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## There is No Masculinity Crisis

by JAMES HEARTFIELD

[1] The view that there is a crisis of masculinity is often associated with a discourse that demonises men, especially young men, as pathological. This discourse reinforces the case for greater social control and state intervention. Perhaps more importantly, at the level of cultural values, such characteristics as self-assertiveness, independence, even objectivity, are cast as problematic, 'masculine values'. Any oppositional attitudes are characterised as evidence of pathological male behaviour. Instead, men are called upon to act the part of the victim, by mourning their loss of power, and getting in touch with their emotional side. This is an attitude that welcomes passivity but criminalizes resistance.

[2] Masculinity theories do appear to be telling us something about a loss of power that matches their real condition. But it is wrong to see this loss of power as a loss in relation to women. Rather it is in relation to capital that men and women alike have lost authority. The cumulative defeats inflicted upon working class organisations in the 1980s and 90s have created a condition in which working class subjectivity has been diminished. The crisis is not one of masculinity, but one of the working class.

[3] British Minister of Education David Blunkett announced urgent action to boost boy's performance in schools following the publication of A- Level exam results in which girls outperformed boys for the first time ever ('Single sex classes to help failing boys', Observer, 20 August, 2000. British pupils take advanced level examinations at age 18) With rare prescience, Helen Wilkinson and Geoff Mulgan reported that girls were 'outperforming boys at 'A' level' six years before it happened, (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 21). 354,553 boys and 417,256 girls sat for A- Level examinations; 4.8 per cent of boys and 3.8 per cent of girls' papers were ungraded ('A-level results by subject', The Guardian, 17 August, 2000). At GCSE level, girls have been outperforming boys for more than ten years ('Girls leave the boys trailing in GCSE results', The Times, 15 October 1999). At University, women have taken the majority of places since 1994, when they were 50.7 per cent of students accepted, widening to 53.7 in 1999, when 148,000 women were given places as opposed to 128,000 men ('Women winning by degrees', The Guardian, 15 August 2000).

[4] Even more dramatic than the education figures, the numbers in work in England and Wales show that men have lost out in recent times:

'The new figures from the Office for National Statistics show that women in paid employment

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outnumber their male counterparts by 12 000 ...  
The numerical barrier was officially broken in  
September last year. Newly revised figures for the  
period show there were 11.248m women in the  
workforce against 11.236m men.' (Sunday Times,  
28 December, 1997.)

[5] Boys' poor educational performance has led to considerable anxiety about prospects for young men in British society. In 1992, a survey by the Centre for Family Research in Cambridge revealed a preference in families for female children, who were viewed as easier and nicer.

[6] 'On the cusp of the 21st century', writes journalist Neil Spencer 'it is girls who are easy, boys who promise trouble. As successive surveys affirm, it's a pattern that runs from kindergarten to job shop. At school, it is girls who are most likely to excel, boys who are most likely to end up in remedial classes (where about 80 per cent of the students are male), and boys who are suspended or excluded (95 per cent). The trouble doesn't stop at the school gates. Teenage boys and young men are more likely to get in trouble with the police, more likely to smash up their cars, more likely to commit violence and more likely to be on the end of it.' (Observer, June 20, 1999)

[7] Neil Spencer's pessimistic view of the situation of boys and young men in British society echoes a more developed discussion about the perceived 'crisis of masculinity'. Masculinity, so psychotherapist Roger Horrocks reports, is in crisis (Horrocks). Feminist writer Ros Coward agrees: 'globalisation and recessions have dealt men a number of blows. Combined with changed status in the family, this has made them especially vulnerable to unemployment, homelessness and depression.' (Coward, 1999b, 1999a). Media psychiatrist Anthony Clare has recently added to the discussion counselling that men should 'place a greater value on love, family and personal relations and less on power, possessions and achievement'(Clare, 2000b, 2000a).

[8] There are many theories of the crisis of masculinity, but there are three distinctive emphases to note. First, there are the characterisations of masculinity as intrinsically pathological. Amongst them we can include such works as Beatrix Campbell's Goliath: Britain's Dangerous Places or Roger Horrocks' Masculinity in Crisis. In their nature, such theories tend to be unsympathetic to male pride, considering that to be part of the problem.

[9] Second there are elegiac accounts of the defeat of the male sex, and of the passing of masculine pride such as Susan Faludi's Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man, or Robert Bly's book Iron John, which initiated the debate about masculinity. These elegiac accounts tend to be more sympathetic, concerned with men as victims of circumstances beyond their control, as argued by Ros Coward, above. Amongst more recent arguments of this kind is a trend to locate the crisis of masculinity in the context of socio-economic change, in particular the collapse of predominantly male employment in industry. These accounts relate to the findings of those 'post-feminist' authors who see the

trajectory of contemporary society as moving in the direction of women, such as former Demos and now Industrial Society researcher Helen Wilkinson (1994, 1997, 2000). Both 'post feminist' theories and elegies for past masculinity share the assumption that men are 'losing the sex war'.

[10] Finally, there are sceptical analyses, which call into question the assumptions that lie behind the perceived crisis in masculinity. Amongst these are those feminist accounts, which reject the basic assumption that masculinity is in crisis, pointing to evidence that men continue to command disproportionate authority, wealth and power. Such, for example may be counted feminist economist Irene Bruegel's measured and sceptical account of the feminisation of the workforce, 'No more jobs for the boys?'. Bruegel, like many feminists is sceptical towards the proposition that men are hard done by, because she believes that despite the arguments to the contrary, women are still the losers in the sex war. There is another sceptical argument, more sweeping in its approach, and that is the argument put by sociologist John MacInnes of the University of Edinburgh. MacInnes argues that 'masculinity does not exist as the property, character trait or aspect of identity of individuals'(MacInnes, 2). Consequently any theory of a 'crisis of masculinity' must equally be flawed. MacInnes shares many of the sceptical feminist qualms about evidence of the defeat of the male sex (MacInnes, Chapter 3, 'The Crisis of Masculinity and the politics of Identity', pp45-60).

### **Pathological masculinity**

[11] Men are eight times more likely to commit Grievous Bodily Harm than women, 27 times more likely to murder, reports Anthony Clare in his Radio programme 'Men in Crisis'. Domestic violence makes up a quarter of all violent crime in the UK and that each week in this country, two women are murdered by their male partners (Wilson). Male violence against women has long been highlighted by feminist writers. University of North London researchers Liz Kelly and Sue Lees point to a 'continuum of violence' that extends from everyday male behaviour to the more grotesque crimes such as rape and murder. Kelly writes:

'Using the concept of a continuum highlights the fact that all women experience sexual violence at some point in their lives. It enables the linking of more common everyday abuses women experience with less common experiences labelled as crimes'. (Kelly, 59)

[12] Kelly's 'continuum of violence' marks male behaviour as endemically pathological, blurring the distinction between extraordinary acts of violence and everyday behaviour. In recent years conservative commentators, too have amplified the arguments of feminists, by drawing attention to the criminal behaviour of young men. Rand Corporation strategist Francis Fukuyama told Observer journalist Tim Adams 'At the heart of the crime figures is our failure to socialise young men by giving them breadwinning, fatherly role models' (6 June 1999). Fukuyama's purpose is far from feminist, but his assessment of pathologically

criminal behaviour on the part of young men is similar. Journalist David Rose also bemoans the growing class of 'lawless, sometimes violent young men' (Rose, 112). The word 'male' is casually associated with the word 'violence' - three time more often than it is with the word 'virtue' on the internet search engine google.com.

[13] Radical journalist Beatrix Campbell commented upon rioting in Liverpool and North-East England in 1991. She wrote of 'the vanity of fragile masculinity with nothing but time on its hands and a borrowed car to break into'. 'Some of them are killers', she charged and 'some of the "bad boys" have just made some crap estates even worse'. But 'while the boys set the place alight', 'it was the women who were campaigning to get the Tyneside and Toxteth police to intervene' (Campbell, 1991). Campbell's account of male criminality is tied closely to the crisis of masculinity. She saw 'young men whose self-esteem was already in crisis, whose joyriding was perhaps fearless to the point of being suicidal' (quoted in Rose, 112). Criminality in this account becomes an alternative realm of achievement for young men who have been denied the conventional route of economic success. A younger and wiser Beatrix Campbell had warned back in 1984 of a 'kind of moral panic which is rooted in the crisis of masculinity, symbolised by the social nuisance of big bad boys who bite social workers' (210). In 1984, Campbell parodied the panic over 'big bad boys', but by 1991, she was contributing to it, taking the side of the social workers.

[14] Economic advisor to the British Chancellor Ed Balls saw the relation between idle young men and criminality more in terms of rational choice theory than a cry for help: 'Young unemployed men find that low wage employment with poor future prospects is an increasingly unattractive alternative to "non-market" activities ... For example, drug use, informal economy and benefit fraud' (Quoted in Wilkinson, 1994, p81). But all agreed that the problems of criminality can be laid at the feet of young men.

[15] According to sociologists J Taylor Gibbs and JR Merighi's study, the pressures of underachievement are felt all the more keenly among groups of men who are already marginal. They perceive an assertive machismo in black Americans that they think is both a defensive reaction to racial disadvantage, but also a spur to violent criminality, such as drug-dealing and shootings. What they call pseudomascularity 'is thus conceptualised here as a mediating factor between marginal social identity and criminality'(Gibbs and Merighi, 80). Gibbs and Merighi expand: 'that is, the young black males who develop "macho" behaviours as a defensive strategy to counter their feelings of marginality will be at a greater risk for anti-social behaviours than those who deal with marginality with more pro-social adaptive strategies.' (Gibbs and Merighi, 80) Here 'pseudomascularity' - is cast as a pathological reaction to the disappointed promise, the unrealisable ideal of masculinity.

[16] A word of caution on these statistics is useful here. Crime in Britain has been falling since 1992, with the exception of the figures for last 1999 which showed an increase, due wholly to changes in the way the numbers are calculated (the inclusion of common assault in the figures). Though many seem to consider

young men pathological, there were 703,000 violent offences recorded last year, or one for every 42 men in the country. The 'continuum of violence' thesis blurs the distinction between the 41 men who commit no offence and the one who does. In fact the attention given to the statistics shows not that society is more tolerant of violence against women, but that it is less so.

[17] The extraordinary figures on the greater likelihood of being assaulted by a man than a woman cited by Anthony Clare on his radio programme, relate to the disproportion between male and female offenders. They do not, however tell us anything about the likelihood of being assaulted by a man in absolute terms, which remains thankfully very low. Interestingly in terms of rate of change, female criminality is getting worse, prompting commentator Anita Chaudhuri to speculate that 'women may be seeking power by imitating male behaviour' ([The Guardian](#), 15 August 2000). Even women's offences are laid at the door of men.

[18] Sue Lees and Liz Kelly advised the British Home Office on how it could pay greater attention to crimes of domestic violence and rape, greatly increasing the number of prosecutions brought in those areas. Campaigners bemoan the fact that the rate of conviction for rape has fallen from 24 per cent of reported cases in 1985 to just ten per cent of cases in 1997. But that fall in percentages is due to the fact that many more rapes are reported and recorded as crimes. A much greater willingness on the part of the Crown Prosecution Service to take cases to court has not necessarily persuaded juries, but still convictions have increased from 450 to almost 600 ([The Guardian](#), 15 August 2000). The vast majority of young men, though, remain law-abiding and peaceable in their everyday behaviour.

[19] Indeed, the realms in which violent behaviour can be expressed are diminishing generation by generation. Street rioting, common in the inner city areas of my youth has all but disappeared. So, too, has football violence been banished from stadiums. Paramilitary violence in northern Ireland is much reduced since the ceasefire, regrettably. National service was abolished many years ago and the shrinking British Army's recent operations have largely been peace-keeping operations. This is in all probability the least violent generation of young men in centuries. But that does not prevent the theories that pathologise the behaviour of young men. As Ros Coward rightly says 'Anti-male rhetoric is sharpest around the most vulnerable members of society - poor, unemployed, young men. The media and politicians often describe disenfranchised young men in quasi-bestial terms - yobs, louts and scum.' (1999b)

### **Socialisation and masculine values**

[20] Shere Hite interviewed about her book *Male Sexuality* reports: 'I ended up feeling that contrary to it being "mother's fault" that boys grew up to be macho, that in fact the influence of a father who is not there was even more telling for most boys. Around the age of 12 they have to make some decision based on sticking with the mother's value system or going with the male value system. Most chose to go with the male value system' (1989). Here the common theme of absent fathers' negative

influence is raised. But the 'male value system' as a pathological subculture has its influence nonetheless. The socialisation of men in masculine values is at the root of the masculinity crisis - at least as far as the theory goes.

[21] Horrocks gives a personal example of the way that the demands of masculinity can become a burden to men:

'I remember my fierce anxiety about being male when I was an adolescent in a Lancashire town, and went around in a gang of lads to pubs, dances and parties. We had a strict code of behaviour and watched each other like hawks to make sure that we all followed it. Any divergence was instantly spotted and ridiculed. For example, the fact that I stayed at school until I was 18 was treated with great suspicion: it wasn't manly.' (95)

[22] One might suspect that Horrocks has misinterpreted the real meaning of his schoolfriends' disapproval - that they were jealous of his parents' ability to send him to college, while they were obliged to go straight to work. However, in this account Horrocks' advantage over his friends is recast as their code of masculine domination over him. Emphasising the burden of masculinity Horrocks argues that 'in becoming accomplices and agents of the patriarchal oppression of women, men are themselves mutilated psychologically'. The militant form of masculinity represents a considerable self-abuse and self-destruction by men. 'In hating women the male hates himself', writes Horrocks, guiltily (182).

[23] Feminist author and campaigner Lynne Segal shares Horrocks' assessment that masculinity is a burden to men. Reviewing Robert Bly's book *Iron John* she wrote 'Certainly ... some men are suffering - particularly those who at present cause the greatest harm to others and themselves: economically dispossessed young men between the ages of 15 and 19.' Any sympathy expressed here is barbed: men are their own worst enemies. Masculine values are a trap that leads men to self-destruction as it does to the destruction of others. This is a view shared by Anthony Clare, in his negative assessment of 'male' competitiveness: 'Most [of my] male colleagues were busy demonstrating how they worked all hours. It was like chimps beating their breasts and baring their teeth. Often it was about as productive.' (2000a)

[24] The thesis that masculine values thwart men is an intriguing one. It presumes that masculine values differ widely from feminine values. But most evidence suggests that men and women have surprisingly similar attitudes and beliefs. As John MacInnes warned 'masculinity' mystifies the social relations within which men and women live and interact.

[25] On the whole, gender differences are becoming less important in social attitudes and most point to a trend to convergence between men and women's attitudes (Ester et al). On one level this is because of the greater participation of women

in the workplace, meaning that 'full time working women's attitudes [are] more similar to men than other women' (Wilkinson et al, 1997, p96). On the other hand, men, especially younger men, have come to share some of the domestic and personal security preoccupations of women, i.e. men are becoming more like women (Jowell et al, 1995). Men are slightly less religious than women are (Pullinger and Summerfield). Indeed the organisation that most British women are likely to be a member of is a religious group (15.7 per cent), and after that a trade union (13.2 per cent). In fact women are around fourteen times more likely to be a member of either of these male-dominated institutions than they are a women's group, (two per cent. Church and Summerfield). British men are marginally more interested in politics than women (Pullinger and Summerfield), as are European and American men (Ester et al, p90). European and American men are also more morally permissive than women, especially in Portugal and Spain (Ester et al, p63). British men are a little more permissive about sexually explicit and homosexual portrayals in the media than women are (R Jowell et al, 1996). British men vote between five and ten points to the left of women (Worcester and Mortimer, p244). According to a recent Demos survey of 2,000 women aged 18-24, 13 per cent thought it was acceptable to use physical violence to get what they wanted ([The Guardian](#), August 15, 2000). Most pointedly the convergence of male and female attitudes is more marked in younger generations, suggesting that such differences as do exist are an historical hangover from the past (Wilkinson, 1994, 1997).

[26] None of these statistics suggest that masculine values deviate very much from feminine values. In fact, following MacInnes it seems best to junk the Gender identification altogether, it tells us so little about people's real attitudes and perceptions. Are masculine values in crisis? It seems to be a moot point, since neither sex is particularly influenced by what is described, generally pejoratively as 'masculinity'. If there is a masculinity crisis, it is not to be found within masculine values.

### **The crisis of masculinity at work**

[27] An apparently more plausible account is made by those writers who identify the crisis of masculinity as an economic effect of the labour market and its impact upon the sexual division of labour and the home. Foremost amongst these has been Susan Faludi, journalist and feminist author of [Backlash](#). Faludi writes about the impact of the recession upon men's role:

'The outer layer of the masculinity crisis, men's loss of economic authority, was most evident in the recessionary winds of the early 90s, as the devastation of male unemployment grew ever fiercer. The role of family breadwinner was plainly being undermined by economic forces that spat many men back into a treacherous job market after redundancy.'(1999b)

[28] Faludi writes in the American context and draws upon the considerable literature about the crisis of the industrial working

class in the early nineties (See Phillips, Barlett and Steele, 1992, 1996, Greider, 1997, Zweig 2000). In their book The War Against Parents, Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Cornel West describe the destructive impact of economic recession on family life, as the role of breadwinner is undermined. In Britain the impact of recession on traditionally male work is perhaps even more marked than it is in America. The scope for an economically motivated crisis of masculinity seems even greater. And, as we have seen, the 'pathological masculinity' thesis takes as an assumption the economic dispossession of men, especially younger men. With the education secretary taking special measures, and the Downing Street Social Exclusion Unit concentrating on the problem of disaffected young men it seems the crisis of masculinity is upon us, in real, material terms.

[29] It should be noted that Faludi qualifies her own version of the economic crisis of masculinity, since she was astute enough to notice the economic upturn that seemed to invalidate it.

'As the economy recovered, the male crisis did not, and it became apparent that whatever men's afflictions were, they could not be gauged solely through statistics. ... Underlying their economic well-being was another layer of social and symbolic understanding between men, a tacit compact undergirding not only male employment but the whole connection between men and the public domain. That pact was forged through loyalty, through a belief that faithfulness, dedication and duty would be rewarded in kind, or at least appreciated in some meaningful way - some way that "made you a man".' (1999b)

[30] Here we can see that Faludi's thesis shares the psychological and cultural features of the pathological version of the crisis of masculinity. Economic recession is only the catalyst; the collapse of the masculine ideal is the cause. Faludi's qualifications are well made. The interpretation that the economic recession and the transition from industrial to service economy leads to a crisis of masculinity does not stand up.

[31] The British statistics are revealing. It is the case that the numbers of women in work in England and Wales exceeded those of men in 1997 (see above). However, the conditions under which women entered the labour market were pointedly disadvantageous, for all but those at the upper end of the job market, women professionals in managerial or administrative jobs.

[32] Changes in the labour market were most pointed in the industrial sector, traditionally male-dominated. The Mining industry, for example, where legislation bars women, lost most of the quarter of a million jobs in the aftermath of the pit closure plan instituted by British Coal following the 1984-5 strike. Other industries that were heavily downsized were the steel, shipbuilding and motor industries. In 1993 Paul Gregg of the Institute for Public Policy Research reported that two million men

have disappeared from the workforce in the last 15 years (32).

[33] This same period is the one in which 'one of the most significant long term trends in the labour market has been the growth of the number of women in employment' ([Britain 2000](#), 147). It seems natural to assume that women were 'taking men's jobs'. But the picture is more complicated. Between 1971 and 1996 the number of women working full-time increased by just over 300 000 from 5.6 million to 5.95 million. At the same time the numbers of women working part-time increased from 2.8 million to five million ([MacInnes](#), 50). Men did lose out as their numbers fell by more than two million (and full time jobs by even more than that, as men also moved into part-time work). Part-time work, with less legal protections is not only provides less income weekly, but also hourly. That women were drawn into the job market on a part-time basis meant that their position in the labour market was disadvantageous.

[34] The discussion about boys and girls educational attainments that provoked the most recent round of breast-beating also fails to match the analysis of masculinity in crisis. On the face of it, the figures for boys are bad. But the relative figures disguise the fact that boys educational attainments at GCSE and A level, have, whilst not to the same extent as girls' increased year on year. So too have the numbers in further and higher education. That there are more women in college does not mean absolutely less men, only relatively less. Nor is it clear that the growth in higher education relates to greater economic success. Whilst figures do support the idea that individuals with qualifications tend to do better than those without, seen in the round the extraordinary increase in student numbers (from 200 000 in the sixties to nearly two million today) has not substantially improved young people's lives and material conditions. On the contrary, in tending to extend the period of economic dependency from age 18 to age 21 it represents a reduction in income, as it does also a masking of youth unemployment for the government.

[35] Even in full time work, men earned 42 per cent more than women annually, leading [The Times](#) to report that 'Women wait 100 years to find that work doesn't pay' (11 May 2000). The hourly figure is less uneven, showing that women earned 80.9 per cent of men's wages, suggesting that even in full-time work the difference was accentuated by increased over- time ('Pay gap between sexes narrows', [The Guardian](#) 15 October 1999). Irene Bruegel found evidence that there was indeed a feminisation of the workforce in professional posts in accountancy, personnel management and marketing management (84). At the other end of the labour market there was evidence that older men had been forced into early retirement and some unskilled jobs that were previously seen as 'women's jobs', such as bar staff, cleaners, and sales assistants had seen an increase in the numbers of men (92). Bruegel sees this mostly as either student workers or marginal workers, such as ethnic minorities. However, the growing number of young men in higher education is itself an important phenomenon that disguises their underemployment, rather than simply being a transient stage.

[36] With men still earning more and working more hours than women, it would be wrong to describe these changes as a 'crisis

of masculinity'. What is clear, though is that there has been a transformation of the sexual division of labour, justifying Ros Coward's argument that 'there is no longer an overarching system of male oppression where men always benefit and women always lose out' (1999b).

### **The end of the family wage**

[37] The transformation of the sexual division of labour can be seen in the balance between working life and domestic work in the sexes. These are analysed in time-accounts by Jonathan Gershuny at Essex University. The overall change was that the average time worked fell from 296 minutes a day in 1961 to 246 in 1995. Just as working hours were reduced, unpaid domestic work increased, but most of this increase was taken up by men. Between 1961 and 1995 men's unpaid work increased from 126 minutes a day to 172 minutes a day. Though men did more domestic work, women still do the greater share, in fact women's domestic work increased by four minutes between 1961 and 1995, from 256 minutes to 260 (Gershuny).

[38] What the figures on domestic work, women in the labour market and pay all indicate is that, whilst there is not equality, the sexual division of labour in society has very much lost its force. In itself, of course, this is to be welcomed given the oppression of women that was built into that division of labour. That said, the conditions under which the sexual division of labour has been transformed are not necessarily ideal. The singular most important change we can identify is the end of the 'family wage'. The legal exclusion of women from the core workforce dates to the factory and education acts of the late nineteenth century, which set legal limits on women's work and, in excluding children from the workforce, enlarged the sphere of unpaid domestic work (Adamson et al, 19). The necessary corollary of that change was the increase in men's wages to sufficient to raise a family, the 'family wage'.

[39] Equal employment legislation in the 1970s combined with the shakeout in industry in the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s as well as the downward pressure on wages all contributed to the transformation of the sexual division of labour. To maintain family income in the face of redundancy or reduced wages, more women entered the labour market, largely part-time, to accommodate housework. The family wage is a thing of the past. Social security payments under the Job Seekers Allowance reflect this change in that dependency allowances are no longer paid for dependent spouses (Bruegel, p83). British Prime Minister Tony Blair recently complained in a private memo that 'it is bizarre that any government I lead should be seen as anti-family'. And yet, as he rightly noted the abolition of the married couples' tax allowance clarified exactly that view (29 April 2000).

[40] The medium term impact of the changed division of labour on family life can be seen in the changing family patterns. Divorce has been relatively high in Britain for many years - due in part to the greater economic independence of women, but also to liberalisation of the law which saw divorce top 100 000 for the first time in 1971 and rise to nearly 200 000 in the nineties. Economist John Ermisch shows that wherever women's income

increases relative to men, their financial need for marriage decreases (Cited in Wilkinson, 1994, p33). This is to put a fairly positive gloss on the increase in family breakdown bemoaned in the Conservative press. Less positive is the increase in one parent households, from 500 000 in 1971 to 1.6m in 1997, which, regardless of any moral argument, are disproportionately poverty-stricken and welfare dependent. Under the previous Conservative government, ministers were wont to ridicule the assumption of a 'job for life', they were less keen on the outcome of economic dislocation - no more marriage for life, as two out of five marriages end in divorce ([The Guardian](#), 27 March 2000). The more interesting factor is the emergence of single person households. Twenty eight per cent of Britons and 34 per cent of Londoners now live alone ([Britain 2000](#), 110; [Focus on London 2000](#), p28).

[41] For radical critics of the status quo, the view that the family is being undermined sounds too much like a conservative lament. Surely the family has been a bulwark of reaction for more than a century. But drawing women into the labour market has advantages for capital, too. As Karl Marx argued, dual income families yield up as much as twice the surplus labour without incurring twice the cost ([Capital](#), Ch.15, sec. 3a). With the disaggregation of working class solidarity in the period 1984-92, it seems to me, the capitalist elite increasingly sense the family to be a barrier to their absolute rule. The tendency for social work professionals and policy makers to see the family in largely negative terms of abusive relations and risk indicates the discomfort that elites feel towards even this most rudimentary social solidarity. The ambiguity that the ruling class feels towards the family was captured in the former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher's statement that 'there is no such thing [as society], only individual people' she said, adding as an afterthought, 'and there are families' ([Woman's Own](#), 31 October 1987). Having overseen the atomisation of the working class Thatcher, like Blair, took her own 'pro-family' attitude for granted, oblivious to the fact that she had done most to undermine family life.

[42] With a history of scepticism towards 'family values' it is not surprising that radicals have tended to welcome the end of the family. To sociologist Anthony Giddens the changes represent a trend towards the democratisation of personal relations (pp117-120). But whilst there is no reason to celebrate the oppressive institution of the family, the conditions under which it is being superseded are plainly not on the terms of working people. Far from leading to a growth in cosmopolitanism and free association, the disaggregation of family life comes in the context of social atomisation and isolation.

### **The working class, not masculinity in crisis**

[43] The analysis of the 'masculinity crisis' is wanting in many ways. It simply fails to describe the real conditions, both at the level of values, where men and women prove to be less dissimilar than a gender analysis of masculinity suggests, but also at the level of economics, where the supposed defeat of the male sex has plainly not happened.

[44] Methodologically speaking the concept of masculinity is

more than suspect it is ideologically loaded. Since 'masculinity' proves to be dissonant to the actual outlook of men, we need to ask what purpose the category serves. In posing the analysis of the condition of men in terms of masculinity the theories tend to make a fetish of sexual difference. Looked at in terms of a division of labour, we can see that there are observable differences between the material conditions of men and women. However, once these differences are relocated into the theory of 'masculinity', they become mystified as psychological and cultural figures that defy empirical substantiation.

[45] The effect of the masculinity concept on theory is to artificially isolate men's experience from women's, and to remove both from the social relations of capitalist reproduction. Considered as a crisis of masculinity the transformation of the sexual division of labour is conceived of with the two genders related to each other only externally, and in opposition. The story of the change becomes one in which men are the clinging to the past, the recidivists and losers. At the same time women are magically transformed into the winners in the New Economy, the vanguard of positive social change.

[46] These effects of masculinity theory are ideological. Feminists like Brugel who object that women have by no means 'won the sex war' against the post-feminist argument put by Helen Wilkinson are right: in job and income terms, men are better off than women. But equally the argument that casts male workers, particularly in industry as clinging to the past, serves as apology for the destructive impact of the recession on working class living standards.

[47] Characteristically, the theory, in tending to absolutize sex difference ignores the way that the economic changes were problematic for men and women alike. Masculinity theory, as a species of gender theory, eternalises the 'war of the sexes' as a zero sum game, in which both parties' interests are mutually exclusive. Though the specific impact was different, neither sex 'won' in the changes wrought in the 1990s. On the contrary, women were drawn into the labour market on conditions of part-time and underpaid working. Men's loss of earnings did not represent the positive transcendence of the family wage. Social atomisation did not represent greater freedom but greater isolation and dependence.

[48] The characterisation of men as pathological tends to demonise men, especially younger men in a way that suits the forces of social control and repression. Police powers are increased in the intervention into family life, and supervision of young men. But more importantly, on the ideological level, values of independence, self-assertiveness, objectivity, are cast as problematic, 'masculine values'. Such an outlook is not a victory for feminism, but conservatism. All oppositional instincts expressed are characterised as evidence of pathological male behaviour. By contrast, men are enjoined to act the part of the victim, by mourning their loss of power, and getting in touch with their emotional side. This is an attitude that welcomes passivity but criminalises resistance.

[49] The resonance of the masculinity theories for men is that

they seem to describe a condition of loss of power that matches their real condition. But it is wrong to see this loss of power as a loss in relation to women. Rather it is in relation to capital that men and women alike have lost authority. The cumulative defeats inflicted upon working class organisations in the 1980s and 90s have created a condition in which working class subjectivity has been diminished. The crisis is not one of masculinity, but one of the working class.

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