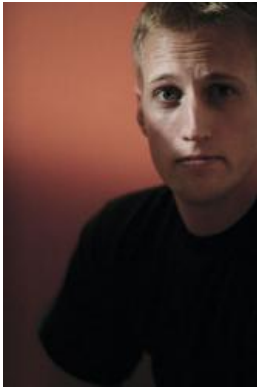# AlbertMohler.com ▬▬▬▬

Masculinity without Manhood?

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It does not take great intellectual sophistication to see that we are in a period of widespread gender confusion. As with so many other developments of our times, our evolving language betrays more substantial shifts in the culture.

Writing in *The Boston Globe* [warning, article includes crude language], Mark Peters argues that the proliferation of "man" terms indicates this confusion over manhood and masculinity.

"Hey guys. Is it time for a manogram? Did you get your manimony check?," he asks. Then he points to the bigger picture:

If you feel like you're seeing man words everywhere, you're not alone. Movies, TV shows, ads, and the Web have been pumping them out. Some are painful puns, some crude slang, and as a genre, they say a great deal about our ever-in-flux gender roles.

Man words come from many man caves. Manimony (alimony paid to fellas) got a boost when it was used on "Cashmere Mafia" this month, just as "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" spread manscaping, which encompasses shaving, waxing, plucking, and other deforestation of the male bod. Manny - the word, not the ballplayer - was popularized by stories about Britney Spears's male nanny, and mancation caught on after Vince Vaughn said it in "The Break-up." Commercials feature man laws, man food, man suits, and man thongs. US soldiers in Iraq call the traditional Muslim dishdasha a man dress, while a resurgence of traditional manly activities has led some to discuss a menaissance.

So a "manogram" is a prostate exam and a "mankini" is a swim suit popular in Europe — where it should stay. Peters, who is a keen observer of language, understands well that these linguistic innovations indicate confusion.

Here is the most important section of his article:

How to act like a man is a humdinger of an issue if you are one. The late Steven L. Nock, a professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, said in an e-mail to me last year that it doesn't take much for women to prove that they're "real women" in the widely accepted senses, but men are in a more slippery situation, especially with the role of father/protector/provider not considered as necessary or desirable as it once was. "[M]asculinity must be continuously earned and displayed. It is never won," Nock wrote. Without a traditional role to embrace, being a man requires constantly defining yourself in opposition to all things female: "No wonder things like man-purses attract attention."

Peters, citing the late Steven L. Nock, argues that men "are in a more slippery situation" precisely because "the role of father/protector/provider [is] not considered as necessary or desirable as it once was."

This really does get to the heart of the issue. Men should not expect to be comfortable with an understanding of masculinity that is not based in these roles and responsibilities. When manhood is not defined in these normative terms, confusion necessarily follows — complete with a new and confusing vocabulary.

In a biblical perspective, manhood is defined in these roles and responsibilities. A man is defined in terms of who he *is* and what he *does* in obedience to God. A society that rejects or sidelines these roles and responsibilities — that does not honor fatherhood and hold it out as expectation — will sow seeds of disastrous confusion. The damage to our language is among the least of our problems.

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While the Bible clearly honors men who forfeit the blessings of wife and children for the sake of the Gospel (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 7:7-9, 32-28), the history of the Christian church indicates that these represent a minority. The normative expectation is that a young man will mature to take on the role of "father/protector/provider" that Peters correctly sees as "not considered as necessary or desirable as it once was" within the secular culture. Those men who are faithfully living out these responsibilities are not likely to be too concerned about finding true masculinity. They are living it.

When this expectation is no longer normative, it should be no surprise that men struggle to define masculinity. The focus shifts from family to fashion accessories. Our language betrays our confusion, but the confusion reveals a larger betrayal.

We lie to ourselves if we believe that we can hold onto a healthy masculinity without honoring true manhood.