

MASCULINITY IN CRISIS ?

**A study on the Threat to Masculine Identities through
Unemployment**

By

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ABSTRACT

The formation of identities within contemporary society is a recent and key focus of postmodernist theorising and empirical research. Beck suggests that a fragmentation in traditional institutions of reproduction like the family and work has obscured social roles. The study of men and masculinities has been one of the most vigorous in contemporary postmodernist scholarship as writers have begun to explore the diversity of men's experiences, conceptions of masculinities and their power relations. Where traditional enactments of masculine identities have been perceived as unproblematic, authors began to suggest that the social roles within which men were typecast were in desperate need of overhaul. Masculinity became a problematic construct and needed to be deconstructed and re-evaluated. With the change in gender roles, especially women's increased participation in the workforce, traditional social roles were altered. My interest lies in examining how these alterations affected men's perception of themselves in society.

Men have long been typecast in instrumental economically derived positions wherein masculinity, male identity and male performance all centre on work. In light of this alleged centrality of employment and occupational status in the lives of men, unemployment might be seen as a providing a situation where masculinity is under challenge. Also, from the arena of the public worksphere comes the concept of a sense of place. No longer finding a location in a place of work through the context of employment and often feeling out of place at home in the private sphere, the unemployed male may have a sense of placelessness. This thesis

investigates an alternative sense of place available to unemployed men
and examines its effects on re-affirming alternative masculine identities.

Introduction

“Masculinity to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.” (Connell 1995)

In the last two decades, the concept of masculinity and attempts at its definition has come under much scrutiny and re-evaluation (Connell 1995; Kimmel 1987; Morgan 1992). Challenges to masculinity have come from a number of different social and economic forces including rationalisation of the work force, the women’s movement and women’s entry to the worksphere and also unemployment. Arising from these challenges came a certain crisis of masculinity where traditional and previously unproblematic notions of masculinity were now being seen as problematic. The concrete structure of traditional masculine identity was being shaken. In the 1970’s both the Feminist and Gay Movements suggested that the traditional enactments of masculinity were in desperate need of overhaul.

Modern theorists no longer speak of masculinity in the singular, but of masculinities in the plural sense. Connell suggests that a single notion of masculinity and a ‘male role’ miss the complexities within masculinity and the multiple forms of masculinity (Connell 1995:72). Brittan (1989) further reiterates this view when he suggests that masculinities needs to be conceptualised in relation to their class, sexual and ethnic locations. Therefore one needed to theorise masculinity in terms of multiple masculinities and the multiple dimensions they embody.

Traditional discourses of masculinity construct the male as the member of the household who goes out and makes a living (Hood, 1996). Paid employment therefore is likely to be an important anchor for traditional masculine identities (Morgan, 1992). Through the socialisation of gender roles, workplaces seem to be the crucibles from which male identities are forged or through which they are given shape and meaning (Morgan 1992).

In light of the alleged centrality of employment and occupational status in the lives of men, unemployment on the other hand may be seen as a paradigmatic example of masculinity under challenge. Unemployment at least potentially provides a challenge to traditional masculine identities (Morgan, 1992). The impact of unemployment would seem to be a fruitful area for the exploration of masculinities, for it is here, one might assume that there is a major assault on one of the most fundamental pillars of male identity, that of employment and occupation. In this thesis, I wish to examine responses by men to this much theorised masculinity crisis and in particular to examine the challenge to masculinity and masculine identity arising from a situation of unemployment.

From the arena of the worksphere comes the concept of a sense of space. Having a job does not just refer to being involved in a set of social and economic relations, or the income received, it also has to do with being in a certain place for a fixed period of time, where a sense of place is constructed (Morgan, 1992). Hood found that researchers tended to

study men almost exclusively in their more public dimension (1993:1). One of the most common patterns of discourses in the construction of masculine identities is that of the public masculinity, involved in the public sphere. No longer finding a location in a place of work, therefore removed from the public space that they have occupied due to unemployment and often feeling out of place at home in the private sphere. The unemployed male was often left with a sense of placelessness (Morgan 1992). It is this notion of placelessness that I also wish to examine in my thesis as it represents a further aspect of the threat that unemployment presents to the traditional male identity. In conjunction with this, I wish to examine an alternative sense of space open to the men in my study. This alternative space is a Men's Centre in Dublin. Established in 1992, the Centre was set up to address some of the issues facing men in the area in the 1990's. It was the first Centre of its kind in this country. It is not an unemployment centre but a centre for men, both employed and unemployed, to come together and discuss issues that affect them. These issues include isolation, depression and unemployment, as well as a "sense of men feeling increasingly lost and redundant"(Men's Centre Fact Sheet). I wish to examine how this Centre affects and influences the lives of the men in my study in their assertion of their masculinity and identity.

In Chapter One, I wish to look at the concept of gender within sociology and specifically, I wish to examine how the dual concepts of masculinity and femininity have been developed in sociological thought. From the

1900's through to the 1950's, sociobiologists proposed that any cognitive or temporal differences between men and women were attributed to their biological sex. This theory was later challenged by an approach, which took cognisance of the role of socialisation and introduced the concept of "social roles". Chapter one will deal with changing sociological thought on gender roles from the 1900's to the 1950's and from the 1960's onwards. I feel that it is important to provide an understanding of how gender definitions and roles have changed and become redefined. This chapter will also examine how modern theorists such as Connell, Kimmel and indeed Morgan criticise the concept of social roles.

In Chapter Two I wish to examine the debate on the crisis of masculinity in modern Western society. I wish to look at precipitating factors: which include the Feminist and Gay movements as well as social and economic changes in society. The works of Kimmel, Connell and Segal have examined these responses and I wish to discuss their contribution to the debate on this masculinity crisis. The responses by men to these factors are quite relevant to my research and deserve examination.

Chapter Three deals with the particular threat to masculinity through unemployment. Theorists such as Morgan suggest that paid work is likely to be an important anchor for traditional masculine identities (Morgan 1992). Henceforth unemployment can at least potentially provide a challenge to traditional masculine identities. In light of the centrality of employment and the positive correlation between work and

male self-identity, it is also important to examine the evidence of any negative correlation between these two. Some theorists argue that while men need to work to survive, work may also destroy them (Hodston 1984). I also wish to discuss the idea of place and placelessness in relation to employment and unemployment respectively.

In Chapter Four, I will outline the methodology that I employed in this primary research, which was that of a qualitative kind. I will outline the reasons why I felt that this method of research was most appropriate to my study and also why I chose not to employ other methods such as quantitative research. This research was concerned with men's experiences of unemployment and its adverse and positive effects on their masculinity. In this chapter I will also present my research results.

Chapter five provides an analysis of these findings with the ideas and concepts discussed in chapters two and three in particular. Ultimately this chapter reveals how the men that I interviewed dealt with or understood challenges to their masculinity. It deals with how they perceived themselves as men in their unemployed status and also how the Centre that they frequented helped in reaffirming their sense of masculinity at a point when many theorists such as Kimmel, Connell and Morgan would postulate that their masculinity was indeed in crisis.

Chapter Six provides a synopsis of the major findings and evaluations of the research.

In conclusion, I feel it is important to examine the 'crisis of masculinity'.
To gain an understanding of this one must refer back to the history of the
various constructions and indeed deconstructions of masculinity.

Chapter One Gender and Sociology

“Does biology determine destiny and are women so very different in every respect; intellectually, emotionally and in terms of their social relationships and career? Alternatively, are they similar creatures falsely presumed to be ideally biologically equipped for a variety of non-interchangeable sex-linked roles?”

(Walczak, quoted in Segal 1990:61)

There are two main ways in which theorists have traditionally attempted to explain gender; through sociobiology and social constructionism. *Gender can be defined as “the socially learned behaviour and expectations that are associated with the two sexes”* (Anderson, 1993: 310). A critical examination of these theories provides a good backdrop upon which to examine recent approaches towards the construction of masculinity within gender roles.

Sociobiological Theory

From the 1900's through to the 1950's, any cognitive or temperamental differences between men and women were attributed to their biological sex. Sex refers to the biological identity of the person signifying the fact that one is either male or female. The most consistently reported findings suggested that women were gifted in verbal skills and men in spatial skills, with men's greater aggressiveness and dominant behaviour being stressed. These differences were accredited to biology and nature. This consensus was compatible then with the continued attempts by many

psychologists to explain men's dominance as a sex in terms of biology, despite the flimsy and disputed nature of their empirical evidence. One recent attempt was made by Moir and Jessel in their 1989 book called Brainsex, which purportedly demonstrates that men and women behave differently because their brains are different. 'Scientific evidence' was used to support the inevitability of men's dominance and women's subordination.

From the sociobiological theory, a hegemonic concept of masculine identity was formed i.e. that of dominance and greater aggressiveness. The object of referring back to these traditional concepts of differences is to provide a context in which sociological definitions of masculinity can be understood. Scientific doctrine in relation to sex differences helped resist women's emancipation. For instance, women's exclusion from universities was justified by the claim that the feminine mind was too delicately poised to handle the rigors of academic work (Connell 1995). It was felt that the resulting mental disturbance would be bad for their capacities to be good wives and mothers. Thus insisting on the difference between men and women as biological or natural helped to reinforce the view that this was the natural order of events. The message was that biology was natural and unchangeable and as gender is biologically caused, inequalities are an inevitable and unavoidable feature of human existence.

According to Connell, around the mid-Century, research concerning sex differences proposed by sociobiologists conflicted with a concept that

seemed to explain its subject matter in a more up to date way; 'the concept of social roles'. (Connell 1995:22).

Social Constructionist - Social Role Theory

Gender is an achieved status, which is a function of socialisation and has social, cultural and psychological components. As a result of direct and indirect experiences, formal and informal learning we develop images conceptions, perceptions and the like of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, people generally behave, hold attitudes and feel the way society says that a male does so, he is called masculine and when a female does so, she is called feminine.

(Walum1984:5 quoted in Franklin 1984)

The assumption underlying social role theory is that social expectations, rules or norms attached to a person's position in society will usually force individuals to positively or negatively conform to them. From this social role theory derived the term "sex roles" which were seen as the cultural elaboration of biological sex differences. Consequently, social role theory helped in the construction of the traits and characteristics of both masculinity and femininity. It helped reinforce the notion of masculinity and femininity as two opposing types of personality, located on either end of a singular bi-polar dimension. In essence, what was masculine was everything femininity was not. Connell suggests that in a culture that does not treat women and men as bearers of polarised character traits at least in principle does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European culture (1995:68).

The masculine role was seen by Brannon (1976), a sex role theorist, as consisting of four basic clusters which he argues are oppressive to women and harmful to men.

- “no sissy stuff” - the avoidance of all feminine behaviour and traits
- “the big wheel” - the acquisition of success, status and bread-winning competence
- “the sturdy oak” - strength, confidence and independence
- “give him hell” - aggression, violence and daring behaviour

(Quoted in Mac An Ghail, 1996:101)

The above traits were encouraged in boys as signs of masculinity and manliness. Such behavior was rewarded whereas deviation from this often produced ostracisation and marginalisation. Thus masculinity and femininity were quite easily interpreted as internalized sex roles, the product of social learning or socialisation. Sociologists use the term ‘socialisation’ to refer to the process by which gender expectations in society are learned. There are many ways in society from which males and females are socialised in to particular roles. Fagot’s 1981 research indicated that boys receive negative feedback from peers when they exhibit feminine behaviour (in Franklin 1984:38). Boys were more likely than female children to be encouraged in independence, adventure, risk taking and so on. He felt it was possible to argue that peer group influence even at an early age may be responsible for most sex-role internalisation especially for males (ibid:38). Vitotow marks out the Ten Commandments for manhood, which exemplify the point made by Brannon in the previous page:

- Thou shalt not be weak, nor have a weak God before you.
- Thou shalt not fail thyself, nor fail as thy father before thee
- Thou shalt not keep holy any day that denies thy work
- Thou shalt not love in ways that are intimate and sharing
- Thou shalt not cry, complain or feel lonely
- Thou shalt not commit public anger
- Thou shalt not be uncertain or ambivalent
- Thou shalt not be dependent
- Thou shalt not acknowledge thy depth of thy limitations
- Thou shalt do unto other men before they do unto you.

Vittitow 1981 (quoted in Franklin 1984:121)

According to Connell the first generation of sex-role theorists assumed that when roles were well defined, socialisation went ahead harmoniously and sex-role learning was basically a good thing (Connell 1995:22). It was felt that internalised sex roles contributed to social stability and the performance of necessary social functions. According to sex-role theorists to be a man was to play a certain role. Masculinity represented just a set of lines and stage directions which males have to learn to perform.

Limitations of Sex-Role Theories

The sex role model has come under heavy criticism in the past two decades for being ahistorical, psychologically reductionist and apolitical.

(Kimmel 1987:12). Kimmel believes that this sex-role paradigm posits a historically invariant model, a kind of static sex-role container into which all biological males and females are forced to fit. He further argues that the paradigm ignored the extent to which conceptions of masculinity and femininity and the content of the male and female were relational. Kimmel suggested that the sex-role paradigm was based upon the traits associated with the role, which he saw as a kind of laundry list of behavioural characteristics rather than their enactments. As the paradigm rested on an individual psychological model the sex-role model cannot adequately grasp shifting structural possibilities of the definition of gender. Consequently, this made sex-roles not only static but posited an ideal configuration that according to Kimmel, bore little if any relation to the ways in which sex-roles are enacted in everyday life.

A criticism which both Kimmel and Connell levied against this sex-role theory was that it minimized the extent to which gender relations were based on power. Not only do men as a group exert power over women as a group, but the historically derived definitions of masculinity and femininity reproduce those power relations. Henceforth, masculinity becomes associated with those traits that imply mastery and authority, femininity with those traits that suggest passivity and subordination. Both theorists felt that by undervaluing the historical and social bases for gender relations, then the sex-role paradigm reproduces the very problems it seeks to understand. (Kimmel1987: 13) Connell feels that it is quite telling that discussions of the 'male sex-role' has mostly ignored

gay men and has had little to say about race and ethnicity. He believes that this sex-role theory has a fundamental difficulty in grasping issues of power. (Connell 1995:27) Within this theory is the basic tendency to understand men and women' position as complementary - a part made explicit by Parson's theory of the instrumental (masculine) and expressive (feminine) orientations.

One of the most influential writers on the male sex-role, social psychologist Joseph Pleck, criticised the assumption that if one adopted the male sex role it automatically promoted psychological adjustment. Instead, Pleck proposed a sex-role which separated the role from the self and which was also fluctuating. Pleck rejects the notion that sex-role internalisation is especially difficult for boys, claiming instead that men's problems are "not due to insecure sex-role identities but to the constraining inconsistent and unrealistic or dysfunctional nature of the sex-role expectations themselves". (quoted in Segal 1990:68). Connell praises Pleck's research and suggests that it effectively demonstrated how much sex roles are taken for granted by functionalist sex role discourse and how little empirical evidence there is to support them.

The sex-role socialisation process tended to reproduce and further divide the concepts of masculinity and femininity by its emphasis on differences not similarities. The whole notion of sex roles and sex-role stereotyping although superficially appealing has been the object of convincing criticism. Segal suggests that it assumes a consistent and uniformed set

of social expectations, positing a non-existent homogeneity to social life (Segal 1990:69). Role theory exaggerates the degree to which people live by expected gender roles, however it must be stressed that even with this exaggeration the very fact that gender roles exist, means that they are quite influential. Research on gender roles has however tended to concentrated primarily on white, heterosexual, middle-class persons.

Masculinity - A Social Construction

Within the framework of social roles, concepts of masculinity and femininity were fairly typecast. The masculine role outlined by Brannon on page eleven were widely accepted as social norms from which masculine identities were forged. The masculine identity tended to be studied by social science researchers almost exclusively in their public dimensions with women's within the private domestic sphere.

“The concept of sex role identity prevents individuals who violate the traditional role for their sex from challenging it; instead they feel personally inadequate and insecure”.

(Pleck, 1981).

With social norms set for masculine behaviours, to deviate from such norms would have meant a sense of inadequacy. Normative sex role theory thus helped to dampen social change. If any change were to be enacted, it would hardly have come from the dominant gender. Being typecast in a stifling stereotypical role did not mean conformity yet it also yielded what Connell refers to as the ‘patriarchal dividend’. Men’s

dominant position in the gender order has had a material pay-off. Though Connell suggest that in general men gain form this patriarchal dividend, specific groups of men gain very little. He cites working class youths economically dispossessed by structural unemployment, as gaining no economic advantage at all over women in their communities. Moreover, for Connell the concept of male role has severe weaknesses, both scientific and practical. It misses the complexities within masculinity and the multiple forms of masculinity and offers very limited strategies of change.

A genre of criticism of the male role was created in the 1970's. Most of the critics believed that masculinity was in crisis and that the crisis itself would drive forward change. The conventional story of how masculinities were made came under criticism. This conventional was seen as taking one form of masculinity to define masculinity in general. Secondly, it took gender as a social mould, whose mark was imprinted on the child, "turning out masculine personalities from the conveyer belt like chocolate frogs"(Connell 1995). According to Connell this woefully underestimated the energy activity and agency of the person. Thus mistaking gender hegemony for gender totalitarianism. He suggested that contrasting evidence show that hegemonic masculinities are produced alongside and in relation to other masculinities.

Chapter 2 The Masculinity Crisis

“Isn’t it time we destroyed the macho ethic?.....
Where has it gotten us in all these thousands of years?
Are we still going to have to be clubbing each other to death?.....
Do I still have to arm wrestle you to have a relationship with you as
another male?..
Do I have to seduce her – just because she’s female?
Can we not have a relationship on some other level?
I don’t want to go through life pretending to be James Dean or Marlon
Brando.

John Lennon, 1980.

Traditional forms of masculine identity came under attack from many corners in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Two of the main instigators of this criticism were the Women’s Movement and Gay Rights activists. The construction of traditional masculinity was viewed as a problematic social construction, which needed to be deconstructed and rethought. The social roles in which men had been typecast were seen to be in desperate need of overhaul. The feminist critique of masculinity evolved around the problematic nature of patriarchy and the subordination of women. In a rather different way the rise of the Gay Movement revealed that previously accepted notions of sexuality and gender were not natural. Consequently both of the movements led to a recognition that the dominant discourses pertaining to masculinity were themselves not merely natural or unchangeable.

The Feminist Critique of Masculinity

“One of the central difficulties in attempting to write about masculinity is that, as a topic it did not really exist until feminists began to attack the presuppositions of traditional, political and social theory”.

(Brittan) 1989:78)

Through the Feminist Movement the traditional enactments of masculinity came under severe criticism. Feminism provided the context through which gender relations of power could be re-examined and deconstructed. The movement helped to highlight the importance of gender divisions as a major way of ordering or structuring social relationships and led to a recognition of the imbalances of power in the relationships between men and women. Henceforth, the feminist critique centered on a critique of the power relations of gender. Jane Flax suggests that the greatest advance in feminist theory is that the existence of gender relations has been problematised, so that gender can no longer be treated as a simple natural fact (Flax 1987:627). It was felt that women has been rendered powerless by the uneven power relations which had typecast men in the public sphere and women predominately in the private sphere. One of the structures of the gender regime that Connell refers to is one that concerns divisions of labour. Feminism in the 1970's argued that in childcare, women's roles were basic to the sexual division of labor and the root cause of men's overall power over women. Thus giving men greater freedom to participate in economic, cultural and political activity. The Feminist Movement therefore sought a redrawing of gender relations where power was equally accessed by

both genders. If, as Segal argues, men's power is the primary determinant of masculinities then the Feminist Movement in asserting their demand for the equality of power relations posed a large threat to its legitimacy.

Many male theorists have criticised the Feminist Movement for its over emphasis on power relations. From Goldberg's Surviving The Myth of Masculine Privilege(1990) to Farrell's The Myth of Male Power(1993) the idea of male powerlessness is central. They argue that the reality of the male role pushed men into conflicting directions and oppressive roles thus rendering them powerless. Men too were victimized by roles to which they as men were forced to adhere. In Farrell's previous work The Liberated Man (1985) he offered a vigorous critique of the masculine value system which he felt trapped men into the 'traditional male role'. A decade later in his book The Male Myth of Power (1994) Farrell redefined power by shifting it from the public domain, to that of the private inner world of emotion. His argument now centers on the amount of attention given to women's experience of powerlessness, feeling it is too much and that it is now time to give attention to men's experience of this. His consensus was that men did not feel emotionally in control of their lives therefore they lacked power. Farrell also argues that "feminism articulated only the shadow side of men and only the light side of women". (Farrell 1993:4). He commented that feminism argued that God might be a she but never argued that the devil might be one as well!

For theorists like Goldberg and Farrell, feminism articulated the need for a change in gender relations but had looked at it from a very one-dimensional viewpoint. In their critique of power relations, they had failed to take into account that men too felt victimised. For many men, enacting this traditional masculine identity was self-destructive. Feminism was seen to offer a rather simplistic syllogism that began with the power of the male gender and the oppression of the female gender and concluded that women were damaged and men were privileged. Horricks suggests that the emphasis on male dominance in public areas of life “have tended to obscure the emotional poverty of everyday life” (Horricks 1994:26). His main thesis is that men and women demarcate out different zones of influence in life, where one predominates and where the other is deprived. Consequently, men are economically and politically powerful and women are emotionally powerful. Franklin Clyde in his book The Changing Definition of Masculinity (1984) offers a similar view when he states that men were perceived simply to have power advantages over women with most attention focusing on the victimisation of women and little devoted to the disadvantage of the male- sex role. (Clyde 1984:1). Pleck’s 1974/1995 article entitled Men’s Power over Women and Other Men in Society attempts to come to grips with the paradoxical reality of the social construction of masculinity. He states that men hold institutional power in patriarchal societies, but most men don’t feel very powerful (quoted in Messner 1997:37). Pleck argued that the masculine social norm that was necessary for men to compete

and win in public life was emotionally and psychologically impoverished, leading men to feel that women had 'expressive power' over them.

From a feminist perspective, it could be argued that even in consideration of this, in society economic power outstrips the emotional and is more beneficial. This idea concurs with Marxist ideology that the economic base of society ultimately determines the cultural superstructure. Connell would also tend to disagree with Goldberg and Farrell. He suggests that men as a group and heterosexual men in particular are not oppressed or disadvantaged as hegemonic masculinity is not a stigmatised identity as western culture honours it. He goes on to state that men's dominant position in the gender order has a material pay-off, which he describes as the 'patriarchal dividend'. However, he does believe that though men in general gain from this dividend, specific groups of men gain very little. He cites that working-class youths economically disposed to structured unemployment may not gain any economic advantage over women in their communities. Messner in his book Politics of Masculinities (1997) refers to what Connell calls the patriarchal dividend as 'institutional privileges', which he believes white heterosexual middle-class men take for granted in society (Messner 1997:4). He suggests that just by being a man naturally afforded greater opportunities. He believes that in the current historical moment, men's institutional privileges still persist by and large but can no longer be entirely taken for granted and cites the Women's Movement as the biggest challenge to it. Middleton, also

rejects the argument used by Farrell and Goldberg that men too are oppressed and insists that men do still oppress women (Middleton 1992:149). He cites Connell's argument that it is wrong to say that men as a whole are equally oppressed adding that the claim is demonstrably false. For Middleton men are the beneficiaries of an oppressive system.

At this point it is important to return to both Connell's (1995) and Brittan's (1989) point in regard to multiple masculinities. Different masculinities possess differential access to power practices of power and effects of power. Henceforth, power is differentiated so that particular styles of masculinity become ascendant or dominant in certain situations. Feminist studies of men and work and workplaces revealed how most organisations were saturated with masculine values (Burton 1991). Feminist analysis criticized the centrality of the masculine model, of lifetime, fulltime and continuous employment. These studies have emphasised the importance of men's continued domination in power relations in contemporary organisations. It is important here to highlight that within these power relations some forms of masculinities are also subordinated in terms of class. This theme is developed by Collinson who argues that within organisational conditions that treat manual workers as second class citizens these men may tend to redefine their sense of self-dignity and respect within the counterculture (Collinson 1998:68).

This idea of subordinated masculinity was missing from the feminist critique of traditional masculine identities, who can be criticised for their condemnation of men's dominance in the public sphere. All men were lumped together as the perpetrators of dominance in gender relations. This clearly is not the case. Feminist theory in addressing the problems of men throughout its development had its major emphasis on women's experience of male domination rather than a theorization of men and masculinity as a whole.

For some men the critiques of dominant discourses of masculinities contested by both the Feminist and Gay rights groups prompted a terrified retreat to traditional discourses. For others it inspired a serious re-evaluation of traditional worldviews, offering support for the social political and economic struggles of women and gay men. Masculinity had become a problematic gender constraint. Masculinity now needed to be treated not as a normative referral against which standards were assessed but as a problematic gender constraint. It is important to look at the different responses by men to both the feminist and gay critique of traditional forms of masculinity as it shows how masculine identities were re-evaluated which is important for my research discussion. As I am examining how men reacted, when faced with a perceived challenge to their masculinity in their situation of unemployment. I feel it is important to look at the literature surrounding men in general and their responses to threats to the masculine norm before I specifically look at the situation of unemployment.

Masculinity Politics

Kimball approaches the crisis or threat to masculinity from a feminist perspective. He puts forward the notion that although today men are developing a wider repertoire of emotions, seeking to express their feelings more deeply with a wider range of women and men, yet violence against women and homophobia both seem to be increasing. He believes that little attention has been paid specifically to men and masculinity as a social scientific problematic (Kimmel 1987:122 in Brod). His perspective on the changing face of masculinity is that new role models for men have not replaced older ones, but have grown alongside them, creating a dramatic tension between ambitious breadwinner and compassionate father, between macho seducer and loving companion (Kimmel 1987:7). Kimmel's own empirical research on men's response to feminism found that a lot of men especially profeminist men, believed that the solution to the crisis of masculinity lay in embracing the feminist model of social construction, rejecting the inadequacy of the male sex role (Kimmel14). His research suggests that although femininity and masculinity are socially constructed within a historical context of gender relations, definitions of masculinity are historically reactive to changing definitions of femininity, as well as changing social and economic situations. He cites three main responses to the crisis of masculinity, that of the antifeminist, pro male and pro feminist.

I reckon I got to light
Out of this territory
Ahead of the rest
Because Aunt Sally
She's going to adopt me
And civilise me and I can't stand it.
Huck Finn

The **antifeminist** trajectory sought to return women to the private domestic sphere. Men had benefited from the sex-role socialisation model, which Connell refers to as the patriarchal dividend. When these roles were contested, the structure of gender power and relations became unstable and inevitably became a threat to hegemonic masculinity. Thus, the antifeminist perspective was that masculinity was in crisis. This however was due to the 'other' and the solution was a re-establishment of the perceived erosion of male dominance. Like Huck Finn civilisation by Aunt Sally was not a path men wanted to take.

The **pro-male** response to the structural changes of masculinity and gender politics, sought to ignore women's increased public participation and sought to reassert masculinity through male only organisations from which women were excluded for example, athletic organisations. This response unlike the antifeminist did not look for the reinstatement of the gender roles. Yet in a similar vein wished to reassert their identities through the masculine norm of male behaviour. This response is strongly asserted by Robert Bly who felt that men were unjustly accused by feminism, and should not accept the blame but instead should acknowledge and celebrate their differences from women. Bly's book

Iron John (1990) emphasised a need for initiation among men to encounter what he called 'the hairy man'; the deep masculinity within themselves, thought to have been lost or damaged in recent change. Bly's ideology of masculinity loosely shared the Jungian conception of masculinity as an emotional system rooted in archetypes. Criticisms of his work centre on blind spots towards race, sexuality, cultural differences and class (Connell 1995:209).

While both the previous responses reacted to the changes in gender roles by reasserting the masculine norm they did so from different perspectives. Masculinity was not problemised or deconstructed. The threat had come from the other, and the solution in the case of the former was to blame the feminist movement, the latter ignoring it.

However, the **profeminist** response was to embrace the feminist model of social reconstruction. Masculinity was viewed as a problematic gender construct, which needed to be deconstructed and critically evaluated. Segal reiterates this view in her suggestion that in response to feminism and the Women's Movement, men became envious of the togetherness it was felt men lacked (Segal 1990). This subsequently saw the formation of men's groups that operated under the idea that their main enemy was conventional masculinity. It was perceived as a social role into which men were forced.

For Connell the way forward was for men to tackle issues that unite men rather than divide them. A new gender politics for men he suggests

means new styles of thinking, including a willingness to be uncertain, an openness to new experiences and new ways of conveying this. He offers a picture, which has been criticised for being too naïve by some theorists, of when pictures of men with guns are rare and pictures of men with push-chairs are common. Connell believes that, with the growth in world feminism and the stabilization of new forms of sexuality, we are now witnessing new forms of hegemonic masculinity. He defines as 'masculine politics' the mobilizations and struggles where the meaning of gender relations is at issue (Connell 1990:207). Connell suggests that in the industrialised world, four kinds of masculinity politics have emerged. One of these is The Men's Movement and I wish to examine it as I feel it is quite important. Some of its themes and issues correlate with what the Men's Centre in this study is trying to achieve in a smaller and somewhat different way.

The Men's Movement is the best known form of gender politics at present.. Issues pertaining to masculinity and the male role raised by the feminist and gay movements were re-interpreted as therapeutic issues. While the feminist movement grew out of a desire for gain the men's movement grew out of a sense of loss. During the 1970s there was a small boom in workshops and therapy groups concerning themselves with men and feminism, male sexuality, male liberation and men's issues. Connell sees this response at first being close to feminism, similar to that of Kimmel's pro-feminist response. A critical attitude was taken to the traditional male role. The rationale for therapy was that men needed

therapists to break out of the traditional male role and become more sensitive and expressive. Men's Centres set up in America in the 1970's claimed they wanted freedom from what they perceived to be a highly restrictive sex-role. The men's movement emerged out of the recognition that their power in society as men not only oppressed women but also imprisoned men in a deadening masculinity, which crippled all relationships with each other, with women, and with themselves.

This notion was further expanded on by Naifeh and Smith (1987) who suggested that men were effectively defined as a social group from which only a limited form of interactions were valid within the public sphere. "Many men are still imprisoned in emotional isolation living out repressive masculine roles. Even though many men today have a clearer awareness of their need for emotional fulfillment, the essence of what it means to "be a man" has changed surprisingly little. They felt that the pillars of manliness continue to be strength, invulnerability and a competitive edge".(Naifeh and Smith 1987 in Middleton 1992:120). They felt that for many men even after years of changing stereotypes, emotional honesty and openness were still among the sacrifices they must make to manhood.

Critique of The Men's Movement

“What the men's liberation movements really amount to is just more of the same old male supremacist complaint that women are really nags and bitches – the power behind the throne – henpecking their men into subservience. The new twist is their attack, sometimes subtle and sometimes not, on the women's liberation movement they usually claim to support”.

Carol Hanisel 1975 (quoted in Messner 1997:36)

A feminist writer Bonni Goldberg in her article "A Second Look"(1996) believes that men were using their movement to regroup and shut women out by pointing to them as the source of their weakness, thus conquering their feeling of dependency on women. While she believes that some men are using the movement to reclaim the throne, not all are. Some instead are gathering together in an attempt to trust each other and to relate outside of the structure of a pecking order, to become better fathers, better husbands and above all better men. Most of the feminist critique of the Men's Movement was that the ideals about men and masculinity had largely failed to address their collusion with power and oppression. In expressing their need to break out of the traditional male role and escape restrictive masculine norms, the issues of power were left unaddressed. For some men the movements were a voice for a criticism of the male social role which had cast men's role as 'instrumental' and women's as 'expressive', which men felt made them equally oppressed as women. In this usage the concept of oppression was depoliticised and seemed only to refer to a general condition faced by everyone in a sexist

society. Henceforth, in these men's talk of oppression in conjunction with women's, it allowed them to sidestep the politicised language of gender relations in favour of a falsely symmetrical call for women and men's liberation from oppressive sex roles. Moreover, men's liberationists tended to give equal analytical weight to the 'costs' and to the 'privileges' attached to the traditional male and the traditional female roles. Middleton believes that men's power has proved extremely resistant to self-analysis within the movement (Middleton 1992:131). He argues that the significance of the movement is that a few men raised their levels of self-consciousness regarding the male sex-role obligations and expectations without due regard for individual differences among males (ibid). One of the obvious criticisms arising from this is that the movement did not take class or race into consideration. Messner validates this point in his account of his attendance in America at one of the first National Conferences on Men and Masculinity in the 1980's. Men were asked to renounce masculinity and fight for a just and egalitarian world. Preceding this speech he speaks of a black man's angry retort at this idea. He announced that white society had not allowed him any male privileges and felt that he had never been allowed to be a man in the racist society. Following this a gay man commented that he couldn't relate to the guiltriping of the heterosexual community about giving up power when he never had any. Thus the simplistic assumption that all men had the same worldviews and experiences were very obviously challenged here. Henceforth, the men's movement can be seen coming from a very white heterosexual worldview.

The masculinity therapy that Connell refers to, was a middle-class, white heterosexual privilege. It mostly ignored social issues and economic equality to focus on emotional problems. We of course can argue also that the Women's Movement concentrated on white middle-class women's oppression from white men, and it did not encompass race or gender issues either. One of the criticisms levied against the search for self-identity in modernity is that it often comes from a very middle-class exclusive perspective. Giddens talks about how in modernity the standard biography becomes the "reflexive biography". (Giddens 1991). His concept of self-reflexivity is bound up with what he perceives as societies increasing recourse to expert systems, similar to the masculinity therapy examined by Connell, where issues pertaining to masculinity and the male role become therapeutic issues. A criticism levied at Giddens in his concept of personal growth and self-actualisation and its middle-class perceptive came from Zarder. He believes that these theories of choice and self-actualisation and examination of identities embrace only one fifth of the population and henceforth become obsolete if they do not encompass the whole picture. He further adds that those trapped in an oppressive modernity, those living under the poverty line cannot become involved in the "we" of modernity. They do not have the luxury of postmodern freedom of choices as circumstances dictate their lifestyle and reality. (Zarder 1998:22).

The interesting point emerging from this argument is how the Men's Centre involved in this research revolves around working-class men and

their issues pertaining to masculinity identity and self-growth. The Centre is situated in a predominately working-class area with high levels of unemployment, poverty and deprivation. Yet within this location there remains an opportunity for these men to access a place in their locality which concentrates on the evaluation of identities and reflexive self-actualisation. Even though the Centre does not promote itself as a professional therapy centre, the issues it deals with include, "the sense of men feeling increasingly lost and redundant" (Factsheet) along with an analysis of men's roles as men, fathers, brothers, sons and spouses. One respondent also spoke of the Centre as a 'place of healing'. Their participation in different programmes brought them in contact with the masculinity therapy issues that Connell spoke about earlier in this chapter. The interesting feature of this Centre is how it facilitated a process that according to many has been previously seen as a one-class restricted privilege.

Chapter Three: Work and Unemployment

Traditional discourses of masculinity describe the man as the member of the household who goes out to work and makes a living. For much of the 20th Century, society has associated men with the act of working and of providing. Cohen believes that this image arises more from general assumptions about men and dominant ideologies of gender than from any empirical evidence. (Cohen 1993 in Hood 1993:1) Yet men have long typecast in economically derived positions whereby masculinity, male identity and male performance all centered on work. Within this traditional assumption, researchers tended to study men's lives almost exclusively in their more public dimensions. According to Pleck there has been an overwhelming acceptance of the male provider role as the model of what men should be. He suggests that the emergence of the new man in the late 20th Century has failed to completely replace the male-breadwinner model or challenge its position of cultural dominance (Pleck 1987). It has been argued by Thompson and Walker that men are widely considered to be the main family providers even though now both spouses contribute to the financial support of the family (Thompson and Walker 1991 in Hood 1993:89).

Work and Identity

Sociological analysis and recent studies of men indicate agreement about the centrality of work in the lives of men. Work, is assumed to be a major basis of identity and of what it means to be a man. Ford in his work spoke of the male desire to prove oneself, and saw that the most legitimate way in our society to do this was through work (Ford 1985). Work has been viewed as being strongly bound up with a sense of self. In response to questions such as "who am I" it was found that men were more likely than women to answer in terms of a particular occupational title (Hughes 1968). Workplaces seem to be the crucibles out of which male identities are forged or through which they are given shape or meaning. Morgan suggests that paid employment, both as a means of making money and of getting out of the house is therefore likely to be an important anchor for traditional masculine identities (Morgan 1992:99). Segal reiterates this view when she suggests that men's engagement in paid work is central to the social construction of masculinity (Segal 1990:29).

With the socialisation of gender roles, it becomes obvious why there has been a strong connection between masculine identity and work. For centuries women and indeed children have been involved in the 'workspere', but have so in much more a subordinated way than that of men. A good example of this was the way that women were less paid in comparison to men. Segal talks about how in the early 19th Century before the notion of the male breadwinner was spoken about men, women and children worked in factory production (Segal 1990:298).

However both from sociobiology and social constructionism there developed an ever-widening gulf between the private feminine sphere of the household and the public masculine world of the workforce. Men became typecast in the public worksphere, whereas women were typecast in the private, domestic nurturing role. Men became the breadwinners and women the homemakers. Feminist analysis has criticised the way that the home is not often recognised as a workplace at all, domestic tasks failed to be acknowledged as work. Even though women are no longer typecast within the domestic sphere, and men no longer strictly within that of the public, in the age of modernity we have not seen any radical change in thinking of men and work.

The notion of male-breadwinner received a variety of challenges in the second half of the 20th Century from economic restructuring which led to the decline of many forms of employment that had strong linkages with masculine notions of strength and physical labour. Another challenge was posed by women's entrance into the labour force and at different level provided clear challenges to the links between employment and masculine identity and finally unemployment returned to become an apparent permanent feature of the economic landscape.

Masculinity and Unemployment

In light of the alleged centrality of employment and occupational status in the lives of men, unemployment might be seen as a paradigmatic example of masculinity under challenge. Morgan felt that the impact of prolonged unemployment and redundancy would seem to be a fruitful area for the exploration of masculinities for it is here one might assume that there is a major assault on one of the most fundamental pillars of male identity (Morgan 1992:119). He suggested that it was a time when masculinity, reflected in the ability to provide comes to be called into question.

Due to the socialisation of men in the public provider roles, we can say that unemployment at least potentially provides a challenge to traditional masculine identities. Griffin in her study of unemployed males suggested that unemployment could threaten the stability of a traditional masculine identity constructed around discourses such as bringing home a wage and freedom from the domestic sphere (Griffin 1985:81 in Mac Ghaill 1996). Willcott and Griffin found that what was challenged and undermined by male unemployment was a particular form of hegemonic masculinity which rests on the provider or breadwinner discourse and that of public masculinity (Willcott and Griffin 1985). Morgan believes there is some kind of circle linking ideas about the centrality of the male breadwinner role, responsibility and the linking of masculinity and unemployment, where unemployment creates a problem of male gender identity (Morgan 1992:100).

Many theorists have studied the alleged effect of unemployment on traditional masculine identities. From the above few examples we might well assume that unemployment does indeed have a profound effect on men's perceptions of self-worth and self-identity. Unemployment has been seen by researchers in the 1930s as entailing challenges to masculinity, while these themes have persisted some variations have been introduced into their discussions.

Studies of unemployment in the 1980s and 1990s show some continuity with the 1930s especially around the notions of male breadwinner role, however there is more willingness to see this as a complex ideological construction rather than a gendered inevitability. Accompanied with this is a greater interest in exploring the wider impact of unemployment on the gendered divisions of labour around the household. We must acknowledge that the male breadwinner model is a social construction with a long and complex history, yet the whole point about social construction is that it is real in its effects and needs to be taken seriously.

Morgan believes that it is necessary to ask questions about the extent to which researchers in studying male unemployment imparted more general assumptions about masculinity and the male role, such as these expectations become part of the reality of what was studied (Morgan 1992:119). He felt that it was possible that these findings reinforced and solidified widely held gender assumptions as findings of social scientists do have some kind of mediated impact on the way in which people see

the world. Morgan believes that in studies of men and masculinity and the breadwinner role that this role is often taken for granted, where we are being told something rather than it being shown (Morgan:106). He feels that what emerges more often is more a question of assertion and assumption rather than hard evidence, suggesting that some research in giving support for the loss of the breadwinner status partially came from researchers' assumptions. As an example of this he cites Komarovsky's 1940 study, whose central topic of enquiry was that of the breadwinner hypothesis. In her study she emphasised that the breadwinner role was taken for granted by the 49 families in her study; stating that the unemployed man experiences unemployment as a threat to "the very touchstone of his manhood" (Komarovsky in Morgan: 107). Morgan believes that here there is something which is being told rather than shown. Another example of this is Beales and Lambert's work entitled Memoirs of the Unemployed (1978) a collection of essays written by long-term unemployed men and women. The editors revealed that they found a confirmation of the breadwinner issue, with the men claiming they felt useless for being unable to provide. However, Morgan disputes this by suggesting that in over one half of the 25 accounts there was no such mention of the loss of the breadwinner role. Instead he feels what strongly emerged was something different, which the editors call "dependence phenomenon", which Morgan suggests is less strongly gender marked.

Studies of unemployment in the 1980s introduced new themes, one of which was that of female unemployment. Studies on unemployment have largely centered on that of men's experience of unemployment and threat to identity. With the centrality of men and work, assumptions prevailed that when work was no longer a part of a man's life then he was left with a certain kind of inadequacy. This idea goes back to that of Hughes, mentioned earlier as indeed other theorists where work was strongly bound up with a sense of self for men. Some studies for example (Henwood and Miles) found few if any differences between groups of full-time unemployed men and women. They found that differences within gender could be as great as those between gender (Henwood and Miles 1987). Yet it is still the case that the popular image or presentation of employment is in terms of the unemployed male and most of the discussions about the psychological and personal effects focus upon the male experience.

What can be derived from this is that the breadwinner role as a major anchorage of masculine identity is not as predominant in society as some researchers believe it to be. As most research on unemployment has concentrated on men, there has been little to compare the male breadwinner thesis to or contest it for example women's experience of unemployment. Henceforth, assumptions of unemployment as major assault on men's masculine identity will still be assumed and portrayed. The male breadwinner thesis assumed that men were the major providers for the family. Thus research concentrated on the nuclear family, which

in modernity is not the norm anymore. Consequently my interest lay in examining, in the context of male unemployment, any perceived assault on self-identity and masculinity by the men that I interviewed.

Place and Placelessness

As mentioned in my introduction, I wish to examine the idea of place and placelessness in relation to employment and unemployment respectively. I was particularly interested in examining how the Men's Centre, acted as a substitute sense of place open to the men which I interviewed for this study. I wished to ascertain whether it helped reaffirm these men's sense of masculinity in their status as unemployed males.

One of the most common patterns of discourses in the construction of masculine identities is that of the public masculinity and involvement in the public sphere. From the arena of the worksphere comes the concept of a sense of place. Having a job, does not just refer to being involved in a set of social and economic relations, or the income received, it also has to do with being in a certain place for a fixed period of time, where a sense of place is constructed (Morgan 1992). No longer finding a location in a place of work, therefore removed from the public space which they have occupied due to unemployment, and often feeling out of place at home in the private sphere, the unemployed male was often left with a sense of placelessness (Morgan 1992). It is this notion of placelessness that I wish to examine as it represents a further aspect of the threat that unemployment presents to the traditional male identity. I

wished to examine whether this perceived challenge to masculinity was in fact a gendered inevitability or, as some theorists are beginning to look at it, as partly an ideological construction. In particular I wished to examine what role the Men's Centre plays in the re-affirmation of masculine identity in the men in this study. As the Centre is exclusively a male domain I am interested in examining how the issues mentioned in their Fact Sheet are discussed and treated in the construction of the participant's masculinities in the 1990's. In their discussion of these themes I wish to examine how the Centre acts as a substitute sense of place for these men. With the public domain of the worksphere now a closed path to these men, what alternative spaces could they use in the assertion of their masculinity. Some studies examined whether men spent more time becoming involved in the private sphere of the home in their situation of unemployment. McKee and Bell's study found that more often men found themselves out of place at home and women tended to agree with this assessment (McKee and Bell 1986). Other such studies seemed to re-enhance this view. Studies of men and unemployment found that unemployed males did not become more active in the informal economy or in household based tasks as they became involuntarily less involved in the formal economy (Pahl 1984, Wallace 1986 in Morgan 1992:117). Henceforth, unemployed males feel out of place in the domestic sphere, a place that through years of socialisation was synonymous with that of the female. Morgan suggests that apart from exchange role couples it would seem at least to have at best limited support in the evidence (Morgan 1992:117). Indeed even in relation to

dual-earner households, where both partners are working, similar facts have been found in relation to this, namely that increasing female participation in the labour market is not matched by increasing male participation in the home (ibid:120).

McKee and Bell suggested that the idea of anything approaching a switch in roles or men adopting previously exclusive female roles, would run counter to deeply held cultural expectations (McKee and Bell 1986). Other studies suggested that men in the context of unemployment tended to occupy the public arena of the street. The men in this study had a further option of the Men's Centre. This space offered the men workshops, on their rights and their entitlements, various crafts and each held a 'job' within the Centre. Thus the sense of place lost in their departure from the arena of public work was somewhat compensated for in the Centre where the men had an opportunity to assert their masculinity in this male dominated space.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Research Results

“There is no burden of proof. There is only the world to experience and understand. Shed the burden of proof to lighten the load for the journey of experience”. (quoted in Patten 1989:7)

In the previous chapters a review of literature relevant to the research problem was presented. In this chapter the methodology used to assemble the necessary data in order to address the research problem will be explained and justified. I will also present the findings from this research.

Research Methods

The research in this study was based on a qualitative approach. Qualitative methodology was decided upon for a number of reasons. Qualitative research was chosen as the primary method in this study due to its nature “as an approach concerned with studying people as persons and being interested in their everyday life experiences and interpretations”. (Sarantaklos 1998:52). One of the characteristic elements of this type of methodology is that “it employs research procedures that produce descriptive data, presenting in the respondent's own words their views and experiences”.(ibid:46). I felt that this was the most appropriate method to investigate the views and experiences of the men in this study as the topic can be quite sensitive and one to one interviews can be more personal than questionnaires. Another reason is that one to one interviews are more likely to reveal more data.

The short time span allotted for the completion of the research rendered quantitative research unfeasible and only a small pilot set of qualitative interviews were completed. In order to produce valid, reliable results one would have to construct a questionnaire, following this, the questionnaire would have to be administered, coded and analysed. I felt that it would have been difficult to identify and cover a statistically valid selection of the population over a short period of time. A more important methodological problem with quantitative research is that a structured questionnaire might not be suitable for the research questions that I was seeking to have answered. Noting the difficulty of coding the responses to open-ended interview questions, I felt that the diversity of these viewpoints received might not have been accounted for in a structured interview. Thus an informal loosely structured interview style was adopted, whereby I entered the interview with a set of topics prepared. These topics were designed to reveal data relating to the research questions. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of yielding high quality data. The interviewer has control over the question order and it also enables the interviewer to establish a rapport with the respondent. There is also the advantage of being able to clarify any problems the respondent may have.

As my research involved men's experiences of the crisis of masculinity and their perceptions of conflicts within the masculine role this type of interviewing was very fruitful as it gives the interviewer the opportunity to probe and expand on their answers and responses. This helps in

yielding good quality data for analysis. In conducting the interviews I allowed "the conversation with a purpose" (Mason 1996:43) to proceed according to the direction taken by the respondent, asking questions in order to prompt the interviewee towards areas which were relevant to the themes that I was examining.

In order to conduct this research I needed to have access to a number of unemployed men. A fellow student told me about the Men's Centre in question and by its very name it interested me more than a centre for the unemployed would. The very idea that it was a centre exclusively for men I felt would provide more fruitful data than would a centre for the unemployed. The Centre's Fact Sheet confirmed my hopes in its statement that the "Centre was formed to address some of the issues facing men in the 1990's". (Centre's fact sheet 1999). One of the issues, apart from issues pertaining to unemployment, was the issue of "a sense of men feeling increasingly lost and redundant"(ibid).

Initial contact was made by dropping into the Centre. Arising out of this the coordinator of the centre put up a notice for the men who frequented the place, telling them about my research and I arranged a date to return and talk to the men to ascertain if they would be interested in participating in an interview. Subsequently, from the group discussion from which I received valuable information six men volunteered to be interviewed. Out of the six I only interviewed five as the sixth failed to turn up for pre-arranged interviews. In an attempt to remedy this problem

I contacted another Men's Centre nearby to obtain more participants but unfortunately was offered no help or assistance. While five interviews are not a great number of respondents, all of these did provide valuable information and insights into sensitive issues of masculinity as affected by unemployment.

Notes were taken at the first group discussion, which were then developed in more depth shortly after the discussion concluded. This initial discussion helped in developing a rapport with the respondents and issues brought up by particular respondents were further developed with them in their individual interviews. I felt that this first contact with the men helped make the semi-structured interviews more relaxed and I found the participants very forthcoming in their responses. Each of the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and lasted on average one and a half hours, with one lasting two and a half hours.

On the day that I interviewed two of the men they had just returned from a Men's Conference and were very enthusiastic about sharing their experiences of discussion with men from other Centres and the issues of masculinity that had arisen at the conference. In the course of my interviews I spent three full days in the Men's Centre and I felt I obtained a sense of what one of the men referred to as the "buzz" (atmosphere) of the Centre.

Documentary Data

In addition to the use of interviews to gather information I also used documentary data. These consisted of secondary sources, which included newspaper articles written about the Centre and the Centre's own Fact-Sheets.

Gender Distortion

In embarking on this research I was aware of possible distortion of data as I was a female interviewing men on sensitive issues of masculinity. It was possible that interpretations of information and statements were viewed differently. Another important consideration was how the men reacted to me as a female considerably younger than some of the respondents, questioning them on their masculinity. There was also the difficulty of interviewing individuals already incorporated into a programme. What often seemed to appear from the data generation was a certain script that the men adhered to in their interviews. At times their responses and views seem to have been articulated to me as a prepared speech which they had heard through their participation in the Centre's programmes. Their use of language in talking about the Centre led me to believe that they had accepted the discourses of the Centre. This use of therapy language was obviously a new acquisition to these men.

Conclusion

The use of informal interviews and documentary analysis in the conduction of this research has been a fruitful method of analysis. The

combination of both methods allowed each to inform upon the other as the research progressed, with the documentary material offering topics to raise for discussion during the interviews. As the documentary evidence was exclusive in reference to the Centre it helped to provide me with valuable information and issues for discussion.

Presentation of Results

This section will provide a presentation of the findings in my primary research. For purposes of clarity I wish to present the findings under two main themes: that of the crisis of masculinity in society and the issue of masculinity in the situation of unemployment.

The men in this study ranged in age from 25 years to 58. Of the five men three were single, one was married with one separated. Four of the five had become unemployed due to redundancy on a number of occasions, while the fifth had left work voluntarily as he wanted to become clean, (he had been a drug addict for a number of years).

Masculinity Crisis

Jack: *The thing is with men, the whole thing's changing whether it's changing for the better I don't know. Some cases it is and in some cases it isn't.*

All of the men that I interviewed believed that there was a need to concentrate on men's issues at this time. All five felt that it was now men's turn to get some attention and for the focus to be on men's issues and problems. They felt that women had come a long way in obtaining their rights and a similar theme running through all of the interviews was that it was now men's turn, to come together and to evaluate what was right for them as men in society.

Sean: *There's lots of groups for women. Some groups would be anti-men that's understandable. They probably went through a lot of stuff*

and have to deal with their own stuff and I think that's what we have to do is deal with our own stuff

In the group discussion, which was my first initial contact with the respondents, we talked about how men in society were viewed. One of the respondents spoke about how he felt that the role of men had changed with women's increased involvement in the public sphere.

Brian: *In my day men were men and women were women and that was that. A woman never had to put her hand in her pocket. ... Nowadays with women working they don't need anyone to take care of them. They go into pubs on their own buy their own pints, they don't need us anymore (laughs).*

Another respondent reiterated this idea of women's increased independence in the public sphere also.

Jack: *Women go to pubs as women not wives not girlfriends, a kind of subculture. They go in their own right, paying for their own pint. Some men can't handle that.*

When the respondents spoke about women they did so in admiration of what women had achieved, only one of the respondents believed that women had, as he put it "gone too far" and that there was little to distinguish men from women anymore. He felt that women had sometimes taken their rights and privileges as women too far. This respondent was older than the rest of the group and was the only married respondent.

One of the strong themes that emerged from the group discussion was that the respondents felt that women benefit more than men in society today. They believed that women gained more from the various

Government schemes and that the courts and law system were much more women friendly.

Jack: *I think women are way ahead in every way, women started fighting for their status in the 1970's wasn't it? and now they get more rights than men. In the courts system and everything the way they are looked after. Look at the courts and the unmarried mothers, the way they get everything handed to them.*

They cited the case of a male friend of theirs who had won a custody battle for his children as a major victory for men and believed it to be quite an exception to the rule.

Liam: *We were all delighted, he's a lovely guy, it was a hard battle for him, but in the end he won. His wife was an alcoholic only for that he didn't stand a chance. He probably wouldn't have had a hope otherwise.*

There was a sense that women's achievements and their striving forward had not been matched by men, where women's roles had changed throughout the years, men had not kept up with or dealt with these changes. One respondent spoke about how he saw gender roles changing in society.

Jack: *When a man went to work he gave the wife money for the house now its gone to the other extent, where the women are going out and keeping the house going till the men get jobs. That men*

providing thing doesn't work anymore, there was this wonderful attitude that men, not all of them mind you, but most men treated their wives severely and said I'm the boss. It's the other way round now, an awful lot of men can't cope with that. They think it's a terrible demeaning thing.

Women had become part of the formerly exclusive male domain and it was felt that men had not dealt with this transition or did not know how to or indeed had not fully accepted it. The persistent theme throughout the interviews was that men needed to evaluate their own selves as men, as gendered beings and to explore their identities as men.

Sean: *Women are taking back their power which is fair enough they have been suppressed, but in some cases it can go to the extreme like men hating. Men need to understand themselves and not feel threatened by women's growth.*

Another respondent viewed the situation as:

Tom: *I think men need to break away from women. There's lots going on for women here, they have stood up and done their thing and the men have just sat there in the pub. I think we need to have some time for ourselves and talk about our own feelings.*

Power Relations

One of the respondents spoke about how he and his wife embarked on personal development courses. Previously both had been working he outside the home and she inside.

Sean: We got on fine because she was at home cooking the dinner and doing the usual thing that would be expected by men.

When these traditional roles were altered there came a change in their relations and also in the relations of power.

Christy: She started to grow, I wanted us to work together, but I had an agenda. I wanted her to go forward but I wanted to her to go my way and that's not what happened. , We started to go forward all right but in different ways. She started getting her own space and became strong and confident in herself. ...

Previously I had control of the situation, so I had part of her if you know what I mean. Here all of a sudden was little old me, fucking left behind, she went from strength to strength. The idea was that the two of us would grow together but I still wanted control and I couldn't do it that way.

Sean was very aware of the power he had in traditional male role that of the provider with his wife in the nurturing, homemaking role. When both embarked on a trajectory of self-growth and development he felt his power been taken away from him. Where his wife's trajectory involved a sense of gain, Sean's involved a sense of loss, loss of the institutional privilege of the dominant gender.

Sean: *It was like I had her power and when she was going forward she was taking back that power. She wasn't robbing mine, just taking back her own power and that was scary for me.....I couldn't focus. All my energy was going into her moving on, it showed me how insecure I was.*

Work and Identity

All of the men had experienced being unemployed for more than five years. Four of the men had been involved in unskilled labour having held various jobs such as cleaners, warehouse workers and security jobs. One respondent was a trained mechanic and later became a trained printer. All of the respondents had started work between the ages of 14-16 years of age. Their departure from the workplace had come from redundancies with the exception of the respondent who was a mechanic and had left the workforce voluntarily as he had a bad drug problem and had wanted to become 'clean'. When questioned about the importance of work for them, four respondents believed that the most important aspect of having a job was that one enjoyed the work they were doing. They believed that working for monetary gain alone was not enough. They felt this was the situation for a lot of people but argued that one needed to enjoy the work and be happy in their particular job.

Jack: *I enjoyed the work I was doing, (warehouse worker) I never went to work for money, I think that's a very bad attitude to have. How could you enjoy work if you were only working for money.*

However he did state that it was easier for him to have such views as he was single and his only responsibility was to himself.

Jack: *I know I only have to worry about myself, and it would be different if I had a family. If I was married I would have been under more pressure to get a job with the wife nagging at you and the kids screaming in you ear. It would be more difficult to cope living on the edge, hoping that money is going to last.*

The fifth respondent, the only married man, spoke about work as a way of providing for his family.

Brian: *When you are married you need to be working all the time, you mightn't be in the job you like, but you can't be choosy you need the money.*

One respondent talked about how when he was married and unemployed, he took jobs as he was under pressure from home to do so.

Sean: *When my youngest daughter was born I was unemployed. It was like go out and get a fucking job, you know what I mean. So I got a job but I wasn't necessarily happy when I worked.*

He believed that a lot of people are in jobs they don't like and are very unhappy. He too believed that it was very important to have a job one liked. His attitude to the nine to five routine was very dismissive.

Sean: *I don't want to throw away half my life working nine to five, the same fucking boring routine everyday. If I never was to work I don't want to do that, that's not me. There's more to life than fucking nine to five jobs you know.*

Only one of the respondents spoke about work as a way of providing. The four other respondents tended to view the importance of work in terms of their aptitude for the job, whether they liked it or not. Obviously since three of the respondents were single their attitude to work would possibly have been different than that of the married respondent who had different responsibilities to undertake. For the majority of the respondents however work needed to operate on more than a functional level, it needed to fulfil another purpose than that of monetary gain alone. In the respondents view an aspect of satisfaction and social agenda was very important.

One respondent spoke about his time in employment as a mechanic. He left the job however as his employer was not paying him enough money. It was regretful decision to make for him as he loved his job.

Tom: *When I worked as a mechanic I loved it, I really did. My heart was really in it but he wouldn't pay me enough money. I was doing two people's job but he wouldn't get someone else in. I left it and it killed me to leave cause I was so happy in it. I walked out the door and there were tears in my eyes.*

This respondent's departure from the work place was due to financial reasons, even though he had been very happy in his job.

An interesting comment about the concept of work was made by the respondent who spoke about work as a way of providing. He spoke about a talk that he attended in the Centre that was given by a lecturer in regard to work

Brian: *She was talking about working you know and not working and said when you're not working your still working. Do you know what I mean. When she said it first I didn't grasp it but now I do. You know like if even if you're gardening that's work or in here {Centre} helping people is work. I never thought of it like that before.*

The institutionalised idea of work tends to firmly place the concept of work in the public sphere. The respondent's perception tended to go beyond the narrow view of work that revolved around the paid public sphere encapsulating a wider idea of a concept of work, which transcended the public arena. Feminist analysis has argued that notions of 'work' and the 'workplace' reduce the meaning and status of work to the organisational or 'workplace' the public sphere. It can be suggested that for men in particular work and workplaces still refer overwhelmingly to what happens in public. In talking about work outside of this workplace the respondent was still referring to the public sphere when he spoke about working in the Centre. Where feminist analysis of work has argued that work in the home still remains invisible and undervalued and is not seen as work at all. The respondent, in his differentiation of work outside the organisational workplace was still referring to the public

sphere. While he did mention gardening as work, this is seen as physical outside work not that of the domestic domain.

What Was Missed About Work

When questioned about what they missed about their work, one of the respondents stated he didn't miss anything at all

Brian: *I don't miss work at all, cause I was working for a wagon (laughs).*

The four other respondents spoke about how they missed interaction with others and meeting people.

Sean: *I missed the lads, missed meeting people and the crack, getting out of the house, being independent.*

The loss of interaction with others was a similar theme in these respondents' responses.

Tom: *I missed working with people having a laugh you know. You're day was filled and when you enjoy your day and can get paid for it, it's great.*

John: *I missed having the crack, the messing that went on you know.*

For the men the most difficult aspect of being unemployed varied. One respondent spoke about how he felt bored and had nothing to do.

Sean: *I suppose the worst part was the boredom, losing self-esteem, having nothing to do.*

This theme resonated in two other respondent's comments.

Liam: *"Having nothing to do, moping around the house".*

For one of the respondents one of the most difficult aspects was filling time.

Brian: *filling your day, but I was lucky I went for walks and read a lot.*

One respondent did not find it difficult whatsoever, in finding things to do.

Jack: *It was great fun. You find you fill your day with other things, go to the library, do jobs for other people, neighbours. I never let a job take over my life. If I lost a job I was never banging my head against the wall, feeling sorry for myself. I'd get another one.*

Loss of social interaction was the main aspect of work missed. The work itself was never mentioned as being something that these respondents missed. There was an absence of any respondent's regret about losing the job they were engaged in. One notable exception was that of the skilled respondent. He spoke about how it was hard to leave his job as he really liked what he was doing. Their predominant concern or regret for their loss of employment concerned the loss of a set of social relations which they had been part of in the workplace.

The men spoke about when offered a job they needed to calculate if it was going to be worthwhile financially to return to work. Upon return to full-time work, the men would lose their unemployment benefits, a consequence of this would be a rent increase.

Jack: *My rent at the moment is £15. If I go out to work it will go up. There's a big difference between what you get into your pocket*

your rent is based on your gross. I have to sit down and decide if it's worth my while, work it all out you know. It's a terrible thing to say but I have to do it. You have to see if it's worth your while to go to work you know.

The respondents had previously disagreed with the idea of work in terms of financial gain. Yet financial considerations were ultimately the determining factors in deciding whether to return to full-time work or not.

Masculinity and Unemployment

When questioned about how their experiences of unemployment and how it affected them as men, all of the men spoke about how much the Men's Centre helped them in their situation of unemployment. Brian, the only married respondent had been made redundant after thirty years of employment. He felt it was more difficult for a man than a woman to be unemployed. When followed up on his remark he talked about how it would be difficult for men to adjust to the domestic sphere.

Brian: *It's definitely harder for a man to be unemployed, take for example cooking, I never cooked in my life. I don't know how to use the washing machine. I never did what women normally do.*

He saw unemployment as a transition from the public sphere into that of the private, where he did not feel comfortable. This is obvious from his following statement:

Brian: *I was coming out of mass one morning and some woman came up to me wife and said "how can you put up with him under your feet all the day", and I told her to fuck off it was none of her business.*

Another respondent reiterated the view that it was indeed harder for men to be unemployed as women still had the private sphere to revert to in times of unemployment.

Sean: *Yeah, it's harder for men because you know the whole breadwinner thing. And women wouldn't be necessarily unemployed they would always have something to do. , Looking after the house or kids if they had any. Blokes wouldn't do that sort of thing"*

From the respondents views it seems that with the loss of a sense of place in their departure from the public arena of work, men had no alternative place available to them as men. With women's departure from the public sphere the private sphere was always available for them as a substitute sense of place. This place was not an option for the men as they did not feel comfortable or feel that they belonged in it. Women's roles as mothers and homemakers were options that could be embarked upon as an alternative job. However, for the men, it was felt that this was not an option.

Tom: *If a woman didn't have kids she could take a chance of probably getting pregnant and then she's working as far as I'm concerned, a woman with children that's a job that is.*

So unemployment created a sense of displacement from the public sphere and there was no concrete alternative available.

Isolation and the Men's Centre

This was a theme brought up frequently by respondents throughout the interviews. It was believed that unlike women who spoke more about their feelings in their interaction with friends, men tended not to talk to others in this way. When they were no longer involved in public interaction through the arena of work they faced the possibility of being isolated and alone.

Liam: *A lot of men are very isolated in the flats, they would just go as far as the shops and the rent office. They don't talk to anybody.*

One of the men talked about how when faced with redundancy a lot of his friends had not dealt with it very well.

Sean: *I know a lot of guys who were made redundant and fell asunder and I said that it won't ever happen to me. I won't end up like these other people. I think that's happening to a lot of men.*

P Page: *"Why do you think they fell asunder"?*

Brian: *I suppose because they had nothing to do you know. They didn't know what to do with themselves they were so used to working and then had nothing to do.*

He spoke about how when he became redundant he knew he could still do a lot of things, but did not know where to start. A friend then introduced him to the Centre.

Brian: *We began to meet every Tuesday discussing all sorts of things.*

There's a lot of guys here who were very isolated on their own and I told them to get off their arses and to come down. No one is going to hand anything on a plate to you. I've been coming here ever since and to be honest at times this place has kept me going.

One respondent felt that this sense of isolation and boredom when unemployed was due to peoples perception of work.

John: *Any man who's made redundant and sits around indoors is heading down the road to mental illness.. It's cause they have the wrong attitude to work. It takes up their whole lives, their attitude is all wrong and that's the whole problem.*

Whatever the reasons or causes of this sense of isolation were, it was perceived as real and something which was affecting a lot of men in their area. They saw the Men's Centre as a place where men could come to speak to others and interact with other men and discuss different issues affecting them.

This theme was strongest in one of the interviews in particular; the respondent had been coming to the centre for two years. He talked about how he felt men were becoming increasingly isolated and felt something or someplace was needed for men to overcome stereotypical expectations of men. This place for him is the Men's Centre, which he saw as:

Sean: *A place of healing, where men could come out of their shells in their own time. A lot of men were really isolated and didn't go*

anywhere. And this place {The Centre} is breaking down these barriers. There's someplace to go now. I've seen something amazing happening here in the last 18 months. I've seen people coming in who couldn't communicate and after a while they are communicating and totally involved.

This Centre is seen as an important tool in helping combat this sense of isolation, which these men had witnessed in their peers and indeed, had felt themselves. It has been suggested that men in the context of unemployment tended to occupy the public arena of the street or that of the pub. The respondents saw the pub as a place where men talked to each other but did not communicate. There was also the added disadvantage of not having much money to spend in the pub.

Liam: *The pub is grand but you don't really talk in the pub, you talk but you don't have real conversations if you know what I mean.*
Anyway you don't really have the money to go drinking.

The centre was seen as an arena where real communication could take place.

Tom: *There are some things said in here and some guys wouldn't even say it to their own wives. You know they wouldn't know how to approach their wives and say it you know, I don't know why maybe they feel they are losing some of their manhood you know.*

The Men's Centre as A Sense Of Place

All of the respondents believed that there was a great need for a Men's Centre, which was exclusively male as opposed to an unemployment centre, which would facilitate both men and women, and whose aims would have been different. It tended to give purpose to fill the day for one respondent.

Liam: *Here it's all about having something to do. It's great, it's all positive in here you know.*

The reasons the respondents gave were predominately similar, men needed to come together as men to discuss their feelings and emotions.

Tom: *I think we need to make a break away from women and talk about our feelings and have some time for ourselves.*

The predominant feeling was that a centre for men was vitally important as it was felt that there were numerous centres for women in the area but none that facilitated men exclusively in the same way. It was felt by the respondents that there was no place for men to go to discuss issues which affected them which they believed women had, one of the respondents captured this theme very vividly.

Sean: *There's nothing out there for men as such, no where to go. A lot of the men are just isolated in the flats. There's lots of groups for women. Now with this place there is somewhere to go. We have created an energy here, healing is taking place. The men's Centre is allowing us to tap into our own creativity, that potential that lies dormant. The workshops, discussions are releasing*

blockages. The time is right for this place, it's a place to be for us. It has its own atmosphere and energy. People just come out of their shell in their own time and start to grow.

The Men's Centre was seen as a place for these men to participate in their own growth as men. Their participation in workshops helped them to realise their potential and develop their skills. The language used to describe what Sean believes to be happening in the Centre is obviously newly acquired since his participation in the Centre. The therapy language has been incorporated into his speech and his thinking.

The Centre held many workshops in personal development, music, art poetry and photography. The respondents had partaken in some, or all, of these workshops. The men felt that they had achieved something in participating in these workshops and had found talents that they had not realised they possessed.

Liam: *I always felt I was fucking useless with me hands, but in a few weeks I was able to make these trees (wire trees) myself and that was a great feeling. We brought some of the trees down to the conference and sold loads of them which was great.*

One of the music workshops which some of the men had participated in went further they had imagined.

Sean: *We did a workshop on personal development through music I was wondering what the hell it was but it was brilliant, we were blown away by what came out of it.*

Some of the men had not been very enthusiastic about this workshop and were reticent to join in but after a brainstorming session a song was put together called "The Future Looks Bright".

Sean: *There was a great buzz from it, we made it into a c.d. I never had a c.d. in my life. The energy was buzzing. We were all blown away on it, when we heard it we were all on a high.*

This song was played at a Men's Conference the respondents had participated in. It was "so well received that it has been suggested that it be adopted as the men's development anthem of Ireland" (Niall Bourke The Northside People 06-07-1998). One of the respondents spoke about how the c.d. had been played in a pub during the weekend of the conference.

Liam: *We were in a pub and we asked the barwoman to put on our song. There I was sitting down having a pint listening to a song I helped write. I never would have dreamed of this in my life. It was unbelievable, listening to your own stuff being played in a pub. I never experienced anything like it before. It's amazing*

knowing you can do something like this. It's normally someone like Boyzone¹ It's always someone else.

It was obvious from the men that the Centre had helped give them a sense of achievement and a sense of confidence that they had not achieved elsewhere. This was very apparent when they spoke about the achievement of the song they wrote which had been well received at the Conference. The opportunity to embark on such an endeavour would have not have been possible had they still been involved in their former working occupations. As Liam commented "It's always someone else". Thus the sense of place lost in their departure from the arena of public work was somewhat compensated for in the Centre where the men had an opportunity to assert and evaluate their masculinity in this male dominated space. With the respondents involvement in the Centre they participated in courses, talks, workshops and excursions to different places.

One of the courses that they completed was in Family Law, from which each participant received a certificate. This was wonderful according to one respondent because:

Liam: *We all got a cert for it which was great because I never got one in my life.*

Their excursions brought them to different parts of the country, places which they had never been to before. They also visited areas of cultural interest such as museums and theatres, which one man stated that

¹ A popular Irish boy band

although he had a free bus pass and could have visited these places before however, he never availed of the opportunity until now.

Tom: *We go out to different places every Thursday, to art galleries, museums, places like that... I have a pass to get in to all these places but I never used it before."*

Masculinity Therapy.

When the respondents spoke about their participation in courses and their meetings with other established Men's Groups, they spoke about sharing, talking about their feeling and personal development. In the course of their involvement in the Centre their adopted use of therapy language had obviously been influenced by the Centre. In the negotiation of affirming an alternative masculine identity these men had accepted the discourses of the Centre.

Sean: *The Centre is allowing us to tap into the potential that lies dormant in a lot of men. The workshops are releasing blockages and those blockages are not allowing you to be yourself... This place has its own atmosphere and energy people just come out of their own shell and start to grow.*

The Centre provided a framework upon which the respondents evaluated their identities.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Masculine Identities and Gender Constructs.

The challenges to masculine identities have been discussed in the first three chapters of this thesis some of its sources include the women's movement and unemployment. In this study women's liberation and their increased independence were found to be affecting masculine identities according to the men interviewed. Traditional typecast notions of masculine and feminine identities were seen to have altered as a consequence of the Women's Rights Movement.

Women and The Public and Work Sphere

The respondents in this study perceived women's liberation as having altered traditional gender identities. According to sociological literature women's assertion of an independent and public identity had narrowed the gulf between traditional masculine and feminine identities. Women now engaged in the public sphere of the workplace and in the social sphere as independent beings. Men's exclusive privilege to these spheres has been challenged. In this study one of the respondent's views regarding women's changing role suggested a certain sense of regret that the traditional and well-defined gender roles were being altered.

Brian: *In my day men were men and women were women and that was that, a woman never had to put her hand in her pocket...Nowadays with women working they don't need*

anyone to take care of them. They go in to pubs on their own buy their own pints. They don't need us anymore (laughs).

This statement indicates a sense of loss, in that he feels not needed anymore. With women's increased involvement in the public sphere in relation to work and the social arena it can be suggested that there existed, among the men in the interviews, a feeling that men's influence over women's lives has been diminished considerably. With this came a certain ambivalence over what roles were exclusively masculine and feminine.

Brian: *There's no real difference between men and women anymore.*

Look at the way they dress and working and all that.

According to these men women had taken on what was previously an exclusive male role that left men with an uncertainty as to what the male role was now. The distinguishing factors between gender roles were becoming less obvious. The dependent role upon which many women had enacted due to their lack of participation in the public sphere had become obsolete. Women were seen as not needing men anymore. This resulted in making gender marked differences less clear-cut than they previously had been.

Power Relations and Work

While unemployed the respondents participated in employment schemes (C.E.S schemes) that allowed them to work a few hours a week and hold on to their unemployment entitlements and benefits. It was here the men felt particularly aggrieved in comparison to the

female gender that they worked alongside in these schemes, many of which were single mothers.

Brian: *I see them with their forty fags a day, driving their cars, buying their dinners and I can't even afford that, there's something wrong somewhere.*

It became apparent that even though the men articulated their support for women's advancement there existed a sense of frustration. The respondents felt that under these schemes women were far better off financially than their male counterparts. Their perception of events was one of comparing their financial position to these women without consideration for child provision which the women participated in. They believed that in their situation as men they should be receiving the same amount as women regardless of the fact that they did not have children. Their perceived notion that women could receive more money than them was something that they felt very hostile about. For this to happen there "was something wrong somewhere".

Social Sphere Participation

In the course of the interviews the respondents spoke about how women were now negotiating the social sphere of pubs as women in their own rights, independent of their male counterparts.

Jack: *Women go to pubs as women, not wives not girlfriends, a kind of subculture. They go in their own right paying for their own pint. Some men can't handle that.*

While this is not a new phenomenon, it seemed to suggest that from the interviews it presented the respondents with an ambivalence of what men's roles were in comparison to women. There was no distinct male role by which gender could be differentiated. Women's lack of dependency on men had obscured these enactments of traditional roles and had not been replaced by any concrete alternative structure from which to work from. These respondents felt a need for an evaluation of men's identities in a time where traditional assumptions were no longer valid. Men were at a point when they felt "increasingly redundant and lost"(Centre's factsheet).

From the above responses came a sense of loss of men's power and dominance. From the respondent's point of view, the alteration of traditional clearly defined social roles was met with a sense of regret and loss. Previously sex-role theorists had assumed when gender roles were well defined socialisation went ahead harmoniously and sex-role learning was a good thing. This socialisation process, making men the dominant gender had its advantages for men. From some of the quoted responses of the respondents, the alteration of roles by women's increased deviation from traditional prescribed social roles was something that was difficult for these men to deal with. They perceived it as a sense of loss of male privilege. Goldberg, in her article "A Second Look" (1996) suggests that one of the outcomes of the Feminist Movement left men with a feeling of vulnerability and frustration. She believed men were grasping because they want to feel

in control again. Women's taking back of power was perceived as a threat to men's identities and one that had previously been a strong marker for gender divisions. With the weakening of this marker men felt threatened. If as Segal argues that men's power is the primary determinant of masculinities then these women's assertion for the equality of power relations in their negotiation of the public sphere as equals posed a large threat to the legitimacy of male power. Noting the fact that they felt that there was "something wrong somewhere" legitimises this view.

The patriarchal dividend that Connell refers to was perceived to be under threat by these men. From their responses it can be suggested that women's equality in society counted as a threat to these men. They perceived women's equality as women's supremacy, getting more than they did in society. The fact that they were no longer the dominant gender was met with frustration and uncertainty. They tended to favour and indeed long for the return to the point where "*men were men and women were women*". Thus reinstating the patriarchal dividend that was once enjoyed. This concept is further discussed in the following section.

Negotiation of Power Relations

Feminism had highlighted the importance of gender divisions as a major way of ordering or structuring social relationships and led to recognition of the imbalances of power in relationships between men and women, thus critiquing the power relations of gender. Where in

western society women had fought to address this imbalance there was a sense of this balance tilting in the direction of females by the respondents. In their articulation of women's rights and strives for equality, it was felt that the re-balancing of power marginalised men's dominance and power. The respondents felt somewhat aggrieved that in women's pursuit of equality, men had somehow not been able to catch up or stay abreast. Henceforth men needed to evaluate their position in the arena of power relations.

Morgan makes the point about how men who may often feel their masculinity denied in the routine subordinated work compensate for this through exerting or attempting to assert a strong patriarchal authority at home. One respondent spoke about how when his wife embarked on her own independent trajectory of power and self growth he was left with a situation in which the power he had asserted over her had been eroded.

Sean: *She started getting her own space and became strong and confident in herself. Previously I had control of the situation, so I had part of her if you know what I mean. Here all of a sudden was little old me, fucking left behind. She went from strength to strength. The idea was that the two of us would grow together but I still wanted control and I couldn't do it that way.*

The control that he had asserted in his affirmation of masculinity had been taken away. The traditional relations of power had become obsolete in his wife's trajectory of the self, leaving the respondent with a sense of powerlessness.

Sean: *It was like I had her power and when she was going forward she was taking back that power. She wasn't robbing mine, just taking back her own power and that was scary for me. I couldn't focus. All my energy was going into her moving on. It showed me how insecure I was.*

This privilege of power which had been previously taken for granted by the respondents had now been called into disrepute. The negotiation of gender relations on the basis of equal terms was a challenge that presented itself to the respondents. The apparent loss of this taken for granted patriarchal dividend which Connell refers to was seen as a sense of loss and sometimes hostility by the respondents.

Work and Identity

Sociological analyses have assumed work to be an important anchor for traditional masculine identities. For much of this century society has associated men with the act of working and providing. Work was assumed a major basis of masculine identity and of what it means to be a man. The public space of work is seen to be one of the crucibles out of which male identities are forged or through which they are given shape or meaning. Male employment was predominately associated with the discourse of the breadwinner thesis where men were seen as providers for their families. Henceforth work was embarked upon from the point of view of the male desire to provide and to prove oneself. Analysis of this research initially presented a somewhat different picture. For many of the respondents work

needed to satisfy social needs more so than purely functional ones. Work needed to offer some sense of stimulus; social interaction and its importance lay in the respondent's propensity for the job.

Jack: *I enjoyed the work I was doing, {warehouse worker}. I never went to work for money. I think that's a very bad attitude to have. How can you enjoy work if you were only working for money.*

He believed that working for monetary gain alone was not a sufficient reason for going to work. In this respondents position of being single he did recognise the fact that if he were married it would have been a different scenario. Work would then take on a different perspective.

Paul: *I would be under more pressure to get a job with the wife nagging at you and the kids screaming in your ear.*

Here work was deemed necessary as a way of providing and escaping the private domain.

The provider role was embarked upon as a necessity in one case where the respondent viewed marriage with children with the responsibility of providing and making money.

Brian: *When you are married you need to be working all the time. You mightn't be in the job you like, but you can't be choosy you need the money.*

While work was not always seen as being fulfilling it served a functional purpose of provision for one's family. When one respondent spoke about the role of provider, he did so from a negative point of view.

Sean: *I was unemployed when my youngest daughter was born. It was like go out and get a fucking job you know what I mean. So I had to get a job.*

This was a role that he felt forced in to not one that was readily embarked on.

Work, for the respondents, needed to serve more meaningful functions of social interaction, a level that reached beyond that of the functional. The respondent that had worked as a mechanic had derived that sense of enjoyment and satisfaction in his work but had to leave because of low wages.

Tom: *When I worked as a mechanic I loved it, I really did. My heart was really in it but he wouldn't pay me enough. I was doing two people's jobs but he wouldn't get someone else in. I left it and it killed me to leave 'cause I was so happy in it. I walked out the door and there were tears in my eyes.*

Some of the respondents believed that working for financial gain was not a sufficient reason alone to work. A sense of satisfaction and social interaction was necessary. This respondent's position was the reverse situation. His job was very satisfying yet this was not sufficient to keep working as the financial gain was not equal to satisfaction derived.

The concept of work

Two of the respondent's views on work stated that one needed to derive satisfaction from a job and this consideration took precedence over monetary gain.

Jack: *I enjoyed the work I was doing. I never went to work for money. I think that's a very bad attitude to have. How could you enjoy work if you were only working for money.*

However in a later statement the same respondent seemed to contradict this earlier view.

Jack: *My rent at the moment is £15. If I go out to work it will go up. There's a big difference between what you get into your pocket. Your rent is based on your gross. I have to sit down and decide if it's worth my while, work it all out you know. It's a terrible thing to say but I have to do it. You have to see if it's worth your while to go to work you know.*

While the respondent disagreed with the idea of work in terms of financial gain only, it was financial considerations that ultimately was the determining factor in his decision to return to full-time work or not. It was at this point that I felt that the views the men offered on work were ones that had been influenced by their participation in the Centre's programme. In their participation in the Centre there seemed to be an acceptance of the discourses offered by the Centre.

Alienation From the Public Sphere Through Unemployment

When the respondents spoke about what they missed about work the majority of the men spoke about their loss of engagement in social relations. Social interaction with their co-workers was an integral part of their everyday working experience.

Liam: *I missed having the crack, the messing that went on you know.*

Sean: *I missed the lads, missed meeting people and the crack.*

The interesting point emerging from this was that the work itself was never mentioned as something that was missed. One exception was that of the skilled respondent. He spoke about how it was hard to leave his job as he really enjoyed the work he was involved in. It can be suggested that the actual physical work engaged in was not something that the remaining non-skilled respondents derived satisfaction from. Their predominant concern or regret for their loss of employment seemed to be the loss of a set of social relations which they had been part of in the workplace. The fact that the work itself was never mentioned could suggest that it did not serve in an important affirmation of masculine identities. Work as a means of freedom from the domestic sphere and the social interaction it offered seemed to be a much more significant factor.

Alienation and the Private Sphere

It was obvious that the respondents did not feel comfortable in the private sphere in their situation of unemployment. I felt this was most obvious in the following respondent's comment.

Brian: *I was coming out of mass one morning and some woman came up to my wife and said how can you put up with him under your feet all the day. And I told her to fuck off it was none of her business.*

Throughout the interview this respondent was anxious to portray the view that in his situation of unemployment he was very content.

Brian: *I'm very happy and I'm fairly well adjusted. I don't know if I gave that impression or not the last day I was talking to you {the group discussion}.*

All of the respondents held the view that it was harder for a man to be unemployed as women still had the private sphere to revert to in times of unemployment. This option was not seen to be available to the men. There was a sense of alienation from the private sphere it was a place that they did not feel they belonged to. It was seen as a woman's domain and was a feminised sense of place. Women's roles as mothers and homemakers were options when they became unemployed.

Tom: *If a woman didn't have kids she could take a chance on probably getting pregnant. Then she's working as far as I'm concerned. A woman with children, that's a job that is.*

Studies that examined men's involvement in the private sphere in the situation of unemployment found that more often men found themselves out of place at home (McKee and Bell 1986). Studies found that as men became less involved in the public domain of work they did not become more active in the private domain of the home. The respondents clearly saw the private domain as feminine and one

that would not aid in an affirmation of their masculine identities. Therefore what the men were left with was a sense of placelessness.

Isolation and Placelessness

Upon entry to the workplace one participates in certain social relations with others that are often lost in one's departure. This loss of social interaction was a strong feature in their departure from the workplace. The respondents felt that men were more isolated than women were, as men did not talk as openly as women did. The social relations engaged by women outside the worksphere in their interaction with others was not matched by men. The respondents believed that women communicated and articulated themselves more so than they did. Subsequently it was felt that men were more isolated than women in the situation of unemployment. In the departure from the workplace the sense of place is given up often creating a certain sense of placelessness. The respondents in their awareness of this and feeling alienated from the private sphere which was seen as a feminine sense of place, felt there was no place for men to go.

Jack: *There's nothing out there for men as such, no where to go. A lot of men are just isolated in the flats. There's lots of groups for women but nothing really for men.*

Often in times of unemployment studies have talked about men occupying the public space of the street. One of these areas is that of the pub culture, however this was not seen as a satisfactory substitute

for the respondents as the social relations undertaken never accounted for real communication.

Jack: The pub is grand but you don't really talk in the pub, you talk but you don't have real conversation if you know what I mean. Anyway you don't really have the money to go drinking.

Thus what emerged for then as a satisfactory substitute sense of place was that of the Men's Centre, which seemed to accommodate the many needs of the men.

The Centre as a Substitute Sense of Place

Tom: Here it's all about having something to do.

The Centre tended to serve two main functions; that of the provision of a sense of place for the unemployed men and also to aid these men in their negotiation of their masculine identity at a point when they perceived it to be under threat. Within the Centre the respondents were involved in a process of self-awareness and self-growth.

Themes discussed in one programme the men had recently participated in dealt with men's ability to share pain and release blockages. The language used by the respondents when they spoke about sharing and healing suggested that in their negotiation of their identities, that the Centre had facilitated in, there seemed to be an acceptance of the discourses offered by the Centre. While the Centre did not advocate or present itself as having a therapeutic agenda, nevertheless through their participation in the Centre these men, some more than others, became involved in a process of self-analysis and

self-examination. There was an awareness of the fact that the previously held privilege of the male as the dominant gender was something that was not available to them anymore in their negotiation of their relationships and their masculine identities.

Connell referred to masculine therapy's rationale as men's needed to break out of the traditional concept of the male role, which was seen to be constricting and highly restrictive. One of the main criticisms levied against this therapy came from a feminist perspective that believed that in men's expression of their desire to escape restrictive male roles, the issue of power was left unaddressed.

The respondent's articulation of how women seemed to gain more than men seemed to come from an unequal notion of what was equal for men and women in society. They seemed to confuse dominance with equality in their assessment of how men and women negotiated the social sphere.

Women's increased independence had been applauded by these men. However when they spoke about how they felt that women were better off than themselves, it suggested that they did not view positions in society held by both genders as being equal. Or indeed did they wish them to be so. Women's empowerment had resulted in men's disempowerment according to the men. It seemed that some of these men did not want to break out of the traditional male role. Women's search for equality was seen as taking some of the patriarchal dividend

from men, it was not viewed as equality. This was obvious in John's statement of how their friend received custody of his children and their group support for this victory. It was perceived as a "hard battle" one they felt he would not have won had his wife not have been an alcoholic. This ties in with their perception of the systems of law as more women friendly. They believed that this man was very lucky. Had his wife not been an alcoholic "he probably wouldn't have a hope". There existed hostility that women did not need men anymore, and were negotiating the public sphere as independent beings both in the workplace and in the social space. Their perception of women's equality was seen as women's advantage over men. The 'therapy' that the Centre seems to offer to these men is that of an awareness of the transient nature of gender roles.

Through their participation in conferences and workshops these men are negotiating contrasting masculine identities. Their grievances in relation to the loss of dominance over their female class counterparts in society and their adoption of the therapy language of the Centre, indicates that the Centre plays a role in facilitating the negotiation of masculine identities. This negotiation may also aid an acceptance of the change in gender relations.

Men's Conference

One of the arenas for such negotiation was a conference that three of the respondents participated in. Sean describes what the weekend was about for him.

Sean: *It was all about sharing. A lot of risks were taken by blokes, cause your'e revealing something about yourself. For me I thought fuck it, I'm going to use this to deal with my shit. It takes a lot of guts to come out and say things. You take a risk wondering what are these people going to think about you as a fella you know.*

The idea of sharing and opening up was equated to a feeling of vulnerability.

Sean: *There were people there who broke down and were crying, grown men. Now normally that's not accepted. It's get up your'e only a fucking wimp, get up you fucking ejit.*

There was a tension between displaying the traditional characteristics of the male, that of strength and invulnerability. Waifeh and Smith (1987) felt that for many men even after years of changing stereotypes, emotions and openness were still among the sacrifices they must make to manhood.

At the conference the risks taken were those of being vulnerable and sharing experiences of pain. Experiences that the men talked about were those that were previously articulated by women alone. Men spoke about their experiences of sexual abuse, molestation and dying of A.I.D.S.

Tom: *My heart went out to him, he broke down crying. My best friend is dying of the virus so I knew what he was going through. A lot of men didn't understand. They didn't tell him to keep his head up like they did to the rest. From their reaction I know they didn't know what he was going through.*

In their articulation of sharing pain and painful experiences Tom states that the man dying of A.I.D.S did not receive the same support from the participants at the Conference. As Tom pointed out they did not seem to understand what he was going through. He was able to empathise as many of his friends had died from the virus. The respondents had availed of the opportunity of this venue to talk about past and present hurts and their sharing of this helped in an evaluation and understanding of their identities.

Sean: *It takes a lot of guts to come out and say things. Some of the stuff for me only opened up for me then. You take a risk wondering what are these people going to think about you as a fella you know and stuff like that.*

He went on further to state

Sean *I think I only got an understanding yesterday {at the Conference} of what the group is all about. I released blockages and that's what it's all about to break down those blockages.*

The respondent's participation and involvement in the Centre had provided an arena in which they negotiated and examined important

aspects of their identities. They were aware of the shifting nature of gender roles. They perceived woman as having advanced in society in becoming independent beings. While some of the respondents seemed to regret the passing of traditional masculine and feminine identities they were nevertheless aware that they had changed and needed to be dealt with.

Chapter Six Conclusion

We have seen in Chapter three theorist's suggestions of the alleged centrality of employment and work in the lives of men and in their construction of masculine identities. Unemployment was thus perceived as providing an example of this identity under challenge. The strongest challenge to masculine identities found in this research came from women's equal negotiation of the public sphere. The affirmation of identities through the arena of work did not arise as a major factor. Work in itself did not seem to be very important to these men. Their loss of social interaction was the most cited aspect missed about work. Indeed what seemed to emerge from the data was that unemployment facilitated in the men's negotiations of their identities. Realising that gender relations had changed and the male privilege of power had been contested, the respondents needed to deal with this. While they did see it as a threat there was a realisation that it had to be dealt with. Henceforth unemployment provided the context from which they set about embarking on this. It was through their situation of unemployment and placelessness that they became involved in an alternative sense of place i.e. the Centre.

The Centre provided the space and indeed framework for them to examine their roles and identities as men. The language used in describing what they did at the Centre demonstrates their acceptance of the discourses of the Centre.

The changing role of women in society came across as the largest threat and challenge to the respondents. The sense gain from women's advancement and empowerment amounted to a sense of loss for men. In

talking about sharing and healing I believe the men were actively involved in the process of change. Men's lack of emotion and sharing was seen as something that men were behind in.

The Centre's main aim is to facilitate a forum for discussion of issues concerning men in the area offering support for each other (Fact Sheet). Its issues include the exploration of men's roles as fathers, brothers, sons and spouses for the new millennium. The Centre offers a similar type of therapy examined by Connell. It offers the men a forum upon which to discuss their roles as men. In the search for identity in modernity, Giddens advocates the recourse to expert systems which is similar to Connell's description of masculinity therapy. The obvious criticism with this is its class restriction. In the arena of the Men's Centre there lies an opportunity for these working class men to explore identities and issues pertaining to masculinity.

This thesis suggests that through the respondent's situation of unemployment their participation in the Centre provided a framework for an exploration of identities. The perceived threat to masculine identities from unemployment did not seem to be a significant factor. In fact work itself in the majority of cases did not seem to be significant in the affirmation of masculine identities of these respondents. One respondent did miss the independence of being employed. Henceforth the importance attributed to work in connection with identities did not seem to arise in this particular study. The threat to the masculine identities of the respondents was perceived as a result their female class counterpart's roles in society.

Some of the respondents still regretted their loss of male privilege arising from this while some had accepted it more than others. For all of the respondents there is an awareness of the changing nature of gender roles and appear to use the Men's Centre as forum for discussing and dealing with these changes.

The Future Looks Bright

As I wander through a desert
I experience the loneliness of life
As the well ran dry
The tears rolled from my eye
With a forgiving nature I let go of the past
Escaping from the crater,
Away from the sand blast.

Chorus

The future looks bright
I love life tonight
The future looks bright tonight.

Our life is like a river with many different stages
Family duties, faith and hope
A book of many pages.
It flows from young to old,
From birth until you die,
Learning from experience,
Not giving up or passing by.

Chorus

The future's bright for me today,
For I've come to realise, that I have got to change,
I've learnt a lot of things in life
And understand it's not worth the strife.
The past was dark, the future is bright
There was many a time I have cried at night.

(This song was composed by the men as a result of a personal development course they embarked on through music)

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