

The Hum Podcast

Episode 12: “Toxic Masculinity is Where It Begins”

{Theme music begins}

{Scott’s voice begins to come in over top of music}

Scott: Toxic masculinity is where it begins really, because that’s a precursor to homophobia, to misogyny, to racism, to everything, and then to violent attacks, to hate crimes, to rape.

{Music increases in volume}

Male voice: You’re listening to The Hum.

{Music decreases in volume}

Gilad: This episode today is sponsored by Proscenium Services, an agency that helps artists and art organizations perform at their best. Proscenium is a great solution for small teams, offering admin and fundraising support to help you get back to your creative work. And here’s the thing about Proscenium Services: I started working with them this year at JAYU and it’s made a world of difference. They’ve been professional, dependable, and have helped art charities surpass our fundraising goals. But most importantly, they’ve alleviated so much of my time, so I can focus on other creative projects like this podcast. Proscenium Services, they’re amazing. Learn more at prosceniumservices.com.

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Simona: We have Laura Marie Wayne, a musician, scholar, filmmaker and the director of *Love Scott*, as well as Scott Jones, a musician originally from Nova Scotia, founder of the anti-homophobia campaign Don't Be Afraid, and the subject of Laura's documentary. The film looks at a traumatic experience that Scott went through just a few years ago.

Gilad: Thank you guys for joining us. I'm so excited to have you both here on the podcast. I guess we'll start with Laura. Can you tell us maybe a little bit more about what the film's about?

Laura: Absolutely. So *Love Scott* is the story of my best friend Scott Jones, who was attacked in October 2013. He had been out at a bar in New Glasgow, New Scotia, and on his way home that night, he was attacked and paralyzed from the waist down. So as soon as this happened - I was in film school at the time - I flew to be with him and I think right away, even in the hospital, it was very apparent to both of us that the reason for Scott's attack wasn't being heard. Scott knew he had been targeted as a gay man, but that was something that the police just weren't able to hear or didn't know how to take seriously, and so it became really important to us to find a way to share Scott's version of the story and Scott's truth, and so that's what the film is. It's basically a portrait of the journey that he's been on since the attack. So I call it a portrait of loss, loneliness and love, and a testament to a very beautiful human spirit.

Gilad: Thank you and that comes off across for sure in viewing the film. Of the dozen plus films I saw at the [Hot Docs] festival, yours definitely stuck with me. Scott, this was a very intimate sort

of film and the film starts as you're starting to go through this experience. Can you tell us more about what it was like to have a camera present in the room as you're going through all of this?

Scott: Right, it was at first a little bit off-putting, but I think that's where my relationship with Laura really helped. We have over 10 years of friendship behind us and so quickly that feeling of "woah there's a camera in the room" went away, and because of our friendship, we were able to go deep into the more painful experiences and unpack some of the trauma that I was going through.

Gilad: Some of the things that's jumped out right off the get-go was that in 1996, the Criminal Code of Canada was amended to recognize hate crimes based on sexual orientations and of the thousands of hate crimes reported by the LGBTQ community. Since then, a judge has acknowledged motivation based on sexual orientation in only 10 cases.

Simona: That's like ridiculous.

Laura: I know, it's shocking.

Simona: I guess my big question is why do you think there was such a hesitation for the police to actually label this as a hate crime and then prosecute as a hate crime?

Laura: That's a big question and I think there's a few layers to that. I think part of it is that, first of all, the majority of the police force is looking at what's happened through very particular lens and that lens is not necessarily reflective of queer experience. So to the average policeman, it's

like they've got the guy, he's pled guilty for attempted murder, that's enough. They don't have an understanding of why it's so important to name the attack for what it was. So I think it has a lot to do with the lens through which they're looking at. And then also it's obviously a tricky thing to prove or gather evidence for it, but we can't do that if we don't know even how to listen to the experience that's been had and we don't have the right questions to ask.

Gilad: Do you think anything would change if this was labelled as a hate crime?

Scott: Oh yeah, I think the conversation that we would be having would be much more in-depth, and I think the opportunity for learning would be much greater because we would know why this happened, or at least be investigating that and, like what I said, the attempted murder charge carries a longer sentence and that's kind of what they're thinking about: okay, attempted murder is sufficient, it covers everything, but it really doesn't. And the lens that you're talking about, you know, Glasgow police are all straight men, doing this investigation, so it's really important when a marginalised community has been targeted to listen and to bring that forth.

Laura: Yeah because if we don't acknowledge that and in the naming of it, then we're making this invisible and then it can continue to happen. As you see in this statistic, that is like the thousands of crimes that are reported, so that's the lived experience of the queer community. And then what's reflected in the formal public record, there's this huge gap, so to me that says that the institutions that are in place don't have the mechanisms to reflect queer experience, or to hear and validate queer experience.

Simona: And I think that another stat that also jumped out was that two out of three hate crimes are not even reported, so to think that if this institution doesn't even listen to me or listen to others, why report? So you think about the many that are suffering in silence, and I think this film really shines a light on that and, you know, essentially reclaiming what has been erased from - the conviction is not always the end result or the end goal, because there's still recovery and healing that needs to happen, which I think may have been - which could have happened maybe earlier or a bit more if someone had just called it what it was and allowed more people to come out of the darkness to talk about it.

Laura: Yeah absolutely and I think that statistic speaks to a very unfortunate disconnect between the queer community and the police. You want to be able to look to the police to protect you, but how can you trust in the police to protect if they're not listening? And I know, you can speak about this, watching Scott go through this experience, it's like a double trauma. When you've already been attacked and traumatized, and then you talk about this and you're either not believed or you're questioned, it's like that's a second form of trauma. So people don't want to go through that and so I think that's a big part of why people don't speak out or bother to.

Scott: And then there are cases, I mean there's a lot of parallels - it's a different situation entirely - but there's one main parallel with the Bruce McArthur case, where the queer community was calling the police out, saying this has been happening for over 10 years; we believe there's a serial killer in our community and the police just weren't listening. A lot of people believe, myself included, that that's because the victims were people of color. It wasn't

until a white man went missing and then his family had to really call the police out on that before they really started to listen, and that's just horrific.

Simona: I just think about the lives that, you know, we know the victims that they have found and identified. We just don't know how far back this goes, and just to think that - I guess it's like, is there a fear on the institution of the police that their goal is to protect all, but they don't because they choose to view it through different lenses, and then only it's - I feel it's really shitty when it's the responsibility of the community to stand up and shout that there is something going wrong. This is just not - these are all connected. You don't need to have a degree in criminology to see that. And I think that, again, this film shines a light on what can happen when you are not heard, and that you have to take it on yourself to actually advocate for yourself in a system that is not really set up to listen.

Gilad: We're now having conversations around toxic masculinity. It's a term that thankfully is coming up more and more in conversation, and we're teaching boys and men that rejecting emotions and feminine feelings is what makes you a man. Do you feel like any part of that played a role in your attack?

Scott: Oh absolutely. I mean I know as a gay man how much toxic masculinity can push you further into the closet. It just dictates the channel through which you need to live your life as a man, and it makes it an incredibly scary experience to be gay in a culture of toxic masculinity. And I think a lot about that and I thought a lot about that with Shane, the man who attacked me, and how much he must have subscribed to that and because I know that I did, and if I did it as

an openly gay man, I um - in small towns, toxic masculinity is what drives bullying, what drives violent attacks.

Simona: I think there was a quote in a CBC article right after the conviction and I think Shane's grandmother had said she definitely believed it had something to do with homophobia, that if you had made a pass at him, it definitely could have sparked that attack. And if you're family members are seeing this, you wonder like why didn't someone step in and say you know, chill out, it's fine, no one is challenging your manhood in that sense.

Scott: Wow, you've really done your research.

Simona: I like doing research. {Laughter}

Gilad: We've been up since four o'clock in the morning {more laughter}, getting ready for this.

Simona: I haven't slept yet!

Gilad: But yeah, that is a clip throughout all of this that I think is like, for me, that's really vindicating that a family member of his said that and recognized that. And if a family member is saying that, I mean, that seems like to me evidence enough for - the police should be listening to that, the court system, the legal system, the justice system should be hearing that, but you know. I want to go back to the film. One clip that jumps out at me all the time when I think about your film, and it's a scene where you're either going down to a lake or to a ravine, and part of what makes that scene so beautiful is the intimacy of the whole thing. You're getting carried

down there, like by piggyback, and it really made me think about you and your relationship to intimacy, and how has it changed at all now?

Scott: So intimacy as in?

Gilad: Like in that scene there, someone had to carry you, right?

Scott: Right.

Gilad: So being now in a wheelchair, it forces you to have to be more intimate in many ways with different people.

Scott: Right yeah, and rely on others. Yeah, that was really hard at first, being more dependent. I really love and loved my independence and being able to do things, and my connection to nature was a very independent connection. I would go to that spot Park Falls, outside of New Glasgow. I'd bike there, 45 minute bike ride, and then go down the trail and be there on my own and kind of meditate in nature. So having to do that with others around and any given situation where I really want to be alone but I have to rely on others, reminds me that I am way more dependant now. It's kind of like being a child all over again, but there's a lot of learning in that and I've grown a lot through this experience. And I'm starting to have a different relationship with dependence, not seeing it as a negative thing and learning to be okay to ask for help, but it's definitely an ongoing process.

Simona: There was a comment about Grindr in the documentary and I just had such a great laugh, because my best friend was born with a genetic condition, where the muscles in his legs didn't grow. At five years old, his legs were amputated from the pelvis down, so intimacy in terms of dating partners or dating has always been a challenge, because he's always lived this experience with no legs. And then coming out when he was in university. And he also kind of goes into describing that the gay community can sometimes be incredibly judgmental if you are not subscribe or have the ideal body type, because there are so many different categories. So have you I guess found - you've had to renavigate your channels now, and do you feel that you're sometimes pushed to date only people within certain parts of the community?

Scott: I think I know your friend {laughs}. I won't name him but ...

Simona: Okay, did he climb a mountain by chance?

Scott: And is he in Toronto?

Simona: Yes.

Scott: Yeah, so we're like the only disabled people on Grindr {Simona laughs}, so like of course we've had our chats about it and yeah absolutely. The gay male community can be quite objectifying and dating apps like, you see it's just all based on your picture and what you look like, and being the only disabled person aside from your friend {Scott and Simona laugh}. But like it would mostly be me because Toronto's so big and they'd be like oh my gosh, and then when we would interact, it would be like okay this is really hard, it is a challenge. And

sometimes people are reaching out to you for the wrong reasons. Some people are fetishizing your body; some people have like a caregiver fetish too and want to take care of you. I will say though, just to tag on to the people that I have met, it kind of filters out the more superficial parts of the community. And the people that I have met are just - there's a much deeper connection there because they see past it or see it as part of me, not even see past it. It's just they accept all of it and it's really beautiful.

Gilad: I appreciate you sharing that and, if it's not already obvious, you've got a voice from the gods. A voice from the gods.

Scott: Oh do I?

Gilad: And I know you do a lot of singing and a lot of choir. Can you tell me more about Don't Be Afraid, the advocacy group that you started, but also the work that you're doing with the choir community?

Scott: Don't Be Afraid is an anti-homophobic campaign and it began really as a pin that was made for an event that was raising money for me. My friend asked me what I wanted the message to be on the pin and I said "Don't Be Afraid". And then my friend in Montreal painted that onto canvas and went around Montreal asking people to pose with this sign, so it started as a photo campaign first. And then we started having events and eventually a choir grew out of it and we started having choir concerts to talk about social issues. So that was the last four years of my life in Halifax, just working with Don't Be Afraid and VOX: A Choir for Social Change. And since moving here, the campaign is just on pause, and I've started another choir here called

Vox Populi, which means “voice of the people”, and that was just kind of a four month pile-up project and about 20 singers, and it was really powerful. It’s always powerful to see the ways in which people relate to music and how that can be used for social change.

Simona: Laura, was it - I feel like trying to capture this story of your best friend, someone you’ve had this 10 year history with, did you ever find yourself filming a situation or a space that had you choked up or just challenged you personally to try to get past that, to really capture what needed to be captured?

Laura: Absolutely. I remember in the Pride Parade, I was supposed to be like walking backwards and filming them as they were, and I was just like balling, like I could not hold it together. But it was more like, to be honest, there was so - I put so much of my focus on Scott and I was so sure about my role as this witness that it was like, I was just kind of in this position, like I was feeling everything he said and I was filming. But I think that truthfully, it's like after we stopped the filming process and the camera went down, it was almost like I could put down this shield in a way. And then there was this even deeper level of grieving that happened for me, because it was like suddenly - now I was like sitting with all of this pain and all of this stuff that I had beared witness to, but the whole time I felt like there was this purpose, you know, with the camera and there was this purpose. And then suddenly just to sit with it without that shield, I feel like - and even now that the film’s coming out, it’s like there’s even another layer of grief that comes up as well, sort of like an ever-evolving process.

Simona: What has been the reception? And I think from this week of just seeing some very hard-hitting documentaries and just seeing around the world is shit and people can be crap, has

there been a reception - I guess an outcry from different populations or communities that just saw the negative and didn't try to see the bigger picture, or has it just been the reception been positive?

Laura: So far we've had amazing audience reception and of course there was some fear around like, yeah is there going to be someone in the audience who stands up and is like "how do you know", I don't know. You never know how people are going to receive something that's also so vulnerable, but we haven't had a screening yet where we didn't have a standing ovation, like a prolonged standing ovation, and then really meaningful questions from the audience. Lots of tears and so I think it's been really rewarding for both of us to see the film touch people.

Gilad: What's it for you though Scott, to see your story up on the screen, knowing there's hundreds of people around you watching it at the same time?

Scott: I think the first screening in London, first time with a big audience, I kind of detached from it and, as a coping mechanism, because I was just really afraid of how people were going to react to it. But then hearing people laughing and crying was really moving and rewarding, but I thought that that was kind of over. But last night at the last screening at Hot Docs, I kind of detached again, because it was just like, I don't know how people are interpreting this and everyone no matter what, every audience is different. It was a different theatre last night and the sound, you couldn't hear.

Laura: It was low volume.

Scott: Yeah, I was just like, oh my gosh. But then afterwards, when people come up to you and say how much the film touched them. Everyone's on their own journey, regardless of the whole audience. It's like no, every single person has a different ...

Simona: Interpretation?

Scott: Yeah.

Laura: I find that's kind of a mixed thing too because on one hand it's so rewarding, but at the same time it's also like, I've seen that we've really had to work hard to get people into the theatre, like it's not a given. There's so many films and so it's like how do you - it's almost like you're competing which misery is most important or something {laughter}. But you know it's so important to share this story and talk about this message, and I found it actually a little bit demoralizing in a way just to realize that there's still so much work to be done, just to keep bringing people out and to even have them come into the theatre.

Gilad: We run a human rights film festival, so each year we're screening films on anything, name it, like wrongful incarceration. Last year, we did a film on female genital mutilation and it's the same sort of thing. It's hard to pack cinemas with content that's heavy. I think a lot of people look at cinema as an escape, as a way to get away from ...

Laura: Totally and like, I went to - I tried to go to one of the other films during Hot Docs, and it was like a beautiful film, very light. And the theatre was packed and like, literally packed and people laughing. And then I left {laughter}. Because it was really this eye-opening moment of

like not everyone is up for coming in and then having their heart broken or listening. It's like sometimes they just want to go and have a good laugh.

Simona: I feel like in Canada we believe - we subscribe to this idea that we're so inclusive and you know, stuff like this can never happen here and they're so isolated. And then I think, watching these documentaries it's like no, it's here. We just don't talk about it and there are parallels, I believe, to the Matthew Shepard story. What happened, which sparked an outrage, and that was in the 90s and we're still here, almost 25 years later, and this is still happening. And I feel as a country, we just can't keep thinking and subscribing that we're not Americans, we're so much better, but here we are.

Laura: Yeah and it's so important to acknowledge too that this was like a very extreme act of violence, but there's so many microaggressions that happen on a daily basis and those are all part of the picture too. So it's like this happens and it's like oh my god, this is still happening, but it's like little versions of this are happening all the time.

Scott: Yeah, when you talk about toxic masculinity - you're actually the first interview that we've done where people have mentioned that and that's so important, because that's a precursor to homophobia, to misogyny, to racism, to everything, and then to violent attacks, to hate crimes, to rape. Toxic masculinity is where it begins really.

Laura: And I don't know if people always make the link between what they might see as a harmless joke or something to then something like this attack, like they can identify that this is

horrible but the joke is harmless and it's actually not, because it's all part of a culture that allows this kind of blatant homophobia to live.

Simona: You parallel the incarceration of Shane to - similar to your own imprisonment, but his ends and like he's out and he gets to go back and continue to do the same activities that, you know, physical, mental, whatever. And you don't. Yet you are still on a path of forgiveness, like has that ever been so challenging to you, or have you ever had that moment just like fuck it, and just kind of subscribe to the anger?

Scott: Well I think the anger - there's a journey with forgiveness and also with my anger and I think, looking back at right when this happened, there were a few months where I was just so angry and it was directed at Shane. But about - actually a couple days after I was attacked, his twin sister reached out to me on Facebook and sent a message, just saying I'm so sorry this happened to you, I'm Shane's sister and this is what we grew up with in our life and it wasn't an easy upbringing. And that was kind of a key to my journey with forgiveness and it kind of unlocked the anger a little bit, but I still went through severe anger. But after a few months I just yeah, the anger opened up towards society as a whole and not just Shane. It was like well - I'm not trying to justify what Shane did, but why did he get to the point where he was stabbing someone? It takes a village to raise a child and I don't think the village was there for Shane and that's a tragedy, and now look at the tragedy that's resolved it.

Gilad: When you think about him leaving prison, is there anything you want him to remember or wish that he changes about himself?

Scott: I - you know when he apologized at the sentencing, I really believed it and I really could see in him a change after I forgave him, and I just hope that he's carrying that day with him. And I would like to meet with him before he is out of prison, because once he's out of prison then there's no real impetus for change, because he's out and I hope to get to meet with him before he - yeah, he's out of prison.

Laura: That was something like - throughout the process that I was so, that I learned from Scott, that I was so moved by. This idea that society was failing Scott now and the way that we're dealing with the aftermath of the crime, that they had failed this other person too. And I think that's why in the film also, we sort of end with the little boy inside, because it goes back to this idea that we all start as these little people. And if you look at it like that, like these two little toddlers that then end up in this situation, it's like what is going wrong along the way that we end up with this. So I think, I don't know, that's something. It's just a way to look at maybe any conflict, even when we're talking about our relationship with the police or whatever, you know it's like we're all - we all start from the same place and deep down we're all kind of like the same inside.

{Theme music fades in}

Gilad: My name's Gilad Cohen.

Simona: And I'm Simona Ramkisson.

Gilad: This podcast was edited by Brandon Fragomeni and Alex Castellani.

Simona: The Hum is an initiative of JAYU, a charity that shares human rights stories through the arts.

{Theme music fades out}

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