

Transcript for Brett McKay | Art of Manliness (Episode 600)

Full show notes found here:

<https://theartofcharm.com/podcast-episodes/brett-mckay-art-manliness-episode-600/>

BRETT: If I can find some classical ideal of being this excellent person, that resonates with me. It's Theodore Roosevelt or Julius Caesar or some great badass from history displaying his virtue, I'm like, "That's awesome." And there's all this conversation about, "We need to redefine masculinity." What you need to do is just revive this classical idea of manliness that we once had and bring it back. You know, and also take into consideration, yeah there's some parts of masculinity or traditional manliness that maybe we should leave in the dustbin of history. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.

JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm. I'm your host Jordan Harbinger. Today we're talking with my friend Brett McKay of The Art of Manliness. Yes, the brand does sound similar. No, we did not do that on purpose. This is a rare episode of AoC because it is specifically for guys; it is about manliness. We're going to talk about why modern masculinity should be revived, not necessarily redefined; the domains of man should develop to become well-rounded; why men should strive to be useful, not important -- and what that has to do with manliness; and why action is the key to flourishing, and why you need to get out of your head. A little bonus discussion at the end about resilience. If you liked our episode about grit, you might dig that discussion. So get your edumacation (sic) with us here at The Art of Charm and Brett McKay from The Art of Manliness. See what I did there? And by the way, if you're new to the show, we'd love to send you some top episodes and the AoC Toolbox. That's where we discuss concepts like reading body language, and having charismatic nonverbal communication, the science of attraction, negotiation techniques, networking and influence strategies, mentorship, persuasion tactics, and everything else that we teach here at The Art of Charm. Check that out at theartofcharm.com/toolbox. Also at theartofcharm.com/podcast you can find the show notes for

this and all previous episodes of the show. All right, here's Brett McKay.

Well first of all we accidentally have, in a way, kind of similar branding. I did not know about Art of Manliness when we started Art of Charm, and I'm sure you did not know about Art of Charm when you started Art of Manliness because we're both relatively small. When did we get introduced? Eight, nine years ago? Through a friend of mine that played soccer with you when you guys were in like, second grade.

BRETT: No I was like, younger than that; I was like, in kindergarten. It was Laura, I think was her name.

JORDAN: Yeah, and she was one of the original Art of Charm AoC sisters as we call them. And she's like, "Hey this friend of mine is writing this book and I think it's about to come out." And she had gotten an advanced copy from you or your publicist or something like that, and I thought, "This guy's got a really similar track." And then four years go by or something, and we only talked like twice, and then suddenly it's like, "Oh, yeah, we're both still doing this! We should probably sync up." As these things go, you had a bunch of kids, and a bunch of stuff happen, and your business blew up, in a good way, and here we are with Art of Manliness being this ginormous Internet property. Do you mind if I ask you how many people visit your blog every month?

BRETT: Yeah, we get about 12 million pageviews a month right now.

JORDAN: That's got to be one of the single largest -- I don't know about websites because you're throwing in Amazon and stuff but -- at least one of the largest blogs anywhere.

BRETT: Yeah, I mean, we're one of the largest independent men's lifestyle sites. We're still behind some of the big corporate behemoths like AskMen or Esquire or Men's Health, but slowly catching up. And it's been crazy because I'd never -- like when I

started this, I didn't think I was going to be doing this, you know, eight years later, but here we are, and it's been a blast.

JORDAN: I don't even think you need to worry about some of those sites because first of all, if you look at some of these men's sites that are owned by big companies, not only are they just a cluster ball of garbage and ads, you can't find anything in there. There's no voice, so to speak, as us artsy fartsy people call it, right? There's no person talking to you. It's like, "Here's a bunch of random fitness videos. Oh, here's a video about some hot chick of the week. Oh, here's a guy who writes for us about technology." It's just like this random -- if Maxim barfed on GQ and they took all their worst content and put it on a website, it would be some of these other sites. I don't think you even want to catch those, because they're in the race to the bottom for like ads and page views and things like that, whereas when you look at Art of Manliness, you see a coherent voice. And, for you that must have been somewhat challenging. Not to write in a coherent voice but to resist the urge to corporatize yourself. I can imagine you've probably taken many a meeting where they say, "Here's what we're going to do. We're going to turn you into the next, you know whatever website with these girls and these clothes and there's going to be \$7,000 worth of ads every week on there and you're going to double your income." It must have been hard to say, "I don't want that."

BRETT: Actually, it wasn't hard at all, because I've been very particular about, you know, maintaining that voice. And yeah, we've had offers, you know, to buy us out, and then also just dealing with advertisers. Them wanting to do a certain thing and I'm like, "No I'm not comfortable with that. I don't think my readers would like that. I don't -- they wouldn't resonate with it; I don't resonate with it." So, yeah, you have to be willing to say no, and honestly, it's not that hard. If you believe in something, you believe in your message, then saying no is actually really easy.

JORDAN: Oh, that's an interesting point because, it seems like you would have to have, and I hate corporate buzzwords, but it seems like you'd have to have some core values that are very clearly

articulated. Or at least very clear to your instinct in your own mind if you're the sole decision maker -- that you make these decisions around those values. And I think for you, it's got to be this idea of manliness and the idea of manliness that you're promoting at Art of Manliness, does that make sense?

BRETT: Yeah, that's exactly what it is. I mean, the reason why I started The Art of Manliness was because I was tired, you know sick myself, of like all the men's content that was being put out there. Here's the origin story. I was actually in a Border's bookstore, when I was in law school, taking a break. And I was just browsing the men's magazines, just killing time during a study session. And I just realized that every month, when you read the headlines on these magazines, it's the exact same thing. You know what you're going to get. There's going to be articles about six pack abs, there's going to be an interview with some, you know, actress or model, where she shares like what she looks for in a guy, and it's like, why is that useful? Like, I'm never going to talk to you. Also, I'm married. Showing clothes that the average guy could not afford. You know, \$4,000 sweaters. Right, just a sweater, it's \$4,000. Like, I'm a broke law student, I'm never going to afford that. And so I just said, "You know what? I'm tired of this. This doesn't resonate with me. So I'm going to start the men's magazine that I would want to read," and so that's what I did. And so, basically what you see on The Art of Manliness, is the men's magazine that Brett McKay would want to read himself.

JORDAN: Do you get a bunch of email, like I used to get, before we sort of opened up AoC to everyone -- do you get a lot of email from women that's like, "Hey, how come you're excluding our gender? What's going on there?" How do you handle that type of thing?

BRETT: I don't get that actually. In fact, most of the emails I get from women are like, "This is fantastic. Like I am so glad I have -- there's this thing I can point my husbands to, my brothers to, my sons to, my guy friends to, that you know, I can get behind. Like I love what you guys are doing and the idea of manliness

that you're promoting." We have a lot of readers, not a lot, I mean probably 20 percent of our readers are female. They are bigger sharers. They share our content with the men in their life. And so as far as you know, women saying, "You're exclusive." We don't really get that, at all.

JORDAN: The only time we really got that was when, a lot of who we now call AoC sisters, were a little disappointed that we weren't speaking more to them. It wasn't that they felt excluded, it was, "Look, I like this so much, I want stuff that's more tailored to me," and I think that's a good problem to have, when people want more from you.

BRETT: Right, the one thing -- the requests that we get from women a lot is like, "When are you going to start, like, a website like this for women?" Because I think there's a lot of women who felt the same way I did about men's magazines that they feel about women's magazines, right? They're just tired of the same content, over and over again. Like, makeup reviews and you know, how to tone your tush and you know, tone your abs, like -- they're looking for something little more substantial as well, that speaks to them as a woman. And yeah, I mean, I'd love to start an Art of Womanliness; I just don't have the bandwidth right now.

JORDAN: Yeah, exactly. And you don't want to license the brand to somebody who you can't trust. That's another thing.

BRETT: Right, exactly, I mean I've had requests like, "Hey, I'll take it," and I'm like, "Ah, I don't know. I don't know if I can trust that." Also, it would be kind of weird for a guy to start a website called The Art of Womanliness.

JORDAN: Yeah. I'll give you that one.

(laugh)

BRETT: So that would be weird. That would be fraught with different issues. Like, here's a guy who's telling ladies how to be a lady. I

mean so if I were to do it, like, I would have to find, like, a lady partner who kind of gets sort of the idea, like sort of the general vibe we're trying to do with The Art of Manliness and be able to do that for women as well.

JORDAN: So what is the idea of manliness that you promote at Art of Manliness? What is different about that? Yeah we've seen all these like men's health six pack abs, the spring break workout. It's almost just avoiding the point entirely. I mean, they're not even trying to say this is manly, they're just kind of implying, "Hey, you have a low sense of self worth in this one area. We're trying to hit that, so that you pick this up, so that we can sell ads." It's a very different thing that you're promoting. I mean, you have an idea of what manliness is / should be, at least according to the brand, that is maybe very traditional, or maybe it's completely different than what we're used to expecting.

BRETT: Yeah so the idea of masculinity that I'm promoting, is actually very classical. It comes from the ancient Greeks and ancient Romans. It was the idea of manliness, it's been around in the West, for most of human history, up until about the middle of the twentieth century, we saw this shift happen. And the classical idea of manliness, basically meant being a man of virtue, right? And we need to broaden our understanding of what virtue means because I think us modern folks, we have this idea of virtue being very sissy and being very proper and prudish, etc. But like the ancient Greeks and the ancient Romans, their idea of virtue just meant being excellent in a whole wide variety of fields. So like, take our word virtue, for example. It comes from the Latin word Virtus, which means manliness, in Latin, and the word vir, it's pronounced "weer," but you can say vir, that's the word man. So like, for the ancient Romans, to be manly, to be a man, meant being a man of virtue. And what kind of virtues did an ancient Roman expect you to have? Well it meant having courage, first and foremost, being a man of temperance, being a man of compassion, being big souled, having, you know being frugal. It was just about being this well-rounded individuals and the ancient Greeks had this idea of arete, which meant excellence. And you wanted to be

excellent in virtue. And you could be excellent in all sorts of virtues. Physical virtues, intellectual virtues, moral virtues, etc. And that was their idea of manliness, just being a well-rounded individual. Someone who's listening is like, "Well this could apply to women." Yeah it can and it should, but what we do is try to cater this to male tastes. Because I think, you know while all these things are very applicable across genders, like, men and women for the most part, have different tastes. Or they'll respond differently to different types of like, a voice, right? Like I have a hard time reading women's magazines, right? Because like, what they're writing there, or what books geared towards, I mean it's like, it doesn't resonate with me. Even though it's the same, like it's talking about being a good person etc. Like, it doesn't resonate with me. But if I can find some classical ideal of being this excellent person, that resonates with me. It's Theodore Roosevelt or Julius Caesar, or some great badass from history, displaying his virtue, I'm like, "That's awesome." So I mean that's basically what we're trying to promote here at the Art of Manliness, this very classical ideal of manliness. And there's all this conversation about, "We need to redefine masculinity." What you need to do is just revive this classical idea of manliness that we once had and bring it back. You know and also take into consideration, yeah there's some part of masculinity or traditional manliness that maybe we should leave in the dustbin of history. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Keep the good stuff but get rid of the bad stuff.

JORDAN: Right, of course. So let's talk about what you think the good stuff is. I mean what domains should a well-rounded man have?

BRETT: Yeah I think one, being physically strong. I mean across -- I've done a lot of research on the anthropology of masculinity -- and across cultures, through time, like one of the defining characteristics of a man is he's physically strong. Now if some people think that's dumb, like right like, sort of that alpha male bodybuilding bro thing. But like it's being strong with a purpose, right? It's not just being strong for sex appeal, or so you, you know, have the six pack abs and sort of -- that sort of like that's the other stuff we were talking about earlier. But

being strong for a purpose, right? Being physically strong so you can serve others. Being physically strong so you can do well on your job. Being physically strong so you can protect others. Whether it's your family or your neighbors. Or if you're a soldier, this is particularly important. You want to be strong so you can fight for your country or fight for your tribe or etc. So yeah, being physically strong I think is really important for me and I think, one of the things I've noticed in my own life, in developing my own physical strength, it's carried over into other areas of my life. I've become more mentally and emotionally resilient, I've developed more grit, I'm more motivated in other areas of my life because I've seen how becoming stronger physically -- like just seeing that manifestation in my physicality, I don't know, just gives you this confidence that you can carry over to other aspects of your life.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: Are there different types of skills like hard skills versus soft skills? At AoC, especially at our workshops and things like that, we talk a lot about soft skills right? Conversations, savoir faire, social dynamics and things to avoid in those areas and things to cultivate in those areas. You seem to have a set of skills that you write about regularly, on the blog, and talk about on your show as well, that have to do, like you said, physical strength, there's some outdoorsy stuff -- do you separate the hard skills from the soft skills? What kind of balance do you think we should talk about here?

BRETT: No so what we're trying to do -- we try to find a balance between hard and soft skills. I think for men particularly, like there's something that men -- they enjoy the hard stuff, right? They enjoy the hard skills. Learning how to, you know, work with their hands, doing outdoor survival skills, building something, something that -- there's something gratifying about that you know, developing those hard skills. But we also focus on the soft skills because, yeah if you want to be successful as a man, whether it's your professional life, or your

love life, you need to understand, have that savoir faire of James Bond, right? Like, where you can be in any situation and navigate it successfully. So we talk a lot about social skills, we talk about money and finances, we talk about relationships. I mean this is stuff you need to understand in order to thrive as a man in the 21st century, right? You're probably not going to ever have to bug out, right? With your bug out bag and use your survival skills. I think it's useful to know that stuff because you never know, it could happen. Also, it's just enjoyable to understand that stuff and work with it. So what we try to promote on The Art of Manliness is just this well rounded man that combines both soft and hard virtues. We call him the gentleman barbarian. That's sort of our archetype is a guy who's strong physically, who's mentally -- or who's effective with these hard skills, that's the barbarian part, but is also refined, is temperate, and has softened some of that hard parts of masculinity with some of the softer virtues.

JORDAN:

Got it. This is important in order, not only of course, to stay modern but, it seems like your concept of the modern man, which we share, is somebody who is not only able to hold his own, but is also not afraid to show vulnerability, show and display this type of emotional thinking with the people in his inner circle, friends and family, to create strong relationships. Because we -- when we talk about manliness, and we think Don Draper, we look at somebody who's completely emotionally unavailable. They might have some great hard skills in some areas, and they might even have a great sense of savoir faire but when it comes down to talking with his wife -- I mean, we've all seen those Mad Men scenes where we're just cringing because you're like, "Man are you really going to read the newspaper in bed and ignore everything she says? You're a terrible husband." Right? "You're a terrible father." It's almost laughable and I've seen a lot of things on the site. Of course the people have shared with me that go into detail about how and why not to do that, which I think is very useful. Speaking of usefulness, you've written about why men should strive to be useful and not important. Can you tell us, first of all, why that is and what that

has to do with manliness and the concept of manliness across cultures?

BRETT:

I think this is sort of endemic of culture right now, is this idea of being important. It's not just men, it also affects women as well. Is that you have to like -- this whole social media culture where you have to be known and you have to, you know, show yourself doing awesome things, you have to develop your personal brand, it's a word I hate. And it's all about being important and no one ever focuses on being useful. If you look at particularly masculinity, there's a great book by David Gilmore; he's an anthropologist who did cross cultural analysis of what manliness meant cross cultures. And he found that one of the defining traits of a man, no matter in which culture you were, is that a man was useful. He was effective. He produced more than he consumed. And so I'm trying to bring back that idea of like, you know, being a man doesn't mean that everyone knows you, that you're mister cool guy, you have a bagillion Instagram followers, whatever. It just means being useful wherever you find yourself in life. Whether it's at work, in your family, in your community, just be useful. And what's interesting is, oftentimes when you just focus on being useful to others without any expectation of being important and being well known, often times you end up being well known and important because you provided so much value to others.

JORDAN:

So it's a lot like what you and I are doing, or at least so far as I would like to think you and I are doing, which is creating something that's worth a legacy, right? That's legacy worthy, I should say. That is useful, people are supposed to put it into action, they're supposed to put it in practice in their lives and in their relationships and at work and by -- vis a vis that, you generate a quote unquote fanbase, or connections and relationships that make you important, that create an indispensable role for you. Instead of striving for 100,000 Instagram followers that are going to click like when you post a picture of yourself eating ice cream, but really you've made yourself a commodity along with every other hashtag influencer, another word that I assume that you hate.

BRETT: Yeah.

JORDAN: I like personal brand and influencers. I put those in the same toilet. And you create that sort of fake or faux image of yourself that has nothing to do with usefulness and everything to do with ego, and self validation. And at the end of the day, even if you make it to the top, it's a completely empty pursuit.

BRETT: Right, exactly. And so there's like -- there's two paradigms you can focus on, and one is a very superficial paradigm, where like you talk about -- you just do these sort of superficial things to make yourself appealing to others. But then the other paradigm is a character paradigm where you just focus on developing your character, being trustworthy, doing those things, being useful, and in the process -- yeah I mean the side benefit of that is you might become important, right? Like that thing that everyone wants. And you might not. And here's the thing, like, you should be doing those things even if you don't become important. Like, you should still strive to be useful because in the end, that's what provides meaning in your life. In the end you're not going to look back and say, "Oh, boy, I'm so glad I had, you know, this bagillion Face -- you know, Instagram followers or whatever. You're going to think, "Man I'm really glad that all the things I was able to do for others, like that meant a lot to me. Even though sometimes it was hard, it provided a lot of meaning to me."

JORDAN: Actually at Art of Charm, one of our chief concepts that I find myself repeating over and over is, the idea of getting out of your head. And you and I talked about this pre show, about getting out of your head, why that's so important, and about taking action. The AoC family is no stranger to hearing me talk about taking action but I'd love to hear your take on it, because I feel like sometimes when one person says something over and over, it starts to dull a little bit and I feel like you probably have an interesting take on this concept.

BRETT:

No, this one is near and dear to my heart so I've been thinking about this idea of getting out of your head, as you said, a lot lately. Because I think that's the thing that's plaguing us, in our modern life. Everyone's like neurotic now. Everyone's depressed. Everyone's anxious. Everyone just -- there's like this malaise that's come over us. I think a lot of it is because, yeah, like we live inside of our heads, right? And our head -- our computer is an extension of our head. Like this digital online world, is an extension of our head. We just tend to remunerate over like stuff that's not important. We just scan through feeds of news that's very abstract. We read content that has this advice but it's still abstract because we don't have the motivation to do anything with it. So we just sit there, like spinning this wheel, inside of our head and it just makes us miserable. But the thing I've found, is the antidote to that, is just taking action. Like just do something. It doesn't have to be that big, either. I think one of the things that holds a lot of people back from taking action is they think you have to be this big giant thing, right? Like I have to set up this perfect workout plan and I have to do it perfectly and if I don't then it's going to fall apart. But no, you don't have to do that. Just like get up and like do some pushups. It can be as simple as that. It's a starting point. The antidote of getting out of your head is just -- is getting connected back with the real world, the concrete world. And you do that just by interacting with it, on a day to day basis and taking action, and rubbing up against friction. And by friction, I mean just frustrations, that happen along the way because things don't go how you planned, annoying people can be friction. That friction though, allows you to get outside of your head, you realize that there's a world beyond my head. There are these frustrations, there are these things that are just going to rub me the wrong way. But that's good. It helps you get outside of your head and helps you realize there's a whole world beyond there and you should embrace it instead of thinking of it as annoying -- like this is just something I can play with. This is like a test and it's a chance for me to refine myself and get better. But yeah, if there's one thing I'm a big harper on is just taking action. It doesn't have to be huge. Just do something small -- just super simple.

JORDAN: So do you have any sort of beginner steps? I know you're big on, first of all taking action, but also, I think the problem with getting out of our heads is a lot of people go, "How do I get out of there? Let me think about that for a while. Oh, my God, what if I don't -- do it and it doesn't work?" And then we end up in our head about getting out of our head and all this other meta barf that happens.

BRETT: I don't know, it's just doing something, right? I think that it's just going back to making it super small and super, just like, discrete. Like it can be, if it's exercise the thing you want to do, it just can be just as simple as going out for a walk. Just walk outside your door, walk for 20 or 30 minutes, and then come back and that's it. It's as simple as that. And you'd be surprised what that can do for you. And then from there, if you want to up your game a bit, you'll say, "I'm going to start lifting weights." All right, just go to the gym. Like that could be your first step, right? You don't have to have a workout in store. Just go to the gym. Get yourself there and then once you're there, lift some weights. And just mess around and then see how you enjoy it. Like you're going to find out, this is actually really great. I enjoy this. And then you go home and you say, "Okay I'm going to develop a program." So you do some research online just to kind of get inside your head again. Develop a program, doesn't have to be very complicated, super slick, then go back to the gym again and do it. That's the thing, don't overthink it. Just get out there and do something.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: One of the things that came across my way recently in the past year or so, that I know you believe in as well, speaking of taking action and being really concrete with those steps -- I got an email, and I can't remember exactly how this happened. You might have even made the intro for me, now that I think about it. You had a trainer and you were saying, "Yeah, I'm lifting weights, I'm doing this," or we had had a phone call and you were like, "Sorry I was at the gym." Somehow it came up that

you were lifting weights and working out. And you had mentioned these kind of ridiculous results, where I was like, "Wait a minute, how did you gain that much muscle in X amount of time?" And you, I think, had introduced me to Matt Reynolds, who is an online trainer and I've talked about him on the show before. StartingStrengthOnlineCoaching.com is his website. We'll link that in the show notes. And, I talked to him and he was kind of like, "You should do this, you should try this. You should do this." And I was like, "Well I kind of got this other thing that I do. Well I do this and that." He'd nagged me a little bit, in a way that I usually don't need to be kind of nagged and bugged. And he showed me all the results and he kept saying like, "Well look at what Brett did today. Here's a picture of Brett. Look, doesn't he look better? Here's a picture of Brett from before," and he's kind of using you as this case study and I thought, "All right, all right, fine. I'll do a couple of your workouts." And I was just immediately, immediately hooked. And I've been lifting weights since college. It's not new for me. But the fact that there was a different way to go about it, a plan, and somebody else who was doing it, you, who was getting results that I didn't actually think were possible, was -- and very much for me, me getting out of my own way. Finding an online trainer that didn't require massive daily commitment to doing stuff and getting this stuff done. And it changed the way that I do a lot of other things, which was very unexpected. I know that we talk a lot about how you do anything is how you do everything. We talk about that a lot at AoC. And I'm sure you have similar concepts with Art of Manliness as well. But I will tell you, the fact that I'm able to go and do these specific workouts, see these results, feel the difference, has actually beneficially affected everything from my relationships to the way that I structure and do different things at work. Simply because, I've been able to create a system, see results in that system, and it's had beneficial spillover in other areas of my life.

BRETT: So barbell training. That has like, transformed my life significantly. Been working with Matt for over a year now. And like you, yeah I've been lifting weights since high school. I

played football in high school, I did barbell training in high school and then I stopped because I got on this like, "I need to be like ripped and jacked," right, "and like have six pack abs and like have muscle definition and look sexy," and I started doing all these you know, HIIT exercises and a lot of bicep curls and body builder type stuff. And I never really made much progress and I think there's a lot of guys who are out there the same way. Like, they're just going to the gym and they're exercising because they know they need to exercise. What Matt and Mark Rippetoe who developed Starting Strength -- they're wanting people to train. And now there's a difference between training and exercising. Exercising is just moving your body. Training is having a program where you progressively get stronger. Starting Strength, that's the whole premise of it. You do these basic barbell lifts, they're compound movements, squat, bench press, shoulder press, deadlifts, and power clean. And each workout you're going to add a little bit more weight. Usually it's just five pounds every workout. And then you do that work out, you add five more pounds next work out. And little by little, you're getting stronger and stronger, and stronger and then in, you know, six months time, you're squatting 1.5 times your bodyweight or two times your bodyweight, just something you probably never thought you'd be able to do. But, I mean that's a great example of getting outside of your head. Right, like, whenever I lift weights, like I just imagine, like I am battling gravity right now. That's what you're doing when you lift weights. You are battling gravity and you want to get outside of your head, that's like the best way. It's like go fight gravity for about an hour. I'm deadlifting 500 pounds, squatting 420 pounds, shoulder pressing 200 pounds, about to bench press 300 pounds. I'm going to hit that in a few weeks. And yeah, I went from 185 pounds and now I'm 216 pounds in over a year. Like you said, it transfers over to other areas of your life. Because, with barbell training you see what incremental progression can do. Just adding five pounds to each workout adds up little by little. That applies to other things in life, whether it's your job, your finances, your relationship skills. Just incremental improvements, over time, you're going to be phenomenally better than you were a year ago. So that's one of

the things that I love about strength training because it just gives you that -- it lets you see first hand what happens whenever you just make small incremental improvements.

JORDAN:

One topic that's been not necessarily trendy but very, very salient recently, especially -- and I feel like it's almost the subtext of a lot of the things we're seeing in the news and a lot of the things we're seeing from left and right in politics and just pretty much every area of our lives, man or woman, for that matter, is the concept of resilience. And you've discussed this a lot at Art of Manliness. These were articles I read from you, at least the first editions, I'm talking about seven plus years ago, and I still remember them quite well. Because the concept of resilience alongside things like grit, are strong determinators of what makes somebody successful in every area of their life, and I would love to explore the concept of resilience, especially as you see it related to your concepts of manliness that we discussed previously.

BRETT:

Right, so yeah resilience -- I wrote about this extensively back in 2010, and it's been a topic that I've just been thinking about because it's something I've struggled with for most of my life. You know, for example, when I was in law school, and you probably can relate to this Jordan -- after I finished my finals I would, you know I'd -- initially felt, you know, really comfortable that I did well. But then I would get home and I'd start thinking about the exams in detail and remembering questions that I missed or issues that I might have failed to see and then my confidence would just quickly evaporate. Then I would start thinking about these worst case scenarios, that, "Oh, my gosh, I might to get a C or a D on this exam, or I might even fail the test and because I made a C on this test I'm not going to be able to make law review. And then because I don't get law review and then like I'm not going to be able to get that awesome law job after I graduate," so just sort of catastrophizing. I just became this like, unresilient (sic) weirdo. Like just moping for like a few weeks. Then I'd get my grades back and they're perfectly fine. So, yeah, it's something I've been struggling with and something I've been working on. And

so you've got to start like what is resilience? There's two ways to look at resilience. The first way is just seeing resilience as this reactive quality. That you're able to bounce back from setbacks, failures, crises, pain, whatever, quickly. Right, you're able to experience that, okay. It sucks but then you get back into the game and start chugging along again. That's the common way that people view resilience and it's super important. But I think it's also important to think of resilience as an active quality. And it's an ability to be proactive in your life. It's having the strength, the grit, as you said earlier, to go and take risks, take on challenges, because you're not afraid to fail. You understand there's going to be failure but you have the resilience to withstand it and move ahead. So yeah, I mean I think it's -- if you want to thrive and survive in this world, you have to develop that resilience. You can't let setbacks get behind you. You can't let even petty annoyances get under your skin, you have to be resilient to them so you can continue to push forward.

JORDAN: It seems like a lot of resilience, from a lot of those that speak about it, is not just building resilience up in your brain, your mind, your body, but also getting rid of faulty programming. You talk about the concept of me, always, everything as a style of thinking and how that's damaging to resilience. I'd love to deconstruct that a little bit.

BRETT: Yes so me, always, everything, thinking is something that happens, that unresilient (sic) people all the time. It's a default way of thinking. Whenever something happens, they think, "Well, this thing, that bad thing that happened, it's completely my fault." That's the me. The always thinks that, "Well this always happens, like, this always happens to me," right? That's the always part. And the everything says, "Well, this is terrible and everything is terrible," that's the everything part. And it's faulty thinking because it's very emotional thinking, for starters, but once you start using your brain, like your prefrontal cortex, and start questioning these statements that you might be making or this thinking you're doing, you start realizing it's a bunch of bunk, right? So you know, if something bad happens,

say a girl dumps you. You might say, "Well, I'm just a loser. Here it happens, I'm just ugly, I'm not charming, I'm not smart. It's just me." Well it's probably not just you. I mean there's a lot of reasons why a girl might dump you, right? And it's not because of you. Maybe she's got something else going on in her life. It's not you but like, she's just not interested in you. She has other interests or other tastes in men. So it has nothing to do with you, it's just like it's -- you're not for her. That's the me part of that. Or say if a girl dumps you and you go, "Well man, this always happens to me, like I'm always getting dumped." Well you've got to step back and say, "Well is that really true?" And you might look back and say, "No, there were a few instances where I had a really long term relationship, you know, with women, but like, I was the one that ended it, because whatever reason." So like, you can say that always statement is false. With the everything, like you might just say, "Whoa geez, I got laid off from my job and everything is terrible." Well is everything really terrible? Probably not. Like your family life's pretty good, you've got something else good going on in your life. Like yeah, it sucks you lost your job, but not everything is terrible in your life. The reason why you have to nip that in the bud, that sort of me, always, everything thinking, right away, because it can just lead you to a really dark place where you just stew, and you stop taking proactive measures to improve your situation. And the thing that is terrible, right because like, you just waste all this energy thinking about and wallowing in the frustration that this one single event has happened when you could be taking steps to improve the situation. So yeah, whenever you have that me, always, everything thinking, it's really hard to do, because like I said, it's very emotional, but you have to stop yourself and question those assumptions you're making and say, "Is it really me? Does this always happen? Is everything always terrible?" and say, "Is everything really bad in my life?" More often than not you're going to find the answer to all those questions are no, it's not true.

JORDAN:

So this is about looking at the situation that you're in and then actually making the mental exercise to find counterexamples to

me, always, everything in order to basically stop yourself from continuing to swirl the drain.

BRETT: Like you said, it keeps you inside of your head, that thinking, instead of taking action.

JORDAN: I think learning to find evidence contrary to certain patterns of thinking, that I find nonproductive, along with taking action, such as, "Okay, maybe this relationship didn't work out," counterexample to me, always, everything, and then taking some action like going to chose a different type of exercise, learning how to cook something, or taking a language course and learning a new skill, helps break out of the orbit of whatever's pulling you in. It's kind of like adding some rocket fuel by taking action and also making sure that you break the shackles by questioning what it is that is holding you down with me, always, everything. And I think that's really important because for a lot of us it's very easy to find that evidence of me, always, everything from confirmation bias, selection bias, whatever we're looking at, and then continue to automatically find evidence that those things are true, which leads to a belief system and pattern of belief that you actually can't break out of it. And that's obviously really terrible for resilience. It's really terrible for grit, it's really terrible for self esteem, and self worth, and it leads to a massive downward spiral that obviously leads to things like depression and beyond.

BRETT: Right, yeah, exactly and what you're talking about there, that sort of idea that you don't take any action at all -- there's actually a name for it, it's called learned helplessness. There's a study done by Dr. Martin Seligman, back in the sixties, where he showed how animals can develop this learned helplessness, but even humans can. What he did was he took like three groups of dogs, and the first groups of dogs were given electric shocks, but these dogs were able to press a panel with their nose to make the shocks stop, right? The second group of dogs were given the shocks as well, but they had no recourse to make them stop. They couldn't do anything to make them stop. And the third group was the control and they received no

shocks. And so, the first and third group -- dogs and these groups of dogs, they recovered well from the experiment. The third group of dogs obviously didn't get shocks, they were fine. The first group of dogs were fine because there was something they could do to stop the shocking. But the second dogs, what ended up happening with them, because they couldn't stop the shocking, they actually just stopped trying, like to do anything at all. Like even when there was -- they even took these second group of dogs and like gave them the option to stop the shock, later on, and like the dogs didn't even try. Because they learned how to be helpless. And so that -- what me, always, everything thinking does is that it trains your brain to think, "There's nothing I can do to then change my situation." So yeah, that's why it's so, so important to nip that in the bud quickly or you'll develop this learned helplessness where you just think, "I can't do anything," when the reality is, there are things that are within your control and that you can do to change and improve your situation.

JORDAN: There's a lot we can talk about. You have a lot of really great content on there. Depression, managing depression, all the way to giving yourself a straight razor shave, or giving one to someone else. There's tons and tons of content on there. How long does it take you, by the way, to research and write some of these articles, I'm just curious.

BRETT: It depends on the article. Some of them are more meatier topics, like it'll take months to research and write. Like there's some topics where I've been sitting on for a year, sort of reading and outlining, and then I finally get around to writing it after a year of sort of stewing on it. Yeah, I mean, we spend a lot of time on this stuff because we really want to provide as much value as we can to people.

JORDAN: Brett thank you so much man, for coming on and discussing this stuff. I'm sure we'll have more from you in the future as well.

BRETT: Hey thanks a lot Jordan.

JORDAN:

Great big thank you to Brett McKay. He is, of course, at theartofmanliness.com. We'll have that linked up in the show notes, and if you like this, just don't forget to thank Brett on Twitter, we'll have that linked in the show notes as well. Remember, you can tap your phone screen or whatever screen you're using to listen to this, hopefully, and the show notes should pop right up. I'm also on Twitter. I post a lot of stuff that never makes it to the show. Funny stuff, engagement with you as fans, and of course articles and insights that I don't have time to air here. Producer Jason and I are both on there @theartofcharm and you're what? Jpdef? J-P-D-E-F we'll have that linked in the show notes. Our boot camps, our live programs that we teach in L.A. bootcamp.theartofcharm.com. Join thousands of other guys who've been through the program who will become your brothers in arms network for life. Guys all around the world. We've had a lot of people travel together, couch surf, even get jobs through that network. It's by far and away the program, the life program, my favorite part of running AoC. It's just a freaking amazing experience. Not only for us teaching, but of course, well mostly, for y'all coming through the program. Remember we do sell out a few months in advance so if you're thinking about it, you're curious about it, get in touch with us. We'll get some info to you so you can plan ahead. You can just email me, jordan@theartofcharm.com or you can go to the website bootcamp.theartofcharm.com. We also have an AoC challenge going on. Theartofcharm.com/challenge. We'll send you missions and little exercises to develop your network, to develop your connection skills. We send you videos with drills and exercises, and we'll send you the Toolbox that I mentioned earlier in the show. That includes a lot of practical stuff on reading body language, nonverbal communication, the science of attraction, negotiation techniques, networking, influence strategies, mentorship, hell persuasion, and all that stuff that we teach here at The Art of Charm. That's theartofcharm.com/challenge or text the word charmed to the number 33444. That's right, you just text 33444, you type the word charmed, and boom! You're in it. For full show notes for this and all previous episodes, head over to

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