

Tuesday, April 3, 2017

So if you are here it is why?

Perhaps you are curious?

What are the characteristics of manhood? I have heard, "Show me the boy at sixteen and I'll show you the man at forty." Is that true? Gentlemen, are you developing into the man you hope to become?

Ladies, when considering the effect male figures play upon your lives, what is it you expect? Demand?

Because you were curious enough to click on this link, and are now asking, "What does it mean to be a strong man, (I do not have to remind you to consider the metaphorical nature of the adjective), how many distinct aspects of your s(S)elf, your being, your heart, your mind, are at work when considering, "What are the characteristics of healthy maleness, manhood, as you encounter this question right now?"

The best way to encounter a matter of such significance is to reflect deeply upon the matter and honor those ideas through writing.

However, perhaps one has never reflected deeply upon the matter before. What to do?

If I wanna get rich, who do I ask?

A rich guy

If I wanna be a cop, I ask a cop

If I wanna go that way, I might find somebody that way and follow that guy.

How do I know if that guy in front of me knows where he is going?

He doesn't have to know where he is going. You have to know where he is going because you are following him.

How do I know where he is going?

He wrote it down.

Where?

Here. These are the pages of the teenager writing to the twenty-three year old who is on the way to being forty before waking up unless one pays attention.

To who? Who should all my future selves pay attention to?

To you, to the teenager. You are in charge. You are in charge of the twenty-three year old you and the forty year old you.

All of them. You are responsible for all of those years laid out in front of you. What do you see?

It depends on where you are looking from.

The way I see the world depends on my perspective of the world. If I see the world as a bad and scary place I will buy a lot of locks and build a lot of hard, hard buildings. If I see the world as a happy place I might stick a big vacuum up into the air and suck all the soot out of the atmosphere and apologize for my malfeasance.<sup>1</sup>

And this is why your view of manhood--

*Your meaning all students,*

Each and all of your perspectives on manhood will help shape the figure of the man you are envisioning for your future self(ves).<sup>2</sup>

Your twenty-three year old you will probably, after stumbling across these writings, will probably smile and be glad you protected them, then stick them away for another seventeen years (email me the allusion to receive<sup>3</sup>) when your forty-year old you turns around for a little guidance and seeks you out. Won't you feel grand having honored yourself so beautifully by not only reflecting on what it means to be a man, but writing it down, saying, "This is how I see it now, and these are my questions and confusions.

That is courage, commitment, and conviction

So I lead with a confession and a question.

I don't know how to do this.<sup>4</sup>

How do I do this?

Simple

I find a pro and follow.

And go slow

Read not to finish

Read to cherish

Or relish

Enjoy each paragraph

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<sup>1</sup> Email me a voice recording of you using this word contextually within a paragraph and we can begin to negotiate. (see Thursday, March 23 footnote 2)

<sup>2</sup> Understand, there is no singular idea of manhood, it is to broad a question to answer on a single sheet of paper. We will address the question through our response to a newspaper article on the matter. Thus, the ideas will have already been laid out, we just have to understand what we are reading and be willing to respond through writing.

<sup>3</sup> Go to Thursday, March 23, 2017 footnote two for further explanation.

<sup>4</sup> This typically sounds like, I don't want to do this. It is much easier to pretend not to want to do something than to admit I cannot do something..

One at a time

Pause and reflect of what you hear (read) saw. Maybe have a pen in hand, capture and corral those ideas, images and wonders that might start to appear

A paragraph at a time

What is manhood, from all perspectives? Especially yours, young woman and young man, each of you is creating the parents of the children you will want to love and protect with all of your heart. What type of man<sup>5</sup>, what are the characteristics of the man who will hold that baby in his hands, whether this man be you or your mate, what will be his perspective on manhood?

Now that I have spun my brain into a pretzel, I would like you to give your heart and mind's attention to the following article by Frank Bruni. I look for his opinion pieces in the New York Times. He writes very intelligently and thoughtfully. Read slowly, the ideas and the language grow more complex the further you read. If you get lost, pause on a paragraph and linger there. Consider understanding as breath, acknowledge your understanding at the close of each paragraph,

No hurry...

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<sup>5</sup> Is this becoming anthrocentric? Is asking this it it sensitivity or fear of recrimination of political incorrectness?



One of the dippiest, catchiest commercials of my youth was for Campbell's soup. I remember it precisely; I can still sing the snippet of song at its center.

“How do you handle a hungry man?” crooned an offscreen voice. A very *deep* voice, I should add. It then answered, thunderously, “The Manhandlers!”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyU--Tb-MO4>

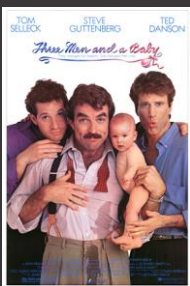
That was the name for a line of especially hearty Campbell's concoctions, and the images that accompanied the lyrics, depending on which iteration of the commercial you saw, might be hockey players slamming into one another or basketball players jockeying for position under the net. The message was that a man worked up a sweat and then ate up a storm – in this case, a beef-and-noodle hurricane, or at least a split-pea squall. He was a force of nature with untamable appetites.

That was the 1970s, and what strikes me isn't how much has changed but how little.

Oh, sure, we're having a soulful discussion, at least in the media, about the elasticity of gender. Just over two weeks ago, the cover of Time magazine read, "Beyond He or She," and in smaller type: "How a new generation is redefining the meaning of gender."

But the following week, Time's cover teased an interview with our president, Donald Trump, whose take on gender is decidedly old-fashioned and fixed. He casts himself — surprise! — as a force of nature with untamable appetites. And that persona won him tens of millions of votes, lofting him to the White House, so it can't have contradicted Americans' notions of manhood all that much.

A real man lusts. A real man rages. A real man doesn't chip in with domestic duties. That's not just Trump's view — he once boasted that he'd never change a diaper — but also, apparently, the message that many young men in America today still get, according to an intriguing study released a few days ago.

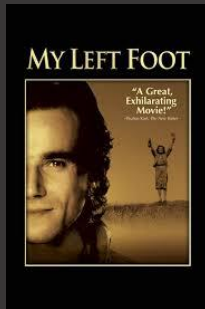


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5Jc6GH40Gg>

Promundo, a nonprofit organization that promotes gender equity, surveyed roughly 1,300 American men between 18 and 30. Seventy-five percent said that they're supposed to act strong even when scared or nervous; 63 percent said that they're exhorted to seize sex whenever available; 46 percent said that they're waved away from household chores.

Promundo also surveyed British and Mexican men, and neither group described a gender construct as musky, musty and unyielding as the one that Americans detailed. The research suggested that plenty of American men live in what some sociologists call the Man Box, constricted by a concept of manhood that includes aggression, hypersexuality, supreme authority and utter self-sufficiency.

I can't say that I'm surprised, not when I look at the [biggest male movie stars](#) and see such an emphasis on brawn over brain. Dwayne Johnson — a.k.a. the Rock — can open a movie; Daniel Day-Lewis cannot. Tom Cruise's box-office status owes more to physical pyrotechnics in the "Mission Impossible" franchise than to courtroom fireworks in "A Few Good Men," just as Hugh Jackman's currency comes from his bladed fingers in "The Wolverine" and now "Logan," not from his dulcet voice in "Les Misérables." Will Smith's verbal dexterity in "Six Degrees of Separation" may have won him critical regard, but his coolness in "Bad Boys" and "Men in Black" made him box-office gold.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZLUZ1eONhk>

We're seeing some young female stars expand into action roles — in the “Hunger Games” series, in the last two “Star Wars” offshoots — but I don't detect a commensurate trend of young male stars seeking, and benefiting from, softer parts. True, Ryan Gosling danced (awkwardly) in “La La Land” and Bradley Cooper embodied vulnerability in “Silver Linings Playbook.” But Cooper soon pivoted into “American Sniper,” for which he thickened his body and slowed his speech.



Maybe I read the tea leaves too closely and pessimistically, but then I'm a gay man whose teen years were in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when homosexuality alone was considered antithetical to true manhood and someone like me was left in a limbo, wondering what claims on masculinity he really had.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBPm2Xom\\_y4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBPm2Xom_y4)

Okay, right there, note your reaction to that last paragraph, here's your honesty right now. Did you see it coming? The article is all about manhood, did you know the writer is gay? Does it matter?

I was a competitive swimmer, and while I hated it, I didn't dare quit, as it felt like a retort to, and inoculation against, anyone questioning my maleness. Just before college I completed an Outward Bound course in the Oregon mountains, and my outsize pride was about how classically manly the adventure had been: no showers, no toilets, harsh weather, bland food.

That was decades ago, but just last week, when I emailed one straight male friend and one gay male friend with a succinct, unexplained question — “When do you feel the most manly?” — their answers reflected a similar perspective.

<http://www.outwardbound.org/>



The straight friend flashed on his experience playing football in high school and college and wrote that he had felt the most manly when leaving the locker room with his “hands and wrists taped up, win or lose, smelling and aching.”

The gay friend mentioned that he’d been hiking a lot recently, in an area where strong winds were tearing at trees. “Limbs keep coming down,” he wrote. “I feel manly when I have to move them off the trail, knowing some are too big for other hikers to budge.”

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When does Trump feel the most manly? That’s pretty obvious: when he’s salivating over women and styling himself some conquistador of the flesh, as he did repeatedly with Howard Stern and on one infamous occasion with Billy Bush. When he’s belittling and emasculating rivals (“Liddle Marco,” “low-energy Jeb”), as he did throughout his campaign. When he’s vowing vengeance against the House Freedom Caucus, as he did last week. When he’s surrounding himself with generals. When he’s pledging huge increases in military spending while moving to starve wonky research and the arts.

What about that last paragraph? Did the tone change? Is it too bias now? Does he lose credibility (ethos) if he shows bias? Do you know what I am talking about? If not, ask.

*There are ways in which his life, and his political career in particular, are a burlesque of manhood, “so craven and desperately needy that it has an air of danger and pathos,” said [Michael Kimmel](#), a Stony Brook University sociologist and the author of “Angry White Men,” a 2013 book that will soon be reissued with a new preface that takes Trump into account.*

*I think Trump protests too much, distracting us from other traits. He abhors handshakes: all those icky germs! He gilds and swirls his hair. Those white crescent moons under his eyes suggest time spent wearing goggles during artificial tanning sessions. The Marlboro Man got his sun on the range, not in the salon.*

#### VOCAB POWER STATION

Burlesque, craven, pathos, (there it is!) abhors,

Marlboro Man (which literary device?)

But Kimmel said that such signals have begun to diversify somewhat. He noted that Axe, which makes men's grooming products, used to be famous for ads that equated using Axe with getting laid, but it unveiled a new one last year that showed one man in a wheelchair, another with cats, another at a chalkboard, another in drag. "Find your magic" was the tagline, and that magic didn't boil down to sweat, swagger or a sheaf of condoms.

Axe, as it happens, sponsored the Promundo study, which concluded that men who registered narrow, clichéd instructions about manhood were more likely to act out in self-destructive ways, such as substance abuse, and in outwardly destructive ones, such as online bullying.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzTSE6kcLwY>



Online bullying? That brings to mind a certain tweeter in chief, and so does the argument that when you feel compelled to project an unforgiving kind of masculine strength, you end up in a twisted, tortured place. You can call it the Man Box. Or, these days, the Oval Office.

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That's a journey through heart and soul as articulated through mind. We would like to thank Mr. Bruni for the experience. Manhood, maybe I'll go back and read it again, and taking it one paragraph at a time.