

## 12. A real man does not have a “brand”

The brilliant but controversial philosopher Jean-Jacque Rousseau asserted that the worst human flaw is the desire to be respected by others. To the extent that a man wants to live morally and maintain his commitment to life and liberty – as manifested in his speech and actual observable behavior (like his selflessness, generosity, success, etc.) – it is clear that he must do everything in his power to avoid being praised for his virtue, otherwise respect will feed his pride. It is hard, likely impossible, to be good and humble at the same time, yet this is what he must strive to do. However, today’s man does just the opposite. He broadcasts his goodness and accomplishments - on social media, in his purchases, and in every other manner possible – and is encourage to do so. We call it “branding”, and typically see nothing wrong with it. Pride is indeed seductive.

The function of a personal brand is to market oneself. Practically nothing is authentically real and true anyway in our modern proxy lives, so there appears to be no harm in embracing proxy masculinity, manufacturing an image and selling it. We desire to be seen as happy, successful, adventurous, interesting, athletic, intelligent, or somehow, in some way, *special*. Whether we actually *are* any of these things is not as important as being *perceived* as being them. That’s all it takes. Our hedonistic, materialistic, shallow culture rewards our image with respect and admiration, which feels good, feels like love in the short term, although it’s just another pale substitute for love in the long term.



Let’s face it, “branding” is an adult word that means “bragging”. Little boys brag. They show off and don’t want to share. Parents admonish them for it, but many parents do it themselves too. A real man is generous with others. But when a man spends time, energy, and money on himself – for his toys, vacations, so-called adventures – it reveals the truth that he *needs* to invest in an image to compensate for some hidden deficiency (namely, of not feeling accepted and loved for what he really is). And he encourages others to do the same, likely because it justifies his selfishness. See, “everyone does it”. Neediness and deficiencies can temporarily hide behind the powerful draw and glare of a successful image campaign, but they are certainly not masculine characteristics. With even a trace left of chronically-suppressed feminine energy, a woman hopefully still has a keen intuition that assesses the wisdom of her attraction to, and for seeing the truth through, the branding facade. Sometimes it takes her only minutes, which makes for amusing dating stories; but sometimes it takes years, after significant damage has been done; for example, when her husband follows his selfish urge to go get a



replacement “trophy-wife”, like purchasing another toy. All men should be ashamed: those who do this, as well as those who are ignorant or silent about it, hence complicit.

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The stream of respect and admiration that flows to a man from people who do not really know the man well feels good. It activates neurological pleasure centers, hence pride’s licensing effect. The temptation to bask in the warm light of this pride, and to crave more, is nearly impossible to resist. Like a drug addict, the man who is in the habit of a successful image promotion campaign will do what is necessary to secure his fix. Since by definition a brand/image is an external attribute that others can perceive, it need not match what is authentically real. The perception, not reality, is all that is required for getting the rewards. This addiction almost always leads to shortcuts, to dishonesty, to inauthentic behaviors, and to activities that are not in the interests of life and liberty. Whenever it’s easier to *pretend* to be something than it is to actually *be* something, the pretentious path is usually taken. All the effort, time, and money spent on branding serves the self-aggrandizement of one person, himself. Our waking hours are finite. This tremendous amount of work – by an otherwise free man who values life - is sacrificed for the image, making the man less alive and less free. If the brand leads to a man being unhealthy, or to spreading the Adamtocracy’s memes, or to being “too busy” to examine whether life or liberty is being valued, then so be it. What is empirically true becomes less important than what is perceived, virtual, proxy.

Women naturally reward flashy behavior with sexual interest, another compounding jolt of short-term pleasure for men. Men are losing the capacity to wisely resist the temptations of reptilian-level animal attraction; so they actually embrace it, especially in marketing. There is nothing inherently wrong with money and natural sexual attraction themselves, but when men don’t realize and don’t care that greed and the urge to reproduce is motivating their behavior, it grows unchecked, and we get what we have in our culture today: We glorify behaviors that garner more money and sexual access, rather than those rooted in virtue. This encourages the selfish little boy, and strengthens the Adamtocracy, further devaluing life and liberty. Nevertheless, it is extremely tempting to the weak male who realizes that a successful sale of his brand gains him all the rewards (admiration, envy, respect, sex) even if the brand is false. We tell children it is wrong to judge a book by its cover, but then as adults we do it anyway. Masculinity needs to lead by example. A real man first and foremost is concerned for the well-being of women and children, for love, OVER the short term benefits of his own image/brand – ABOVE his desire to be respected, envied, and lusted after.

When we think and speak of “rewards”, we are automatically referring to money. Money is certainly purchasing power, and it is associated with freedom to do things that we want to do. But what else? How do we spend money? We use it to buy “nice” things, take fun vacations, go on adventures, host impressive parties, eat at trendy restaurants, and see interesting places, all things that other people notice and that a man can brag about, and get away with it, if he really wants to. Those of us who spend money to engage in such actions do so because they are pleasurable in themselves, but they also serve to promote an image; for example, successful, witty, powerful, happy, charming, intelligent, interesting, adventurous, enlightened, evolved, charitable, generous, and important, to name a few – however we want to be seen – as our ideal self, our proxy self. Even if we don’t post on Facebook (but *especially* if we do), others will find out eventually. It’s how we acquire popularity and fame. Based on “image”, we “imagine” that people will admire and respect us; which feels good when it happens, because it

feels like love. It is not even necessary that we actually possess any of the characteristics of the brand we promote, only that others – our associates, friends, family, ‘fans’, *believe* it. And it works! We all participate. We admire and respect people based on image, and we are encouraged to have a professional, even a personal, brand, to sell, sell, sell – ultimately to sell ourselves into slavery, as evidenced by the constant chorus of “I’m too busy”. Of course, once we get to know someone really well that can change, but at least in the short term, it works. The problem is that these feelings of admiration, adulation, and adoration are finite and temporary, so they must be constantly fed with hard work and continuous consumption, like gluttonous pigs. The virtue of modern man has become twisted into a frantic selfishness that keeps us so busy that we have neither the inclination, time, nor energy for anything deeper. In the Adamtocracy’s memosphere, we honor this self-centered branding behavioral script with noble-sounding labels such as “success” and “merit.”

**David Brooks, *The Road to Character* (p252-254):**

*The meritocracy liberates enormous energies, and ranks people in ways good and bad. But it also has a subtle effect on character, culture, and values. Any hypercompetitive system built upon merit is going to encourage people to think a lot about themselves and the cultivation of their own skills. Work becomes the defining feature of life, especially as you begin to get social invitations because you happen to inhabit a certain job. Subtly, softly, but pervasively, this system instills a certain utilitarian calculus in us all. The meritocracy subtly encourages an instrumental ethos in which each occasion – a party, a dinner – and each acquaintance becomes an opportunity to advance your status and professional life project. People are likely to think in commercial categories – to speak about opportunity costs, scalability, human capital, cost benefit analysis, even when it comes to how they spend private time.*



*The meaning of the word “character” changes. It is used less to describe traits like selflessness, generosity, self-sacrifice, and other qualities that sometimes make worldly success less likely. It is instead used to describe traits like self-control, grit, resilience, and tenacity, qualities that make worldly success more likely.*

*The meritocratic system wants you to be big about yourself – to puff yourself, to be completely sure of yourself, to believe that you deserve a lot and to get what you think you deserve (so long it is good). The meritocracy wants you to assert and advertise yourself. It wants you to display and exaggerate your achievements. The achievement machine rewards you if you can demonstrate superiority – if with a thousand little gestures, conversational types, and styles of dress you demonstrate that you are a bit smarter, hipper, more accomplished, sophisticated, famous, plugged in, and fashion forward than the people around you. It encourages narrowing. It encourages you to be a shrewd animal.*

*The shrewd animal has streamlined his inner humanity to make his ascent more aerodynamic. He carefully manages his time and his emotional commitments. Things once done in a poetic*

*frame of mind, such as going to college, meeting a potential lover, or bonding with an employer, are now done in a more professional frame of mind. Is this person, opportunity, or experience of use to me?*

*It's a culture in which people are defined by their external abilities and achievements, in which the cult of busyness develops as everybody frantically tells each other how overcommitted they are...*

*This tradition tells you how to do things that will propel you to the top, but it doesn't encourage you to ask yourself why you are doing them...It encourages people to become praise seeking machines, to measure their lives by external praise – if people like you and accord you status, then you must be doing something right.*