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# The crisis of masculinity and the renegotiation of power

Jennifer Lemon*

SUMMARY

**Due** *to rapid social, economic and political change, many aspects of the traditional male sex role have been rendered increasingly dysfunctional and obsolete. This has led to a period of destabilisation in traditional gender roles and relationships, prompting sex role strain and a contemporary 'crisis of masculinity'. This alleged crisis has given rise to renewed interest in the male sex role, providing the impetus for a new field of study in the eighties known as Men's Studies. This article examines the underlying assumptions of the so-called crisis of masculinity theory, and the factors that have precipitated this alleged crisis, namely the rise of feminism and the women's movement, the gay liberation movement, the declining emotional and mental health of men, and the rise of the mass media and popular culture.*

OPSOMMING

**Teen** *die agtergrond van ekonomiese, politieke en sosiale veranderinge word tradisionele opvattings oor manlikheid en die manlike seksrol in 'n toenemende mate bevraagteken. Tradisionele beskouings oor die man word selfs as disfunksioneel en uitgedien beskou. Hierdie bevraagtekening het aanleiding gegee tot 'n destabilisering van die verhouding tussen geslagsrolle, spanning en uiteindelik die sogenaamde 'krisis van die man'. 'n Bewuswording van hierdie 'krisis' het aanleiding gegee tot 'n nuwe ondersoekgebied, naamlik 'Men's Studies'. In hierdie artikel word kortliks gekyk na van die aannames wat die teorie oor die 'krisis van die man' onderlê en na die faktore wat 'n waarskynlike bydrae tot hierdie 'krisis' gelewer het: die opkoms van feminisme en die vrouebeweging, die 'gay' bevrydingsbeweging, die agteruitgang van die psigiese en fisiese welsyn van die man, en die rol van die massamedia en populêre kultuur.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

**Contemporary** society has, since the Industrial Revolution and the dawn of the modern era, experienced a number of dramatic social changes precipitated by the rise of social and political movements, most notably, the women's movement, the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the gay liberation movement, and the communication revolution (cf Bardwick 1979). Today's society is characterised by social, economic and political change, as the traditional values of society and civilised life are questioned, reevaluated and renegotiated. In the words of Foucault (1980b: 80; cf Martin 1988: 3), recent years have seen

> *... a certain fragility in the bedrock of existence — even, and perhaps above all, in those aspects of it that are most familiar, most solid, and most intimately related to our bodies and our everyday behaviour.*

These changes have been reflected in, and in part precipitated by, the developing mass media, and the meteoric rise of popular culture.

Significantly, one of the most profound and provocative questions being addressed, both in society at large and in the mass media in particular, relates to gender and the relevance of traditional and stereotypical roles assigned to women and men. The proliferation of social movements and the new political constituencies which have arisen from them, have begun to expose the historical and social uncertainties of Western patriarchy, and in particular the masculine power base which sustains it. These changes have brought about a radical disruption of masculinity and the male sex role, resulting in a period of unprecedented social disequilibrium as gender relations are renegotiated and redefined. One of the most significant consequences of this change has been the emergence of the so-called contemporary 'crisis of masculinity' and a new field of study in the eighties known as 'Men's Studies' (cf Kimmel 1986; Brod 1987; Seidler 1989; Filene 1987; Kimmel 1987a; Brittan 1989; Segal 1990; Carrigan et al 1987).

This article examines the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' theory, and the factors contributing to its development, namely the women's movement and

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the rise of feminism, the gay liberation movement, the communication revolution and the rise of popular culture, and the declining emotional and physical health of men.

## 2 MASCULINITY AS PROBLEMATIC

As a consequence of the women's movement and the rise of feminism, a great deal has been written about women and 'women's issues'. Moreover, volumes have been written on the stereotyped images (both visual and verbal) of women as presented and represented in the mass media, including the definitive and scholarly works of authors such as Molly Haskell *(From reverence to rape 1987),* Annette Kuhn (*Women's pictures. Feminism and cinema* 1982), Kaplan (*Women and film. Both sides of the camera* 1983), and Laura Mulvey (*Visual and other pleasures* 1989), to mention only a few (see Fishburn 1982 for a comprehensive bibliography of sources on women in popular culture) (cf King & Stott 1977; Kuhn 1982; Mellen 1977; Rosen 1973; Kaplan 1983; Haskell 1987; Davies et al 1987; Lerner 1979; Butler & Paisley 1980; Steeves 1987).

Significantly, comparatively little has been written about men, masculinity, or images of men in the mass media (cf Carrigan et al 1987: 64; Fejes 1989). Indeed, the proliferation of writing on women has contributed in recent years to drawing attention to the relative silence surrounding masculinity and the experience of men.

The notion, however, that not very much has been written about men is arguably a contradiction in terms, an anomaly, since the history of the social sciences and humankind in general has been largely dominated by research and writing 'by men, on men, and for men' (Hearn 1989). The feminist critique of traditional male scholarship is precisely that women have been essentially written out of, and marginalised in, male-biased scholarship, with the result that virtually everything, except explicitly feminist studies, is in fact male scholarship (cf Brod 1987; Hearn 1989; Eisler 1989; Lerner 1977; Segal 1990; Spender 1980; Carrigan et al 1987). However, as a growing number of authors observe, very little has been written about men **as men** (Brod 1987; Kimmel 1986; Seidler 1989). The tendency among men to assume the stance of 'generic man', the stance in which male lives are presumed to be the norm for human lives, has resulted not only in a loss of understanding concerning the experience of women, but also to the loss of understanding and knowledge of men's experience insofar as it is specifically men's. Traditional scholarship, by elevating men to pseudo-universal human beings, has thus failed to explicitly recognise men and masculinity as **problematic** (cf Brod 1987; Kimmel 1986; Seidler 1989). As Brod (1987: 2) writes,

> *While seemingly about men, traditional scholarship's treatment of generic man as the human norm in fact systematically excludes from consideration what is unique to men* quo *men. The over-generalisation from male to generic human experience not only distorts our understanding of what, if anything, is truly generic to humanity but also precludes the study of masculinity as a specific male experience, rather than a universal paradigm for human experience.*

However, as Komarovsky (1976: 1) points out, a change in power relationships between two groups generally begins with a concentration on the weaker party in its struggle for power. Hence the voluminous writings on women's liberation, images of women in the mass media, sex role stereotyping, female sexuality, (etc). As the struggle achieves some public recognition, attention tends to shift away from the weaker party to the relationship between the two. Komarovsky (1976: 1) contends that society has reached the point when the upheaval in women's roles must be seen for what it is: a process of change in both feminine and masculine social roles. Hence the growing interest in masculinity, Men's Studies, and the male sex role (cf Hoch 1979: 10). More importantly, however, the emergence of the so-called contemporary 'crisis of masculinity' in recent years, has prompted renewed interest in the study of men and masculinity.

## 3 THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY THEORY

The rebirth of feminism and the women's movement in the 1960s, and the subsequent rise of the gay liberation movement, broke the silence surrounding masculinity. It exposed the mechanisms of patriarchal structures and institutions, and offered both an explicit and implicit critique of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. This, together with the impact of dramatic social, economic and political change, the rise of the mass media, and the declining physical and emotional health of men, allegedly prompted a contemporary 'crisis of masculinity'.

While a number of authors (Bednarik 1970; Brenton 1967; Fasteau 1974; Komarovsky 1976; Steinmann & Fox 1974; Brod 1987; Kimmel 1986) have identified and referred to the so-called 'contemporary crisis of masculinity', surprisingly few define precisely what is meant by this term.

As history shows, a 'crisis of masculinity' is by no means being experienced for the first time in the history of 'mankind'. Social, economic, and political change inevitably causes conflict, often resulting in crises, the magnitude of which may be slight or profound. However, from the literature, it would appear that the **contemporary** 'crisis of masculinity' first came to light in the late-1960s and early-1970s (cf Brenton 1967; Bednarik 1970; Farrell 1974; Goldberg 1976; Gilder 1973).

These early publications on men, masculinity and the male sex role were largely popular and polemical works frequently written in reaction to (and against) the new wave of feminism and the sexual revolution, which placed a number of stresses and strains on men due to the gradual erosion of male

power (cf Doyle 1976; Winich 1968; Bednarik 1970; Goldberg 1976; Gilder 1973; Brenton 1967; Farrell 1974). Many of these early writers on men and male liberation, especially those who wrote for the popular press, tended to describe men as passive victims of impersonal, socialising forces (cf Brod 1987: 12–13).

For instance, Bednarik (1970), one of the first contemporary author's to comment on the 'crisis of masculinity', argues that men are in crisis because they are more acutely affected than women by social changes, upheavals and revolutions, since "it is men who have brought these about and who continue to bring them about". Bednarik (1970) repeatedly insists that the masculine crisis has not arisen as a consequence of the women's movement or the changing status of women, but rather as a consequence of the development of technology which is responsible for feminising the male population, and precipitating a crisis of the male sex role (cf Bednarik 1970: 7–8).

> *The male is obviously in retreat, though not from the onslaught of emancipated woman or any 'coming matriarchy'. He is in retreat from what he himself has wrought, from a world of over-automatized, overcentralized controls that make him feel superfluous as a man* (Bednarik 1970: 7).

According to Bednarik (1970), it is these man-made changes which are responsible for disrupting the male sex role.

Bednarik's argument is clearly sexist and androcentric, ascribing all action and influence to men, who, according to him, have "with very few exceptions ... laid the scientific groundwork for changes in *our* reality ...", since "... the male has always been the inventor of mankind's future, the stage director of history" (Bednarik 1970: 34) (my emphasis). Indeed, Bednarik (1970: 6) goes so far as to suggest that the "so-called emancipation of women is also directly or indirectly the result of masculine efforts which have produced changes so fundamental as to make woman's emancipation possible"!

This polemical, and remarkably contradictory work is founded upon the assumptions of biological reductionism, is frequently homophobic (he describes homosexuality as a "perversion", and refers to "sadistic rapist-killers" and "woman-hating homosexuals"), and is both promale and, despite his protestations to the contrary, antifeminist in tone.

Other early writing on the masculine crisis emerged from the so-called men's liberation movements, which came to light in the 1960s and 1970s (cf David & Brannon 1976; Pleck & Sawyer 1974; Fasteau 1975; Pleck 1981; Tolson 1977; Pleck & Pleck 1980). It is largely from these works that the contemporary crisis of masculinity theory has emerged.

In essence, the crisis of masculinity theory focuses on the male sex role identity (MSRI) paradigm, and concerns the plight of contemporary men in Western societies (most notably in the United States of America and Britain), in meeting the multiplicity of conflicting and contradictory demands made of them. From the literature, it would appear that men in modern Western societies, are subject to an unprecedented number of pressures and tensions due to social, economic, historical and political change, resulting in a serious 'crisis of identity'.

Pleck (1981), who is the most prolific author on the male sex role, argues that due to historical and social change, many of the requirements of the male sex role have been rendered obsolete. However, the myths, stereotypes and images of the male sex role persist. The male sex role has thus become an "invisible straitjacket" which keeps a man bound to antiquated patriarchal notions of what he must do or be in order to prove himself a man (Brenton 1967: 13). Consequently, increasing numbers of men find it difficult to conform to the traditional masculine norms and, in an attempt to resolve the apparent contradictions between the images of the past and the realities of the present, deviate from society's "master gender stereotypes" (Brittan 1989: 25; cf Pleck 1981). The inability to conform to societal expectations for the male sex role, and the concomitant deviancy, results in the experience of **sex role strain**, which refers to role conflict or "felt difficulties in fulfilling role obligations" (Goode, in Komarovsky 1976: 8). Parsons (in Komarovsky 1976: 8) defines sex role strain as,

> ... *the exposure of the actor to conflicting sets of legitimized role expectations such that complete fulfillment of both is realistically impossible.*

In short, the crisis of masculinity theory suggests that men today, more than ever, are confused about what it means to be a man, and are progressively attempting to push beyond the rigid role prescriptions of the traditional concepts of masculinity that constrain male behaviour (Kimmel 1987b: 121–122; Tax, in Hock 1979: 17).

As Brod (1987: xii) observes, to be 'masculine' is to have a particular psychological identity, social role, place in the labour force, and sense of self. In industrial societies, 'real men' define themselves in three ways. Firstly, they earn money in the public labour force and support their families through that effort. Secondly, they (should) have formal power over women and children in those families. And finally, 'real men' are heterosexual.

Ironically, postindustrial societies severely undercut such a definition of masculinity. They are heedlessly destructive of the industrial jobs that men have traditionally filled, and heedlessly generative of the lower-paying service jobs that women frequently occupy. Moreover, postindustrial cultures are extremely heterogeneous and tend to accept the values of egalitarianism and the ideology of liberalism more readily, thereby making room for greater freedom for women and a wider range of options regarding sexual preference and expression (cf Brod 1987: xi–xiii). A contradiction thus

exists between the hegemonic male image (patriarchal ideology) and the real conditions of men's lives, leaving men to nurse what Brenton (1967: 40) refers to as a "potent patriarchal hangover" (cf Bednarik 1970; Brod 1987: 74).

Moreover, while social, economic, historical and political change have rendered the traditional male role obsolete in many respects, the mass media and social norms still propagate the old stereotypical roles for men and women. Men are confronted with the dilemma of contradictory and conflicting images of themselves, the increasing irrelevance of the traditional roles, compounded by women's challenge to their power (cf Moore 1989; Steinmann & Fox 1974; Kimmel 1987a: 48; Brittan 1989).

## 4 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY

A number of complex social, economic, political and historical factors have contributed to the development of the contemporary 'crisis of masculinity', the most important of which are (i) the women's movement and the rise of feminism; (ii) the gay liberation movement and the increasing visibility of homosexuality; (iii) the communication revolution and the rise of popular culture; and (iv) the declining emotional and physical health of men. In the following section these factors are briefly discussed.

### 4.1 The women's movement and the rise of feminism

From the literature on the 'crisis of masculinity', it would appear that the rebirth of feminism and the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s provided the primary impetus for the recent interest in the study of men and masculinity, although no mention is made of what precisely is meant by feminism and the feminist movement, nor what branch of the feminist movement is being referred to (radical, liberal, Marxist, etc) (cf Brod 1987; Segal 1990; Seidler 1987; Moore 1980; Kimmel 1987a, 1987b; Carrigan et al 1987).

Nevertheless, since definitions of masculinity are historically and socially reactive to changing definitions of femininity, it seems reasonable to expect that an indirect, but inevitable consequence of a feminist questioning of what it is to be a woman, would be a growing questioning of what it is to be a man (cf Kimmel 1987b: 123; Brittan 1989: 180). Moreover, a fundamental component of feminist theory and criticism is a critique of masculinity, and in particular patriarchal ideology, or masculinism, as the power base upon which institutionalised or hegemonic masculinity is founded.

The 1960s saw the rebirth of two influential movements within feminism, namely the **liberal** tradition which is primarily concerned with the attainment of equal rights for women, and the **radical** tradition which is essentially concerned with subverting and revolutionising existing patriarchal social structures (cf Bouchier 1983; Eisenstein 1981).

The publication of Betty Friedan's influential book, *The feminine mystique* in 1963, marked the beginning of the second wave of liberal feminism. In 1966 the *National Organisation of Women* (NOW), which aimed to use existing laws and constitutional structures to fight discrimination and to educate for changes in women's roles, was founded in the United States of America (Bouchier 1983: 45). *The National Organisation of Women aim* to

> *... take actions to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men. This purpose includes, but is not limited to, equal rights and responsibilities in all aspects of citizenship, public service, employment, education, and family life, and it includes freedom from discrimination because of age, marital status, sexual preference and parenthood* (quoted in Eisenstein 1981: 193).

During the 1960s massive demonstrations and marches were organised which drew attention to feminism and women's issues, and elicited a great deal of media publicity. In addition, numerous campaigns were launched to lobby for equal rights for women and other minorities (cf Bouchier 1983: 47). As Bouchier (1983) points out, the cumulative effect of the new wave of liberal feminism was to create a genuine sensitivity to women's issues in government, in industry, and in the mass media.

Moreover, along with the peace movement, the black civil rights movement, the Neo-Marxist New Left, and the youth counter-culture, the 1960s and 1970s spawned a new branch of feminist thinking broadly defined as radical feminism (cf Firestone 1970; Millett 1977; Rich 1977; Greer 1971; Dworkin 1981; French 1988). It is undoubtedly this branch of the feminist movement that attracted the most attention and media publicity, and was to have the most profound impact.

According to radical feminists, patriarchy defined men as the enemy. Radical feminists thus suggested that women did not need men, and that the liberation of sexual behaviour would break the hold of the monogamous, heterosexual family as the source of patriarchal power (Bouchier 1983: 79).

Overthrowing and subverting the patriarchal state was a major objective of this branch of the women's movement. While liberal feminists campaigned for equal rights, the abolition of sex role stereotypes in the media, and free access to the mass media in order to publicise their objectives, et cetera, radical feminists advocated a separatist ideology, and a radical critique of patriarchy, male violence, and sexuality. Thus, due to the influence of radical feminism during the 1970s, the women's movement shifted its focus from economic and egalitarian issues to the radical separatist demand for liberation *from men.*

In the late-1960s and early-1970s radical feminists were especially visible because they had learned how to shock and therefore how to assure

widespread coverage in the media. While such exposure led to many dismissing all feminists as bra-burning, man-hating extremists (a symbol of the women's movement which has lasted until the present), its visibility made the existence of a women's movement impossible to ignore. Moreover, it made the demands of the mainstream feminist groups such as the *National Organisation of Women* seem tame in contrast, and ironically, in reaction to radical feminism, the media's portrayals of mainstream feminism became increasingly sympathetic (cf Bouchier 1983: 11).

The 1970s was undoubtedly the decade of the women's liberation movement (cf Bouchier 1983: 93; Bardwick 1979: 910). Media coverage grew, and despite the fact that the coverage was almost entirely negative, stressing the extreme and emotional aspects of the movement, it drew considerable attention to the movement, and paradoxically assisted in the realisation of some of its aims.

However, since its very earliest beginnings in the eighteenth century, the women's movement has been regarded as a subversive influence and a threat to decent moral values and social order. The call for women's rights and equality thus aroused bitter opposition and feminists had to contend with powerful enemies who regard the liberation of women as a threat to the structure and maintenance of civilised society.

Reactions to the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s can be classified in broad terms by three counter movements: (i) the antifeminist movement, (ii) the promale movement, and, (iii) the profeminist movement.

### *4.1.1 Antifeminist movement*

For every revolution there will be some form of counter revolution. For some men the alleged 'crisis of masculinity' was seen to have been caused by women and their liberation movements. To those who stand to lose by the equality of women, to support a movement so contrary to their own interests is clearly anathema. It is therefore not surprising that when women began to move into male dominated spheres of power and influence, many men reacted with considerable hostility, fear and aggression. Consequently, during the 1960s and 1970s male antifeminist movements began to grow in number, and began to work towards the resubordination of women.

Antifeminist backlash activities assumed many guises. One particular male response, particularly prevalent in the literature on men and masculinity in the seventies, was marked by a tendency to reverse feminism, and to claim that it is women who have special social privileges. In short, this theory argues that in reality it is men who are the victims of oppressive sex roles (cf Doyle 1976; Gilder 1973; Goldberg 1976; Pleck & Sawyer 1974).

This particular form of aggression appears in more subtle ways in many of the so-called 'men's movements', which claim not to be in opposition to feminism, and must be distinguished from profeminist male organisations. These organisations, such as the *Organisation of Free Men,* are concerned with the limitations of the role of the father, and the excessive power which they believe women wield over their children. They rebel against the unemotional lives which their roles force them to lead both at home and at work. However, while this movement is promale in nature, Bouchier (1983: 155) points out that it has attracted and sustained considerable antifeminist sentiment.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of popular publications and articles appeared on the so-called 'crisis of masculinity', male liberation, and the theme of 'male victimisation' (cf Goldberg 1976; Farrell 1974; Gilder 1973; Winich 1968; Fasteau 1975; Bednarik 1970). These works, such as R F Doyle's, *The rape of the male* (1976), are examples of attempts made to subvert the claims of feminists about the oppression of women, and to present a case for the oppression ('rape') of the male.

For example Doyle (1976) argues, in less than subtle terms, that in reality it is men who are the victims of sexual prejudice. His book is a protest against what he regards as a little recognised dimension of sexual prejudice, that is, sex discrimination against men, "a situation of such enormity it has dishonored our time" (Doyle 1976: 1). His polemical and controversial work constitutes an emotional tirade against the tyranny of womanhood in general, and the women's movement in particular. At the same time, he insists that he is not anti-woman, merely 'pro-decency'. He argues that the words of Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville in 1831, that the new feminist movement would result in "weak men and disorderly women", has proven prophetic (cf Doyle 1976: 112). He writes,

> *... Braying, foul-mouthed feminists demand concessions and conditions ranging from the merely unfair and unnatural to the revolting, so much so that I will not dignify all of them by taking issue. Some demands sound reasonable; but closer examination reveals that they want privilege upon privilege. Today the world; tomorrow the universe. For example, they want equal employment with men, and equal pay for not necessarily equal ability or equal work. They want access to men's clubs and organisations* (Doyle 1976: 112).

Doyle (1976: 171) predicts that if women's liberation persists, the 'rape of the male' will continue, and that ultimately society will collapse.

Other less revolutionary and polemical writers, who nevertheless regard the women's movement as a step off the cliff for 'mankind', include George Gilder (*Sexual suicide* 1973), Karl Bednarik (*The male in crisis* 1970), Charles Winick, (*The new people* 1968), and Herb Goldberg (*The hazards of being male. Surviving the myth of masculine privilege* 1976), amongst others.

More recent and organised opposition to the

women's movement includes the rise of the *New Right* in North America and Europe, and the powerful *Moral Majority* in the United States of America. These two movements are examples of efforts made to subvert various of the gains made by women's movements during the 1960s and 1970s, and to put women and other minorities 'back in their place'. A central theme of these neoconservative movements concerns the entire debate on sexual politics, most notably the idealisation of the nuclear family and traditional sex role divisions between male and female as the cornerstone of society.

The *New Right* is a highly organised countersocial movement which has mobilised considerable political support through its emphasis on 'social problems', such as the rising rate of divorce, the decline in the traditional family, increasing homosexuality, (etc), and has played an active role in perpetuating traditional conceptions of sex and gender. A prominent feature of the *New Right* is its blatant discrimination against so-called 'outgroups', such as cultural and ethnic minorities, women, male and female homosexuals, amongst others (cf Miles 1989: 53–54). During the 1980s the emergence of the alleged AIDS 'epidemic' provided the ideal and providential symbol for conservative sexual politics, and contributed substantially to a new wave of repressive politics, and a spate of 'moral panics' (cf Miles 1989: 54).

According to Miles (1989: 54), the successes of the *New Right* include the implementation of many forms of homophobic legislation, the ritual denunciation of feminists as lesbians, and in unorganised 'gay-bashing'. He suggests that the *New Right* epitomises the fear being experienced by men that women may well be able to do without them, and even more disturbingly, that men may themselves be treated by other men in ways in which they are accustomed to treating women.

In America, religious fundamentalism, combined with television evangelism, big business, and the political conservatism of the Republican Party combined to form the powerful *Moral Majority* (cf Segal 1990: 161). Significantly, this antifeminist backlash is most ardently supported, and most acutely prominent among certain fundamentalist religious groups,

> ... *by whom the God-ordained positions of men and women (in employment, in housework, in intellectual and moral leadership, in discipline, and, of course, in bed) are proclaimed and lived (at least for public consumption, as a series of recent scandals remind us)* (Miles 1989: 54).

The *Moral Majority* calls for a return to the idealised past and to traditional masculinist values (cf Hess & Ferree 1987). This movement, like the secular *New Right,* is largely concerned with the affirmation of the sanctity of the home and family life, hostility to homosexuality and 'sexual deviance', opposition to sex education, support for anti-abortion campaigns, and the reassertion of traditional demarcations between the sexes (cf Richardson 1988; Rupp & Taylor 1986; Bouchier 1983: 161–162).

Both the *New Right* and the *Moral Majority* tend to image feminists as selfish and anti-family, and tend to blame feminists and the women's movement for most of society's woes: rising divorce rates, abortion, teenage pregnancy, unemployment among white men, declining Christian morality, increasing homosexuality, and the AIDS epidemic, amongst others (cf Rupp and Taylor 1986; Richardson 1988).

#### *4.1.2 Promale movement*

Closely associated with the antifeminist movement, is the promale movement. This group of men see the solution to the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' in a vigorous reassertion of traditional masculine values. This response manifested itself in many ways, the most notable examples of which included the founding of various organisations devoted to the rigorous celebration of masculinist values. The most prominent example of an organisation founded with this objective in mind is the *Boy Scouts,* founded in 1910 by Lord Baden-Powell. The *Boy Scouts* celebrates a masculinity tested and proven against nature and other men, removed from the feminising effects of women, home, school and church (cf Dubbert 1979; Hantover 1978).

Other organisations founded with the view to reestablishing traditional masculine values are the *Young Men's Christian Association* (YMCA), and an assortment of men's societies and sporting clubs. In this way the promale movement hopes to counter the forces of feminism, and maintain the values of traditional manhood (cf Steinmann & Fox 1974; Pleck 1981; Brod 1987; Nelson 1988).

The formation of the *Ku Klux Klan* in America however, is undoubtedly the most radical and sinister example of an organisation established to preserve masculinist values and ideology. According to Dubbert (1979: 68), at the heart of the formation of the *Ku Klux Klan* lies the promise of the restoration of masculine power and control.

#### *4.1.3 Profeminist movement*

Another reaction to feminism and the women's movement, although initially less influential, is the profeminist men's movement. During the 1970s, when the feminist movement was at its peak, a small, but significant group of men (in America and Britain) openly embraced feminist principles as a potential solution to the 'crisis of masculinity'.

The profeminist sentiment was first expressed in 1969 with the establishment of the first male consciousness raising group in New York. The profeminist movement tended to attract young, white, middle-class, leftist men, who wished to 'support' the women's liberation movement. One such group of men in the United States of America, *The Berkley Men's Centre,* issued a manifesto, which included the following statements:

*We as men, want to take back our full humanity .... We no longer want to feel the need to perform sexually, socially, or in any way to live up to an imposed male role, from a traditional American society or a 'counterculture'.*

*We want to relate to both women and men in more human ways — with warmth, sensitivity, emotion and honesty .... We want to be equal with women and end destructive competitive relationships with men. We are oppressed by conditioning which ... serves to create a mutual dependence on male (abstract, aggressive, strong, unemotional) and female (nurturing, passive, weak, emotional) roles.*

*We believe that this half-humanization will only change when our competitive, male dominated, individualistic society becomes cooperative, based on sharing of resources and skills. We want to use our creative energy to serve our common needs and not to make profits for our employers* (Richardson 1988: 245–246).

These male liberation movements had a strong anti-violence component, and dozens of working groups, such as *Rape and Violence End Now* (RAVEN), *Men Against Cool* (MAC), and *EMERGE* (a men's counseling service on domestic violence), were formed in an attempt to change men's violent behaviour.

Against this background it may be argued that the profeminist movement, which gave rise to the development of the new field of Men's Studies in the 1980s, was largely a response to the rhetoric of the radical feminist movement, and its critique of male sexuality and violence.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the men's liberation movement grew steadily, becoming more centralised and organised. Conventions on men and Men's Studies began to appear. In 1983 the *National Organisation for Changing Men* (NOCM) was established, and the first newsletter (which was to become a journal in 1985), published (cf Brod 1987: 45; Kimmel 1987a, 1987b, 1986).

Essentially, the NOCM aims to change the patriarchal nature of society, and contends that patriarchy and the male sex role generates serious problems for men as well as for women. These problems result in an overemphasis on work and success, the neglect of personal relationships, aggressive behaviour, the inability to be nurturant and caring, the avoidance of anything remotely feminine (homophobia), and excessive competitiveness. The NOCM is thus concerned with the ways in which the male role impoverishes men, the oppression of women in all its guises, and the oppression that arises from homophobia and racism (cf Richardson 1988; Farrell 1974; Bouchier 1983; Tuttle 1986; Brod 1987; Kimmel 1987a, 1987b). The following statement was made by the NOCM:

*The social structure of our society is closely connected to other ways in which some men have power over others: rich over poor, white over black, old over young, etc. NOCM members recognise the injustice of all such forms of oppression, and see them as historically connected to the ancient patriarchal pattern whereby a few powerful men obtain power over other men, women, children, and the environment. We believe that the struggle against sexism is closely related to other struggles against oppression* (NOCM, in Richardson 1988: 246).

Significantly, most of the male liberation groups formed, such as the NOCM, are comprised mainly of white, heterosexual men, largely excluding black men and homosexuals. In recent years however, the NOCM has begun to address the issues of its own racism, and the special problems experienced by black men in particular.

#### *4.1.4 Critique*

It is not merely coincidental that the new interest in men, masculinity, and Men's Studies arose at a time when the feminist women's movement, and especially radical feminism, was at its peak. Undoubtedly, radical feminism posed the most serious threat to men in that it attacked the fundamental bases upon which patriarchy is founded, namely the family and sexuality. Indeed, on the face of things it would appear that the new interest in masculinity and the male sex role is more directly a consequence of radical feminist discourse and its subversive critique of patriarchy, than of the rhetoric of liberal feminism.

However, a closer analysis of the relationship of feminism to the crisis of masculinity theory and the so-called 'male liberation movement', begins to suggest an alternative, and possibly more important, explanation concerning the role of liberal feminism in prompting the development of the crisis of masculinity theory.

As Eisenstein, in her book *The radical future of liberal feminism* (1981), so convincingly argues, the formation of NOW in 1966 marked the first collaboration between the state and the women's movement, since liberal "mainstream" feminism was, implicitly and explicitly, supportive of the broader and more general liberal bias of American politics, which had begun to adopt the ideology of liberalism as its worldview. The state therefore found it easy to accept liberal feminism as the least threatening form of feminism.

Furthermore, it may be argued that Betty Friedan's writings implicitly and uncritically apply the ideology of liberal individualism in order to develop a theory of women's oppression. Her feminist demands essentially accommodate the patriarchal state, and the ideology of liberal individualism, without being aware of its patriarchal biases. As Eisenstein (1981: 181) points out, Friedan has no theory of sexual power and privilege, and thus uncritically accepts the pluralist theory of liberalism. For Friedan, women's liberation is then seen in terms of an individualist framework (individual men oppressing individual women). She thereby avoids dealing with the patriarchal organisation of

society as part of the political life of society. Her pluralist view of politics replaces the theory of sexual oppression (espoused by radical feminists). Within this context, both women and men appear to suffer from the present system of sexual inequality. "Man is not the enemy, but a fellow victim of the present half equality ..." (Friedan 1970: 38). Women are then not interested in taking power away from men, but in creating institutions that will make equality between the sexes possible.

In reading the arguments of liberal feminism, it becomes increasingly apparent that a less than coincidental similarity exists between the discourse of liberal feminist writing and that of the crisis of masculinity theory which emerged in the 1970s (cf Goldberg 1976; Fasteau 1975; Bednarik 1970; Brenton 1967; Kaye 1974; Pleck & Sawyer 1974; Pleck 1981).

For example, Friedan's analysis of women's oppression is best expressed through her analysis of the "feminine mystique", which defines woman in terms of her femininity, and her roles as wife and mother. Friedan's theory, like the crisis of masculinity theory, is then centrally concerned with women's loss of identity (sex role identity).

> *It is my thesis that the core of the problem for women today is not sexual but a problem of identity — a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique* (Friedan 1963: 69).

She does not explain the economic, social, or historical origins of the mystique, nor its connections to capitalist patriarchy. Moreover, Friedan (1963, 1977), like the crisis of masculinity theorists, essentially ignores the issues of race and class, focusing on white, middle class women. In short, Friedan (1977: 23) envisions woman's problem as "a massive crisis of identity". Against this background it may be argued that the men's liberation movements and the crisis of masculinity theorists have largely co-opted liberal feminist discourse, and mechanically applied it to men to argue that men are equally oppressed by the unreasonable dictates of the male sex role. The single most important danger of this unholy alliance between liberal feminism and the male liberation movement is that it serves merely to entrench the patriarchal system, by denying the ways in which the exercise of power and privilege perpetuates male domination. Moreover, it fails to explain the ways in which the state functions to protect and nurture the system of power called patriarchy. In reality, the so-called "feminine mystique" or "masculine mystique" is a powerful **ideological force,** and has a political purpose in reproducing the relations of hegemonic masculinity (patriarchy).

### 4.2 Homosexuality and the gay liberation movement

A further factor contributing to the development of the alleged contemporary 'crisis of masculinity' is the increasing visibility of homosexuality and the rise of the gay liberation movement in the late-1960s and early-1970s.

Already as early as 1957, Hacker commented that the "increase" of homosexuality, the "flight from masculinity", was a reflection of male sex role conflict, and an index of the burdens of masculinity (cf Carrigan et al 1987: 74). Indeed, homosexuality has always been regarded as an indicator of insufficient or inadequate masculinity, and as such poses a fundamental threat to masculinity and masculine ideals. The increasing visibility of homosexuality in America and Britain in the 1960s and 1970s was regarded as evidence that all was not well with men and masculinity, pointing to the existence of role conflict among men, and within the male sex role.

Initially the male liberation movements were hostile to homosexuals and homosexuality. To heterosexual men, the gay liberation movement represented a deviant and subversive reversal of the dominant sexual ideology, which suggested that the real problem lay with rigid social definitions of masculinity (Carrigan et al 1987: 83–84). This clearly posed a threat to hegemonic masculinity and the maintenance of the patriarchal status quo. Moreover, to heterosexual men, homosexuality was an embarrassment, and gay men were consequently excluded from the literature on men and masculinity by heterosexual men in the 1970s.

In the 1970s, a small men's liberation movement developed among homosexual men in the United States of America. Inspired largely by the gains made by women and the women's movement, homosexual men began to move for their liberation, to call into question conventional (heterosexual) understandings of what it means to be a man.

The gay liberation movement shared a common goal with the women's liberation movement, namely the creation of a society which does not categorise and oppress people on the basis of their sex or sexual preference. *The Gay Liberation Front* (GLF) began to realise that a feminist revolution would bring about gay liberation as well.

> *We recognise that the oppression that gay people suffer is an integral part of the social structure of our society. Women and gay people are both victims of the cultural and ideological phenomenon known as sexism. This is manifested in our culture as male supremacy and heterosexual chauvinism* (Carrigan et al 1987: 84).

Gay activists were thus the first contemporary group of men to address the problems of hegemonic masculinity, to apply the political techniques of women's liberation, and to align with feminists on issues of sexual politics (cf Carrigan et al 1987: 83; Altman 1982).

Indeed, the emerging history of male homosexuality offers a most valuable starting point for constructing an historical perspective on masculinity,

> ... *since it forces one to think of masculinity as being constantly constructed within the history*

*of an evolving social structure, a structure of sexual power relations. It obliges one to see this construction as a social struggle going on in a complex ideological and political field in which there is a continuing process of mobilization, marginalization, contestation, resistance, and subordination* (Carrigan et al 1987: 89).

A consideration of homosexuality provides the beginnings of a dynamic conception of masculinity as a structure of social relations, and as a social and historical construction (cf Carrigan et al 1987: 86; Weeks 1977, 1981, 1986).

In summary, the rise of feminism and the women's movement, and the gay liberation movement have contributed substantially to the emergence of the contemporary 'crisis of masculinity', disrupting the assumptions of patriarchal ideology and hegemonic masculinity. Significantly, this process has been shaped by, and reflected in, the mass media. The mass media have thus, implicitly and explicitly, contributed to precipitating and fabricating the current crisis of identity.

### 4.3 The mass media and the rise of popular culture

In contemporary society human possibilities for communication have been greatly enhanced by the development of technology and the rise of the mass media. Indeed, the media have become an increasingly powerful social and cultural force. It may thus be argued that in modern society, the media hold the key to political and cultural change, since the visibility of change makes awareness unavoidable. As Bardwick (1979: 2) points out, as a result of the media the sheer rate of change has become significant, irrespective of the content of media messages. Thus, while the 'crisis of masculinity' may have occurred as a result of enormous structural changes and advances in industrial societies of the Western world, and be theorised and discussed in the academy, it is given reality by the media. It may then be argued that the media have played a significant role in precipitating, or creating, the alleged 'crisis of masculinity', since they constitute one of the prime sites for the reproduction of gender divisions, sexism and patriarchal ideology.

As the historical development of feminism and the women's movement has shown, an antagonistic and hostile relationship has long existed between the women's movement and the mass media (Hole & Levine 1972: 226; Bouchier 1983: 165). This is understandable in view of the fact that the media are largely controlled and dominated by men, whose fundamental interests lie in maintaining the patriarchal status quo (cf Butler & Paisley 1980; Courtney & Whipple 1983; Friedman 1977). Since feminism seems to threaten the assumptions of a patriarchal system, the media have mobilised

> ... *every device, from the bra-burning myth to the sneering diminutive 'women's lib' ... to reduce feminism to the status of an amusing and sometimes titillating sideshow* (Bouchier 1983: 165).

In general, media reaction to feminism and the women's movement in America and Britain has been marked by two broad responses, namely hostility and co-optation.

The media have responded with singular hostility and aggression to the radical branch of the feminist movement, exaggerating its rhetoric and militancy, and presenting radical feminists as man-hating, lesbian extremists. Radical feminism has thus largely drawn negative media coverage, which has frequently been extremely damaging to the women's movement as a whole. However, certain issues addressed by radical feminists have enjoyed considerable indepth media publicity. These issues include the focus on certain 'social problems' such as sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence, which have human interest value. Thus, despite its negative portrayal of radical feminists, the media have unwittingly contributed to drawing attention the the problems of masculinity and patriarchal domination.

In general, the media have been less critical of the liberal feminist movement and have consistently dealt with this branch of the women's movement by co-opting certain sections of the movement and its rhetoric in an attempt to render it harmless (cf Eisenstein 1981; Bouchier 1983: 166).

Since liberal feminism is 'mainstream', and thus more in line with the general liberal bias of American politics and state policies, it is deemed more acceptable for public consumption (cf Eisenstein 1981: 177). In short, it is seen as the least threatening form of feminism, and is therefore given the most publicity and public recognition. One of the ways in which this has been done, has been to distort the politics of radical, socialist and lesbian feminists, and to present liberal feminism as the more reasonable approach. Liberal feminism, which has largely uncritically accepted the ideology of liberal individualism, has in this way been co-opted by the state and the mass media in the service of those who wish to be seen to be maintaining the ideology of 'democracy' and 'freedom of speech' (cf Bouchier 1983; Eisenstein 1981). The media have thus willingly embraced liberal feminist discourse so long as it stayed within the framework of 'legitimate' values, and was considered by the media barons to be accessible, 'respectable', and inoffensive. In recent years, the media have made extensive use of liberal feminist discourse on oppressive sex roles.

They have uncritically co-opted its language, and applied it to men, using it as a marketing tool, and as motivation for their new and fashionable images of the so-called 'New Man', which offers a sensitive, nurturing, expressive and sensual image of masculinity. While the media have begun to offer men new and alternative images of themselves, they have also done more than their fair share to shore up waning male confidence, and to restore the

traditional male image. The anti-woman theme has been popular in film and television productions, in which men pursue activities separate from the feminising influence of women (common in Westerns, War films, and the male 'buddy' genres). As Russo (1985) points out, the media are frequently homophobic, and overemphasise a hypermasculine male image as the standard for heterosexual masculinity. Moreover, the media have been shown to make extensive use of sex role stereotypes to convey their messages which serve to entrench, naturalise and legitimise the dichotomous and traditional conceptions of sex and gender (cf Butler & Paisley 1980; Courtney & Whipple 1983; Friedman 1977).

Finally, the media have provided a degree of support for profeminist tendencies within society by drawing attention to feminists and the advances made by the women's movement, and by means of counter-stereotypical portrayals of sex and gender. An increasing number of films, television productions and advertisements have begun to feature women in prominent and professional roles traditionally filled by men, and men in occupations traditionally held by women. Images of men have in recent years begun to give credence to a more sensitive, nurturing and caring conception of masculinity, with men sharing household and childcare responsibilities. The changing fashions and trends for a masculine image have begun to contradict the old stereotypes, and offer a greater range of role choices and alternatives for men. The male role is thus less well defined than before. While this may contribute to confusion and a 'crisis of masculinity', it also offers men an opportunity to expand their roles.

Homosexuality has become a more frequent theme in a number of films and television productions. While many of these images portray homosexuality in a stereotyped and negative way, some productions have begun to deal more honestly with homosexuality. These productions have contributed to raising an awareness of the reality and implications of alternative sexual preferences, and of the social and cultural construction of sexuality.

### 4.4 Declining physical and emotional health

According to the crisis of masculinity theory, the mounting evidence in support of the declining physical and emotional health of men in Western societies, is clear evidence that masculinity is in crisis.

According to popular myth, women are biologically and psychologically the weaker sex (cf Moore 1989: 95; Ehrenreich 1983: chapter 6). Traditionally, masculinity is upheld as the standard of physical and emotional health, and when compared to the health of men, women can only be considered deviants. Historically, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause and menstruation were regarded as medical events, if not actual diseases, requiring sustained medical intervention.

However, social, economic and political change and the advancement of medical technology and scientific research in the twentieth century has radically disrupted this ideology, resulting in two fundamental changes in the conception of physical and mental health.

Firstly, recent years have seen a change in traditional conceptions of mental (psychological) health, and of 'normalcy' (cf Bardwick 1979: 35–39). Historically, the great bulk of research focused on the differences between the sexes, and psychological health was measured in terms of stereotypically feminine females and masculine males. However, due to the influence of feminism, and the development of scientific research, this one-dimensional view of sex and gender has been shown to be an over-simplified and static view of sex differences, and gender similarities have become increasingly apparent. Consequently, the basic concepts of psychological health have begun to change, and psychologists and researchers have begun to suggest that people who score high on their own gender scale and low on the other are not psychologically healthy, because their development is too confined (cf Williams & Best 1982: 295–305). It is argued that these individuals are poorly adjusted and are not flexible enough to cope with the multiplicity of demands made of them by life.

The androgynous concept of psychological health has been introduced, which defines the ideal person as having a blend of interests, abilities and traits which are both masculine and feminine, expressive and instrumental (cf Bem 1974, 1975; Bardwick 1979: 151–159; Williams & Best 1982). Both the instrumental/adaptive behaviours associated with the male stereotype, and the integrative/expressive behaviours associated with the female stereotype are seen to be essential for adequate functioning (cf Williams & Best 1982: 295–301). Moreover, research has begun to expose the weaknesses of the masculine sex role which is shown to be psychologically destructive, especially with regard to violence, aggression and sexuality (see Pleck (1981: chapter 7)).

The second change in the concept of physical and emotional health has been prompted by the growing body of medical research which has begun to mount substantial evidence which questions the validity of the notion that women are the weaker sex.

In modern, Western societies, with the pressures of industrialisation, urbanisation and technological development, heart disease, cancer and strokes have become the principal killers. Ironically, in an increasingly stressful environment, men find themselves at a marked disadvantage. During the 1950s, with the rise of mass society, death rates from coronary heart disease rose precipitously, reaching 'epidemic' proportions. Significantly, this was statistically a male disease, with men three times more likely to die of heart disease than women (cf Ehrenreich 1983: 71). Researchers and physicians claim-

ed that the stresses of modern society were to blame, and increasing references were made to the burdens of the breadwinner role. By 1970 women were expected to live eight years longer than the average man, and the weight of medical research began to force a major reevaluation of the relationship between gender and health (cf. Ehrenreich 1983: 70). Indeed, increasing evidence began to suggest that men were in fact, genetically, physically and psychologically, the weaker sex.

Ironically, while it was theorised that the incidence of coronary heart disease amongst women would increase as more women entered the job market, this did not occur. If anything, women's health improved. As Ehrenreich (1983: 78) shows, in 1960 males in America were 1.62 times more likely as females to die of heart disease, while in 1976, males were 2.1 times as likely to die of heart disease. Moreover, an eight year study of 900 women in 1979 showed that women employed outside the home were no more likely to develop heart disease than full-time housewives. Research on coronary victims thus began to suggest that masculinity itself might be a risk factor for coronary heart disease, and that men with stereotypically masculine characteristics, such as the Type A personality marked by extreme competitiveness, striving for achievement, and aggressiveness, were most susceptible to heart disease (Ehrenreich 1983: 21).

In the seventies, there was a sudden and renewed interest in masculinity and the male sex role. Many authors who were now writing on men, masculinity and male liberation were eager to adopt the argument of male frailty to support their contention that men were in crisis, and needed liberating from the restrictive requirements and dictates of the traditional male role (cf Farrell 1974; Fasteau 1975; Pleck and Sawyer 1974; Gilder 1973; Goldberg 1976). This line of reasoning has been eagerly adopted by the mass media who have increasingly begun to feature the emotional man, burdened by his paternal and breadwinning responsibilities.

Indeed, the mounting evidence on the declining emotional and physical health of men is argued to be one of the most striking though contentious evidences of the existence of the crisis of masculinity (cf Olson 1982: 23; Miles 1989). In the United States of America, Goldberg (1976), Farrell (1974), Gilder (1973), Kaye (1974), and others, cite statistics which consistently show that men do not live as long as women, and are more susceptible to disease, suicide, crime, accidents, childhood emotional disorders, alcoholism and drug addiction (cf Olson 1982: 23). Moreover, Gilder (1973: 6) points out that men commit over 90 percent of major crimes of violence, 100 percent of all rapes, and 95 percent of burglaries. Men comprise 94 percent of drunken drivers, 70 percent of suicides, and 91 percent of offenders against family and children. Research on single men ostensibly reveals even more ominous statistics, with single men comprising from 80 to 90 percent of most categories of social pathology (cf Olson 1982: 23; Goldberg 1976; Brod 1987: 54–55; Kaye 1974; Hoch 1979: 17, 18). These statistics are attributed to the unrealistic and increasingly dysfunctional dictates of the 'masculine mystique', and are regarded as 'evidence' of the damaging effects of the male sex role (cf Kaye 1974; Gilder 1973; Connell 1987; Segal 1990; Ehrenreich 1983; Goldberg 1976; Farrell 1973: 12; Kaye 1974; Brod 1987: 54–55; Chafetz 1978: 56–61; Hoch 1979: 17–18; Fasteau 1975; Pleck 1981). As Ehrenreich (1983: 140) points out,

> *No treatise or document of men's liberation, no matter how brief, failed to mention the bodily injuries sustained by role-abiding men, from ulcers and accidents to the most 'masculine' of illnesses, coronary heart disease.*

Thus, in recent years, increasing role conflict and markedly higher rates of stress-related diseases and deaths among young men have contributed to the serious reevaluation of the male sex role. The recognition of these 'symptoms' and other 'social problems', such as male violence and sexuality, homosexuality, and homophobia, has resulted in men paying more serious attention to their physical and emotional health, and to the requirements of the traditional male sex role (cf Miles 1989; Hoch 1979: 6; Nelson 1988: 12–13; Hodson 1984: 3–16; Brod 1987: 54–55).

In response to the new awareness of the health hazards of the masculine role, the 1970s and 1980s have seen a massive growth in the health and fitness industry, and a new and fashionable obsession with physical fitness. However, as Ehrenreich (1983: 140) observes,

> *... the initial and irrefutable reason for men to transform themselves was not to improve their social status or expand their consciousness, but to save their lives.*

(See Moore (1989) for a comprehensive summary of research on male vulnerability, and Fogel et al (1986) for a psychoanalytic perspective on male vulnerability. Also see Segal (1990: 73–82).)

## 5 CRITIQUE OF THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY THEORY

Having outlined the basic assumptions of the crisis of masculinity theory, and discussed the central factors which have contributed to its development, a number of critical questions arise as to its value and relevance. Indeed, the question may be asked as to whether it is true to say that masculinity is in crisis in a world in which men still possess the power of unquestioned domination. Within this context, it may be argued that the crisis of masculinity theory is irrelevant and misplaced, and that the alleged 'crisis' is merely a masculine invention in a desperate attempt to shore up male power and privilege at a time when their rule and continued domination is under threat. In this regard a number

of claims made by the crisis of masculinity theorists must be interrogated, and critically evaluated. Six criticisms of this theory can be identified.

Firstly, the notion promulgated by the so-called men's liberation movements that men are equally oppressed and need liberating — whether that be from the male sex role, social norms, society or from themselves — is arguably an absurd and misplaced notion, and according to Connell (1987: xi), demonstrably false. Men, and especially white, heterosexual men, are in general advantaged by the current social structure in most Western societies. As Hoch (1979) points out, men, as agents of a patriarchal culture, remain the dominant gender, and are subjects in dominance (cf Tolson 1977; Heath 1987). Men do not, in general, experience sexual oppression. In short, a patriarchal system already operates in their favour.

For men, male liberation and 'consciousness raising' is merely a self-reflective, 'self-deconstructive' practice, providing an opportunity for personal growth and self discovery. Ultimately, the notion of male liberation tends to simply ignore the reality of the power which men possess and wield over women and other minorities, and the ways in which patriarchy is institutionalised within the social structure. Masculinity is constructed in terms of social power or oppression, and "to simply deny, or vaguely wish to 'relinquish', the reality of this power is to fall victim to a liberal myopia" (Tolson 1977: 144).

Secondly, in addition to men's liberation movements, there are a considerable number of male intellectuals who are beginning to consciously employ feminist discourse in an intellectual analysis of masculinity. Recent years have seen the emergence of the so-called 'male feminist' among white, male, heterosexual academics (cf Jardine & Smith 1987: viii). However, as Stephen Heath (1987: 1) points out, politically, "men's relation to feminism is an impossible one", since no matter how sincere or sympathetic men are, they are situated as male. This reality brings with it the implications of domination and appropriation, indeed everything that feminism and feminists attempt to challenge. Feminism reverses patriarchal assumptions, and examines men as the 'objects' of analysis, as agents of the structure to be transformed, and representatives of the "patriarchal mode" (Heath 1987: 1).

Showalter (1987: 127) observes that there is an inherent danger in male theorists borrowing the language of feminist discourse, especially without a willingness to explore the masculinist bias of their own language, since what emerges is a phallic 'feminist' criticism that competes with women instead of breaking out of patriarchal bounds. The matter of interests is thus a crucial factor in assessing the relative value of any contribution made by men, 'male feminists' and Men's Studies, to an ongoing feminist debate on sexual oppression and patriarchal domination.

As Braidotti (1987: 234) points out, men have not inherited a world of oppression and exclusion on the basis of their sex, nor do they have the lived experience of being historically denied the status of subject as a consequence of their sex. She suggests that it must be very uncomfortable to be a white, middle class male intellectual at a time in history when so many minorities and oppressed groups are speaking up for themselves; a time when the hegemony of the white knowing subject is crumbling.

> *Lacking the lack, they cannot participate in the great ferment of ideas that is shaking up Western culture: it must be very painful indeed to have no option other than being the empirical referent of the historical oppressor of women, and being asked to account for his atrocities* (Braidotti 1987: 235).

Ultimately, to respond to feminism, men must forgo their mastery, and give up their power. What this implies is a loss of status and position as dominant in society. The question as to why men would choose to do this is the critical question (cf Farrell 1986: 3). While the debate about men's liberation and 'men in feminism' demonstrates that there are costs for men in their social advantages, and that (some) men are increasingly uneasy about their masculine role, it is essential that the underlying assumptions of this approach not be accepted uncritically.

A third consideration with regard to the crisis of masculinity theory is that it is essentially founded upon the assumptions of sex role theory. This theory is arguably a form of social determinism, and effectively divests men of the responsibility for their actions, since it ascribes the problems of masculinity to society and the male sex role itself. More importantly however, is the fact that sex role theory cannot account for the fundamental reality of social power (cf Brod 1987; Carrigan et al 1987; Connell 1987).

A fourth important and inherent weakness of the crisis of masculinity theory is that in general it assumes that there is one monolithic essence which constitutes 'masculinity'. Most studies on men and masculinity tend to treat masculinity as if it can be defined as some measurable and timeless essence. The tendency to see masculinity as a perfect ideal, a monolithic essence that can be identified and unproblematically defined, is a gross oversimplification, and makes little room for the diversity of males roles and ideologies. In reality, it may be argued that the notion of 'masculinity' is a myth, since there are a wide range of extremely divergent conceptions of **masculinities** (cf Brittan 1989: 1). Since gender does not exist outside history and culture, both masculinity and femininity are continuously subject to a process of reinterpretation (cf Kimmel 1987a: 194). Moreover, as Franklin (1984) points out, a number of masculinities simultaneously co-exist within a given social dynamic. Masculinity is then local and subject to change.

What does remain relatively constant is masculine ideology, or 'masculinism' (Brittan 1987: 3–6). Thus, while masculinity refers to those aspects of men's behaviour that fluctuate over time (such as fashion trends and popular fads, myths, stereotypes and sex roles), masculinism refers to the ideology that justifies and naturalises male domination or patriarchy. Unlike masculinity, masculine ideology or masculinism, is not subject to the vagaries of fashion, and tends to be relatively resistant to change.

The fifth flaw in the crisis of masculinity theory is that it assumes that all men constitute a class, and have the same sense of collective identity, thereby overcategorising men. Clearly, all men do not have the same interests, nor do they share collective identities or the same class position. Indeed, it may be argued that Men's Studies, which has emerged in response to the crisis of masculinity theory, is inherently contradictory of its own stated aim to destroy discrimination at its social roots. It is frequently classist (focusing on middle class men), racist (focusing on white men), and sexist (focusing on heterosexual men), and makes little room for the diversity of male roles and forms of masculinity, or masculinities.

The sixth, and final criticism of the crisis of masculinity theory is that it assumes that all men, men-in-general, are in crisis. However, as Brittan (1989) points out, this thesis is far too simplistic, since a crisis of masculinity would only be a crisis if the relations of gender were perceived and experienced as problematic by a significant proportion of men and not only by an elite group of white, middle class intellectuals, who possess the power with which to afford the indulgent exercise of liberalism.

The notion of a general masculine crisis implies the breakdown of heterosexualism and the decline of men's power and authority, and suggests that men-in-general believe that their traditional powers and privileges are being appropriated by women. Within this context, the question may be asked as to whether there is any real crisis of masculinity in terms of the majority of men in Western, patriarchal societies.

While it is true that there is an emergent group of white, middle class men, at least in the United States and Britain, who are committed to a more liberal and humanist view of gender relations, it would be grossly inaccurate to assume that the kinds of discussion that inform academic, intellectual and feminist analyses of gender relations are generally understood and accepted.

Brittan (1989: 184) suggests that the optimistic view that men are more committed to a humanist view of gender relations is naive, and that " 'the incorrigible propositions of gender' remain the cornerstone on which social policy is built in all industrial societies". Instead of a 'crisis of masculinity', there may be some kind of 'legitimation crisis' in which male authority can no longer be taken for granted, and has to be defended and rationalised. This has led to a destabilisation of patriarchal ideology, and masculinity.

It may then be argued that some men may experience a 'crisis of masculinity', in that the legitimacy of their traditional roles is now in question. In recent years, hegemonic masculinity has been subject to question and reevaluation. This has led to heightening of tension within the male role and masculinity. Moreover, due to the fact that masculinity is a relational construct, and exists only in relation to femininity, changes in women's roles has necessitated a number of adaptations in hegemonic masculinity. Within this context, the so-called 'crisis' is nothing more than a realisation among men that women have begun to make inroads into areas of control traditionally appropriated by men, implying yet another change in the power balance between the sexes (cf Craib 1987: 739; Tolson 1977).

Probably the most important factor which has precipitated the alleged 'crisis' is the belief that women are not only beginning to dominate certain sections of the labour market, but that they are moving into positions of real power in society, questioning the legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal power (cf Brittan 1989: 180). The 'crisis of masculinity' is then more a reaction to a loss of, what Bardwick (1979: 22) refers to as, "existential anchors" which serve as a source of sexual identity (such as the family, and the traditional roles of husband, father, and breadwinner, etc). Moreover, since men's identities are contingent upon an array of structures and institutions, when these shift or weaken, men's dominant positions are threatened.

In conclusion, the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' is really a shifting of the balance of power between the sexes, and represents far more than a crisis merely of the male sex role, or sex role strain. The so-called 'crisis of masculinity' represents a time of renegotiating taken-for-granted, 'commonsense' assumptions, and a redistribution of power in human relations in response to these changes.

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