

ManDown

Your Masculinity Needs a Detox

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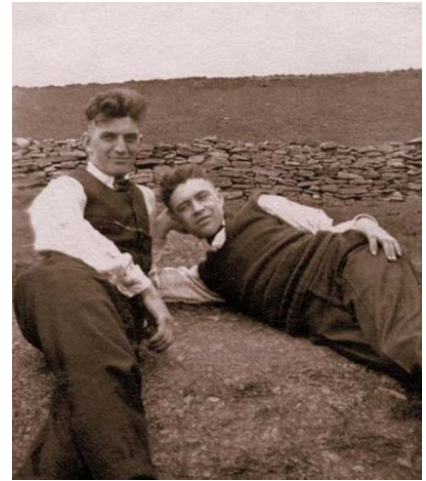
WHAT DO YOU SEE? If you view this picture of friends in 1929 beginning a day of hunting through a modern lens—our prism of modern culture—you might not only think it odd, but maybe *gay*. Who sits straddling another man’s legs, head peering through their crotch, and *holding hands*? This is a posed shot; it’s a portrait, not a joke shot or an impromptu one.

Before Western culture became dominant, a global marker of social interactions, men enjoyed friendships with other men that were as equally characterized by affections and care as those between women. Of course, there were strictures for both men and women, in comportment and in social displays. But by the turn of the 20th Century, significant events predicated a turn of events that curtailed the way men enjoyed each other, in freedom of intimacy and emotional ties, physicality, and togetherness.

That “turn” shifted *exteriority* to *interiority* for men; while women were left to continue openly displaying their affectations to each other, branding them as the ‘weaker sex’ for not having the self-control that now men seemingly had.

This new male category of identity not only caused men to be more careful and less comfortable with showing affection towards each other, but also introduced a reticent and

hierarchical manner in dealing with other men. Gone quickly were the frivolities of laying hands on your friend(s), hand-holding, or leg lockings; lying next to each other in the park to talk; or sundry other intimate, familiar, caring, easy interactions. In their place came shoulder side-hugs (if at that); certainly, a recoil at the thought that you (alone, or as a group) could be seen as *homosexual*, a term coined in 1869, but from the turn of the Century on, used vigorously by church and society to keep men as men.



Male friends, left to right: Attorneys, 1901; Stable workers, 1911; Businessmen at lunch in park, 1932

THINKING OF MEN as *either* homosexual or heterosexual became common. The conception of homosexual as an onerous and stigmatized identity sent a clear message: To be a (heterosexual) man one must be tough and not sensitive; to be a (heterosexual) man, you show much less affection and care for another man, even if he is your best buddy, friend, confidant. And, as had already been the case—but now even more exaggerated—to be a real man, you took charge of your household, your spouse, your children: You reclaimed the Victorian stiffness of privity and prudery. But you *could* get a mistress. You were a man!



“Gone was the affection and care for another man, even if he was your best buddy, friend, confidant.”

Best friends on an afternoon ride in Southern California, 1925

By the time the First and Second world wars were over, “real men” had emerged, their roles becoming more formal, external to the household, certainly less intimate with each other but forever intimate, sexualized and patronizing with their spouses. Men became competitors, getting ahead in the now rush for industrial expansion, suburbanism; a dog-eat-dog world of one-upmanship for positions and power. Becoming external to the household meant that women, now returning from their “Rosie the Riveter” war days, ran the household and the children. Men, well, they had someone to care for the children, and them—sometimes hand and foot.

And we taught these “values” to our children, especially male children. These were brought up to “*not cry*,” to “*suck it up*,” “*take it like a real man*,” learn to use all the tools in Dad’s garage (or else you were of no good), and model him in his way of being. Most importantly, to insure you did not take rift-raft from your future spouse.

Men became pernicious, hard-hearted, often playing both sides of the coin: To their children he was the all-knowing, all doing-Dad, who was either feared or revered. To their wives, he became the needed sustenance despite his insouciance, his bigotry, and in some cases, his cheating heart.

The Sixties and love in the air tried to change all that; and for some it did. Men found freedom from role restrictions and prude sex, via acid trips, free love and communes. But life in the beyond-real didn’t last. It also didn’t wash away all the prejudicials of manhood. Men began to slowly filter back into the known, “mature” roles of men, as they had reified decades before. The Women’s Movement (1960’s–80’s) did solidify in some men their move to something better. For most, however, it did the opposite: It further congealed the sentiment that they, and women, weren’t only different, but that males had the better sense to rule, govern, and make sense of the world. For many, it underscored the need to maintain power.

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More could be said to extend this history lesson to the modern period. However, I want to get to the gist of what this article is all about: **Getting to detoxify manhood from all its encumberings, all of the trappings that culture and history and male egotism has laid on us men.** Not only do we owe it to ourselves, our families, but to the world.

I’ll start with what a majority of men still inherit: We raised our kids in the latter part of the 20th century, when our culture was in temblor mode; when a new civic engagement had taken us both by surprise as well as by our own design. Our Millennial children grew up chewing on smartphones, then tablets, then video games, and ultimately cruising the net, invading websites where all things were challengeable and new Avatars remediated their deficiencies stat. Among all those learnings were the roles we *still* play as men and women.

What Millennials inherited was a mixed bag: a family that was predominantly more open than not (yet traditional still); a set of “friends” (many virtual at that) which defined the

universe better than parents (who didn't *know much*, really); and, yes, a desire to be more humane, more compassionate. Also, more egotistical, when it really came down to it.

For men, this meant negotiating female relationships that were at once infused with some traditional courting (mostly virtual), certainly sexual, and certainly through movies, dating sites, friends' stories and what not, ripe with expectations of remaining a "stud." Of making all the right sexual moves—all aimed, of course, at seeing whether this or that "hookup" was going to work itself into something more authentic, even lasting.

In this sexualized and presumptive cauldron of hipness, many men seemed to take advantage of casual hookups as a venue for satisfying that old (sexual) itch, without doing much else to foster relationships. **As a professor, I've heard many tales of woe coming from broken-hearted women that thought "after all this time, he'd get to the question. . ." which of course, never did come.**

If one of these pairings eventually worked, and the man respected the gal (you know, she was fun but "mature," had a job, seemed to jive with him in all the right places), and he worked it out after experimenting for a while, and decided to get married . . . the guy then had to figure out how this new role of "husband" was to work out. For that, he really had no friends to go to . . . After men marry, these often undo single friendships. such becoming cumbersome to negotiate.

What *he* didn't realize was *she* had still been raised in a matrix of female socialization that *assured her of a friend network*; that continued to allow her, and her mother before her, and her grandmother before her, to build strong emotional and friendship bonds with other women. She was *still* with a significant friend or friends with whom she could share all her whispers, ask questions, and know they would understand. Know they would be there to help, console, give advice; and yes, also to go to the toilet together when they went out for coffee.

If you were lucky, you did keep some of your buddies, still. With this small group (like 3) you still played the occasional hoop or soccer game, or went to a game with them. In those occasions, you reverted to the banter your learned was acceptable as a teen, the jerking around, the high-fiving, the slap in the butt (maybe); but never did you really talk personally or intimately to *any*. And, if it did happen, it was brief, a small consolation, like, "*Dude, I feel your pain.*" "*I get your misery.*" At best, ". . . *know am your bro (bra?) and you can come over any time for a beer.*"

Sweep away all the nice, and you are left with your own floating ship, and no real intimate anchor.

For Mosaics, yes, they seem to enjoy a more open same-sex camaraderie, and don't mind the occasional long hug and all that, since they grew up/are growing up with a much more open society regarding gender, sexual orientation, and what not.

For these, the boundaries of rigid masculinity have assuredly opened up some. While Millennials did crash through with their metrosexual grooming, etc., Mosaics aren't really that interested in the artifice, but are on more authentic relationships. But, the jury is still out as to whether this present generation will actually move the male needle further. Some are already enjoining the fray when they (finally) get a job, get to work, and start the male competition beyond sports.

It is the course of men's lives now: for most, no real intimacy with another like kind, little capacity to emote or get help. The intimacy and camaraderie we see in the pictures above; the talk between men that mimicked those intimacies between women—all of that has dissipated for the most part in the modern world.

If you are religious, and you belong to a Church Men's group, you go and participate in their outings, their hunting, fishing, or skiing trips, and the many bible studies and sharings that go on. To me, many resemble recovery groups, since eventually someone will turn it into an open forum for the grief stricken. The usuals are pornography, drinking too much, looking around too much when married; sometimes bewilderment at not being able to communicate with their wives, like the *"She's from Venus and I'm from Mars"* kind of planetary oscillation. **But are these your friends? Can you really tell them your secrets?** And what would they do with them—and *you?*

The current world of masculinities isn't much different than it has been for decades (if you stretch it, centuries): Competitive, distrusting, toxic with the asbestos of past manhoods.

It is a masculinity that we need to detox, a masculinity that needs healing: We need to override patriarchy, move into an equality of being with women that not only respects their God-designed equality, but makes us their true helpmeets. We need to hold ourselves accountable for respect, for privilege (yes, we still have it), for making of money more than it is; and of power and control, vices. We need to move our language from foul and degrading when we anger, to clean, forgiving and accepting. Humble isn't a bad term, and we men need to help ourselves become that: Humble isn't weakness—to the contrary, humility is what wins hearts.

To our children we owe not only respect, but an example of who men can really be—*loving, caring, respectful, thankful, giving, forgiving, mature, confident, capable, friendly, warm, inviting, entertaining, conversational, and most of all, trustworthy*; a lover of God and (if you have one), a spouse.

We need to clear the room from vices: Too much to drink? Beer is not alcohol? Couch-potatoing while there's still laundry to fold, toilet paper to replace, things to pick up? It's not only the yard and the garbage, Duh.

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For those reading this saying I am stereotyping men, let me assure you that there are statistics to back up nearly every assertion here. We men have moved forward for certain; and every generation deals with its own reckoning, of course. However, we remain still mired in a lot of context and behaviors and thinking that needs to change more permanently.

Fortunately, there *are* groups—both within Christianity, and outside of it—that have taken detoxing masculinity as a serious goal.

Bloom Homie is an Instagram account hosted by rapper Figgy Baby and now friend (English teacher) Eric Eztli, which has more than 4,500 followers, and growing. The goal is to encourage men to come out of their toxic masculinities and inspire them to be soft, courageous, emotional, truthful, and bold. With musicians, poets, and other artists joining in, this Instagram community supports each other as they post, let loose on their emotions, and seek facilitations. Men are realizing they can be vulnerable with each other and not lose status, gain support, and a reimagined self. Followers often post tender messages of support, some do poetry, while others share deeply personal experiences. Some reflect on their fathers, and in turn, the kind of fathers *they* want to be. The men challenge male violence, promote love, and caring.

On the Christian side, there are multiple efforts world-wide to transform men from toxic masculinity. Some have fantastic monikers, “**Blokes, Babies, and Bacon**” (A men-only baby and toddler session with bacon sandwiches, big screen sports and plenty of toys: Anglican Church, Australia); “**Men’s Stuff**” (a place for husbands, dads, brothers, uncles, fellas, single men [18+] who seek positive change for themselves and to foster caring relationships with each other.) The successful ones claim to steer men away from “hegemonic masculinities” and into authentic self- and others relationships that center around Christ as Center.

Oh, and lest I forget about the *same-sex attracted*: There are Christian groups that don’t *label*, but instead help you to understand how same-sex attraction came to be, and what you want to do about it. “**Brothers Road**” [officially, **Brothers on a Road Less Traveled**] is a non-profit, multi-faith, international fellowship primarily of men from bisexual or same-sex-attracted backgrounds who—for their own, deeply personal reasons—typically **do not accept or identify with the label “gay,”** and prefer instead to explore and address underlying issues, in order to embrace what the group calls “authentic masculinity.”

And there is a significant point to make here: Detoxing masculinity requires us to understand both the redemptive work of Christ, and also Christ incarnate as a man—a man who didn’t follow masculine conventions of his time.

If Jesus is to be the “model” for everyone (especially men), then we must leach out those cultural traits of masculinity that have been inherited to Jesus through the ages. As I see it, Jesus displayed more traits that are *androgynous* than sex-typed as masculine, regardless of his male body:

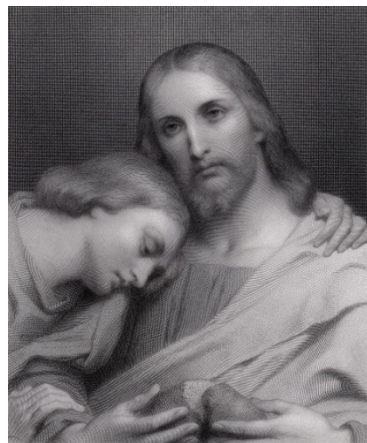
Jesus weeps as he comforts Martha and Mary after Lazarus' death (John 11:35). He never took a wife, per male Jewish custom. He traveled with both male and female followers. He is homosocially intimate with his beloved disciple John, who rests frequently upon Jesus' chest. He spoke directly to women, he healed women, he addressed women like he would address any man. He is anointed by women, and appears to his women followers first. Jesus demonstrated a selflessness which has not been part of male socialization.

To be a “godly man” then, is to emulate Jesus; to learn the traits He had and incorporate them in our lives, socially, emotionally, for the good of others *and* ourselves. That would make us men, all us men of faith, *androgynous* men who can both be bold and benign, humble and helpful.

Toxic masculinity won't go away until we slowly dissolve it from our lives, our self-images, and start to reassemble a manhood that is caring and comfortable. **It must include other men: Other men as friends, as confidants, as trusted others, much as women have done with women friends for millenia.** We need to re-establish relationships with men that are *homosocial* and good for both the soul, and our self. For a decade, psychologists have been writing about the “friendship crisis” facing many men. Men don't want to seem too needy, they say.

More than that, we need to reclaim the good purpose of male intimacy without the fear of homophobia—it is a toxin that perpetually destroys men by robbing them of the intimacy women enjoy with women without the sexual getting in the middle.

It is slow work, but one that we must do, and it seems, is being done. The Pandemic may have started online friendship networks that are re-writing the male script. When we finally can breathe next to each other, we must take those good beginnings into the public square and start to show the world what reimagined masculinity is all about: friends, love, support, and if so blessed, a happy and mutual set of relationships for life.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



VINCENT E. GIL, PH.D., FAACS, is Emeritus Professor of Medical & Psychological Anthropology and Human Sexuality at Vanguard University. He is senior adjunct professor in Nursing. His Ph.D. in Medical and Psychological Anthropology is from UCLA, and included coursework at UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute. His postdoctoral in Sexual Sciences (Clinical and Medical) is from The Masters and Johnson Institute, followed by a second postdoctoral in Public Health Epidemiology (Sexual Diseases) from UCLA. His recent book, *"A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution"* (Cascade, 2020) gives voice to understanding gender and intersexuality as well as addresses a theology of being that reflects Jesus' care and concern for all. Dr. Gil remains a licensed minister with the SoCal Network of the Assemblies of God, and a member minister of the support network of United Evangelical Churches. Dr. Gil can be contacted at vgil@vanguard.edu.