



Episode 34: Men, Intimacy, and Becoming Relational Again, A Conversation with Hayden Lindsey, LPC

Liz Higgins (00:02):

Hey, y'all! Liz Higgins here, and welcome to the Millennial Life Podcast, where my main goal is to share conversations that will inspire you and drive you toward the life and relationship you desire. I'm here to share what I've learned as a licensed therapist and relationship coach specializing in millennial relationships and wellness, as well as transformative conversations with other professionals. Thanks for listening and enjoy today's episode!

Liz Higgins (00:33):

Hey everybody! Thanks for listening to the podcast today. I am so excited to have you here, because I've got a great guest set up for our conversation today. I have Hayden Lindsey, who is a Licensed Professional Counselor and specializes in helping people master the art of creating great relationships. And if you've listened to any of my podcasts, you know, that that is, that is my jam. That is what I'm trying to do here, is help you all hear the things and just get enlightened on what it takes to make great relationships in our modern world. So, Hayden, thank you for being here with me today!

Hayden Lindsey (01:14):

Thank you, Liz. I'm just so happy to be here!

Liz Higgins (01:16):

Yeah! It's been really cool getting to know you and meeting you through, um, our mutual interest of Relational Life Therapy. So again, I'm just super excited to have you here today and sharing some insights with us about relationships and specifically the work that you do with men - men and relationships. So maybe you can just share a little bit with us about what got you into this whole work and this journey of being a therapist.

Hayden Lindsey (01:44):

Yeah, that's, I think that's an easy one for me. Um, I, I will joke with my clients that I, I didn't get into this because I was particularly good at relationships and went, uh, 'Oh yeah, this is really easy. And I'm going to teach people how to, how to, how to do this.' Um, so I actually really struggled with relationships for a, a large part of my adult life, and decided to turn my weakness into a strength.

And, uh, I just, I decided if I can, if I can figure this out, so can everyone else. So I got really interested in what makes for healthy intimacy. Uh, and then through that got into working with men because I, I quickly found out that it's really difficult to work with intimacy without working with masculinity... Because everything, uh, that we are taught as boys and as men really sets us up to be pretty crappy at intimacy. So that's sort of the long and short of, you know, my, my two specialties - relationships (I do a lot of couples therapy) uh, and then, uh, men's work as well.

Liz Higgins (02:50):

Oh yeah. And just, just based on what you shared there, I'm like, oh my gosh, we could go so many incredible directions. But to keep it focused, I would love to hear, like, what you see coming in your office, um, particularly with guys today. You know, because I think... I think we are in a really awesome time where our generation as a whole is, is much more open to this idea of sitting in a therapist's office and exploring what that process even is. So I don't know if you experience the same thing, but people seem generally more open to coming through the door. Um, and then, you know, they get on the couch and then can kind of feel 'Alright, do I really want to do this?' But what do you kind of see coming through your doors?

Hayden Lindsey (03:36):

Well, I've been, uh, really impressed and grateful just to see more and more men coming in, sort of on their own volition. I know we've got a reputation for (especially if we're doing couples work), for sort of being dragged through the door by, by the ear, uh, sort of the old traditional way of thinking about it. But, uh, more and more men are seeking out therapy for themselves, and more and more men are seeking out therapy for their relationship. And I think it's a beautiful thing. I think what I find most challenging is a lot of men will come in and they'll, they'll know that they need to do something. That they're, they're not happy, they're, uh, clinically depressed or just irritable, or kind of looking around and going, 'I did all the things. I have the job and the, and the marriage and the kids. And, and why am I not happy?' But they don't, they, they don't have a clear, uh... They're, they're unable to articulate for me what, what the work is that they want to do. So that ends up being, uh, I think a big part of my job on the front end is, uh, kind of looking at the pieces here, uh, of their lives and actually helping them figure out how to define their problem for themselves.

Liz Higgins (04:55):

Oh yeah. Because they're kind of coming in with this, this, I guess, "symptom", or this "presenting problem", maybe like... Maybe that's a feeling, or maybe that's a tension in relationship happening or something, and they're not quite there with the like, you know, awareness of what's led to that, what's going on. So you kind of have to do the deep, deep, deeper digging to even just clearly define, like how did that come to be and stuff. And that makes a lot of sense.

Hayden Lindsey (05:27):

Yeah. And yeah, I have it in my head that a big reason for this is just, you know, I, I struggle to say that men are more injured than women, but, uh, I do think our culture really, uh... although it distorts intimacy for, for both men and women, women are still taught to value it. And so a lot of men come in kind of completely having parts of themselves sort of surgically removed by just growing up a boy in our culture. Um, and so...

Liz Higgins (06:01):

Oh yeah!

Hayden Lindsey (06:02):

So there, there's a lot of grief and a lot of, uh, unspoken mourning there. And... Yeah. Then we end up having to do quite a lot of digging just to get to, uh, what is, what is the issue?

Liz Higgins (06:15):

Oh, yeah. Well, and, I would just love to ask you a little more about some of that, like... Men's conditioning in this world, in this culture, um, even for our generation that is - in a lot of levels - more, more "woke", right? Like what, tell us about that. Like, yeah. What do men experience growing up?

Hayden Lindsey (06:40):

Well, Terry Real has this great term, uh, you may have heard, uh, as a fellow RLT-er. (I guess if you're listening, I should define that as Relational Life Therapy is the, this is one of the, uh, the forms of therapy I practice that focuses on building intimacy.) But I use this concept of the normative trauma of boyhood. And this is sort of just the, the, the routine trauma. Like we can, we can bet if you grow up a boy in America (or really anywhere in the world right now) uh, you're, you're going to have these sorts of injuries. I think I shared this with you, Liz, uh, on our initial call, but I have a very salient memory of being 12, sixth grade, and, um, my parents were going through a divorce. And I was on the playground crying before school. And I went to a private, uh, private Catholic school in North Dallas.

Hayden Lindsey (07:36):

If you just look objectively at my life, really nothing traumatic about it. But I do have this memory of this older kid coming up to me and he slapped me in the face. And, uh, and they called me a pussy. And told me to stop crying. And, um, I kind of went, oh, okay. I remember that moment, very saliently, because I went, ah, all right, that's a part of me that I'm going to shove down. And, um, you know, and I did a pretty good job of shoving it down, and I went through middle school, high school, uh, and then, you know, got out into the, into college. And, uh, well, I had a depressive episode that showed up as, you know, uh, just anger. Rage episodes, a lot of self-medication. And, and you know, I don't, I don't trace it back to that one moment, but there are probably a, a hundred thousand of those little moments that I experienced, you know, just in my, um, the course of my upbringing. Uh, and then I, I work with men who have all sorts of backgrounds who have, um, you know, some pretty profound abuse in their families. And it's just, you start taking the normative trauma, just the normal way that we, uh, we, we turn boys into men through injury. Uh, and then you layer on top of it, some of these, these other events, um, and it's a, it's a recipe for a lot of really disconnected and isolated men.

Liz Higgins (09:03):

Absolutely. And, and thank you for sharing that, you know? Hearing you kind of talk through some of your, well, a very formative experience, it sounds, where you learned to put that piece of you, that part of you to the side, stuff it. And what you later on did feel that you could access and express, I guess, were some of those emotions that I see guys - men - sharing with me, even in therapy, it's like anger, rage... That more explosive experience of whatever's going on. Like, that's the piece that

men, um, I guess through this patriarchal lens that we're kind of discussing right now, feel permission to show up. Like, that's what they're taught to be.

Hayden Lindsey (09:53):

Yeah. And I've actually read some research that suggests by about 9, we have learned to suppress everything besides anger. So you think about - before you're even 10 years old, our boys are running around, uh, just disconnected from a lot of their emotionality. Uh, and that's, it, it's really heartbreaking for me. Um, it seems like such a big problem to take on, uh, it can seem overwhelming at times. But, uh, again, I think we, maybe we do this one man at a time and, you know, if I can get to a guy and help him work through this stuff so he doesn't pass it on, uh, that, that intergenerational component for me is a big part of this work. I, I often tell all my guys that you might be working on 3, 4, 5, 6, 10 generations worth of crap. And no wonder you feel like you're crazy. It's 'cause you're, you're feeling all the feelings that haven't been expressed in your family for a hundred years; whatever it is.

Liz Higgins (11:00):

Yeah, absolutely. And I just appreciate that you said that because this is like systemic conditioning. This is like, we almost can't just look to our own generation, our own generation's parents, and like place the blame there. And it's really not about that. But it's like this, this is like the world we have been in. And we're in this place now where, I think, just systemically, culturally, societally, (if that's a word) we're like unraveling a bit, and we're kind of untangling from these notions and narratives. And these movements are really coming to the forefront of like, this stuff is not okay. And in my work - and as I hear you saying in your work - relationally speaking, I, I think that's very much happening right now. And it's like, dude, the way we are raising our boys, this is not okay.

Hayden Lindsey (11:57):

And in a, uh, in a post-nuclear world, I think, uh, we really need to get a handle on this before (and I say this with all seriousness) before we blow ourselves up. Uh, because it is, it is injured men in power who have, you know, the access to all these launch codes. And, um, again, I hope I'm not being hyperbolic here. Uh, but, uh, I just think we need more, more men to step up and do their healing work. Because there are some pretty serious consequences globally if we don't get a handle on this.

Liz Higgins (12:36):

Can you take us back a little bit? We, we did chat before, and you were kind of getting into the concept of The Man Box. And I don't know, maybe a lot of listeners here have not heard of that concept, but when I learned about that, it made a lot of sense. And I was just wondering if you could kind of explain that to us.

Hayden Lindsey (12:55):

Yeah. Um, if you haven't heard of The Man Box you, I promise you, you know what it is. But, uh, it's a fabulous concept for, I think, understanding the experience of men, uh, these days. The term man box is actually a, a abbreviation for the Act Like A Man Box. Um, I do like the shorthand, 'cause it, it rolls off the tongue a little better, but, um... The, the full version really emphasizes that masculinity is performative. The term came out of some research done in the 80's by Paul Kivel and his

colleagues at the Oakland Men's Project. Um, they, they basically looked at, uh, a lot of adolescents and kind of their experience growing up in Oakland. And what he found was there, there are behaviors and, and, uh... There are behaviors that fall into a box, The Man Box, uh, and those behaviors are relatively safe.

Hayden Lindsey (13:52):

And then anything that falls outside of the box, uh, we, we really punish by shame and at times violence. So anything considered feminine, for example, will fall outside of the box. So the, The Man Box is really responsible for, uh, all, all of the phobias, the homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, anything that, that doesn't "fit the mold" in the box really gets punished. So I'm floating back to, you know, sitting on the playground, uh, crying, you know, that is a, that, that crying behavior is very far outside of the box. So, uh, here's this kid coming up sort of enforcing, uh, The Man Box and, you know, enforcing it with violence and shame. Hits me in the face. Okay. I know, let me get back in the box, let me shove that down.

Liz Higgins (14:42):

Yeah. And I think it's so interesting Hayden, to... Again, going back to that moment you reflect on that, like, this was another child, this was another kid that was like putting you back in the box. Like, that conditioning was already so there for him.

Hayden Lindsey (14:58):

Yeah. And then, you know, I, I, I picked up the baton and ran with it. And I'm sure there are, uh, I could reflect on some, some moments in my history where I, I became the enforcer. And what is so damning about The Man Box, if it were just about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, that would probably be bad enough. But even within the box, there is a kind of a hierarchy and a masculinity is sort of a moving target. And I always use the example of, like, football. Like if, if you like football, that's solidly in the box. But, uh, you know, do you like the right team? And, uh, you know, you'll see guys at bars, uh, kind of rippin' each other over whose team is, is manlier and... "Oh, you like the Cowboys? The 'Cowgirls!'" Uh, and it doesn't, it doesn't seem like... A lot of these seem really, you know, low level, well, they're microaggressions. Microaggressions are sort of the, the tool that we use to, in everyday life to keep, uh, keep them in, in the box. Or establish where I am on the, on the ladder, uh, inside the box.

Liz Higgins (16:07):

Yeah! It's like the, the, the ruler slap in the hand. Right,

Hayden Lindsey (16:10):

Right, right. But I just, those erosions, uh, just, they add up. And one of the things I work with my guys on is, you know, I enjoy a good, we call it 'ball busting'. Right? Uh, I enjoy good ripping, you know. If there's a relationship there! But I think a lot of men have learned to establish bonds through the microaggressions. Um, and so if our relationship is built on aggression, uh, you know, what kind of, what kind of friendship would we really have?

Liz Higgins (16:44):

Yeah, that's true. And, and I did want to ask, like, how do you see, you know... Growing up with that conditioning. Learning, like, you know, not in these terms, but obviously the, the experience is there, you... You are in this box, you should be in this box. That's a man, that's masculinity. How does that impact, you know, teens, young adults, millennials, people our age. Like how does that impact people relationally?

Hayden Lindsey (17:13):

Oh, it's huge. Um, the, the primary, I think agent in, uh, The Man Box sort of mindset is shame. And by the way, the research shows us that men with a Man Box mentality, uh, are, are more violent. They are more likely to complete suicide. Uh, they are more likely to struggle with substance abuse. Uh, so The Man Box is quite literally killing us, uh, just, just at a, at a macro level. But, uh, at the relational level, I think we lose sight of how difficult it is to connect with someone when I am in a 'shame state'. And so if the, the, if I'm exposed to these, uh, policing behaviors, uh, over and over again - "Don't do that, that's feminine. That is, uh, unmanly. Here's a healthy dose of shame." Uh, I'm gonna move through the world, either living in that shame or living out of, sort of the grandiose protective measures that we take.

Hayden Lindsey (18:16):

And neither of those states are compatible with intimacy. They're both kind of two sides of the same coin. Um, this is Terry Real's gift, I think, to the, to the, to the world and the therapeutic community. Just the understanding of shame and grandiosity as being anti-relational. So I always say, we connect at the ground floor. If I'm in the basement, uh, in a shame state, I'm going to miss you there. If I'm up in the penthouse, hovering above you, uh, in a superior grandiose state, we just won't be able to connect there,

Liz Higgins (18:49):

That is so helpful to hear you describing it that way. It resonates so much. And I think that's what drew me to Terry's model, because again, it's like... This is calling out the shit that we all know has been there! And now we're, again, like this much more self-aware generation, and we're in these relationships. A lot of people, um, our age, dealing with these tendencies, you know, of... And there's stuff for, for all genders to look at. Right? But we're kind of specifically talking about what men have endured through, you know, from a very young age and just how that conditioning is very non-relational. And, um, I don't know. I'm just curious, like, as you work with these guys and they come in and they're like, alright, they've been in that box. What does that process... I mean, this just feels like such a big question, right? Like, what is that process like to kind of open the box, exit the box? Like, is it even doable? Like how do you, how do you see people get there?

Hayden Lindsey (19:53):

Yeah. So I... Here's where I'll answer your question in a roundabout way. But I think this is where men are most vulnerable. Um, when it comes to kind of self-help and, uh, you know, I, I see all these programs out there for men that are like, you know, "Become The Alpha" and, uh, the work with a lot of folks in the, a lot of guys in the pickup artist community. And, um, these things are aimed at helping men thrive in the box. So it's like, I'm going to teach you how to be alpha. I'm going to teach

you how to, how to climb the pyramid so that you can kick ass. And they're not using this language, but I read that, and this, this is how you thrive in the box. This is how you...

Liz Higgins (20:39):

Well yeah. And you, like, and like how you were saying earlier that metaphor was so great, like "living in the penthouse. Be up there."

Hayden Lindsey (20:44):

Right, right, right. Um, so I use this other, the 'prison psychiatrist'. It's like, um, you know, I can give you medication and help you to feel better, but you're still locked up. Uh, so in the work I do, um, I'm very much aiming to break down the walls of the box. And this is where I wish Game of Thrones had maybe ended a little better. Because, you know, Khaleesi talks about breaking the wheel. And I, I feel like I want to break, break the wheel, break the box. But, uh, that could be, that could be another episode where we talk about, uh, how, how poorly Game of Thrones ended.

Liz Higgins (21:19):

Oh yeah. Don't let me forget to pitch your podcast at the end of this! 'Cause that sounds like a great conversation for your podcast.

Hayden Lindsey (21:26):

Over some drinks. But I, uh, so your question, you know, how do we help men exit the box? I think the short answer is, we have to help them reclaim the parts of them that they've they've rejected. So I, I kind of use this example myself again. Going back to that, that moment when I was in sixth grade and giving myself the love and compassion that, uh, giving that to my inner child, that part of me, that, that wasn't received in that moment. And we, we, and we sometimes have to take, take it bit by bit. Um, and I've done this sort of, I kind of borrow from Internal Family Systems here. Uh, this 'parts work' where, um, in the IFS language, these are exiled parts. Parts of us that, um, Terry calls them 'wounded children'. Uh, I like both of them. They're both fabulous imagery, but th this part of me that I've exiled.

Hayden Lindsey (22:21):

And so that's the part of me that, uh, can feel empathy, uh, that can feel my feelings and express them moderately. This is why we see a lot of, a lot of rage, uh, uh, because I I'm, I'm sad, I'm grieving, I'm hurt, and I have nowhere to express that. And so it comes out sideways as anger. But yeah, I've done this parts work with, with the, uh, all sorts of different scenarios. I've, uh, um, I did one where we went back to a similar bullying episode and we literally, visually picked up this young man off of this, uh, uh, a teenager off the floor of the bathroom. He'd gotten, uh, jumped in the bathroom and was literally lying in a pool of urine. And we got to pick him up and hug him and clean him up and, um, you know, cry, crying through this whole process.

Hayden Lindsey (23:15):

But, um, so I think that's how we do it. We, we go back and we take it bit by bit. And I don't know that that, that the work is ever done, but, um, that's on the, the shame side. So I want to be able to, to, to nurture those parts of me that hold the shame. I also want to be able to contain the parts of me that are, you know, doing the shaming. So, uh, I I've started to notice in myself when I, when I start to...

It's so easy. It's just so seductive to, to, you know, hang out with a group of friends and want to be snarky and sarcastic and, uh, and have this, that microaggression. Um, and I, and I started to try to catch myself. And can I say something more openhearted here? Um, and just watching how that has impacted my, my relationships with other men has been, uh, tremendous. So again, tending to both sides of the coin.

Liz Higgins (24:12):

Absolutely. I imagine that these are, like, you're saying, it's like moments that you catch to practice something a little different in yourself. And then, like you're saying - the deeper work of, you know, sitting with somebody like you, that knows all these processes and, um, and help. You know, therapy is to help people with this. I tend to believe, and from my own personal journey, like the work is never done. You definitely get to much healthier places of functioning, but like we carry, we carry the stories, we carry the experience. And I just love that you called out, like, this can be like, multi-generational work that you're doing. And it will just never end. And I think that's beautiful. And for some listeners, it might be like, you know, shit! But this is, this is being human. And this is being relational. If you choose to like, say yes to this opportunity, which I, I definitely see it as opportunity, you know, that will feel hard at times.

Hayden Lindsey (25:15):

And to your point about the multi-generational, I think of this as less, less as like, you know, um, my parents really screwed me up. Uh, and it's more of a, more of a gift to the previous generations that, you know, I'm standing up to the fire and, uh, doing the work that they didn't have access to, or... There is a, just a tremendous, I was reflecting on this this week. Um, it is Men's Mental Health Month, by the way. So, uh, what are, what are some of the barriers men experience to, uh, care? And I do think men are an underserved population when it comes to mental health. Uh, one of them is learned helplessness. And we go back to that old famous study of the dogs and the electrified floor. And, um, the control group learned that they could escape these electrical shocks and hop over the fence to save themselves. And the ones that were stuck in these cages and couldn't escape, they stopped trying to do anything for themselves.

Hayden Lindsey (26:19):

And I think there is a huge component to that. For a lot of men, it's just, we just get beaten down and isolated. And, uh, since we're not talking to other men about our problems, we feel really alone in them. That's, that's the shame. Um, I worked with an older gentleman recently, just, he started to, he told me 'I just accepted that this was my lot in life.' He was referring to his depression. Um, and so he literally just didn't realize that he could live differently. And, um, so when we start talking inter-generationally, I think that that element of learned helplessness is huge in that. And, um, I'm glad that so many of us are waking up and going, 'I don't know if I can live differently, but I'd like to at least try.'

Liz Higgins (27:15):

Yeah. Well, and oftentimes, I think it's just that, that, that yes. To like, I just want to, I just want to try, I don't know how this will go and like, that's okay. If you're sitting in that space, that's okay to not know, you know? But just, just walking through that door and seeing what could come up, I think, because like you and I, Hayden we know, like there is a way out of that. There, there is a way to

experience something different. And again, yes, you carry, you carry your story and you are you, and you have the, the exiles you've got and all that kind of stuff, but, but there's absolutely a different possibility.

Hayden Lindsey (27:54):

And I will say in a lot of families, the one that is... Ultimately the one that is going to stand up to this is the one that, uh, is sort of the sickest quote unquote. In the old, uh, Family Therapy Language, the Identified Patient. The, the one who kind of carries all the symptoms and dysfunction of the family, where everyone else is just kind of coping with it. And, and, you know, uh, moving through the world, quote unquote normally. But, um, the Identified Patient is usually the one who kind of betrays the family and, uh, that may have not been the greatest language, but it speaks the truth. It's like, Hey, there's something going on here. Uh, and they may not have the language to, to point to it, but they, it shows up in their body and in their, their mental health. So if you're listening and you're in that space, um, I definitely feel for you.

Liz Higgins (28:54):

And the last thing I wanted to ask you about is something that we had talked about when we chatted before, but it's... You had mentioned like, there being a real connection between fear and shame. And like this fear/shame cycle in relationships. And I was just curious to ask you more about that, because it seemed really on point.

Hayden Lindsey (29:13):

Yeah. I would love to talk about that. And definitely knowing that a lot of your audience is women, um, I think it'll be helpful for a lot of women to understand. This is something I borrow from Pat Love and Steven Stosny. And, um, uh, Steven Stosny is really the one that, I think, has sort of pioneered this framework or theory around, uh, fear and shame. But it boils down to this - The, the, uh... When it comes to relationships, um, there's sort of a tendency for men to have this really profound vulnerability to shame. (I think due in large part to The Man Box stuff that we've been talking about. And there's some, some physiology in there, that I don't have to delve into, but, um...) So some neuro-biological reasons, and then psychosocial reasons why men are vulnerable to shame.

Hayden Lindsey (30:05):

And then on the flip side, women tend to be more vulnerable to fear - fear of harm, fear of deprivation or desertion. And so, I struggle to think of a heterosexual couple I'm working with right now that does not display some form of this. And so what happens, practically at home is, uh, I'll just start with a woman. The, the starting point is kind of arbitrary once we start thinking in terms of cycles, but... The woman will experience some kind of fear, (and it may be conscious or unconscious) and she will kind of go after the guy to soothe the fear, to find comfort. Uh, and this is one of the things that, that fear does. It makes us want to talk about the problem. Um, if you're a fear-based organism and you're experiencing fear, you want to talk about it because it makes the fear go away. If you are a shame-based organism, uh, we don't want to - shame-based organism here! I don't want to talk about the problem at all.

Hayden Lindsey (31:07):

Uh, and so if a partner is coming to me with, you know, something that I'm not doing correctly, or, um, anything that I've, what falls under the big three that I talk about. Uh, for men, the biggest three types of shame are going to be Provider, Protector, and Lover shame. So if I'm failing as a provider, a protector, or a lover. And it can be, you know, miniscally... this vulnerability to shame is just so profound. Typically, the man will start to withdraw, or he will use some sort of shame screen defense. That can be aggression or, uh, defensiveness. And so you just see at home, again, this spark of fear in the woman. She pursues the man. Her pursuit triggers his shame. He engages in withdrawal behavior, which feels like abandonment, or he gets defensive, which, uh, defensive or aggressive, which also triggers more fear.

Hayden Lindsey (32:11):

So then we get into this fear, shame, fear, shame, fear, shame. And the only real tool that we have of dealing with this is to talk about it. And I think psychotherapy has aided and abetted and sort of prioritized the fear side of things. "Let's talk about it, talk about it, talk about it." So I would just like to lend equal weight to the shame side of things and help men (or if, if you are not a man, but a shame-based organism) heal that shame. And so it doesn't have to run your relationship.

Liz Higgins (32:48):

Yeah! Because, if you're not... If you're not aware of what, what comes up inside of you and how that plays out. I mean, you're just going down into the basement or going up into the penthouse. And the patterns persist. And you just are like, at a certain point, I think exhausted. And that's when people, you know, bounce before really taking the opportunity to like, figure out 'what is this?' Um, you know, or you're just in this place of like, gosh, dissatisfaction and pain.

Hayden Lindsey (33:21):

Yeah, that... Sue Johnson calls it 'Freeze and Flee'. It's like, we're just kind of living around each other. But... I've worked with so many people where the, the partner walks into the room and it's like, you can just feel your muscles tighten. And, um, oh yeah. That freeze response. Um, I don't want to get in a conflict, but I'm, you know... I don't want to step on any toes. But I've given up hope that this person will, you know, comfort me. So that's not a place - and if you're in that place right now, I definitely encourage you to get some, get some help - that those problems don't tint.

Liz Higgins (34:03):

What, what could that look like from your perspective, Hayden? Like, would you say, you know, see if your partner will go to couples therapy? Or would somebody start this work, like, on their own? Or what do you do if, you know, you have a penthouse partner and they're just like, 'I'm not doing that shit.' Like, what do you, what do you do?

Hayden Lindsey (34:21):

Uh, I come back to carrot - the old fashioned carrot and the stick. The reason people go to therapy (or do anything really) is to avoid some negative outcome or get some positive outcome. And, um, you know. I think there's a lot of positive outcomes to be had from doing this kind of work. Um, if your sex life is in the tank, you know, that's a great carrot for a lot of men come to therapy so we can have better sex, a decrease in conflict. Um, just... I think the research shows us that couples in

healthy, connected relationships do better in their careers. Uh, so there's all sorts of benefits here! And then, you know, the stick is like, 'I'm not gonna put up with this anymore. If we're really caught in a dysfunctional loop, and I'm nearing my bottom line, I need to shake things up.' Also call this rock - daring to rock the boat. Or risking the relationship you have to get the one that you want. Which is... takes a lot of courage.

Liz Higgins (35:34):

Yeah! And that's where it's like, yeah, that's like, the hard truth of this. You have to be willing to look at, I guess, what there is to lose. And at the very same moment, like what there is to gain, which is so much. And sometimes that will be with the same partner, and maybe it's not. You know, you and I certainly are not fortune tellers and it would never be our position to say that. But I think that this work is a journey. And, um, I know for me personally, I've been able to do a lot of this within one relationship, which has really been a fascinating experience to go through with my husband. And that's been awesome. Um, so lots of possibilities.

Hayden Lindsey (36:15):

And I'll just add, I think the men I see who get complacent, or, uh, how do I even want to say that? I think because of the way that we are raised, men are conditioned to tolerate higher levels of disconnection. So that... and, and unfortunately this translates in a lot of heterosexual relationships as like, there was a huge, huge, huge, emotional burden placed on the woman. And so this is why, you know, I am seeing more men initiate couples therapy, but I think the women are still bringing the bulk of the guys in. It's because we're, we're not - again, learned helplessness. We don't know that it can be better. And so our partners going, 'Hey, it could be better.' And we're going, 'Ah, this is just, I've learned to live like this. I've learned to live with this profound sense of isolation and disconnection.' That, and again, that's really sad to me. Um, so I, I just put that on... as a, as a woman, if you're listening (or even as a man) we don't have to settle.

Liz Higgins (37:27):

Ooh, that is, that is so powerful. And I just thank you for sharing that right there. Because I know people, somebody out there is probably listening to this (or will be when this is out) and going like, 'Oh, oh my gosh. Like, this is a different kind of angle to look at what I've been going through and being in this relationship where I feel like I'm with somebody I love so much, and I want this to work, but like, maybe they're not leveling up.' And maybe, maybe, you know, you feel like it's not enough. Like, might not be the wrong person! It might just be this system that we're all existing in. And that, you know, we can change.

Liz Higgins (38:04):

And I just want to ask you Hayden, to kind of wrap this up, what, you know... In being male yourself and doing your own work, as you've shared with me, what have... What has maybe been something that you've uncovered about your own narrative on masculinity? And how, you know... How have you shifted how you've shown up there?

Hayden Lindsey (38:27):

That's a great question. I have started to view my own journey as, actually, kind of similar to, um... There, there's a theory in Diversity Counseling that talks about how people with multicultural

backgrounds sort of start to identify with the dominant culture. And then they have a sort of a pushback, and then an integration. And I feel this way with my masculinity. I started out really wanting to be a boy and do all the boy things. And then I started to look around at the men in my life, and seeing a lot of destruction and abuse of power. My mom's brother is... just this horrific racism and homophobia.

Hayden Lindsey (39:29):

And, um, that was the model of masculinity. And, and I didn't want to be like that. I didn't know that there was something better, but I didn't want to be like that. So I really, I disowned a lot of my masculinity thinking that masculinity is bad. And then I went into... I started experimenting with intimacy. I got into a relationship with a lovely woman, and I just wasn't showing up for her in a healthy, masculine way. I had sort of disowned this toxicity (at least I, I thought, I think it was coming out sort of more passive aggressively.) And so we, we didn't work out, but, uh. The, the coming to, I would say this - coming to a deep understanding that men are good, and masculinity is good. Um, and that the teaching of... what feminism has to teach us is about the pitfalls of immature masculinity. Which is essentially men living out of boy psychology. And owning it. Embracing the gift of maleness, if that's important to you.

Hayden Lindsey (40:36):

And it ended up being important to me. So, understanding that I can be healthy and masculine. And, um, and that's why a lot of guys aren't coming to therapy. They think the therapist is going to feminize them. I would love to frame therapy as I'm here to, to help you become more masculine - healthy masculine. Um, so I had this kind of pendulum swing in my own history of overidentifying, um... kind of rebelling against, and then reintegrating. It's like, Ooh, maybe there are times to be tough. Maybe there are times to be, uh, my, my aggression can be used for good or my initiative... All these things that we associate with traditional masculinity. Uh, there's some good stuff in there. Um, and unfortunately The Man Box mentality is what, uh, what distorts those.

Liz Higgins (41:29):

Yeah. Yeah. Oh my gosh. Thank you so much for sharing today, because this... Seriously, this, like, excites me to hear people like you and men like you, just putting this new, fresh - it's like, it's like a rebirth, you know? To hear like how, how you grew and who you are learning to become. And this, this new practice that's much more integrated in yourself around what it is to be a man. And just showing up better in your, in your relationships and for yourself. So thank you!

Liz Higgins (42:03):

Now tell us where we can find you! If people are like, I want to find this Hayden guy, I want to work with him.

Hayden Lindsey (42:11):

Man. I'm all over! Let's see. Um, if you would like to know more about my therapy practice, I'm based here in Austin, Texas. And my practice is Austin Intimacy Solutions. Uh, very masculine by the way! Men are, we're very much interested in the solutions.

Liz Higgins (42:28):

I love that! Interested in solutions.

Hayden Lindsey (42:33):

So that's austinintimacysolutions.com. I am starting a new men's program that I keep pushing back due to, you know, winter weather here in Texas and then a life-changing move. So my partner and I are actually super millennial right now, living out of an RV. But that program is called Men's Integration Work. And you will be able to find me at mensintegrationwork.com. I'm also on Instagram @mensintegrationwork. And then I have another podcast I do, with two colleagues of mine. We are Therapy on Tap. We sit around and drink beer and talk about mental health. We have an episode called Men on Tap that's out now, and you can find that wherever you listen to podcasts.

Liz Higgins (43:29):

Nice! Oh my gosh, I'm going to go listen. And then I'm going to like, (not passively aggressively) text it to my husband. Um, he actually really enjoys listening to that kind of stuff. So that's awesome to hear. And we will put links to all of those things that you just mentioned in the Show Notes for this episode, so people can just click right over and connect with you. Thank you so much for doing this! I, this conversation, it excites me and it's just so fulfilling to chat with you and hear the work you're doing with men, with couples, with anybody. And I'm just very grateful to you right now. So thank you!

Hayden Lindsey (44:07):

Thank you for having me on! This was a blast.

Thanks again for listening to the podcast. If you like the show, leave us five stars or write a review. If you're interested in learning more, sign up for my free ebook "The One Barrier to Commitment All Millennials Face" at millenniallifecounseling.com.

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