

Scene on Radio

Domination (MEN, Part 11)

<http://www.sceneonradio.org/episode-57-domination-men-part-11/>

Jim Rome, The Jim Rome Show: Grandpa Joe, I mean, that guy's the worst. He's a bad guy, Joe. This guy lays in bed all day long in his pajamas, while his old lady's working, like, she's triple-shifting at the laundromat. And then the second the kid comes home with a Golden Ticket, he's right out of bed. All of a sudden the old guy is like, hits his head on the ceiling getting out of bed. He's dancing around, moonwalking.

John Biewen: You may have guessed that's a clip from talk radio. You may not have surmised it's from a radio show devoted to sports. It's a guy named Jim Rome, one of the nation's most popular sports talk radio hosts. Not talking sports at the moment but instead going off on a fictional character from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*.

Celeste Headlee: When guys talk on sports radio shows – and let's face it, most of the hosts and callers on sports radio are men – they mostly talk about sports. Who's gonna win the championship, which guy should the coach put in at quarterback. But far more interesting, for our purposes on this podcast, are the times when people on sports talk radio talk about how to be a man. As it turns out, they talk about that a lot.

John Biewen: Directly and indirectly, ironically and seriously, how to be an admirable guy in these complicated times. And how not to.

Jim Rome: This guy's like, (sings) 'I got a golden ticket.' Yeah, Pops, why don't you get yourself a *job*? Why don't you support the family, why don't you kick something into that pot? Instead of you and the six others being in bed in your pajamas all day long watching TV. Then all of a sudden the kid comes home with a candy bar and a golden ticket, and you're ready to run a marathon. Deadbeat.

[Music]

Celeste Headlee: From the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and PRX, it's *Scene on Radio*, Part 11 of our series, MEN. We're looking at masculinity, sexism, patriarchy. How it all works, and why we need to take it apart. I'm Celeste Headlee.

John Biewen: I'm John Biewen. For this episode, we've repurposed and rebuilt a piece from Season One on this show. It was part of a series that looked at stuff like race, class, and gender through sports. Borrowing from Raymond Carver, I called that original episode, "What Men Talk About When They Talk About Sports."

Celeste Headlee: And as it turned out John, you had to listen to a heck of a lot of sports talk radio in order to do this piece. I gotta wonder, Is that something you do anyway?

John Biewen: It's not something I ordinarily do. I have listened to *games* on the radio at various points in my life – especially baseball, which is definitely the best sport to watch on the radio. But sports *talk* was never of interest to me. I mean, I've never been into sports so much that I wanted to spend hours listening to people talk about it. How about you, Celeste? Sports talk radio?

Celeste Headlee: Um, no. I'm sure that's not a surprise. But sports talk radio is a wildly popular format. There are about as many sports talk stations as there are public radio stations, and sports talk has tens of millions of listeners, mostly men aged twenty-five to fifty-four. Some major cities have not just one, but three or four stations, talking sports 24-7. I guess you thought there was something important you could learn about American men by listening in. But really, John, I am not sold on this yet. We're talking about really big, broad issues of masculinity and gender in this podcast. Sports talk sounds like a little bit of a trivial detour. Am I gonna care about this?

John Biewen: Fair question. First of all, you're gonna hear very little about sports themselves in this episode. And this is the next-to-last episode in our 12-part season. You could almost say, in a way, it's the climax of the series. That's how important I think this is. Not sports per se. Because of course not all men are into sports, either. A lot of women love sports. A jaunt through sports talk radio might sound like a sidebar. But it points us, I think, to one of the central things we have to understand about our patriarchal culture.

Celeste Headlee: That's your pitch. OK, I'm willing to be convinced. So tell me what' the big deal about this. And then we'll talk about it, and hear more from the psychologist, Terry Real.

[Sound of tuning dial, cycling through music and talk stations]

John Biewen: Now, if you're not a sports talk listener, you may be thinking, I know what this is gonna be. A bunch of guys in their electronic treehouse sounding like 1962.

Mike Valenti, radio host: Grilling is like a real bastion of manhood. It's just a man thing.

Terry Foster, co-host: Right.

John Biewen: Oozing testosterone, sizing up women's bodies, bashing gays, with maybe some recreational racism thrown in from time to time. That's more or less what I expected. (By the way, more than 90-percent of the top sports talk radio hosts are white men. Almost all of the rest are black men. Of the top 100 most popular sports talk radio programs, among them, the 185 or so hosts that they have because a number of them have more than one host, there's one woman, at WFAM in New York City.)

That said, having spent a bunch of hours listening, I have to say, what goes on in that radio clubhouse is more complicated than I expected, and more interesting.

Radio Guy 1: Yeah, seems to me it's like weakness on weakness, strength on strength...

Guy 2: Yeah....

Guy 1: 'Cause Cook is obviously very impressive....

David Nylund: This is a station I listen to the most. I'm listening to 97.1 The Ticket, which is a local Detroit sports radio program...

John Biewen: David Nylund is on the couch in his loft condo in Sacramento, California. He's streaming the station on his laptop.

David Nylund: It helps me hear more substantive discussion of Detroit sports or Michigan State, University of Michigan. But it also is a way of feeling connected to home.

Radio on laptop, host: You know it could be a long day for Michigan State. They'll probably come up with something a little bit better than they had against Rutgers, but....

David Nylund: This is a really huge game. This would be really significant to beat Michigan ... I was actually getting sort of pumped up as a Michigan State fan.

John Biewen: So, you get it. David is a fan. But seriously, he's REALLY a fan.

[Sound of an opening door.]

David Nylund: Here's all my Detroit stuff, right here. Al Kaline....

John Biewen: He's got framed pictures of Detroit sports heroes on the walls in his front hallway.

David Nylund: Yeah, so the rest of the house is just modern art, and some people give me a hard time, like, being a metrosexual, but then there's this area that honors Detroit sports teams and then my bathroom is all Michigan state – plaques and the toothbrush holder...

John Biewen: Just to be really clear, you have a Michigan State Spartans shower curtain. It's Michigan State green with the Spartans logo on it, the helmet, right, and the....

David Nylund: So this is over the top, but this is where my loyalty and passion is...

John Biewen: But if you're picturing a Joe Six Pack kind of sports fan, his references to modern art and being a "metrosexual" might have tipped you off that there's more to David Nylund.

David Nylund [montage]: I am a full professor at California State University-Sacramento. / A professor of social work I've been there about 13 years. / I've mainly been a psychotherapist for close to thirty years. / I also have a Ph.D in cultural studies with an emphasis in feminist theory. / I'm very social justice minded, work with queer communities. / I am the Clinical Director of the Gender Health Center which is a local non-profit agency that serves the transgender community.

John Biewen: At this point you could be thinking: what?

David Nylund: Yeah, I mean, in many ways it's a contradiction.

John Biewen: But David thinks the blended brand of masculinity that he's living out is not unusual.

David Nylund: Influenced by traditional ideas of manhood but also being informed by a lot of the recent progress made in regards to gay rights, women's rights. So, I think in some way I am, maybe a more heightened contradiction, but I think a lot of men live a similar life.

John Biewen: David hears a good bit of that complexity in the voices of sports talk radio. And he's an expert. He wrote a book on the subject.

David Nylund: It's called *Beer, Babes, and Balls: Masculinity in Sports Talk Radio*.

John Biewen: He said that really fast. Wouldn't want you to miss that title.

[Sound: tape rewinds.] Here he is again, slowed down.

David Nylund: It's called *Beer, Babes, and Balls: Masculinity in Sports Talk Radio*.

John Biewen: Not a typical title for what is in fact a scholarly book, published by an academic press. Nylund did lots of listening to sports talk radio, and applied content analysis. He interviewed people who work on and listen to sports talk shows. In particular, he focused on the guy we heard at the top of this episode: currently the number two sports talk radio host in the whole country: Jim Rome of CBS Sports.

David Nylund: Jim Rome became famous on a national level for his rather Neanderthal, macho speech, a lot of what he calls talking smack, pretty much like insulting others and getting the upper hand. And he was known for insulting a quarterback for the Rams at the time, Jim Everett, referring to him as Chrissie, the tennis player, feminizing him because he didn't stay in the pocket and get hit.

ESPN, Jim Rome: Jim, good to have you on the show.

Jim Everett: Good to be here, Jim, thank you.

Jim Rome: Check that. Chris Everett, good to have you on the show!

Jim Everett: You know what? You know, you've been calling me that for about the last five years.

Jim Rome: Now, two years, actually, Chris.

Jim Everett: Well....

David Nylund: So Jim Rome was assaulted by Jim Everett on a live show on ESPN2.

Jim Everett: But if you call me Chris Everett to my face one more time....

Jim Rome: I already did it twice!

Jim Everett: If you call it one more time, we better take a station break.

Jim Rome: Chris.

[Crashing sounds: Everett attacks Rome across the table]

John Biewen: That was Jim Rome back in 1994. But, as David says, people aren't just one thing. And sometimes they evolve.

David Nylund: So I thought he was interesting to interrogate and to analyze because at the same time, in terms of his promoting these traditional sexist, macho ideas, he became known for his support of gay athletes and not tolerating homophobic speech on his program.

Jim Rome: Let's go to the phones. We go to Beaufort, South Carolina, Neal. ...

John Biewen: Here's Rome on his radio show almost twenty years after the Jim Everett incident, in 2013, leading a discussion about gay players in pro football.

Caller: You know we've been listening to all this gay sports stuff and the NFL, and I wanted to bring up how come we haven't talked about any of, maybe some of the lesbian types of stuff that go on maybe in soccer or softball or women's basketball, or any of the uncomfortableness that might be going on in that locker room. Why have we just singled out the men?

Jim Rome: What do you mean? What are you talking about? What should we be talking about that we're not talking about?

Caller: Just ... I just feel like, you know ... two guys can go ahead and watch a lesbian –something, and they would like it. But you would never find a woman watching two guys and enjoy that.

[Pause] [Buzzer, recorded rap-like song: We don't like that call...]

Jim Rome: What I do not enjoy is the stupidity of that telephone call, that's what I don't enjoy. What the hell are you talking about?! I understand that this is going to be a very difficult conversation for some of you to handle and have. But you need to do better than that.

John Biewen: Rome is not some overtly sensitive public radio type and he's nobody's political activist. But he often plays the grownup in the room when somebody calls in with a question or comment that's bigoted or clueless. About sexual orientation, about women...

Caller: I got myself in a position where a girl had come up to me, and I was one of the star linebackers on our team. I said to myself, I tell any guy, if I have to rape a girl just to get her into bed and have sex with her or whatever, it's not worth it. Some of these athletes—

[Sound: Loud buzzer]

Jim Rome: It's not? And for the last time, rape is not having sex. Rape is committing a crime. A violent crime.

John Biewen: Or about race.

Caller: What's this absolute cult fascination with Chicago and St. Louis? They're both toxic dumps in the Midwest, and the only thing that both these cities are known for is crime, crack, and having more black people than a Tarzan flick.

[Sound: Buzzer]

Jim Rome: Are you freaking kidding me? I don't need that crap on my radio show.

John Biewen: So, what does Rome have to say about the biggest and longest-running politically-loaded sports story of our time, the mostly-black NFL players kneeling for the national anthem? Here's Rome on his show in May 2018.

Jim Rome: The protests are not about the national anthem. They're not about the flag. They're not about the military. And to me to claim that they are is pretty ignorant. The idea that the players are making a statement that the nation is not living up to the values represented by the flag, is somehow disrespectful to the flag, is just beyond me, because that's just not what they're saying. I mean, whose idea was it for Colin Kaepernick to kneel in the first place? Green Beret, Texas Longhorn, Seattle Seahawk, Nate Boyer. Nate Boyer gave him that idea. It was born out of a conversation that the two of them had, a conversation where Boyer said the first words from Kaepernick were to *thank* Boyer for his service. The players have made it pretty clear that their concerns are with social injustice. Their concerns are with police brutality....

David Nylund: It becomes a vehicle to have a fairly substantive discussion of social issues that couldn't be predicted on a first reading of sports radio.

John Biewen: David Nylund says he listened to long, intense discussions about domestic violence on sports radio, after Ray Rice and other football players were charged with assaulting their girlfriends and their children.

David Nylund: Men who were listening to sports radio were having discussions about an issue that they otherwise wouldn't have. They wouldn't have it in other genres. They're not going to lectures at the university sponsored by, you know, the Women and Gender Studies Department. So I think that is important to acknowledge.

[MUSIC]

John Biewen: So yeah, Nylund says, sports talk radio is a kind of refuge for a lot of men, a place to go and relax and talk guy stuff, away from the demands of a shifting culture. And for some, that does mean behaving like ... well, this is host Josh Innes a few years ago, talking with a co-host about the model Kate Upton, the day after she appeared on their show to talk about her interest in equestrian.

Josh Innes: Would you ever pleasure her orally, that's the next question....

John Biewen: So yes, sometimes these guys are absolute pigs on the air. But sports radio also seems to be a place, often, where men get together to try to figure out how to be.

[BREAK]

John Biewen: After listening to hours of sports talk, and especially the *Jim Rome Show*, I compiled a short list of lessons for being a guy that I thought I heard on those shows. I ran them past professor David Nylund, and he approved, he agreed I was on the right track. So, here they are.

First rule. Have something to say, and for god's sake, say it emphatically. Don't offer it up as one possibility among others, make a pronouncement. Or, as Jim Rome likes to put it: "Have a take. Don't suck." Here's David Nylund.

David Nylund: There isn't people on this program, like, "I wonder if it's possible, you know, could it be this point but I'm not sure, what do you think?" It's a very direct debate style, make your point, and then Jim Rome decides whether that is a good take, and then you're in the club, you're in the man club, or not, and then you get buzzed out.

John Biewen: You've gotta speak confidently, and with style. Don't be boring. Those standards apply to the occasional woman caller, too.

Caller, Jolene: Hey Rome, how are you?

Jim Rome: Great, Jolene, how are you?

Jolene: I wanted to talk to you about the guy from South Carolina yesterday, when he called in and was supposedly taking his kids and his dog out back to shoot em?

Jim Rome: Sure.

Jolene: I mean....

Jim Rome: That would be like what?

Jolene: He sucks.

[Buzzer sound]

Jim Rome: And now I just hung up on you again, Jolene. Just not a good phone call, Jolene. I mean I'm trying, I'm helping you. There are several million people listening on several hundred radio stations, and if you call up and say, "Hey Rome, I wanna talk about that guy I heard on the program yesterday, he sucks," well so does your take. You have to do better than that.

John Biewen: Next rule: Do your job. Don't be Grandpa Joe. Show some integrity. In short: be a standup guy.

Jim Rome: How about A-Rod? Nailed as a cheater. Remember when we used to talk about how this was gonna be the guy that helped restore integrity to major league baseball? This is a guy who we can believe in, this guy doesn't cheat....

John Biewen: Finally, the last pair of rules, and these are big. First, don't be a loser. Don't be the *wrong kind* of guy. That might sound like just another way of saying, "be a winner." Which – spoiler alert, that is the last rule, coming next. But "don't be a loser" needs some attention of its own. I have to say, this surprised me more than anything, in listening to sports talk and the Rome show in particular: The amount of time spent talking about the type of guy *not* to be.

Jim Rome, reading message from caller: Hey Jim. Add Homebrew Beer Guy to the Hated Guys list. You know the guy...

[crossfade to:] Snake Guy. Y'all know that guy, right? When you went to college, wasn't there always that one idiot with the snake in the dorm? There's always that one guy!

John Biewen: Karaoke Guy. Jersey Guy – the grown man who wears football jerseys out and about. The list goes on.

Jim Rome: You know Golf Guy. You know Likes to Fight Guy. You know At the Party Guy. And you know, Gym Guy. We all know him, we all hate him. You know,

the guy who rocks the weightlifting gloves, the gloves that he has to re-velcro before every big set....

John Biewen: It's a little daunting, isn't it? It's a minefield trying to figure out how not to be one of these loser types. But do you notice what I notice about the Hated Guys? For me it brings back that complexity that David Nylund, our expert in Sacramento, talked about earlier. On the one hand, there's this retrograde, adolescent, who-should-we-all-shun kind of talk. For Nylund, this kind of thing pretty much blows up the idea of the John Wayne, rugged individualist American man.

David Nylund: In many ways men are just very much wanting to fit in. There isn't much independence, it's like fitting in with the Guy Code or the Bro Code.

John Biewen: But at the same time, a lot of the guys Rome hates are the old-school, traditionally masculine dudes. The guy in the sports car who pulls up beside you on the freeway and wants to race.

Jim Rome: Who do you think that is? It's a given. Corvette Guy.

John Biewen: Or this one:

Jim Rome: Handshake guy. The bone crusher. Shaking somebody's hand is a greeting, it's a formality, it is not a tough man's competition. I know you think

you're establishing some sort of alpha dog status. We get it, you're tough. Good for you. Can I have my freaking hand back, please.

John Biewen: Rome said that on the radio before Donald Trump became president and established himself as possibly the world's most ridiculous Handshake Guy. Finally, the most important rule of all: Be a winner. Be the top dog. Be The Guy. Here's Rome a few years ago talking about the basketball player, Dwight Howard, who was trying to decide at the time whether to stay with the Los Angeles Lakers or move to a smaller-market team with less pressure.

Jim Rome: The fact that he hasn't come right out and said, I want to be here and I want to dominate, I want to be here and I want to be the face of the franchise, all of that tells me he's not sure he can handle it and he's not sure he wants it. And if he's not sure, then that's not a guy I would trust. You have to have a kill or be killed mentality and a willingness to grind, and I haven't seen that from him either. The fact that he wants to look around and see what else is out there tells me, he doesn't have what it takes to be The Man in L.A. If the guy wanted to be The Guy, we'd know it.

John Biewen: See, it's not just about being a great player, or a team player. It's about making yourself the unquestioned leader. Jim Rome himself is comfortable being The Guy. His radio show reportedly earns him tens of millions of dollars a year, and the way he presides as host you'll never doubt he's in charge.

[MUSIC]

Celeste Headlee: Are most sports talk guys like Jim Rome? Because he sounds like a lot of the men I know. They love sports and they have strong opinions, but they don't hate women or gay people. Regular guys, not the guys that I usually hear on talk radio who sound like they're performing an Al Bundy role or something.

John Biewen: Of course there's a whole range among sports talk hosts. Just like among regular talk radio hosts. We heard the clip from the jackass talking about Kate Upton, and those guys are out there. But my impression, and David Nylund would back this up, is that Rome is not unusual these days among the top sports talk shows. There would be more people like him among the most popular shows. And that's one *kinda* hopeful takeaway, I think, from this. That the messages of feminism, at least *some* of those messages, are reaching into most corners of society by now, even this one. Lots of men are at least wrestling with them.

Celeste Headlee: It is interesting to hear how Jim Rome himself evolved from his macho, bad-boy days of the 1990s – again, *in some ways*. He's clear now in swatting away rape culture talk and homophobic talk from his callers, and racist talk.

John Biewen: But – now we've each used the phrase "in some ways" in talking about Jim Rome's feminist evolution. Because at the same time, there are other features of his show, like that debating style that he insists on. Each caller is basically accepting a challenge -- to make the most authoritative declaration you can, and to do it with flair. Insults to your debating opponent – some other guy

who has a different opinion about who's the best player or whatever it is -- insults are encouraged and rewarded.

Celeste Headlee: Necessary. I don't think anyone would mistake that for conversation. And by the way, I saw a guy wearing a t-shirt that said, "if she says we need to talk... run." But on Rome's show, he's turned mansplaining into a competitive sport. Even the callers are separated into winners and losers.

John Biewen: He actually calls his show, *The Jungle*. "Welcome to The Jungle," he says.

Celeste Headlee: And that's really part of a huge piece of traditional American masculinity that seems to go unquestioned in Jim Rome's world: Be a winner. Life is a contest and you'd better win.

John Biewen: Yeah. (And by the way, Jim Rome declined my interview invitation through his publicist.) But this is the big idea that I think we need to talk more about. This, "where are you in the pecking order, dude?" thing. There are so many ramifications to this perceived difference between men and women – men are competitive; women are collaborative and cooperative. On average. Recognizing, as always, that these are generalizations that don't apply to every individual.

Celeste Headlee: Right. But trust me, just about every woman out there will tell you, it's real. It's a thing. This need to be somebody, to be a success and to be

seen as a success by the people around you. Many if not most men seem to feel it in a particularly urgent way that is tied up with gender.

John Biewen: As a man, I'll just say the struggle is real. The imprint that you get as a dude in our culture – I'll speak for myself, I got it. I've recognized it for many years and it's a lifelong challenge to loosen its grip and try to be guided by other, more healthy motivations. But yeah, the imperative to achieve, to excel. And to get outside *recognition* of your achievements. You know, Buddhist teachers talk about the comparing mind.

Celeste Headlee: Yeah,, and if the Buddha was talking about it 2600 years ago, that shows it's a very deeply human innate tendency, to measure yourself against other people. And men don't have a monopoly on it and neither does American culture, for sure. And frankly, it's not always a bad thing. It's okay to be inspired by others to be better and do more. But lots of cultures throughout history have recognized oversized ego and excessive competitiveness as character flaws, something to watch out for in ourselves. American culture practically sanctifies competitiveness, as this great virtue – especially for men.

John Biewen: We celebrate the rugged individual, the Marlboro man, and we've got this hyper-competitive, capitalist economy with its yawning gap between winners and losers.

Celeste Headlee: And oh how we celebrate the winners. Right? The superstar athletes, the tech billionaires, the movie stars.

Donald Trump: We're gonna win so much! We're gonna win at every level! We're gonna win economically, we're gonna win with military, we're gonna win with healthcare and for our veterans, we're gonna win with every single facet. We're gonna win so much, you may even get tired of winning! And you'll say please, please, it's too much winning!

John Biewen: The man we elected president in 2016, with a large majority of white men's votes, doesn't just talk like that.

Celeste Headlee: No. He shows, and even says, in effect, that for him it's about winning *no matter what*.

John Biewen: Remember that speech he gave at a rally right after the Brett Kavanaugh-Christine Blasey Ford hearings?

Donald Trump: How did you get home? I don't remember. How'd you get there? I don't remember. Where was the place? I don't remember. How many years ago was it? I don't know. (Crowd roars)

Leslie Stahl: You mimicked Professor Blasey Ford. You mimicked her!

Donald Trump: Had I not made that speech, we would not have won.

Celeste Headlee: Yeah, on *Sixty Minutes*, Leslie Stahl challenged Trump about the way he treated Professor Ford. Finally, Trump just cut off the questioning.

Donald Trump: You know what? I'm not gonna get into it. Because we won. It doesn't matter. We won.

John Biewen: Trump is downright cartoonish. But this Be The Winner messaging is everywhere in our culture. That guy in all the TV ads -- that guy with the square jaw, the sunglasses, the stylish clothes, the beautiful woman gazing at him longingly, and the gorgeous luxury car.

Celeste Headlee: He's in control, he's got this, and somehow it's presented as though it's effortless for him. If you're a real man, that's what your life is like.

John Biewen: By the way, Jim Rome, the sports talk host, is pretty much that guy. I imagine most of his listeners are not -- they're not wearing tailored suits, living in a California mansion, showing up in *Cigar Aficionado* magazine, which he did. But his fans can associate themselves with that life by listening in, and they can call in to talk with Jim himself about how that other guy over there, the guy with the snake in his dorm room, *he's* not a cool guy like us, he's a loser.

Celeste Headlee: And it's not just about success or being cool, this is all deeply tied up with *domination*. Power and control. It's not just being the top dog in your profession or whatever, but also, traditionally at least, in your relationships. Especially -- if you're a heterosexual male -- your relationships with women.

John Biewen: When you boil it down, that's what patriarchy is: A master-servant relationship. And to the extent that a man soaks up that deep-down belief, that he's supposed to be in a dominant position with respect to women, of course that leads to all the toxic stuff we've talked about throughout the MEN series.

Celeste Headlee: You talked about these ideas with Terry Real, the psychologist, therapist, and author who we heard from in the last episode.

John Biewen: Yeah. In the last couple of episodes we've talked about how masculinity is defined by what it negates, by the things that you must *not* be, as a man. Not weak, not a woman, not gay. Not vulnerable. Or, to state that last one as a positive trait: You're supposed to be *invulnerable*. Like Superman, who's literally impervious even to bullets. Or T'Challa, in *Black Panther*, with that amazing protective suit. Or the movie in which Bruce Willis becomes a super strong superhero. It's called *Unbreakable*. Here's Terry Real.

Terry Real: The lie of patriarchy is dominion. The lie of patriarchy is hierarchy, that you are above the world, you are above nature and you're imposing your will, like a doctor on a patient or a mechanic on a car. You are above the system. This is called hubris. The Greeks understood it. Hubris or overweening pride was the essence of all Greek tragedies. This is where the men fell, was by their grandiosity and pride. You are not in charge of the universe, you are not in control of the universe.

Celeste Headlee: It's actually a trap, isn't it. If a man buys into this idea that he has to be in control and to be invulnerable, he is bound to fail. Even the most successful man can't win all the time, and everybody comes crashing down eventually.

John Biewen: Even in everyday life, and even if you are the CEO or the national champion in this or that, and you're generally riding high, today, you know, deep down, that you don't have it together all that well. You're muddling through, you're sure as hell not invulnerable. Terry Real says that reality, that knowledge, leads to shame.

Terry Real: All men have underlying shame because we all live a lie. The lie is that we're invulnerable when in fact we're not. We're human. The lie is that we're in charge of nature, we're in charge of result, we're in charge of whether we close the deal or not, when we're not in charge of shit. We're in charge of ourselves on a good day, that's it. So all of us men are trying to live up this thing which is basically -- You know what I say? I tell guys, running away from your vulnerability is like running away from your rectum. It has a way of following you no matter where you go.

Celeste Headlee: I figured that a podcast on men would have to bring up butts at some point. But seriously, this is the part of masculinity that I feel so much empathy for. This pressure to have the answer all the time, to be stoic and unmoved. I think this is part of what's behind mansplaining, in my opinion. It looks like a guy talking down to a woman and telling her the answer, but I feel like

it comes from decades of being expected to have the answers. And the sort of bravado men use to cover up their insecurity of not knowing.

John Biewen: Yeah it just becomes hard to say “I dunno!” The words Terry Real uses to talk about this issue are shame and *grandiosity*. He says, as a couples therapist, he spends a lot of time trying to help men “come down from” grandiosity, as he puts it. And to make a shift from hierarchical thinking – either I’m winning or I’m losing – to a *relational* way of being.

Terry Real: When you shift from that dominant hierarchical thinking to relational thinking, you shift from linear thinking to ecological thinking. You're not above the system, you're a humble subcomponent part of the system, you live inside of it, and it's in your interest to keep it clean and healthy.

Celeste Headlee: Keeping the system clean and healthy. Whether the system you’re talking about is a relationship – say, a marriage – or whether you’re talking about the literal ecosystem.

John Biewen: Yep. And Terry Real is talking about that, too.

Terry Real: The delusion of dominance over the feminine, including Mother Nature, will kill us. Let me be clear about the stakes. If we continue to believe that we are technologists above the rule of nature, nature will prove otherwise. And the consequences will be severe. And they are coming.

Celeste Headlee: He's talking about climate change, which is here and already doing lots of damage, and promises to be much more catastrophic. Of course, feminists have made this point before, that the impulse to *dominate*— which is a very patriarchal way of being in the world — is the same impulse whether you're dominating women, or the people who work for you, or other people you decide are different from you, or the natural world. Women have said it for a long time, but apparently it hasn't been said enough.

John Biewen: Judging from the way we're behaving, as a society, in the face of an environmental catastrophe that we're making for ourselves.

Celeste Headlee: Gotta turn it around, people. It's time for a change. A big change.

John Biewen: And that change is mostly a matter of policy when you're talking about something like climate change. But for individual men, to get over our egos, our need to win and to get recognition from outside of ourselves? That's personal work.

Terry Real: Healthy self-esteem which is what I teach men, which is rare in our culture, healthy self-esteem comes from the inside out. It's because you're here and you are human and you're breathing. And your essential worth cannot be added to, cannot be subtracted from, it can't be better or worse than the guy to the left or the right of you.

Celeste Headlee: Or the woman, or the gender non-binary person, or the child, or whomever.

[MUSIC]

Celeste Headlee: Next time: The season finale. Some takeaways from the MEN series, and thoughts on what to do about it all.

John Biewen: John Barth of PRX is our editor. Music by Alex Weston, and by Evgueni and Sacha Galperine. Music and production help from Joe Augustine of Narrative Music.

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