# POPULAR CULTURE AND THE 'CRISIS OF MASCULINITY'

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**ABSTRACT**

**The eighties and nineties have witnessed a renewed and unprecedented interest in men and masculinity due to the emergence of the alleged contemporary 'crisis of masculinity'. This has been most prevalent in popular culture representations, which appear on the surface to offer the modern man a whole range of 'new' roles and relationships, freeing him from patriachal entrapment and the dicates and demands of the traditional male sex role. The New Man is imaged as soft, sensitive, expressive and unafraid to show his emotions. New erotosized images have made their appearance, and men are imaged as sex objects in a way that only women were represented in the past. However, the question arises as to what these images mean, and whether or not they represent any change in the patriarchal status quo in Western societies. In this article an attempt is made to deconstruct some of the new notions of masculinity in the light of the contemporary 'crisis of masculinity', and the new popular culture representations of men in the mass media.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Images of masculinity enter into the most intimate human communications, and are enshrined in social rituals and customs. Many mass media images and narratives depend for their specific meaning on the play between culturally defined 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements (cf. Tolson, 1977:8; Gamman & Marshment, 1988:6). Indeed, the media's constant re-enactment of the rites of masculine behaviour have become the main staple of entertainment (cf. Hoch, 1979:15). Gender and the dichotomies of male and female, masculine and feminine, are thus a fundamental part of the social fabric as it is constructed. Masculinity is part of the formal language, or 'code', built into the framework of social organisation. Tolson (1977:8) argues that these images, or outward presentations, ultimately become part of an internal self-image. Given that gender is socially constructed, images of gender in popular culture become texts on normative behaviour, thereby constituting a significant way in which culture is used to construct gender (cf. Kimmel, 1986:526). It is in the images of popu-

lar culture (in film, in television programmes, advertising, newspapers, popular songs and novels) that men are invited to recognise themselves in the masculine mode (role). While men clearly do not passively live out the masculine myth imposed by these images, neither do they live completely outside it, since it pervades society and culture (cf. Easthope, 1986:166, 157).

Within the context of a cultural studies approach, the media and its images are important sites for the propagation and perpetuation of dominant ideologies (such as patriarchy), and play a major role in the social and ideological construction of individuals as gendered subjects. For this reason it is necessary to interrogate the ideological production and circulation of gender in the images of the mass media in order to come to an understanding of the ways in which masculinity (and femininity) is constructed in society. Popular culture as a cultural text is thus seen as a means of cultural analysis, and as such is an important source of information regarding the ideological construction of gender relations and identities (cf. Fiske, 1987a:108).

Indeed, it may be argued that media images, as symbolic and ideological expressions or representations of 'reality', are a valuable visual (or verbal) lexicon of social change, since they reflect the ideologies of the dominant groups within the societies in which they are created. Moreover, within the context of a cultural studies approach, the media and popular culture are seen as a site where meanings are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed, resisted or negotiated (cf. Fiske, 1987a; Hall et al., 1980; Fiske, 1987b; Gamman & Marshment, 1988; Stockard & Johnson, 1980:8).

Against this background, this article focuses on mass media *images* of men and masculinity, broadly defined as visual representations or symbolic and ideological expressions of a particular society's conception or fabrication of masculinity and manhood. *Masculinity* may be defined as the set of images, values, interests, and activities (i.e. sex roles) held important for the successful achievement of male adulthood in Western societies (cf. Jeffords, 1989:xii). These images do not reflect 'reality', but are fundamentally ideological, and thus reflect the interests (dominant ideologies) of the institutions, organisations or individuals who created them.

For the purposes of this discussion, *popular culture* is defined as those productions, both artistic and commercial, designed for mass consumption, which, while they may appeal to and express the tastes and understanding of the majority of the public, reflect the values, beliefs and ideologies of the dominant group (cf. Geist & Nachbar, 1983:24).

Popular culture is then not defined in terms of elitist assumptions which see popular culture merely as debased "mass culture", and which distinguishes rigidly between "high culture" and art and "popular culture" or "low art". Nor is popular culture defined simply in terms of that which is popular in that it has mass appeal. Rather popular culture is seen to be founded upon popular myth, beliefs and values which are manifested in terms of objects or artifacts, popular images and icons. These manifestations relate profoundly to culture, and both affect and reflect the values of a particular society. Popular culture, at all these levels, imposes a structure on experience, and provides a way of looking at the world which is fundamentally ideological. Popular culture can then not be seen

without reference to other cultural, political and social spheres. Popular culture must be seen in its dimension as ideology, as a space that is always contested and never won, as the cultural sphere of people who are constantly undermined and marginalised by the social relations in which they participation (Williamson, in Shiach, 1989:8). As Shiach (1989:7) points out, many categories brought to, and conclusions drawn from, the analysis of popular culture reflect more about the state of the dominant culture than they reveal about popular culture.

Against this background, this article examines the nature of hegemonic masculinity and the new popular culture representations of men and masculinity.

## THE 'CRISIS OF MASCULINITY' AND THE MEDIA

A powerful and complex network of attitudes and expectations surrounds the male sex role in Western societies. Images of the ideal man saturate the mass media and pervade every aspect of human life. However, due to social, economic and political change, the traditional roles associated with the male sex role have been rendered increasingly dysfunctional and obsolete, allegedly precipitating a contemporary 'crisis of masculinity'.

According to the crisis of masculinity proponents, masculinity is in crisis due to the unreasonable and demanding pressures of the male sex role, which has been rendered increasingly dysfunctional and obsolete by social, eocnomic, historical and political change.

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 and stereotypes 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). However, the inability to conform to social expectation, and the concomitant deviancy which occurs, results in the experience of sex role strain, which is defined as "the exposure of the actor to conflicting sets of legitimized role expectations such that complete fulfilment of both is realistically impossible" (Parsons, in Komarovsky, 1976:8). The experience of sex role strain has allegedly led to a contemporary 'crisis', manifested in the declining emotional and physical health of men, increasing gender confusion and homosexuality, and changes in the traditional conceptions of the male sex role.

In short, the crisis of masculinity theory suggests that men today are increasingly 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).

While the so-called '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 in the media. Indeed, it may be argued that the so-called 'crisis of masculinity' is to a great extend a fabri-

cation of the media, and that the media have played a significant role in precipitating, or creating the alleged crisis.

A great deal of research and analysis has been done on sex role stereotypes in the mass media. This research consistently reveals the presence of traditional and stereotypical portrayals of men and women, masculinity and femininity (cf. Butler & Paisley, 1980; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Friedman, 1977; Fishwick, 1982; Barthel, 1983; Durkin, 1985; Gunter, 1986). From the proliferating research it would appear that sex role images in the mass media are quite stable, conventional and supportive of the status quo (cf. Greenberg, 1980; Zemach & Cohen, 1986, Haskell, 1987; Mellen, 1977; Rosen, 1973; Kaplan, 1983, Goffman, 1976; Livingstone & Green, 1986; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Barthel, 1988, Mankiewicz & Swerdlow, 1978; Berger, 1972; Richardson, 1988:69-81; Signorielli, 1989). However, most of this research concentrates mainly on popular culture representations of women and their effects on audiences (cf. Tuchman, 1978; Rakow, 1986). Thus, the emphasis has fallen on femininity and the female sex role, and few analyses focus specifically on male sex roles (cf. Pleck, 1981). However, as Pingree (1976:193-200) points out, while women are stereotyped in the mass media, men are equally stereotyped, but in a reverse of the way women are, that is men are seen typically in the work place, but are not portrayed as responsible for or competent at home or child care (cf. Courtney & Whipple, 1983:10). However, as the crisis of masculinity theory demonstrates, these images are increasingly at odds with reality. It would appear then, that despite the fact that society has changed substantially over the decades, media images have not (cf. Signorielli, 1989; Durkin, 1985; Dambrot et al., 1988). This has assisted in prompting the alleged crisis.

In terms of the crisis of masculinity theory, the media have in this way contributed to sex role strain, and ultimately, to the masculine crisis, by offering limited and at times demanding stereotypes of men and women, perpetuating sexism, and offering contradictory images of social reality.

## THE TRADITIONAL MALE SEX ROLE

The traditional male sex role embodies an ideal image of what it means to be a man within Western society and culture. This image does not comprise a monolithic essence, but consists of several different, and at times contradictory, images (cf. David & Brannon, 1976:11).

While the male role is demanding, it is not very specific, and is subsequently difficult to define in concrete terms. This has contributed substantially to the current confusion surrounding the male sex role, and to the apparent lack of research and study on the experience of masculinity. David and Brannon (1976:11) point out that there are several basic routes and many variations to fulfilling the minimum requirements of the male role. Many acceptable combinations and styles of masculinity have been popularised by the mass media and media personalities. While these cultural fashions and fads change over time, beneath the permutations, a small number of basic themes pervade and ultimately define the traditional male sex role. These include a fear of femininity, male inexpressiveness, homophobia, the glorification of male friendship and comraderie, the expectation of success and status, the breadwinner ethic, emotional strength and self-reliance, physical strength, and athletic and sexual prowess.

In summary, the traditional male sex role, as personally and socially defined, requires men to appear tough, objective, rational, independent, achievement-oriented, aggressive, virile and emotionally inexpressive (cf. Jourard, 1974:22; David & Brannon, 1976; Pleck & Sawyer, 1974; Brenton, 1967; Kaye, 1974; Easthope, 1986; Hoch, 1979; David & Brannon, 1976:36).

This role is clearly unrealistic, based on a stereotyped and unattainable ideal image of masculinity. In reality, real men do not, and cannot, fulfill these idealised cultural prescriptions in every respect. However, as Fasteau (1975:2) points out, while no one fully conforms to its dictates, the traditional male sex role is nevertheless the most fundamental yardstick against which men measure themselves as men. To the extent then, that men fail to meet its injunctions, even by deliberate choice, they are likely to see themselves as inadequate in some way (cf. Hoch, 1979; Kaye, 1974:3-4).

Against this background it may be argued that the traditional male sex role has contributed towards sex role strain and the 'crisis of masculinity' in that it advocates one rigid and essentially unattainable male image. The media have undoubtedly added to this by making extensive use of sex role stereotypes, and presenting a largely unrealistic, dysfunctional and obsolete image of masculinity in an attempt to legitimise and propagate patriarchal ideologies.

However, in recent years a new and alternative image of masculinity has been offered by the mass media – the image of the so-called 'New Man' – which is said to reflect the changes and adaptations in the male sex role which have become necessary due to social, economic and political change.

## THE CONTEMPORARY MALE SEX ROLE

The contemporary male sex role has emerged both as a reaction to the limiting constraints of the traditional male role, and as a consequence of the changing roles of both men and women in a postmodern society.

While the traditional male role is epitomised by the eschewing of emotionality and intellectualism, achievement orientation, vigorous physical action, strength, and sexual prowess, the new contemporary male sex role ostensibly places less emphasis on male dominance, and greater emphasis on interdependence between men and women. While the 'new' male sex role has a number of characteristics in common with the traditional role, there are two notable changes or adaptations which have come to characterise the contemporary male sex role, namely the new 'New Man' image, and the resurgence of fatherhood. These two aspects of the contemporary male sex role are discussed in the following section.

### *Images of the 'New Man'*

On the surface the new 'New Man' image seems to break with the traditional 'rules' of masculinity. In sharp contrast to the virulent machismo of the traditional or archetypal man, the 'New Man' is imaged as remarkably warm and human, even feminine.

Significantly, the new New Man is most visible in the images of the mass media and popular culture. These images offer men who are able to share their feelings and emotions more readily, and are more caring, less competitive and aggressive (Segal, 1990:26). Indeed, it may be argued that the New Man phenomenon is a creation of the media, and is promoted in magazines (i.e. Cosmopolitan and GQ), in advertising, in films and in television pro-

grammes which offer a sensual, sensitive, caring, expressive, even effeminate presentation and representation of masculinity (cf. Hearn, 1987:5; Heller, in Bernards & O'Neill, 1989:117).

A recent feature article in GQ (1991:63-93) entitled Are you man enough? asks the following questions:

> Are you man enough to change a nappy? admit you're wrong? fight for your country? be present at the birth? kiss your father? let her pay? shop for lingerie? cook quiche? mind the child? do the laundry? be a stripper? be a floral decorator or secretary? work for a woman? enjoy a platonic relationship? take the AIDS test? do your own typing?

The collection of articles that follow, accompanied by glossy images of the New Man, suggest that the New Man can in fact do all these things, and still be a 'real' man.

Another aspect of the New Man image is a preoccupation and fascination with cross-dressing. Stereotypically masculine fashions are being worn by women, while stereotypically feminine fashions are being worn by men. This is clearly reflected in the mass media, which have begun to experiment with unisex or bisexual images. This blurring of gender roles, known as the 'gender bender' phenomenon, is most often seen in pop culture (i.e. popular stars such as Boy George and Prince), and in fashion as men are urged by fashion leaders and commercial advertising to change their clothes, to use cosmetics and jewellery (cf. Hearn, 1987:5).

The New Man is interested in designer fashion wear, in experimenting with style, and unashamedly uses cosmetics. As a counter trend to the traditional image of the woman as a sex object with the male as the viewer, the new roles are being reversed, and images of a new sexualised masculinity have become popular. Male models are portrayed in passive, feminised poses, and there is a new tendency to eroticise the male form. The advent of the New Man has seen a proliferation of erotic, nude or semi-nude images of men, in part attributable to a dawning recognition of female sexuality, and also to a thriving gay economy (Chapman & Rutherford, 1988:235). As a recent article in the Pretoria News (14 November, 1990) comments,

> while women's bodies – most of them nude or semi-nude – have been endlessly portrayed in popular culture, the media are now portraying the male body with almost equal zest.

Images of men are increasingly fragmented, softened, subtly altered by reference and allusion. Chapman and Rutherford (1988:59) observe that the increasing eroticisation of men's bodies, the shifting of gay erotic images into main stream popular culture, represents a blurring of sexual differences and a loosening of masculine rigidity. However, it is significant to note that despite the abundance of homoerotic images, male genitalia are still largely absent, the phallus hidden from view and public scrutiny. According to Chapman and Rutherford (1988:236), this is one indicator of the inequalities in social relations between men and women which are replicated even in an apparently egalitarian pursuit.

The New Man has also emerged in what appears to be a new genre of films and television programmes which focus on single fathers, 'house husbands' and gender reversals, a few notable examples of which are Kramer vs Kramer (1979), Three men and a baby (1987), Three men and a little

lady (1991), Raising Arizona (1987), Three fugitives (1989), Mr Mom (1983), and television programmes such as Who's the boss, Raising Miranda, Thirty-something, Working it out, The family man, American dream, and First born (1989). Many of these films and television programmes make comedy out of the reversal of social and sexual roles, such as the incompetent male who is forced to take up a women's traditional role (cf. Slavin, 1989:11,12).

Other films which emerged during the eighties, that reflect the preoccupation with the new roles and relationships for men and women, and deal with the new conceptions of family life, parenthood, masculinity and femininity, sex and gender, include, La cage aux folles (1979), Torch song trilogy (1988), The world according to Garp (1982), Victor/Victoria (1982), Baby boom (1987), and the well-known film, Tootsie (1982) (cf. Slavin, 1989). It is ironic that what Molly Haskell (in Showalter, 1987:121) calls "the first genuinely mainstream feminist heroine of our era", namely Dustin Hoffman as Dorothy Michaels, turned out to be a man. Moreover, with the new sexual 'freedom', and the new feminised masculine image, homosexuality has been the subject of a number of films, for example, My beautiful laundrette (1985), Torch song trilogy (1988), Another country (1984), Maurice (1987), Kiss of the spider woman (1985), Personal best (1982), and the television series, Dress grey, amongst others.

As Showalter (1987:120-121) observes, this trend is symptomatic of an ambiance in which sex roles are increasingly under attack, and gender anxieties take a variety of cultural forms.

The second adaptation of the traditional male sex role is to be found in the new preoccupation with fathers and fatherhood.

***The resurgence of fatherhood***

Lewis (1986:1) suggests that of all family role changes, the most significant changes are occurring in the role of the father (cf. Russell, 1983). The media have eagerly drawn attention to some of these apparent changes in men's family roles with the production of a number of popular films and television's series on the theme of fathers and fatherhood. The first and probably most influential film was Kramer vs Kramer (1979), starring Dustin Hoffman and Meryl Streep, followed later by Mr Mom (1983). Other films and television programmes which reflect the current interest in fathering and fatherhood include Three men and a baby (1987), and its sequel, Three men and a little lady (1991), the television series The family man and Raising Miranda, amongst others. By all appearances men are becoming more interested in parenting and in family relationships.

The so-called 'New Father', is fully entrenched in the Mothercare catalogues, securely ensconced in the role of being a good father. He is imaged as soft and gentle, and most importantly, not afraid to show these feminine emotions. The new liberalised images of masculinity show men pushing baby buggies, attending births, and unashamedly cuddling babies in public. These images have been taken up and encouraged by the mass media and are growing in popularity. Fatherhood is clearly in vogue, with fathers and babies fast becoming trendy and attractive fashion accessories. The image of the New Father is splashed on the pages of popular magazines and in advertisements, with tough macho images of semi-clad men cradling (usually naked) babies. By all appearances the eighties has witnessed a change in attitudes towards children and childcare, and in the experience of fatherhood. A plethora of popular

books have been written in the past few years on the importance and value of fatherhood (cf. Chapman & Rutherford, 1988:34; Brenton, 1967:chapter 5; Lewis & Sussman, 1986; Anderson, 1983; Grad et al., 1981; Parke, 1981; Russell, 1983), and by the 1980's films like Kramer vs Kramer (1980), Ordinary people (1980), and Mr Mom (1983) were creating men "whose tame domesticity produced fathers who were more sensitive, and more nurturing, than their self-centered, ambitious wives" (Segal, 1990:29). The modern father prides himself in his knowledge and expertise insofar as childcare and housework are concerned, and is ostensibly more affectionate and intimate with his wife and children.

A number of commentators (Slavin, 1989; Modleski, 1989) however, express their doubts as to the motivation for the new interest in fathers and fatherhood. Slavin (1989), for example, suggests that the incursion by men into women's traditional territory is motivated by the male fear of loss of sexual and social potency. And in her analysis of Three men and a baby (1987), Tania Modleski (1989:62-77) comments that

> it is possible ... for men to respond to the feminist demand for their increased participation in childrearing in such a way as to make women more marginal than ever. In the final analysis, the effect ... is simply to give men more options than they already have in patriarchy ...

The traditional conception of masculinity implied both directly and indirectly that men should separate themselves from the private world of the home, and the feminising influence of women and children. The home, has thus become the exclusive domain of women, in which they frequently wield considerable power and influence. With the increasing domestication of society however, the dichotomy between the private world of the home, and the public world of work as the hallmark of masculine identity, has been responsible for virtually single handedly dethroning and unseating men, leaving them increasingly powerless.

Against this background, it is not surprising that recent years have seen an ever increasing number of men who are progressively becoming more involved with pregnancy and childbirth (cf. Hearn, 1987:198). Over the past twenty years a revolution in popular attitudes towards father' presence at the birth has taken place, and the great majority of births are now attended by fathers. Fatherhood classes have become popular, paternity leave has become an issue, and fathers are now frequently involved in ante-natal relaxation classes. Fatherhood has become fashionable, with talk of 'we're pregnant', 'pregnant father', 'expectant fathers' (etc.) (cf. Gresh, 1980; Kahan, 1978; Phillips & Anzalone, 1982). Indeed, it is now widely accepted that fathers have a 'right' to see their child being born, and as Hearn (1987:152-154) points out, some commentators have gone so far as to suggest that the fathers' presence at the birth "has improved enormously the quality of the childbirth experience for the mother" (cf. Woollett et al., 1982). Fathers it would seem are now almost indispensable. Thus, with the New Man image, and the new interest in fatherhood, it would appear that there has been a radical change in society's conception of masculinity and the traditional male sex role (cf. Hearn, 1987:153; Chapman & Rutherford, 1988).

However, the question must be asked as to whether or not this new interest in fathers and fatherhood reflects any actual change in men's roles and respon-

sibilities, and the traditional power structures of domination embodied in patriarchy. While these developments may sound very promising in challenging conventional models of masculinity, fundamental questions must be asked regarding the accuracy and relevance of the new images. The new images of men and masculinity cannot be uncritically accepted, and the question must be asked as to whether or not this new trend reflects any real change in gender roles and identities. Does the New Man image point to more significant changes in male culture, in the way men see themselves, other men, and women?

***Critique***

While some have argued that men have begun to move away from destructive traditional roles to more open, relaxed and balanced roles, and that Western society is becoming more egalitarian (cf. Goldberg, 1976), others argue that this is not the case, and that while men may have changed, they have not changed for the better (cf. Ehrenreich, 1983; Ehrenreich, 1989:123).

Instead, Ehrenreich (1983) suggests that the so-called New Man is a shallow construction of the mass media. As Brenton (1967:25) observes, while the New Man may "dry the dinner dishes night after night, help diaper the baby, cook up a barbecue on Sunday afternoon, and regularly take his family for drives or to the movie", this is no indicator of real involvement or change in the male sex role or patriarchal ideology. Moreover, Chassler (1989:130) argues that while the women's movement has made some remarkable changes in the roles and lives of women, it has failed to significantly alter the position of men. Smith and Reid (in Bernards & O'Neil, 1989:134) comment that,

> The labor market behaviour on the part of wives has done little to change the differentiation of family roles or the attitudes of most families. Husbands are still seen as the breadwinners, or at least the primary breadwinners, while wives are still responsible for the home and children even if their role set has expanded.... The changes in women's roles – particularly their employment outside the home – have not been matched by changes in men's roles.

It is apparent that, like the New Man image, the changing face of fatherhood is full of inconsistencies and contradictions. Lewis (1986:2-3) argues that the alleged changes in men's family roles are nothing more than media hype, triggered by the release of the film Kramer vs Kramer (1980), and later, Mr Mom (1983). Indeed, a number of authors suggest that men's fatherly involvement with their children is merely an illusion (cf. Segal, 1990:35; Hearn, 1987; Chapman & Rutherford, 1988; Lewis & Sussman, 1986).

In reality, there has been little actual change in the amount of time men spend with their families, or in the amount of practical work men do as fathers (Segal, 1990:33). As Hearn (1987:155) points out, in practical terms, involvement before and during birth is not the same as involvement after birth.

Ultimately, the issue of fatherhood is a political one which must be subject to question, scrutiny and opposition. The recent insistence on the participation of fathers may in fact simply reinforce hegemonic masculinity, and entrench the power which men wield over women and children, thereby reinstating men to positions of authority in the home, just at a time in history when so-

cial developments consistently undermine such authority (cf. Wood, 1986:172).

During the mid-eighties a number of social surveys were conducted which questioned the optimism of much of the recent literature on fathers. One such study suggests that men's daily household contribution had risen by a mere one minute over a ten years period, averaging about one hour and twenty minutes (Segal, 1990:34). Lewis (1986) suggests that changes in paternal behaviour are in fact slight (cf. Segal, 1990:34-35). He points out that numerous studies have shown that fathers in general are not as involved as they would like to believe they are. Thus, a significant gulf exists between beliefs and practices, between the images of the media and social reality (Lewis, 1986; Parke, 1981). In short, it may be argued that Mr Mom (1983), like the new New Man, is essentially a carefully constructed media myth (Thomas, 1989:142-146).

Moreover, there are real dangers attached to the new emphasis on fatherhood, since it merely serves the function of the old profamily rhetoric, which has functioned to shore up men's power and women's dependence (cf. Segal, 1990:50). As Brod (1987:16) comments,

> Much of the 'new fathers' childbirth involvement, usually unquestioningly accepted as a benefit to women, appears suspiciously like a couvade ritual... it remains unclear how much of the 'new fathering' ethos is an attempt to surrender or reestablish male power in the face of feminist gains for women.

Ultimately, the new ideology of contemporary masculinity, and the valorisation of fatherhood has enabled men to have the best of both worlds. More importantly however, is the fact that this ideology of fatherhood purposely ignores the recent rise of men's domestic violence, sexual abuse of children, and abuse of parental power. Jeff Hearn (1987:149) goes so far as to suggest that "the notion of fatherhood must be smashed or more precisely dropped bit by bit into the ocean" (cf. Segal, 1990:57).

It is undoubtedly true that due to the increasing participation of women in the labour force, men have been forced to spend more time on household duties and child-rearing activities than before (cf. Thomas, 1989:146; Lewis, 1986:1). However, while men may pitch in at home more often than their forefathers did, they still do not do as much as their wives. Most studies show that women do two or three times as much housework and childrearing as their husbands. And when men do play an 'equal role', they often avoid the drudgery of housework.

Mort (in Chapman & Rutherford, 1988:22) suggests that in the new images, many of the traditional codes are still in place, and that the so-called New Man is little more than a "tired rerun of male power – another stylish tune on an old theme". Rowena Chapman (1988:235) concludes that the New Man represents not so much a rebellion against the traditional male role, but an adaptation in masculinity. "Men change but only in order to hold on to power, not to relinquish it" (Chapman & Rutherford, 1988:235). She argues that while the combination of feminism and social change may have produced a fragmentation in male identity by questioning its assumptions, the effect of the emergence of the New Man has been to reinforce the existing power structure, by producing a hybrid masculinity which is better able and more suited to retain control. Indeed, one important feature of patriarchy is its resilience, its ability to mutate in order to

survive, undermining threats to its symbolic order by incorporating their critique, and adjusting its ideology (cf. Chapman, 1988:235). The mass media and gender stereotypes play a dominant role in the process of perpetuating dominant ideologies, and are the channels by which power replicates itself.

In his analysis of the popular television series, Thirty-something, Robert Hanke (1990:231) suggests that the New Man image merely articulates a negotiated version of hegemonic masculinty that remains complicit with dominant (masculinist) ideology by reinforcing the status quo and fatherhood, and privileging hetereosexualism. As Hanke (1990:233) points out, one way in which various 'crises' and conflicts in gender relations may be handled and defused is through the construction of a social definition of masculinity that is more open to the work of maintaining interpersonal relationships, and more accommodating of traditionally feminine connotations and values (i.e. sensitive, nurturing, emotionally expressive, etc.). The so-called New Man represents merely an adaptation of hegemonic masculinity which currently broadens what it means to be a man. As Brittan (1987:187) observes, hegemonic masculinity is able to defuse crises in the gender order by using counter and oppositional discourses for its own purposes. Thus, the process of masculine hegemony may well entail the representation of a "new view of manhood" in order to accommodate women's interests, desires, and pleasures within the context of post-industrial capitalism (Hanke, 1990:236). Hegemonic masculinity works through a variety of popular culture images of men, including images of soft, nonviolent, expressive and nurturing men in order to win the consent of male and female viewers, who, as social agents, may be situated very differently (cf. Fiske, 1987a; 1987b). The New Man image therefore secures the dominance of some men (and the subordination of women) within the sex/gender system.

Hegemonic masculinity may then work through the apparent inversion of differences, as it does in popular culture expressions of antifeminist ideology. As Ehrenreich (1983:163) points out, "New Right ideology inverts the traditional imagery of gender roles: men are 'passive', 'fragile'; while women are 'active' and 'can do everything'." Moreover, hegemonic masculinity can work through the leveling of some gender differences, by constructing 'feminised' men who are more open to domestic concerns and interpersonal relationships. Questions of power and real gender inequities are subsequently glossed over, if not totally ignored (cf. Hanke, 1990:245).

Ultimately, the key question is not whether such a version of masculinity is more "modern" or less "sexist" than traditional conceptions of the male role, but how masculinity is defined and redefined in order to remain hegemonic (Hanke, 1990:233; Brittan, 1987). Put simply, hegemonic masculinity changes in order to remain hegemonic (Hanke, 1990:245).

In short, these modifications of hegemonic masculinity may represent some shift in the cultural meanings of masculinity without an accompanying shift in social structural arrangements, thereby recuperating patriarchal ideology by making it more adaptable to contemporary social conditions and more able to accommodate counter-hegemonic forces, such as liberal feminist ideology and gay/lesbian politics. Within this context, it may be argued that the oppositional gender ideology of liberal feminism has been successfully absorbed, contained and rearticulated.

Thus, as Hanke (1990:245) and Ebert (1988) advice, scholars seeking to advance the critical study of gender and the media should be careful to avoid falling prey to the progressive fallacy in which any changes in images of male and female characters are taken as the displacement of dominant gender ideologies. Ultimately, significant social change in the direction of gender equality will require more than the 'new' view of manhood offered by the mass media.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while it is probably true to say that the new images represent an attempt to resolve some of the obvious contradictions of the traditional male sex role – the 'macho man', and to recognise and make peace with the feminine within the self, this does not imply that a significant proportion of men have become more feminised, nor that the majority of men accept the new images, and implied roles (cf. Chapman, 1988:227). While the emerging social ideals of the New Man and the New Father reflected in the media may well help increase motivation for change, encouraging men to become more actively involved in parenting responsibilities, and more expressive and open in their relationships, this does not necessarily reflect any real and substantial change in the structure and ideology of hegemonic masculinity, or the patriarchal structure of Western societies.

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