

Chapter 10

What Is a Man?

Denigrating Terms to Describe Men, Manhood, and Masculinity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is an examination of derogations used to describe men with an emphasis on denunciative words that have emerged over the last few decades and seem to have become standardized terms now formally included in the English language. An examination of manhood is presented with each term as well as the traditional role of dominant male hegemony. It is suggested the intended creation and effect of these terms was to break down traditional societal male-oriented privileged status and standing. These terms, however, have performed the inverse and only seem to strengthen the same male hegemony that societal activists have wished to break down. Suggestions and clinical insight related to these expressions and potential psych-ed pieces are offered for counselors and psychotherapists.

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INTRODUCTION

The world of broadcast and social media exploded when the latest hot-button issue hit the digisphere. At odds was recognizing and defining exactly what a “woman” is. Clickbait websites blew up. Many took the pseudo-intellectual highroad and stated they did not know and could not answer. One of these was even Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson who, when asked to define womanhood, responded by saying “I can’t” and that she “. . . is not a biologist” (Ward, 2022, para. 1). Her inability was probably more of a virtue signal to not offend gender activists, but her response was both insulting and bewildering to the vast majority of Americans who rolled their eyes when a grown, educated woman and mother of two children could not or would not define womanhood (Moutevelis, 2022). Her words echoed an unofficial trending campaign decrying the traditional delineation of womanhood as too facile and that womanhood forms an identity so deeply steeped in nuance and dimensional complexity so as to invalidate and eschew traditional definition. What a woman is and what is her role are themes that have been in the process of deconstruction since the 1970s by feminist scholars and those sympathetic to the notion of removing any delimiting definitions of woman (Fish Hatfield, 2010).

Lacking sufficient scrutiny, Brown Jackson’s response was to reinforce the idea that conventional delineations of womanhood are too binary, lacking depth, adequacy and accuracy, thus rendering the historical socially prescribed definition of womanhood to be unusable. This intellectual rejection spread wildly and many jumped on the bandwagon. In spite of the trendiness of this notion, the simple reality is that fundamentally a woman is an adult female who exists in contradistinction to an adult male. This basic truth seems to pain-torture the luminosity of contemporary voices who still respond with exhaustion and haughty derision when a time-honored definition of womanhood is ever proposed. Activist hysteria seems to feed a societally-sanctioned ever-bleeding emotional hemophilia over the brazenness of defining a woman in traditional terms. Those perpetually-offended still react on cue reeling with outrage and crying scandal whenever demarcations are presented that does not neatly fit the current posturing of how a woman is defined.

But, what if society were to flip the tables, setting aside this notion and linger for a moment on the definition of what is a man? It is likely the same enlightened masses would provide the same online firestorm and react scornfully displaying a similar tired affect, crying foul of an outdated social construct. If this is ever asked in an open national forum, it is likely that posturing would once again follow and emotions spiral out of control. It is probable that society would reject a time-honored definition negating the simple reality that a man is no longer a boy, but an adult male. However, any contemporary discussion of what is a man seems to be immediately followed, in almost whiplash-like fashion, by a harsh denunciation of toxic masculinity (TM).

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