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Man Up or Man Down? Newsweek Redefines Masculinity

A healthy masculinity should motivate men to find their way in this new world of changed economic realities and work opportunities, and to do this while remaining men.

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“We’ve arrived at another crossroads,” declares *Newsweek* — and this one represents a crisis for masculinity. As the magazine’s current cover story asserts, “The prevailing codes of manhood have yet to adjust to the changing demands on men.” With this cover story dedicated to “rethinking” masculinity, *Newsweek* launches itself into a very relevant cultural conversation.

“Man Up!” is the message the magazine conveys on its cover, though by the time a reader actually reads the article, he or she may be forgiven for having little idea of what this means. If, indeed, the traditional male is “an endangered species,” where does this leave men?

Writers Andrew Romano and Tony Dokoupil get right to the heart of that matter when they ask, “What’s the matter with men?” They point to the recent recession, which we now know has led to a significant and seemingly permanent change in the workforce — and largely at the expense of men. By some estimates, eight out of ten jobs lost in the recession were in sectors of the economy that are traditionally dominated by men, such as construction and manufacturing. In 1945, the male share of the labor force was 70 percent. Now it is less than 50 percent. In the nation’s largest cities, women often make more than men on average do. Women now outnumber men at virtually every level of higher education, starting with a six to four advantage in undergraduate registrations. The list goes on.

So, how do men recover? By reasserting masculinity? Here is a warning from Romano and Dokoupil:

But suggesting that men should stick to some musty script of masculinity only perpetuates the problem. For starters, it encourages them to confront new challenges the same way they dealt with earlier upheavals: by blaming women, retreating into the woods, or burying their anxieties beneath machismo. And it does nothing to help them succeed in school, secure sustainable jobs, or be better fathers in an economy that’s rapidly outgrowing Marlboro Manliness.

Well, men will certainly not recover a healthy manhood by aping crude stereotypes or cultural constructions of “Marlboro Manliness.” At the same time, the path to recovery doesn’t lie in denying the truth about gender differences or roles.

The authors point to a “New Macho,” a redefined masculinity that is shaped around what *Newsweek* sees as the new realities in both the economy and the home. The new man is a nurturing man, they argue, as ready to change a diaper as to change a tire. And as for work, even as jobs in the traditionally male sectors of the society disappear, men must find new roles in sectors previously associated primarily with women. These are also concentrated in nurturing roles or positions in the information economy.



The new jobs are to be found in health care and education, for example. Future projections call for over 500,000 new teaching jobs in the next decade, along with 582,000 new nurses. *Newsweek* predicts that 6.9 million new jobs will appear in the social sector of the economy, where men have often been thin on the ground.

Men, Romano and Dokoupil argue, are ill equipped for this new economy, under-educated and often unemployed. Men will adjust to the new reality or be left behind.

The most interesting portion of the *Newsweek* cover story concerns the home front. The authors admit that the “New Macho” is “a path to masculinity paved with girly jobs and dirty diapers.”

American readers of the magazine are likely to note very quickly that Romano and Dokoupil seem quite enamored with Europe and its welfare and social policies. They highlight Sweden’s liberal parental leave policy as evidence of how government can act to redefine a reality as basic and ingrained as gender roles. In Sweden, “men are expected to work less and father more” and to see themselves as equally competent at child-rearing.

The message is plain — men will have to redefine masculinity as they take on “girly” jobs, transform themselves into nurturers, and celebrate a fully egalitarian society in terms of gender. Working for a female boss will become standard, as will the expectation that a stay-at-home father is as common as a stay-at-home mom.

On that point, *Newsweek* confidently points to a future that is not likely to happen quite as described. Americans may say that they are for services like paid parental leave, but when it comes to any tangible policy, economic factors are likely to scuttle the plan.

Of course, the call for men to be more engaged with their children is never wrong. Indeed, in this case, the political Left is picking up on themes long driven by the Right, and by conservative Christians in particular. The difference is that the Christian concern for asserting a man’s responsibility and fulfillment in fatherhood is not about social egalitarianism. Rather, it is driven by a biblical conception of true manhood as defined through the roles of husband and father.

Still, as much as we might complain about *Newsweek*’s rather predictable tip of the hat to the welfare state and the end of many gender distinctions, there is a sense in which the writers come very close to getting a big point just right.

They explain:

The truth is, it's not how men style themselves that will make them whole again—it's what they do with their days. The riggers, welders, and boilermakers of generations past weren't wearing overalls to feel like men, as Susan Faludi, the author of books on both sexes, has pointed out. Instead, “their sense of their own manhood flowed out of their utility in a society, not the other way around,” she writes. “Conceiving of masculinity as something to be”—a part to play—“turns manliness into [something] ornamental, and about as ‘masculine’ as fake eyelashes are inherently ‘feminine.’?”

We may be surprised to find ourselves in agreement with Susan Faludi here, but she is absolutely right. Our fathers and grandfathers did not put on overalls to play dress up. They were headed for work. Faludi is profoundly right when she writes that “their sense of their own manhood flowed out of their utility in a society, not the other way around.”

A true masculinity is grounded in a man’s determination to fulfill his manhood in being a good husband, father, citizen, worker, leader, and friend — one who makes a difference, fulfills a role for others, and devotes his life to these tasks. Most of our fathers went to work early and toiled all day because they knew it was their duty to put bread on the table, a roof over our heads, and a future in front of us. They made their way to ball games and school events dead tired, went home and took care of things, and then got up and did it all over again the next day.

Today’s men are likely to be more nurturing, but they are also statistically less faithful. They may be changing more diapers, but they are also more likely to change spouses. Men must be encouraged and expected to be both faithful fathers and faithful husbands. Otherwise, any society is in big trouble.

The *Newsweek* cover story is an undisguised alert that the world is changing. A healthy masculinity should motivate men to find their way in this new world of changed economic realities and work opportunities, and to do this while remaining men. The unanswered question from *Newsweek*’s analysis is this: Will men change the new work of work, or

will the new social realities change men?

Though barely mentioned in the article, the most haunting question is about today's boys. The magazine's cover features a shirtless man holding a young boy. It is the boy's face that looks at the reader. We had better hope that the "new masculinity" of the uncharted future is one that leads that boy and his generation to become authentic and faithful men.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

Andrew Romano and Tony Dokoupil, "Men's Lib," from the "Man Up" cover story in *Newsweek*, September 27, 2010

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