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The Influence of Peyton Manning's Christian Masculinity

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Have you ever had a role model or favorite athlete? I had a few, Peyton Manning was and still is my favorite. My favorite team has always been the Indianapolis Colts and that is the team Peyton Manning played for. Growing up I collected a variety of trading cards. I have a couple of Peyton Manning's rookie cards and even one of his jersey cards. I remember getting those and being pretty fired up when I got them. I admired his attitude toward the sport as it always seemed like he was trying to make a positive impact, work hard, have fun, and win. Peyton Manning's Dad, Archie Manning, and brother Eli Manning have all played in the NFL, aka the National Football League. The Manning's have created a culture of success (Manning, P., Manning, A., Underwood, J., & Inc, P. 2017).

In my youth, seeing All-Stars like Peyton Manning throw the football around, having fun, winning games and breaking records had an impact on a lot of football fans growing up. It encouraged a lot of us to want to be like him. This phenomenon is called Social Learning Theory, which is defined as showing that individuals learn to be masculine and feminine by imitating others and getting responses from others to their behaviors. (Fixmer-Oraiz, N., & Wood, J. T. (2019), p. 41) Also, According to Albert Bandura, a Canadian-American psychologist who was the David Starr Jordan professor in Psychology says that Social Learning Theory suggests that observation and modeling play a primary role in how and why people learn. (*How social learning theory works*) This is one type of role model and I think having good role models growing up is important. What kind of impact do role models in Social Learning Theory have on humanity?

I did not recognize Peyton Manning for his Christian beliefs, but I just kind of figured that he was a Christian by the way he treated people, until I looked into it. I thought he was a Christian because of his good attitude, positive tone of voice, a smile that makes you feel like

something great is happening, and a we are having fun and winning presence. According to the American Renewal Project, he is the kind of guy that treats fans, media, personnel, teammates, and opponents with respect and is the consummate professional (“*Peyton Manning opens up about his Christian faith*”, 2014). He is heavily promoted by the media in the production of family-friendly commercials with humor and a humble approach to life.

Christian Masculinity for my dad is solving a problem at his old business, Empire Plastics, or throwing a pitch in baseball in his younger days. For Martin Luther, it was “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me Amen.” For Winston Churchill it was, “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight in the hills, but we shall never surrender.” For the early Church Martyr Ignatius of Antioch, who was sentenced to death by lions, it was, “May I enjoy the wild beasts that are prepared for me. I pray that they would be found eager to rush at me, and I will also entice them to devour me speedily... If they are unwilling to assail me, I will compel them to do so.” (“*The masculinity of christ*”, 2022) History is full of awesome accounts such as these.

For most Christians, we learned what Christian Masculinity is by studying and understanding the accounts of Jesus in the Bible since Jesus Christ is the only perfect man ever made. We learn from him what good men do in good and bad times, how to treat one another, and guidance in life in general. Jesus is the Ultimate provider and protector. He heals the sick, feeds the hungry, and many other miracles to help people. He leads with leadership traits of kindness, boldness, fearlessness, sacrificial love, and resolve. (“*The masculinity of christ*”, 2022)

Christ’s kindness is shown in verses like “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”. (Ephesians 4:31-32) (Hoerber,

1986) If you are trying to understand who Christ and God are, Christ is Jesus, and God is a trinity, which is a spirit that works through 3 persons, where in this case Jesus is the son of God but also is God through spirit. The Trinity is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Admin. 2021, August 21) The inward frame of mind refuses to forgive and does not work. Traits such as the ones exclaimed in the first sentence of the verse above are the ones we need to keep out of our relationships so that we can place good things in each other's minds such as kindness, grace, forgiveness, tenderheartedness, and love. Since God is all-knowing, he acts kindly to us with love, to those who believe, must treat each other with kindness. (Admin. 2021, August 21)

A good example of Jesus' boldness of when he stood before thousands of people exclaiming who can be one of his followers by saying:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters--yes, and even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26-27) (Hoerber, 1986)

He was able to speak about God's truth with love regardless of the consequences. Consequences consisted of bearing our sin which ultimately was death. Although he was resurrected, he suffered through a lot of pain that came from whipping, stoning, carrying the cross, wearing a crown of thorns, being beaten, and more prior to his death and resurrection. This kind of boldness requires us to be out front just as Christ was. (*The masculinity of christ*, 2022)

Another leadership trait is fearlessness, which is part of what makes boldness. Fearlessness has no fear and boldness is taking action being in a state of fearlessness. A form of

Christian courage is made through fearing the Lord and tends to make all other fears go away. The fear of the lord is based on love, not wrath or anger. Then the fear of man is made from sin or wrongdoing. 1 John 4:18 from the Concordia Self-study Bible, New International Version, says “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment”. Jesus was not frightened by God but Jesus honorably respected God. Jesus was famous for being fearless when intense remarks came from Godless men. He also was able to command others to fearlessly cast out demons, eat with sinners, condemn religious leaders, and more. (“*The masculinity of christ*”, 2022)

Sacrificial love is another biblical leadership trait. Jesus exemplified this by laying down his life for his followers. Just like in John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (Hoerber, 1986) Another example is in Ephesians 5:25 Paul instructs: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”. (Hoerber, 1986) Those are a few examples. Jesus shows us how he serves and fixes problems with his sacrificial love. Love is masculine because it forms the basis to protect one’s own or what is ours. Men guard their flock which has been entrusted to them. G.K. Chesterton, a philosopher, Christian apologist, and literary and art critic said, “The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.” (“*The masculinity of christ*”, 2022)

Resolve and sacrificial love is like the relationship between boldness and fearlessness. Sacrificial love was given to us due to mankind’s sinful nature and resolve was the choice to have Jesus put up on the cross for crucifixion. Jesus had so much resolve and confidence in what was going on that he knew what was going to happen to him. He knew that he was going to be crucified, prior to it happening he spoke about it to his followers, aka disciples. The resolve was

also made part by Jesus' masculinity; as a male who produced testosterone that would equip him for duties as required as God's son. People who hold the traits and talents of a Christian are often considered heroes. (*"The masculinity of christ"*, 2022)

"Heroes have been defined in various terms, be it as men of extraordinary bravery or superhuman strength, or as the chief male characters in an epic." (Werner, Y. M., 2021, p 63)

Very recently the definition of a hero has shifted to any man or woman endowed by other with special significance. Heroism has turned into a social construction of a heroic reputation where cultural attitudes are social practices are examined and is seen as an embodiment and role model who inspired imitation and worship. This heroism model all depends on characteristics that make someone more than human. Other factors that shape appreciation of heroism are history, geography, nation, and denomination. The value of heroism depends on who created the hero's image, what qualities are liked, and what heroes are accepted by people in the time they exist. (Werner, Y. M., 2021)

Social Learning Theory was developed by Walter Mischel and others in 1966(Fixmer-Oraiz, N., & Wood, J. T. 2019, p. 41). This theory shows us how we learn to be masculine or feminine by doing what others are doing and then getting responses for it. Some children imitate what they see on TV to see how it fits into who they are and how people will accept them. For example, Peyton Manning would say, "Omaha" in one of his infamous cadences before hiking the ball. If someone knows the cadence "Omaha", and he/she hears someone say it as Peyton says it, they probably think of Peyton Manning saying his cadence. I think of Peyton Manning saying his cadence and Omaha, Nebraska, the city, and state I was born in. The main point is that the cadence "Omaha" is associated with a very good Quarterback. The cadence being repeated

by people besides Peyton Manning is an example of a behavior that is rewarded and tends to be repeated. Thus, social learning suggests that rewards from others teach boys and girls which behaviors are appropriate for them (Kunkel, Hummert, & Dennis, 2006; Wood, 2013).

In the case of Peyton Manning and his family, the theory is relative to athletes who play or ordinary people who like the sport of football. Here people are rewarded for scoring touchdowns, getting first downs, interceptions, recovering fumbles, field goals, and long punts. Compared to raising a child, when a parent rewards their boy or girl for certain behaviors it may shape who they are. For example, if a parent and others reward boys for behaviors that reflect being masculine and discourage ones thought to be feminine it shapes boys into masculinity and visa versus. (Fixmer-Oraiz, N., & Wood, J. T. 2019, p. 42) In these cases, the adults treat the child according to their own gender stereotypes and biases.

Our Televisions, radio, newspaper, other media devices, and forms of communication play a major role in what behaviors are rewarded and which ones are not for each sex. (Fixmer-Oraiz, N., & Wood, J. T., p. 42) For example, the toys we buy at the store and use growing up are often gender specific. If you played in the sandbox, you knew that you had a big toy loader to move a whole bunch of sand efficiently and precisely and that you could build something really cool! When I lived in my hometown of Brandon, South Dakota at 405 Lakota Circle, my childhood friend Mike McCoy, my brother Jordan, and I built Brandon, SD's, Huset's Speedway's racetrack in that sandbox once at my parent's house. We had a little broken loader that looked like a sprint car to go around it. Seeing that we built something like the racetrack in town, I thought we did something really special!

That is another example of how human behavior is influenced by Social Learning Theory. Most behavior is learned observationally through people who are good at what they do.

(*“How social learning theory works”*) The performance is sometimes used as a guide for others who are trying to do what was performed. The performances are sometimes recorded in forms of media such as a TV show, audio recording, written down as notes, published as a book, etc. These are then learned through conditioning of the mind which influences attention and memory. (Cherry, K., 2022) The performance may adapt in more efficient ways over time as technology or new tricks are learned but the duty or task it is accomplishing is probably the same. What we like and how we are influenced make us who we are. This cognitive drive is mostly what guides us to the career paths we choose to follow and how we live our life.

Our society has a major input on how we go about life at all ages, especially in our early years. The education systems we must choose from are limited to US Education System and Home Schooling. There are also 3 types of education, Formal, Informal, and Non-formal Education. Formal learning takes place at a school. Informal takes place in reading a book, watching TV, from a parent, or any media. Non-formal Education refers to adult basic education, adult literacy education, or skill development. (*“The 3 types of education”*) For example a fitness program, a community learning course, a course online, and other platforms. There are many forms of education. Social Learning Theory is used in all of these and serves a very key role in our success as a society.

In Peyton’s and his dad’s book called “Manning”, Peyton said, “My faith has been number one since I was 13 years old and heard from the pulpit on a Sunday morning in New Orleans a simple question: If you died today, are you one hundred percent sure you’d go to heaven?” (*“Manning's Christian Faith”*) His two brothers, Cooper and Eli, were there to witness it, but it did not hit them the way it hit Peyton, Peyton’s heart was pounding. The church was big and it made Peyton feel small in the dwelling. The minister asked those who wanted assurance

through Jesus Christ to raise their hands, and Peyton raised his hand. The minister invited those who had their hands up to the front of the church and his heart really started to pound. The front of the church looked like it was a mile away. Peyton went to the front and committed his life to Christ and his faith, which has been the most important aspect of his life ever since then.

Some players are more vocal in their Christianity by pointing to heaven when they score a touchdown as well as praising God after games. (Manning, P., Manning, A., Underwood, J., & Inc, P. 2017) Another example and tradition is the postgame prayer huddle. According to Ackerman, this tradition started with Pat Richie. (Ackerman, 2017) Richie said he was in the shower when the idea hit him and where a lot of great thoughts have come to mind. None of those thoughts would change the traditions of football like this one. The idea from the two-time Super Bowl Champion San Francisco 49er chaplain came to him in 1990 when he was struck to use his platform to give glory to God.

Peyton stated “I just want my actions to speak louder, and I don’t want to be more of a target for criticism than I already am” he explained. (Ong, C., 2016) He also explains that it is difficult to be a Christian because he gets scrutinized heavily every time he makes a mistake. For example, when he would be drinking a beer in public people would think “HMMMM, Peyton says he’s this, that, or the other, and there he is drinking alcohol. What’s that all about?” He then clarified that “Christians drink beer. So do non-Christians. Christians also make mistakes, just as non-Christians do. My faith doesn’t make me perfect, it makes me forgiven, and provides me the assurance I looked for half my life ago.” Some athletes and coaches prefer to use a reserved approach, and some use a more outspoken approach to express their Christianity. For example, Tim Tebow, an NFL quarterback for the Denver Broncos in the past used the outspoken approach. He was considered and may still be considered “the most high-profile religious athlete

in the world”. His act of showing his Christian values created a “round-the-clock media circus” (Lee, A., 2017), which shows how it may have gone for Peyton Manning if he used a more outspoken approach.

Manning says he is blessed because he is “given so much” in his life, and that is why he prays every night “about a lot of things and a lot of people.” (Ong, C., 2016) God does not really root for any specific football team, and this is why he does not pray for victory. This may also relate to why NFL football players from opposing teams pray together at the end of the game. Peyton says, “I pray to keep both teams injury free, and personally, that I use whatever talent I have to the best of my ability”. (Ong, C., 2016) He does not think God really cares about who wins the game besides how winning the game might affect the fans, players, or the group of people who have any affiliation with the team. “If the Colts were playing the Cowboys and I prayed for the Colts and Troy Aikman prayed for the Cowboys, wouldn’t that make it a standoff?” (Ong, C., 2016)

Peyton Manning considers himself fortunate to be able to go to God for guidance, he hopes and prays for guidance with his journey to heaven as he does not want to do too many things that would displease God before he goes to heaven himself. He believes he is living a freer and much better life being committed to God, living with a purpose of not doing too many things that would displease God. Among Peyton Manning with his Christian faith are Philip Rivers, Tony Dungy, Josh Hamilton, Dikembe Mutombo, Jimmer Fredett, and many more. (Lee, A., 2017)

When Peyton Manning is asked questions about commandments in the Bible, he answers them. For example, “love your enemy”, football is a collision sport, but not a violent game. There are rules in the game that prevent violence from happening and he knows that he does not

have to hate anybody he plays against, but to play as hard as he can with the rules. Peyton Manning loves football and even now when he is not in his youth or childhood would play it for nothing if that was the only way to play. (*"Manning's Christian Faith"*)

Peyton Manning thinks our reputation is very important. He talks about how his reputation reflects his family and says "Dad says it can take twenty years to make a reputation, and five minutes to ruin it. I want my reputation to be able to make it through whatever five-minute crises I run into and I'm a lot more comfortable knowing where my help is" (*"Manning's Christian Faith"*). Manning's reputation of humility and Christian values extends to Peyton's brother Cooper's son, Arch Manning. (Wilson, L., 2022) Especially with all the social media apps like TikTok and Twitter, "he seems like an anomaly" says coach Nelson Stewart, Arch Manning's coach at Isidore Newman School. (Schlabach, M., 2021) Coach Nelson also states that "He has such a good level of humility" and "He doesn't like attention and he doesn't draw attention to himself. He just likes hanging out with friends."

Peyton Manning grew up in a Christian family. His Dad, Archie Manning grew up in Drew, Mississippi, a beautiful little place with the greatest people on earth. (Manning, A., Reed, J., Brown, K., & Janoso, E., 2022) It is where Archie grew up and it was a town that was good for a kid who needed help making the right choices. When Archie was 12, he remembers a concession stand at the ballpark was unlocked. He stuck his hand in there and pulled out several sodas and drank them. (Manning, A., Reed, J., Brown, K., & Janoso, E., 2022) He did not think it was wrong, but he found out from his Mom that it was. She said, "Only the foolish steal and cheat, and if you do it again you'll be doing it for the rest of your life."

Archie got a lot of advice growing up. When he was 15, he was about 130 pounds and just about 6 feet tall. He was skinny, so skinny he didn't want to take his shirt off playing

basketball or dare to even go to the local swimming hole. He was not a big fan of being skinny since he was trying to be a football player. He did not know anyone skinnier than himself. His Dad Buddy Manning knew the problem, it was at the dinner table. His Dad did not “browbeat” him into eating instead he said gently, “You better step a little closer to the dinner table or you’ll fall between the floor boards”. The following summer he found a job pulling mortar and hauling bricks from six to six as a bricklayer’s assistant to help build him up. It was tough work, but it paid off, by the time he was a sophomore at Ole Miss he was 6’4 and 210 lbs. (Manning, A., Reed, J., Brown, K., & Janoso, E., 2022)

Archie’s parents also had a way with him while he was getting an education. They didn’t whip him for bad grades or pay Archie off for good grades. They were simply proud of him when getting an A and if he did not get an A, they simply asked why he did not get an A. After his parents asked, he would usually suddenly know why he slipped. It was too much television or too much fooling around. He would normally be put on the spot for an explanation, which lead to fewer excuses for the next time. (Manning, A., Reed, J., Brown, K., & Janoso, E., 2022)

Archie’s parents brought him to church when he was a small boy, and he learned a lot. At the end of his sophomore year in college, his dad started to lose faith, ran into some personal problems, then took his own life. Archie went into a deep depression and wondered why his father would do such a thing. In prayer, he asked, “over and over”. What he learned from his father through church prepared him early in life for this blow. “I knew that Christ alone was the perfect Man, that He died for us on the cross, that he forgives us for our mistakes and that his strength can offset our weaknesses. Soon I was able to see Christ’s love and forgiveness in this terrible personal tragedy.” (Manning, A., Reed, J., Brown, K., & Janoso, E., 2022)

Archie learned that sometimes you have to suffer to really know how to depend on the Lord. God helped him accept the responsibility of taking care of his mom and sister Pam. He came out of depression with faith stronger than ever. Archie has run into times of discouragement as a professional football player. At the time in his 3 years with the Saints, they hadn't won too many football games. (Manning, A., Reed, J., Brown, K., & Janoso, E., 2022)

These traits of Christianity; carry over to Archie's kin, for Peyton Manning, it has always been about his big four: Faith, Family, Friends, and Football. They are all important, but faith has always been number one to him ever since Peyton has been 13 years old.

Peyton Manning's younger brother Eli Manning met his wife Abby for the first time at Ole Miss in 2002. She was a Freshman and Eli was a Junior. In 2004 Eli went to New York to play for the Giants and Abby finished her degree in 2005. She then hopped on a plane and began work in the fashion industry. Eli and Abby tied the knot in 2007, then they had a family of 3 daughters, Ava Frances (2011), Lucy Thomas (2013), Carline Olivia(2015), "then something out of a movie script", came their only son Charles "Charlie" Elisha who was born on Super Bowl Sunday in 2018. Eli knew his role as a father was more important than anything on the gridiron. (Pinak, P., 2022)

In 2020, Eli was interviewed after the Kansas City Chiefs won the Superbowl. (Claybourn, 2020) The event was called the Super Bowl Breakfast. The hope was to leave those in attendance with an understanding of who God is and what the Gospel is about and attract people who may not attend church or spiritual things. Terry Bortz, director of the Super Bowl Breakfast said "But they'll come because they're going to see their heroes up on stage and they're going to hear stories that they would never hear anywhere else. It's just been amazing to me what God does every year." (Claybourn, 2020)

They give out a big award every year for the breakfast event called Athletes in Action/Bart Starr Award. (Claybourn, 2020) The honor is voted by the players for a player who characterizes extraordinary integrity, character, and leadership in life. (Claybourn, 2020) Eli Manning won the award in 2020 and Peyton won it in 2015. His brother Peyton and Peyton's coach Tony Dungy were in attendance. Eli followed in his brother's footsteps, letting his actions mostly speak for his Christian roots. (Claybourn, 2020)

Peyton's older brother Cooper Manning is less known but was also a Manning who was thought to make it into the NFL. Instead of being QB, Cooper was a wide receiver who caught balls from Peyton for over 1,000 yards with All-State honors at Isidore Newman High School. He planned to play at Ole Miss, where his dad Archie played. Cooper was diagnosed with spinal stenosis, which caused his career to end. (Mike Gavin., 2022) Cooper grew up in the Baptist church but was converted to Catholicism after marrying his wife, Ellen. They both have continued their relationship with God where the 3 children, Arch, May, and Heid all attend St. Francis of Assisi Church as well. Cooper's son Arch who currently goes to Isidore Newman High School is currently the number 1 football prospect from the 2023 high school class and has committed to play college football for the Texas Longhorns. (Mike Gavin., 2022) The Manning's are a Royal family of the NFL and a great example of Social Learning Theory as a family.

The Manning family shows us how Social Learning Theory and a good gene pool can lead to a lot of success, in this case on the gridiron and Christianity. Social Learning Theory has a lot of influence on us growing up in a family since we spent a lot of time around each other. The theory brings awareness to how and why we do what we do, if the Social Learning Theory focuses on rewarding certain behaviors for the short term, especially for children and those who do not know or foresee how the rewards and in some cases, discipline affect people, it makes you

wonder what happens down the road in life. That is what God and the Bible are for, it shows us how things work in the short and long term.

Human behavior is judged and rewarded with a joyful childhood, money, good/loyal relationships, advancement in life, clean air to breathe, peace, a good retirement, a healthy body/youthfulness, good health, a good education, a great job, and much more. This is how we measure the success of what we are doing and people who have these things are usually a great example to use for theories such as Social Learning Theory. Cultural differences also influence what people consider normal and how human behaviors are judged. In different parts of the world cultures and how behaviors are judged may be different.

The Social Learning Theory is limited to human factors. Limitations include some genetic conditions or the environment where social learning takes place. Some of the genetic conditions include Down Syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, Klinefelter syndrome, Triple-X syndrome, Turner syndrome, and more. (“U.S. National Library of Medicine”) (“*Genetic disorders*”) Environmental conditions would include a home where parents do not have it all together or a time of war where conditions to learn do not exist. Human factors and environmental limitations are always trying to be improved in hopes of a better future, yet some individuals prove to succeed in a bad environment.

The future of Social Learning Theory is being used through technology. Technology like virtual reality and augmented reality would be examples of newer technology. Virtual Reality gives us the ability to see things with a 3-dimensional perspective without having to go to the experience in real life. NASA explains “The idea is to present the correct cues to your perceptual and cognitive system so that your brain interprets those cues as objects out there in the three-dimensional world. These cues have been surprisingly simple to provide using computer

graphics: simply render a three-dimensional object (in stereo) from a point of view which matches the positions of your eyes as you move about”. (“NASA”) A very handy tool if you do not have the capability or resources to visit the place you need to visit. The most popular presence of this technology is being used in video games which is a form of Social Learning Theory.

Augmented reality gives us the ability to view the physical environment around us with digital elements such as sound and visuals to be displayed from or on a device. (Hayes, A. 2022) For example, if you are at the library and you want a tour and had an application that was Augment Reality ready for tours, the application could show or tell you what the parts of the library are used for and/or what they are through the device. A very efficient way to learn if a tour guide is not available. Tools such as these are becoming more common and will be a great asset if everyone is capable to use them.

In many cases with the media, we look for someone famous, a coach, or a leader to give credit for Social Learning or what was taught. With newer technology such as this, the app programmers and developers could be the ones or additional person(s) you would give credit to.

Social Learning Theory has been revolutionized through the ages through media and technology. The only way I knew about Peyton Manning was through the TV, newspaper, radio, and any other forms of media. His Christianity is shown through the way he acts in the media. The media has exemplified and made us more aware on a larger more public scale of how important good leaders are. Being able to flip on your favorite football game to watch the live action made it more fun to follow and is worth a lot in today’s society.

Christian Masculinity is defined by many people with a range of careers. The Manning family is a great example of Christian Masculinity for the NFL. That is one way a Christian can affect the lives of many in a positive way. People all over the world can and are using Christian values to create a better way of life. Hopefully, we can continue to form Christian traits of goodwill to provide a better future for ourselves and the rest of humanity.

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