Weekly Top Five Articles

Married Fathers As The Solution to the Masculinity Crisis, TikTok Really Hurts Girls' Men
Health, William F. Buckley, and more. . .

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Here's what stood out this week. . .

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(1) "**[Against Self-Optimization: The wellness industry sells you a version of yourse](#)**
[it can't deliver. Hope lies elsewhere](#)," by David Zahl, *Plough Magazine* (July 1, 2025)

Zahl critiques the modern obsession with self-improvement and efficiency, arguing
that the wellness industry sells an unattainable ideal that leaves people exhausted a
isolated. Zahl begins with humorous frustration over digital tools meant to "optimi
daily life but that often cause more stress—an example of how technique, as defined
sociologist Jacques Ellul, fails to deliver on its promises of convenience and control

Zahl's deeper concern is how the language of optimization reduces humans to
machines, fostering a culture where people measure their worth by productivity and
efficiency. This mentality infiltrates parenting, leisure, and personal growth, sidelir
play, relationships, and faith in favor of measurable outcomes. For Christians, he
argues, this stands in stark contrast to the example of Jesus, who frequently withdre
from work to pray, embodying rest and presence over relentless engagement.

Self-optimization, Zahl warns, is the modern rebranding of self-help, driven by a
perfectionistic urge to become an idealized version of oneself through data-tracki
and consumption. It's often a solitary pursuit, increasing social disconnection whil
feeding a lucrative $2 trillion wellness industry that preys on people's insecurities a
fuels a relentless cycle of spending and self-scrutiny.

Ultimately, Zahl contends that self-optimization breeds despair because it implies
endless personal growth while ignoring human limits and mortality. Bodies age,
abilities wane, and no level of optimization can prevent decline. As a Christian, Zah
writes against optimization as an act of hope, pointing instead to grace—a divine
acceptance that values people not for their productivity but for their inherent worth

True freedom, he suggests, lies not in perfecting ourselves but in resting in the mer
of a God who loves unoptimized souls.

(2) "[The Origin of the Research University](#)," by Clara Collier, *Asterik Magazine* **(Apr
2025)**

Seems like the Germans may have ruined universities.

For most of their thousand-year history, universities were not places of research but
institutions for training clergy, lawyers, and doctors. Serious scholarship happened
scientific academies, not on campuses. Yet, in 19th-century Germany, universities
transformed into research powerhouses—a revolution that shaped modern academi
worldwide.

Collier traces this shift to several intertwined forces. In the Enlightenment, critics
wanted universities to become useful "factories" producing skilled professionals for
the state. This merged with Germany's tradition of cameralism—the science of pub
administration—which pushed universities to serve economic and governmental
needs. Early reforms, like the founding of the University of Göttingen in the 1730s,
introduced innovations such as government-funded faculties, publication
requirements for professors, and the first modern academic research library. Fame :
publications became the currency for attracting students and securing state prestig

However, true research culture emerged from a Romantic reaction against mere uti
Thinkers like Fichte, Schelling, and Schleiermacher envisioned universities as place
for holistic intellectual development (Bildung), emphasizing systematic,
interconnected knowledge—Wissenschaft—rather than isolated facts. Seminars,
pioneered at Göttingen in classical philology, became crucibles for training student
to produce original scholarship.

The Napoleonic Wars catalyzed change by devastating existing universities, promp
Prussia to establish a new model in Berlin in 1810 under Wilhelm von Humboldt.

Humboldt blended Enlightenment practicality with Romantic ideals, institutionaliz
the unity of teaching and research and academic freedom. The Berlin Ph.D. require
original research—a significant departure from earlier practices of rote dissertation
defenses.

By mid-19th century, German universities had become engines of research, spawning specialized disciplines and publishing cultures. This model spread globally, inspiring American institutions like Johns Hopkins and Harvard. Collier concludes that the research university arose from crisis, compromise, and compet ideals—commercial, bureaucratic, Romantic—that together built the infrastructu for organized knowledge creation we rely on today.

(3) "[A Practical Fanatic](#)," by Sam Adler-Bell, *The Ideas Letter* (June 26, 2025)

Adler-Bell reviews Sam Tanenhaus's monumental new biography of William F. Buckley Jr., *Buckley: The Life and The Revolution that Changed America.* Tanenhaus, w first met Buckley in 1990 while researching Whittaker Chambers, spent decades crafting a vivid, nuanced portrait of the man who reshaped American conservatism from a marginal movement into a force with intellectual heft and cultural allure.

Tanenhaus's Buckley is charismatic, charming, and indefatigable—a man whose wi and networking prowess turned conservatism into a respectable brand. Adler-Bell s that Buckley's life, for all its glamour and energy, lacks the tragic pathos of figures l Chambers. Buckley was less a profound thinker than a dazzling performer, "an aesthete of controversy," whose talents lay in organizing, debating, and creating an intellectual community through ventures like *National Review.*

The biography explores Buckley's aristocratic Catholic upbringing, his early brillian (and arrogance) at Yale, and formative relationships with conservative mentors like Willmoore Kendall. Buckley's affinity for figures like Joe McCarthy revealed his readiness to excuse slander and smear tactics as "psychological warfare" against liberal elites. While Buckley's elegant persona helped sanitize conservatism for a m

audience, his movement retained ties to unsavory racial and extremist currents, as Tanenhaus documents, notably in *National Review*'s defense of segregation.

Adler-Bell notes how Buckley's "fusionism" sought to balance highbrow intellectualism with populist fervor. Yet Buckley's legacy is contested, especially in light of Trumpism, which some view as a betrayal of Buckley's refined conservatism while others see it as exposing longstanding undercurrents he could not fully suppr

Ultimately, Tanenhaus's book captures Buckley as a brilliant tactician rather than a great theorist—a man driven by loyalty, spectacle, and an insatiable need to charm. **Buckley left American politics more combative and performative, embodying conservatism not as a coherent ideology but as a way of living with flair and contradiction.**

(4) [**TikTok and similar platforms linked to body dissatisfaction and eating disorde symptoms**](#) by **Vladimir Hedrih**, *PsyPost* (June 27, 2025)

Parents, do not let your kids get TikTok, especially girls. No church should be tryin communicate with teens on TikTok. A clear sign that your church does not care abo girls is whether its youth ministry has a TikTok account. Bottom line: if they care about girls at all, they won't have one.

A new study from China, published in *Psychological Reports*, reveals a troubling connection between adolescents' use of short-form video platforms—like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts—and increased risks of body dissatisfactio and eating disorder symptoms. Researchers surveyed 795 students, aged 10 to 18, across three secondary schools, examining how time spent on these platforms relate to body image concerns and disordered eating behaviors.

Short-form video apps are particularly popular among younger audiences due to the fast-paced, algorithm-driven content, often showcasing idealized—and sometimes digitally altered—body types. Such content fuels social comparison, potentially lead

adolescents to feel dissatisfied with their own bodies and, in some cases, prompting harmful eating behaviors in attempts to emulate the physiques seen on screen.

The study found notable sex differences in how these dynamics play out. **Overall, g reported higher levels of eating disorder symptoms, were more prone to compare their bodies to those in videos, and experienced greater dissatisfaction with their appearance. For girls, body image comparison emerged as a significant link betwe video consumption and eating disorder risk. In boys, however, while video use als increased eating disorder risk, body dissatisfaction played a more direct mediatin role rather than body comparison.**

Across the sample, greater engagement with short-form video platforms was strong correlated with elevated eating disorder symptoms and body dissatisfaction. About of participants disclosed unhealthy eating behaviors, signaling a potential risk for developing clinically significant eating disorders.

While the findings underscore the mental health risks posed by social media's visua culture, the authors caution that the study's cross-sectional design cannot prove causation. Nonetheless, the research adds to growing evidence that social media's influence on adolescents' body image and eating behaviors is significant and warra attention from parents, educators, and mental health professionals.

(5) [Married Fatherhood Is Key to Solving the Masculinity Crisis](#), **by Samuel Wilkinson,** *Institute For Family Studies* **(July 3, 2025)**

Wilkinson explores how rising male aimlessness in America reflects not only economic or academic disparities but a deeper crisis of meaning and identity. Youn men increasingly lag in educational attainment, live with parents longer, and report feelings of loneliness and purposelessness—a pattern Wilkinson links to the erosio stable family structures, especially married fatherhood.

While various solutions—like educational reforms, more male teachers, and expand vocational training—are frequently proposed, Wilkinson argues these address only part of the problem. Drawing on psychology and evolutionary biology, he emphasiz that human beings derive profound meaning from relationships. For women, biological processes like pregnancy and childbirth forge strong emotional bonds wi children. Men, lacking such direct biological connections, rely more heavily on cultural institutions—chief among them marriage—to tether them to fatherhood ar the responsibilities that come with it.

Wilkinson traces how marriage has historically linked men to their children, transforming them from distant providers into active, nurturing fathers. However, rising divorce rates have weakened this bond, often reducing fatherhood to intermittent visits and financial transactions. Such fragmentation deprives men of (of life's deepest sources of purpose and love.

Wilkinson illustrates this dynamic through Charles Ballard's work with absentee fathers in Cleveland. Ballard found that reconnecting men with their children not o improved father-child relationships but also spurred employment and financial stability, highlighting how purpose fuels male resilience and growth.

Ultimately, Wilkinson contends that solutions to the masculinity crisis must includ fostering marriage and fatherhood. These institutions help men cultivate responsibility, connection, and identity—vital ingredients for both personal fulfilln and societal well-being. **Fatherhood, anchored in marriage, is a transformative catalyst for healthy masculinity.**

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