paul for being a first time guest on the show for sharing your experiences for talking about the ways in which you mentor and lead and honestly, I hope to have you back again sometime.

Paul 56:40

Me too. That would be that would be awesome. Thank you for this opportunity.

Naomi 56:44

Well, I'm looking forward to keeping the conversation going. In the meantime, thank you so much, Jeff and Paul. And that has been our podcast all the best and listeners looking forward to hearing from you.

Deborah 57:03

Hi, I'm Debra Gould, CEO of BALANCE for Blind Adults and executive producer of The Living blind podcast. We hope you enjoyed this episode, the first of season four. I want to thank our guests Paul Mack and Jeffrey Rainey for your interesting and sometimes very personal insights into this complex subject of masculinity as it relates to your lived experience. At the Living Blind podcast, this is what we're all about... the personal view from the inside out. As usual, I also want to thank our hosts Naomi Hazlett, our administrator Ronashelle Coro, our new video editor Jeffrey Young, and the whole team at BALANCE for Blind Adults for all your support. And for this last episode produced by Jeff Rainey, thank you very much for your efforts. Finally, many thanks to our donors without whom this podcast would not be possible. We'll see you next time on The Living Blind podcast.

Deanna 57:58

My name is Deanna Carruthers, and I'm the Development Officer here at BALANCE for Blind Adults. It is time for the fifth annual "Because of BALANCE" campaign. Together clients, current and former staff, board members, volunteers and general community members come together to talk about the impact BALANCE has had on their lives. Because of BALANCE, life is better. Let's share the difference BALANCE is making in all our lives and help build awareness of the small and mighty organization. Please consider joining as a fundraiser today by emailing me Deanna at development@fba.org It's truly an incredible opportunity to give back to this amazing organization and help build awareness so that others can benefit from this great organization as well.