

The Masculinist #1: The Trouble With Men

Aaron M. Renn <arenn@urbanophile.com>
To: "Aaron M. Renn" <arenn@urbanophile.com>

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Thanks so much for agreeing to receive my new newsletter about the crisis of men in society and especially in the church. Since I called my blog on cities “The Urbanophile”, I’m calling this one “The Masculinist.” It’s dedicated to attracting more men to Christ, helping build better and godlier men; and more, and more successful, marriages in the church.

So welcome to the Masculinist. Thanks to all of you for being a part of it. Obviously I won’t be spamming you with thousands of messages. I plan to only send out one per month to start.

Do you want to change the world for the better? I ask you to please forward this newsletter far and wide to those you think might be interested, because I need your help to make this a success. People can subscribe by clicking this link: <http://www.urbanophile.com/masculinist/>

The Trouble With Men



Men and boys are too often dysfunctional and failing in our society.

Seven million prime working age men between 25-54 are unemployed and not even looking for work. Labor force participation has especially plummeted among young men with less than a college degree. And the time spent not working isn’t being filled with school or training; it is being replaced on a nearly one to one basis with video games (though one presumes pornography also looms large). These are the so-called “NEETs” – Neither Employed nor in Education or Training. This is part of a pattern of delayed adulthood; fully 35% of men ages 18-34 live with their parents compared with only 28% who live with a “spouse”. NPR calls this an “[economic mystery](#).”

This isn’t just at the low end of the economic spectrum. My colleague Kay Hymowitz wrote the book [Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men Into Boys](#). Along with similar works such as Hanna Rosin’s [The End of Men](#), we see a pattern of male failure at the higher end too. Men are now only receiving around 40% of both bachelor’s and master’s degrees as women dominate higher education. Though men retain a large

majority of top posts, most corporate managers are actually now women. 13 out of 15 job categories projected to grow the most in the future are predominantly female.

This isn't just an educational or economic problem. It's a physical and health one too. Only [26% of adult men are of normal weight](#), with the rest overweight or obese. [Diabetes diagnoses are up](#). Only a quarter of men meet government standards for [aerobic exercise and strength training](#). Grip strength among young men, one of the key indicators of overall strength and even health, has declined significantly. In the last 30 years the grip strength of college age men has [declined from 117 pounds to 98 pounds](#) and is now about the same as 30-year-old women. Men are even chemically less masculine today; testosterone levels are in decline, [falling by as much as 22%](#) in recent years.



Besides college or work, another thing men are too often not doing much of is spending much time in church, something I'll explore in more detail in the future. But to set the stage, David Morrow in his book titled, in a direct and masculine manner, [Why Men Hate Going to Church](#), surveyed the contemporary scene. He notes that the typical church congregation is 60% or more female, and that "the men who do show up for services often seem passive, bored, or uneasy." Among married female churchgoers, about 20% have a husband who does not come to church. This 60/40 ratio may have improved a bit recently, but only because of an accelerating abandonment of church by women.

None of this is to suggest that everything is great for women. They have their own critical problems with obesity, diabetes, etc. Despite vast social changes that favored women in the wake of 1960s second wave feminism, they are actually less happy than before. One [study concludes](#), "Measures of women's subjective well-being have fallen both absolutely and relatively to that of men [over the last 35 years]. While the expansion in women's opportunities has been extensively studied, the concurrent decline in subjective well-being has largely gone unnoted." A recent study in Great Britain found a [sharp rise in unhappiness](#) among young girls. A stunning [one-quarter of women take psychotropic medications](#). So women have problems too, even if in some ways they are outperforming men.

Unsurprisingly, this has also fed into family indicators, including a rise in the single and never married population, the rise in the number of childless women, and especially very high growth in out of wedlock births. 41% of all children are now born out of wedlock, including a stunning 72% of black children. The out of wedlock birth rate was less than 5% in 1950. This rate is critical because the consequences for life outcomes of being born out of wedlock are dire. The church is hardly immune to these trends, as church rates of premarital sex and divorce are not much lower than those in secular society – 38% divorce even among [Evangelicals who attend church weekly](#).

Beyond the objective problems men (and women and the family) are suffering, the very idea of masculinity itself is increasingly being questioned and redefined by society. Jack Urwin has argued that [the proverbial "stiff upper lip" is killing British men](#). He wrote a book called [Man Up](#) about "toxic masculinity" and says that ["We don't need to be the men our grandfathers were."](#) A recent New York Times op-ed titled ["Men's Lib!"](#) claimed that traditional masculinity was past its sell-by date, "The old economy and the old model of masculinity are obsolete. Women have learned to become more like men. Now men need to learn to become more like women." The Washington Post took it to the next level, saying, ["Your manliness could be killing the planet."](#)



The rise of transgenderism has even called into question what it means to be a man at all. A recent [Time magazine profile](#) of a bearded trans-man named Evan who had and is nursing a baby lays it out, "Pregnancies like Evan's—and the many that are likely to follow—will stretch our cultural perceptions of gender norms even further. Americans are just starting to open up to the idea that you may be born into a female body, but believe that you are really a man. But what if you are born into a female body, know you are a man and still want to participate in the traditionally exclusive rite of womanhood? What kind of man are you then?"

The church, like the world, is often ambivalent at best about masculinity, and pastors frequently express frustration over the men in their pews. Megachurch pastor Matt Chandler calls them ["boys who can shave."](#) He writes in his book [The Mingling of Souls](#) that, "There is a growing crisis about the meaning of masculinity itself, a crisis that points to the betrayal of men by the very hypermasculine ideals that they are meant to embody." In their book [The Meaning of Marriage](#), Tim and Kathy Keller write, "Dominant, swaggering (and sinful) male behavior is assumed to be the default mode if one wishes to get ahead or be taken seriously in the world." Focus on the Family's Glenn Stanton says, "Our most pressing social problem today is a man deficit."

Yet despite this vast outpouring of statistics, hand wringing, re-evaluations of masculinity, sermons and books, nothing

has changed the basic trajectory we are on. This suggests fundamental errors by the church in the diagnosis of these problems, and in the development of proposed solutions.

Society at large has decisively rejected God and His word about how we should live our lives. So while I will look at this problem generally, my focus will primarily be on men and the church.

Looking specifically at the church, any honest accounting must start by having the courage to face the unpleasant truth: when it comes to attracting men and building godly, successful men and families, the church has failed. There may be many individual cases of success, but in aggregate, whatever the church is doing, it hasn't worked, despite having the truth of God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit. This is especially true once you account for socioeconomic status. (Family stability is pretty good for the secular top echelons generally in America, as scholars as diverse as Charles Murray and Robert Putnam have pointed out. Contrary to popular belief, church attendance is higher among higher SES groups, and low among lower SES ones). Fundamentally, if the church hasn't been failing, why are all these pastors so worked up on the topic?

Because this problem is indeed so critical and change has proven so elusive, I have decided to take it on.

Who Am I?

Who am I, and why do I think I can contribute to this discussion? I am Aaron M. Renn, a 46yo man in New York. I will tell more of my story over time. I am a Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a think tank typically described as conservative, where I focus on urban policy and culture. My work here on men is purely personal in nature and not affiliated with my employer.

I started with no professional or educational background in urban policy, yet developed into a nationally recognized expert in the issue. Similarly, I have no seminary or professional background here. But after spending years and many hundreds of hours studying this area, and personally seeing my life transformed through the power of God and by applying what I've learned, I am confident that I have unique and compelling insights and practical solutions to offer here.

My goal is to change the future trajectory for men (and by extension their families) in the church for the better. I want to start out by changing the way you think about the problem, hopefully at a minimum giving you new perspectives on it that you have not considered before. I'm going to start out slow to establish a common baseline, but if you know my work you know I'll make it worth your while to read and will not hesitate to follow the evidence wherever it leads - even if it's not popular. So beware! This is not a safe space.

So that you know where I'm coming from religiously, I grew up in rural Southern Indiana where I was raised in a rural, fundamentalist, Pentecostal (Assemblies of God) church. I was not really a Christian until six years ago. I currently attend a Presbyterian (EPC) church, and hold to a largely traditional theology and a complementarian view on marriage.

I plan to take an ecumenical approach here, though obviously I have my own perspectives, hence I want there to be full disclosure on my origin point. I'm delighted to have Catholics and others from outside my tradition on the list.

Again, I would ask everyone to forward this on to others of interest, because it's a critical topic area and I need your help. My target is Christian men and pastors. I recommend against including non-Christians or women on this list, but I trust all of your judgments in the matter of who to include.

Anyone who wants to subscribe can do so at this link: <http://www.urbanophile.com/masculinist/>

Noteworthy

Each Masculinist will include links to recent articles relevant to our topic. Read them or not as they strike your interest.

My [review of JD Vance's #1 New York Times bestselling memoir *Hillbilly Elegy*](#). "Throughout the book, Vance displays an obvious and strong matriarchal orientation."

Esquire ran the first joint [interview with Clint Eastwood and his son](#). "She was definitely a little more understanding. You get the law laid down, you know, the ax. I look at it like weapons in my war chest now. He made me hustle, and claw, and fight. That's all stuff you want. You want that drive."

A New York Times article on [marital difficulties from divided loyalties in the presidential election](#). “If you vote for Trump, I will divorce you and move to Canada,’ she recalled telling him. He tried to laugh it off. ‘I’m serious,’ Dr. Maguire told him.”

New York Magazine writes about [the new science of single people](#).

Thirteen women talk about why [they never want to be married](#). “I don’t understand the rationale of promising someone you love that you will never love anyone else.”

Emma Lindsay says [being single is hard](#). “But anyway, the part I actually find hard about being single is that I never get touched, and this is *always* overlooked and undervalued.”

The Daily Mail profiles [women who stop having sex with their husbands](#) but claim to still love them anyway. “I’ve had all the sex I need to in my life, and truthfully, I’m just over it. Plus I’m a little bored.”

Ross Douthat says that Donald Trump is [a playboy running for President](#).

Live Not By Lies

There’s a set of principles I plan to follow in this newsletter, which I’ll talk about over the first few issues.

The first principle is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s famous dictum: *live not by lies*. He wrote his [essay of that name](#) in 1974, just as he was about to be arrested and sent into exile in the West.

We face far less dire circumstances than Soviet dissidents, yet too often we lack the courage to say things that might cause us even to just to lose standing in the world or the church. But more importantly, we too often lack the courage to seriously examine our own beliefs to ask whether or not we have come to genuinely believe things that are simply not true.

As the faith shrinks ever further in the West, as men fall into decline in society, as men reject Christ or otherwise fail to live up to Christian standards, we must have the courage to consider that we may be fundamentally mistaken – and in many and serious ways. Because the most fundamental question of all is, “What is true?”

I don’t claim to have all of the answers myself. I believe that we are all out to sea as a church in a lot of areas, even if we don’t recognize it. I include myself in that. But a quest for truth, regardless of whether pleasant, will be our North Star, with the ultimate arbiter of truth being God’s word.

Coda

"Men stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn, drying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust. The men were silent and they did not move often. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men—to feel whether this time the men would break. The women studied the men's faces secretly, for the corn could go, as long as something else remained. The children stood near by, drawing figures in the dust with bare toes, and the children sent exploring senses out to see whether men and women would break. The children peeked at the faces of the men and women, and then drew careful lines in the dust with their toes. Horses came to the watering troughs and nuzzled the water to clear the surface dust. After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break. Then they asked, What'll we do? And the men replied, I don't know. But it was all right. The women knew it was all right, and the watching children knew it was all right. Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole." - John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

PO Box 231028
New York NY 10023
USA

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