

A Man's Place

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It is not possible to say that marriage has been a great success in the past, but it is clearer now than ever before that the institution is severely strained. One agreed fact is that the majority of divorces are started by wives, suggesting that they see before their husbands do that there is no point in going on. So what is wrong with so many men, that they cannot see what is happening in their relationships? My provisional reply to that question is that men have typically been in difficulties with relationships for a very long time, thousands of years in fact, and that it is about time we revised our ideas about what men are for.

chapter in *Women, Men and Marriage*, (ed) C. Clulow, London: Sheldon Press, 1995

Introduction

If a woman's place is in the home, then a man's place is out of it. This is not the sort of thing one says nowadays, but in most societies, in most periods of history, it has been the accepted view of the matter. So why not stop there? Most of the concepts, even obligations, of manhood that come to mind without much reflection are to do with fighting, sexuality and fathering; the three f's if you like. First of all, a man has to be brave, strong and heroic. He should not complain if he is in pain or afraid. He should win the struggle, whatever it is, and when he finally gets home he should bring with him the dead body of whatever it was he was in contest with, whether enemy or prey. This is the fighting, hunting male, and he is derived from the image of a wild hairy beast that is bigger and stronger than all the others, like a great ape. Of course he will have been afraid during his exploits, but somehow this is not to be discussed. Then there is another side of his character which is his virility. This is to do with his sexual potency. We need to distinguish his actual ability from what he says about it. The vital importance of potency runs throughout the history of manhood, and failure is not to be considered. His actual activity in sexual intercourse may in fact be totally different from his talk. In reality he may be tender and affectionate as well as thrusting and powerful. A man's relationship with a woman begins more or less the same way as a woman's in infancy, and however big and strong he is, there is still the baby boy inside that wants to cuddle up to mummy. The third aspect of his character is the father, traditionally stern and unyielding, remote and terrifying. Even some modern men confess that, before their children were born, they believed that their primary task was to punish them. But his actual life with his children may be quite different, if he allows it, so that he can be gentle and attentive with them, as well as fierce and firm, just like a mother is.

All of these facets of the man's character are performances. Now the performing male has a problem, in my view. He used to be able to get away with it, but the need for this particular show is fading fast.

Until the second world war men could reasonably be seen as soldiers in reserve. Images of men from that time could only be cast in this upright mode but since then there has been a change which will never be reversed. The smokestack phase of the industrial revolution is over. Men's work in factories, and most powerfully, down the mine, is more or less finished. Most jobs are now dependent on technology of some kind. Muscle power, which is virtually the only physical advantage of the male, is no longer necessary, except for furniture removal and a few other tasks that defiantly resist electronic wizardry. With these very few exceptions, women can do anything that men can do. The fact that they don't is no longer a physical but a political phenomenon. The best paid and most prestigious jobs are still held by men. I am not sure that these jobs are in reality so desirable. Who really wants to spend half the night in the House of Commons, or in a faraway hotel room negotiating a big deal? The answer is, of course, that many men, and some women, do want this because it seems to be exciting. There is no denying the antidepressant effect of work in institutions. Even quite humdrum activities can give you the feeling that you are helping some giant wheel to turn.

It is odd that the most important job of all, looking after children, has such low status. This has something to do with the assumption that it is only women's work. I think we also have to recognise that, apart from the special moments of wonder that parents can have with children, a lot of childcare is a chore. You can enjoy children without spending hours in their company. Children see it differently. They would like to spend hours in your company, even if you do not have to attend to them directly. Parents, and it usually is mothers, are expected to be, if not actually in the room, somewhere nearby. Now that women have found freedom in paid work, they are prepared to pay someone else to look after the children. The prime privilege of the father - working outside the home - has been badly dented. Of course the average pay of men is higher than for women, and women still finish up doing low status jobs that few men would touch, but all that is gradually changing. So the clear definition of the man's place is losing its sharpness. Most of the women who have taken advantage of these changes would not think for a moment that this had anything to do with feminism, yet it must have played its part.

It is because the woman's place has changed that the man's has to do so. He did not initiate the change, although he could welcome it if he understood it. It is women who have fought to be educated, to understand the outside world, to use their wisdom and intelligence to make things different. Mostly, men resisted this because it undermined their fragile hold on the world. It may seem odd to describe male prestige as fragile, but this is just the point. If you are not sure of yourself, you have to make yourself more important than you are. Women's advance over the past few hundred years has accelerated in recent decades, but I am more concerned here to discuss the advance of men that preceded it long ago.

The rise of patriarchy in neolithic times

Up to about ten thousand years ago men and women lived relatively simple lives in the open, sometimes in caves. Yet they had developed sophisticated social and ritual activities that gave meaning to life. They buried their dead, and had done so for tens of thousand of years. They could light fires and paint brilliant pictures on cave

walls. What they could not do was to grow plants and harvest them. We may think this a distinct disadvantage, but the gathering and hunting lifestyle can be quite an easy one. After all, the food is there to be had; you do not have to work for it. This is how other animals live.

It is usually assumed, or was until recently, that early humans depended on meat to live, and that because they were the hunters, upon men to survive. Modern scholars and anthropologists have other ideas (Tanner, 1981). Most of the food eaten by people in pre-agricultural societies is gathered by hand. It need not be vegetable. It is quite possible to get good quality protein from small animals and insects, even if we might not be keen to eat them ourselves. You have to remember that the world was not very crowded in prehistoric times. Also much of it was covered with ice, and people tended to live in warmer parts such as Africa and the Middle East. Even modern hunter gatherers such as the !Kung say that life is easy, and wonder why other people struggle so hard to grow food when you can just pick it. Interestingly, the skeletal remains of early people show that the first farmers had, on average, smaller bodies than the hunter-gatherers that preceded them, suggesting that the quality of the new diet was actually poorer (Diamond, 1991). We think of bread or rice as staple human foods, but before ten thousand years ago such grains would only be an incidental part of the diet. Life was not necessarily nasty and brutish, although it was shorter than now.

Here is an account of how it might have been in those days: “everyone has sufficient food and there is little stress and jealousy as everyone has equal access to the very few commodities available....If women were, on the whole, responsible for gathering plant foods and perhaps small animals, this may not have taken many hours a day. Unlike hunting, which depends on quietness, plant gathering could be quite a social activity, carried out by all the able bodied women of a band working together. Young children could play round about, receiving attention whenever necessary, or remain at the homebase with elderly relatives.” (Ehrenberg, 1989, p62) This is a picture of stable domestic life. Note the similarity with the modern family, whether nuclear or not. The father is absent, at work. The difference is, however, that his work was not absolutely necessary. He would return with a dead animal from time to time, maybe a gigantic one like a mammoth which could indeed feed the band for weeks, but these were bonuses rather than essentials. No doubt it is good to have a roast for Sunday dinner, but if you have a reasonable diet during the week, that will do well enough.

I think the idealisation of the hunting male was an invention. He is very skilful and brave, it is true, but he is not the breadwinner (notice how even the term breadwinner relates to the post-agricultural world in which wealth was measured in wheat, not meat). Furthermore he is not the patriarch either. The misty picture of the prehistoric family (you can imagine the Victorians portraying this very well) is a large bearded man holding a dead beast, standing over his wife and children, master of all he surveys. My understanding of this impressive archetype is that it was developed later, out of our - that is men's - wish to be just as important as women. In prehistoric life, it is much more likely that the man and the woman were more equal, and that the man played his part without any sense of superiority. He was probably

less well-equipped with detailed knowledge of plants and small animals than her, and less involved in the care of the children. His bonds with other males, as in other primate species, may have been quite strong, as they would face death together on hunting trips. At best he could be a helpful consort to the mother of his children. If either sex felt superior, it was likely to be the women (Lerner, 1986). After all they had the greatest gift, which was the capacity to produce babies. This was a mysterious process, and it is possible that the 'facts of life' as we quaintly call them, were not known, or at least not given much significance, until the agricultural revolution. It is clear that life could go on without these facts, although once they were known, of course things had to change. There is a curious paradox here: before men knew about their part in making babies they were relatively modest; after discovering what a tiny part it was, they became inflated. "The discovery of physiological paternity is the discovery at the same time of men's inclusion in and exclusion from natural reproductive process" (O'Brien, 1981).

Following the agricultural revolution that began in the Middle East about ten thousand years ago, the status of males changed dramatically. In evolutionary terms, what happened was quite rapid. After millennia of gathering and hunting, the idea that seeds could be planted and grown took over within a few hundred years. It started in the 'fertile crescent' of the Levant, where conditions were just right for the growth of wheat-like grasses. Farming began on a small scale, so that women and men could share tasks equally, using a hoe to turn the soil, and learning about the sexual lives of animals as they became domesticated. This is probably about the time that the penny dropped. They discovered that humans are mammals too, and have the same organs as cows and pigs, although in slightly different places. The domestication of plants and animals included the domestication of humans.

But being ingenious, these early agriculturalists soon saw that they could make bigger farms. This is where the male's superior strength came into its own. The first ploughs were made around 4000 BC, and their invention made it possible to cultivate far larger areas than before. This work would have been done by men, putting them in a position to take charge of the surpluses they made. As soon as you move from subsistence to surplus, you are in the business of business (Engels, 1874). And the same goes for animal herds. A large herd needs tending by shepherds and cowboys, as we might now call them, who would spend much of their time away from the home base. For women, this was not possible as long as they had dependent children to look after. They also has a lot of extra work to do, making food and other items from animal products: milk, skins and so on. The management of big herds and the discovery that you could train an animal to pull a plough, and later to pull a wheeled cart, led to the first experiments in genetic engineering - namely, the castration of weaker males and the promotion of the stud. Here was a very good model for the increasingly powerful man to follow. Furthermore, ploughs were at first made of wood but later of metal, the fashioning of which has remained one of the preserves of men for most of history. The maker of iron tools could also make weapons.

The demise of the goddesses

Not surprisingly similar changes were going on in the mythical world of the deities. In the old days the principal objects of worship were female, or just animals and spirits, like the wind. But the decline of the goddesses seems to have been fairly continuous from the start of the agricultural revolution. At the beginning of history was the city of Sumer, in Mesopotamia, which flourished between 4000 and 3000 BC. There the first written records were made. Judging from the stories left behind, the male and female gods were moving in opposite directions, one in the ascendant and the other declining. Inanna, the queen of heaven, the goddess of love and war, was worshipped there, but the stories about her reveal that she was struggling to maintain superiority over a competitive husband as well as a jealous sister (Sanday, 1981). Male gods were appearing, apparently with the intention of taking over (Fisher, 1979). Later Inanna becomes Anath of Canaan. After that she disappears as a goddess, only to reappear, according to several authors (Sanday, 1981, Baring & Cashford, 1991), as Eve in the garden of Eden, and then later as the Virgin Mary. In the Mediterranean, around Greece, there was a similar story. Preceding the legends of classical Greece, the chief deity of the Aegeans was the Great Goddess, the Universal Mother (Johnson, 1988, Neumann, 1955), who was sometimes called Rhea (Guirand, 1959). But she is later upstaged by her son Zeus, after which she significantly becomes just one of his many wives. Zeus was the god of the sky, and the most powerful god who saw everything and knew everything, not unlike the God of the Bible and the Qur'an.

In other parts of the world, there arose a whole host of father-creators. In ancient China the August Personage of Jade prevailed. "He was the first god...[who] created human beings...by modelling them in clay. He is referred to as Father-Heaven" (p381) (Guirand, 1959). And from India came "Brahma.. the first person of the Hindu Trinity..... the father of gods and of men". He unfolds the universe and "by thought produced the waters and deposited his seed in them. This seed became a golden egg as brilliant as the sun....In this egg the blessed one remained a whole year, then of himself, by the effort of his thought only, he divided the egg into two. From the two halves he made heaven and earth...(p344) (Guirand, 1959). This god is unusual in that he is regarded as being fallible and is said to have made a number of mistakes, so the process of creation proceeded by advances and setbacks. He is depicted with four heads (Senior, 1985). Much later in history, the Slavs had a sun and fire god Svarog, who was the father of all the other gods. In Teutonic mythology, the giant Ymir, the first of all living beings was formed from the thawing of the ice (Guirand, 1959), and gave birth to the first male-and-female couple from his sweaty armpit (Walker, 1983). Lacking a vagina, many gods gave birth from their mouths. Other methods included a lethal form of Caesarian section, hatching from a male-incubated egg, or birth through the penis. Zeus also managed to defy anatomy. Having swallowed his wife Metis, he gave birth to Athene from his head. These are different portrayals of ingenious, mythical fathers, all of whom created humans without female help. These remarkable feats of biological acrobatics were required to prop up the new man of the day, very different to the one of the same name we are busy trying to find. The fact is that within the space of about a thousand years man had, decisively and impressively, created god in his own image. With agricultural surpluses to distribute in return for favours and

loyalty, the charismatic 'big men' could also take political leadership (Service, 1975). These were the prototype kings and emperors, who saw themselves as fathers of all their people.

How did father-creators come to occupy such a prominent place in so many religions? If you did not know how infants were conceived, you would not worship a man because he does not have babies - he does not make people. You would say that, in the beginning, the first human came out of a female, which is of course the truth. Yet by the time and in the places that these myths were established, the truth had been abandoned. It looks as though when man realized the facts of life he could not face them, so he changed them. Here is a passage from the Oresteia trilogy by Aeschylus: "The mother is not the parent of the child / Which is called hers. She is the nurse who tends the growth / Of young seed planted by its true parent, the male" (cited by Lerner, 1986, p205).

It is quite likely that women would have supported men in the technological and economic advancement of agriculture because it seemed a good idea to build bigger and better businesses. If you assume there was no battle of the sexes before that time (some sort of garden of Eden) then why would there be any reason to stop them? What we now regard as 'natural' differences between men and women were being created in most unnatural ways, that is, by culture.

Rivalry and envy

The fact that male deities replaced female ones, and took over their reproductive powers, strongly suggests an envious attack on women (Kraemer, 1991). Relative equality gave way to the inequality of the sexes of the historic world. Men's status, or prestige, was increased, but at great cost to their modesty, their capacity to love, and, of course, to women. As feminist scholars have shown, the political, intellectual and artistic achievements of women throughout history have been largely ignored. But because vulnerability and tenderness are projected into women, the definition of maleness becomes rather hollow, encouraging performance at the expense of genuineness. "It is as if the symbol of authority is a hard father who is not yet assured of loving and being loved, a narcissistically wounded or deprived person who, despairing of being loved, resorts to force and legalistic principles and reinforces this way of feeling secure by accentuating masculine-feminine polarities and subjugating females and female deities"(p188) (Redfearn, 1992).

Something happened to men all those years ago that is only now becoming clear. This is partly because the story of the world was written by men who could not question their superior role in it. The fact is that men are just as necessary as women for keeping the species going, but that they do not have to be in charge. Until the smoke of the industrial revolution began to clear, we could not see this. It has been the task of many women scholars and writers to open our eyes to a different version of the story, and a different role for us. There is always a very fierce reaction to this sort of talk, and not only from men. The attempt to rebalance genders seems to disturb the very foundations of our thinking. This is so because notions of sex and gender *are* the foundation of much of our thinking, about roles, power, love, sexuality, social order; the very stuff of life and its meaning. Freud shocked the world with his observations that sexuality is part of everyone's life, even infants.

Feminists, who have rarely been friends with Freud, have noted that our unconscious reliance on assumptions of gender is equally pervasive.

Men in non-Western societies

So far I have been telling a story, rather a 'just so' story, of how the man laid claim to his power over the woman. I am saying that in his anxiety to assert his equal importance he was overcome with a bitter envy that made him hate the woman he had previously admired. While thinking about this, it is instructive to look at other societies besides our own. We can readily imagine the privilege of the male in a western setting, how he can talk louder and interrupt the female, how he can stare at her while her eyes are averted downwards. Even today this sort of process goes on all the time. The difference is that we can now talk about it and question if that is how things should be. In Japan, men and women use different parts of speech when saying precisely the same thing. So as she proposes to leave the house, for example, a woman will say the same words but with different endings. The effect is that the female utterance is soft and sweet, while the male is tough and active.

In every society men are distinguished from women, in some quite violently. Here is a description of the boy's upbringing in the Yanomami people of Venezuela.

'Yanomami boys learn cruelty by practicing on animals. Lizot watched several male juveniles gathered round a wounded monkey. They poked their fingers into the wounds and pushed sharp sticks into its eyes. As the monkey dies, little by little, "its every contortion stimulates them and makes them laugh" ... The Yanomami's preferred form of armed engagement is the surprise raid at dawn. Under cover of darkness the members of the raiding party pick a trail outside the enemy village and wait for the first man or woman to come along at daybreak. They kill as many men as they can, take the women as captives, and try to leave the scene before the whole village can be roused ... husbands beat their wives for disobedience, but especially for adultery ... others beat their wives with clubs, swung at them with machetes and axes, or burned them with firebrands. Some shot barbed arrows into their wives' legs..' (cited in Harris, 1993, p64 - 65).¹

The highland people of Papua New Guinea are even fiercer. The male initiation cult involves learning how to dominate women.

"Inside the cult house, which no woman may enter, the Nama men store their sacred flutes whose sounds terrorize the women and children. Only male initiates learn that it is their fathers and brothers who make the sounds and not carnivorous supernatural birds. They swear to kill any woman or child who learns the secret even by accident... ..After being secluded in the cult house the initiates emerge into adulthood. They are given a bride whom they promptly shoot in the right thigh with an arrow to demonstrate unyielding power over her. Women work in the gardens, raise pigs, and do all the dirty work while men stand around gossiping, making speeches, and decorating themselves with paint, feathers and shells" (Harris, 1993, p65).

¹ the Yanomami are not to be written off as merely aggressive people. They number about 9,000, one of the largest group of forest living people in the world, but around 1,500 have died from disease, murder, poisoned rivers and invasion of their land.)

The anthropologist David Gilmore had made a study of masculinity which confirms the prevalence of anxiety in the male. He has to show that he is able to perform. Gilmore (1990) describes a number of societies where maleness is valued highly in this way, including a study of Andalusian life, one of the places where the macho concept was born. Here a man who has no children is a failure, but he also has to provide for his family. The breadwinning role, so challenged in our society, is actually one of the more durable and interesting roles for the man. This was what Margaret Mead (1962) regarded as the innovation of the human race, even if it turns out not to have been as indispensable as she thought. In a cash economy, breadwinning is actually a more important role than hunting in the foraging society, and Gilmore points out that it is fundamentally a generous, even sacrificial, thing to do - to make money and spend it on others. Manhood, he says, is a kind of male procreation. But it has to be seen to be done: "a man's effectiveness is measured as others see him in action" (p35). So the performance does not have to be violent, domineering or humiliating to women, but it does have to be witnessed. This is, of course, what *testis* actually means. It is the evidence of your manhood.

A man's place in the modern world

Before we call for change in men we will need to understand why we have resisted and hung on so doggedly for so long. This has to do with the fact that boys cannot become men without relinquishing their identification with their mothers (Greenson, 1968, Hudson & Jacot, 1991). The historical rise of patriarchy is really a slow version of what happens in the development of each boy in our western societies. At first, he is just a baby, and while his parents and others are keen to know which sex he is, he doesn't care one way or the other. So although he is treated differently from a baby girl he is not conscious of the difference. He just loves his mummy. This can be compared with the prehistoric worship of goddesses and spirits.

Sometime during the second year he begins to sense the difference. This depends of being able to see the naked bodies of girls and boys, but also on the insistence of his caretakers that he is a boy, which is not like a girl. The girl is having complementary experiences while receiving the same sort of message: that is, that she is a girl, and not a boy. The difference is that she is surrounded by women, so she can see what she is meant to become (Phillips, 1993). The importance of this evidence is not diminished by the fact that many of the women seen by children now leave the house and go to work. This only increases the range of things women can be seen to be doing: looking after you, feeding you, doing household tasks, but also going out and coming back. Both boys and girls witness this, but the boy does not see much of the men. This is gradually changing, but the statistics exposing the new man's confidence trick are now well known: he claims to do his share, but he doesn't do as much as he says. In other words, it's a bit of a performance! The boy is being told he is male, but sees vastly less of the male example than of the female. Logic dictates that if the male is different, then he must be unlike the female. The only thing to do is to give up everything to do with female and set off into the darkness to become one of those mysterious and powerful absent males. This is equivalent to the rise of the creator gods at the beginning of history. In order to feel male he has to jettison what he perceives as maternal qualities by putting mother down. As Jalmert (1990)

says "the positive outcome of this development is that the boy will see himself as separate with marked boundaries. The negative outcome is that boy will have difficulties in getting close to other persons. We might even call it a fear of intimacy" (p3). This sounds like a reasonable description of far too many men.

It does not have to be like that. If the man's place was, like the woman's, both in the home and out of it, then the boy would not have to grow up in this way. I do not mean that he will be able to avoid the negotiation of the delicate passage from dependent infant to assertive gender-conscious toddler, but with adult males around him he can see for himself what he might become, and, of course, there would at once be more variety in his experience. Nor do I mean that men have to be the same as women (the inevitable segregations of sport will see to that!), but a greater range of identities and roles can become available for them, just as there are for modern women. For a child of either sex, a real man is so much more interesting than an absent fantasy, whatever exciting or important things he is meant to be doing. Notice that I say *a real man*, a phrase normally reserved for one with particularly impressive powers, political, muscular or sexual. The trouble with that model, as we have seen, is that it implies putting women down.

Men as partners

It should be clear enough that if we had a greater variety of couplings between men and women as parents, there would be a corresponding greater variety of gender identities. This is particularly urgent now because of the imminent extinction of the 'old man' without any plausible successor waiting in the wings. Yet there is a great deal of anxiety about change because, whether we like it or not, it is happening now. The contortions of politicians trying to defend the old moral order is just one sign of widespread panic. This is nowhere more evident than in the threatened male, and his well documented backlash. It is simply wrong to state that women's liberation has gone far enough, when it has hardly started. But the shrillness of the opposition to change must not be disregarded. What we may be witnessing is the beginning of the end of a really ancient patriarchal structure. How can this possibly happen without real fear on the part of men (and even women) everywhere, a fear which could produce further and ever more desperate efforts to reassert authority? Either the frightened male is defeated, in which case the backlash will be all the more violent and possibly terminal, or he is taken on board as a thinking human being. In order to do this he will need to be brought up differently. We need to make a commitment to a more flexible male for the future. In spite of everything, there are many signs of change. Most men attend the delivery of their children now, compared with hardly any thirty years ago. But they still receive little social encouragement to participate as parents, even though we know that many men are now keen to do their share (Kraemer 1994). Or at least they say they are, which is at least a start. When they do, it increases the richness of the children's experience from infancy right up to adulthood (Lamb & Oppenheim, 1989, Russell & Radojevic, 1992, Pruett, 1993), but it would also make a difference to our expectations of men in general.

The man as engaged parent and marital partner is still far from the norm. Other chapters in this book examine the enormous challenges posed by other aspects of a

real marriage partnership, where commitments of different kinds are made and kept. Most people still believe in this, which is why they go on getting married, even for the second and third time. Life away from home can be exciting for men, where they are free and feel less vulnerable. Yet that is not the whole story. Models of maleness in our society are terribly limited, although the fact that it is at all possible to write this now is evidence of real change. It could not have happened even twenty years ago. I do not underestimate the social and political changes necessary to allow men to participate in domestic life, but now is the time to push for it.

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