Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914

John Tosh

In the present intellectual climate, writing history by period is distinctly out of fashion. The cultural mode of historical analysis tends to bypass such concerns. In pursuing the cultural turn, we have become used to finding a plurality of contested meanings in the texts and images of the past, which has the effect of dissolving any sense of trajectory or process. But the long view—or the bird's eye view—brings into focus the sequential development of a few large themes, not all of which may be visible to the cultural analyst working on a particular moment in time.[1] My purpose in this article is to restore a sense of trajectory to the history of British masculinities in the nineteenth century, while at the same time acknowledging the continuing appeal of more traditional gender formations.

During the period 1800–1914, Britain was first and foremost an industrializing society; it was also, with growing conviction, an imperialist country; and it was a society characterized by increasingly sharp category distinctions of gender and sexuality. Masculinity is self-evidently central to our understanding of the last of these themes, which has been the subject of important work over the past fifteen years. Industry and empire, on the other hand, have been the property of entrenched historiographies, which have proved resistant to gender perspectives. Thus E. J. Hobsbawm's influential text, called explicitly *Industry and Empire*, included no intimation that gender might be a significant dimension when it was first published in 1964; and when a second edition appeared as recently as 1999, the historical role of women was in part acknowledged, but men continued to be seen as entirely ungendered persons.[2] That kind of myopia is all too typical of syntheses of modern British history.[3] At the same time, historians of masculinity

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[1] See Penelope J. Corfield, "History and the Challenge of Gender History," *Rethinking History* 1 (1997): 241–58, quote on 249.

[2] E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day*, 2nd ed. (London, 1999).

[3] A rare exception is Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640–1990* (London, 1999).

tend to work in a compartmentalized fashion, focusing on family, work, or the public sphere rather than attempting an overview. This article is intended show how the historiography of the nineteenth century looks when masculinity is accorded its proper weight in economic development, imperial expansion, and the culture of gender. Each sphere provides the basis for a partial periodization, but how the three are to be related to one another presents acute problems of historical explanation, which have thus far scarcely been addressed.

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The starting point for the interpretation of changing masculinities in nineteenth-century Britain is the growing ascendancy of a cluster of masculine attributes that corresponded to the requirements of an urbanized, market-led, and increasingly industrialized society. To call this "modern" masculinity is too imprecise. The criteria of "modernity" are notoriously unstable, and "modern masculinity" can be taken in a different sense to the one offered here, as in George Mosse's *The Image of Man* (1996), where the key determinant is not industrialization but nationalism (his book being primarily based on continental rather than British material).[4] "Modern masculinity" also begs too many questions about the fate of masculinity in postindustrial society. To call it "middle-class" would discount the very important place that this masculinity had both above and below the middle class. "Bourgeois" is the least misleading label, because it suggests not just the class in which this masculinity took shape, but a specific phase in historical development—a social order of which bourgeois masculinity was a constituent part. There has been a necessary reaction against seeing this as the only story to be told (in the manner of Peter Stearns's pioneering work of the 1970s, *Be A Man!*); indeed—Mosse's work excepted—the coupling of masculinity with "modernity" is distinctly out of fashion.[5] Yet on a long view the nineteenth century was clearly pivotal in entrenching an entrepreneurial, individualistic masculinity, organized around a punishing work ethic, a compensating validation of the home, and a restraint on physical aggression.

These features were not, of course, entirely new. Much of the picture painted by Margaret Hunt in her account of the eighteenth-century middling sort is recognizable to the historian of Victorian bourgeois masculinity: the careful accounting for time spent, the emphasis on thrift, and the avoidance of physical conflict in public spaces.[6] But the social base of this masculinity was much broader in the nineteenth century. The commercial, manufacturing, and professional classes were all expanding at a much faster rate than before, and their lives were increasingly organized around the dual commitment to work and home so characteristic of modern industrial society. These values were to be found equally in the lives of the schoolmaster, the mill owner, the doctor, and the tenant farmer, without, of

[4] George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York, 1996).

[5] Peter N. Stearns, *Be A Man! Males in Modern Society* (New York, 1979).

[6] Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and Family in England, 1680–1780* (Berkeley, 1996); David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity England, 1550–1850* (Berkeley, 2002).

course, eroding the important occupational distinctions between them.[7] They had a similar hold over the labor aristocracy: working men proud of their hard-earned skill, their "independence," their domestic habits, and their self-improvement.[8] Domesticated manhood was the ideal of the "moral force" Chartists and of the mid-Victorian advocates of household franchise.[9] By the turn of the century, the pattern was sufficiently prevalent for the Conservative Party to shift its electoral pitch from "the honest labourer who had earned the right to a quiet pint, to the honest labourer who had earned the right to a quiet home life," as Jon Lawrence has put it.[10]

In two areas "modern" masculinity entered new territory in the nineteenth century. The first of these was an increasing self-consciousness about occupation (or "calling") and a corresponding elaboration of the work ethic. In the middle class, as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall showed, masculinity was more firmly locked than ever into a notion of paid, productive work, as wives were excluded from contributing to the business.[11] A generation later a similar process was to be observed in the working class, especially among those workers whose traditional pride in their skill had to be maintained in the less-promising conditions of the factory. This was also the period when a "family wage" for the "bread-winner," and a wife dedicated to domestic duties, became the goal of the better-paid worker.[12] This exclusive male responsibility for the family income led to the characteristically Victorian valorization of work as both moral duty and personal fulfillment. Disciplined attention to business had long been the mark of the self-made man, but nineteenth-century attitudes to work went beyond crude economic rationality. They reflected unease about the unfettered acquisitiveness of commercial society and the disappearance of traditional moral landmarks.[13] In its most elevated form (as in the hugely popular writings of Thomas Carlyle) work ceased to be drudgery and became the path to self-making, a creative act conferring meaning on the work and identity on the worker. A particularly powerful version of this ideal was instilled in the aspirant members of the service class in the public

[7] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT, 1999).

[8] Neville Kirk, *The Growth of Working-Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (Beckenham, 1985); Keith McClelland, "Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850–1880," in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London, 1991), 74–91.

[9] Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches* (Berkeley, 1995); Keith McClelland, "England's Greatness, the Working Man," in *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867*, by Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall (Cambridge, 2000), 98–99.

[10] Jon Lawrence, "Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880–1914," *English Historical Review* 108 (1993): 629–52, quote on 650.

[11] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, 1987), 229–71.

[12] The interpretation of this process has been the subject of vigorous debate among feminists and others. For a critical overview, see Colin Creighton, "The Rise of the Male Breadwinner Family: A Reappraisal," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38 (1996): 310–37. See particularly Wally Seccombe, "Patriarchy Stabilized: The Construction of the Male Bread-Winner Wage Norm in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Social History* 11 (1986): 53–76.

[13] The classic exposition of this theme is Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1833–1870* (New Haven, CT, 1957), chap. 3.

schools whose hold over the middle class rapidly grew between 1870 and 1914.[14] Duty and personal authenticity were characteristically Victorian renditions of the work ethic. For some men they furnished a genuinely inspiring personal code; for others, little more than a camouflage for moneymaking and self-advancement. The work ethic also conferred a certain dignity on breakdown from "overwork," a condition of passivity and dependence that would otherwise have placed the victim's manhood in question.[15] Of the central importance of work to masculine identity there can be no doubt.

The second area in which bourgeois masculinity changed in the course of the nineteenth century was in the value placed on the domestic sphere. Here again we have to be careful in defining what was specifically "Victorian" about the cult of home. Eighteenth-century businessmen practiced a "rational" domesticity, regarding it as a means of stemming the drain of spending on entertainments in town, and as the best guarantor of their respectability.[16] As the middle-class abandonment of the pub suggests, those motives still weighed with the Victorian bourgeois. But his commitment to home went beyond the "rational." It was sentimental in the sense of being an emotional reaction to a sense of alienation from the very circumstances that made possible his success. Materially, the home was counterposed to the noise and ugliness of the city; morally, it was counterposed to the cynicism and cruelty of market relations.[17] The competing claims of home and work were estimated in widely divergent ways: for every morally fastidious businessman whose spirits lightened as he crossed the domestic threshold, there was another who relished the aggression and risk taking of commercial life as a break from the banal routines of home life. The tension between patriarchal authority and the wife's claim to superiority in "her" sphere took many different forms.[18] But however it was experienced, the gulf between home and work had never been greater, and it profoundly conditioned men's modes of self-presentation in both spheres.[19] The culture of domesticity was most elaborate and articulate in the professional and business classes, where it was well entrenched by the 1840s; by the end of the century it was no less prevalent among the suburban lower middle class, whose commitment to companionate marriage has been analyzed by James Hammerton.[20]

The least-explored dimension of the development of a masculinity attuned to industrial society is its declining investment in physical violence. Eighteenth-century society had tolerated high levels of violence in the streets and in taverns. Masculine honor was virtually coterminous with reputation, so that any slur or

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[14] J. R. de S. Honey, *Tom Brown's Universe: The Development of the Victorian Public School* (London, 1977).

[15] Janet Oppenheim, *"Shattered Nerves": Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (New York, 1991), 152–57. Compare E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1993), 185–93.

[16] Hunt, *Middling Sort*.

[17] Tosh, *A Man's Place*, chap. 2.

[18] A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (London, 1992).

[19] Ibid.

[20] A. James Hammerton, "Pooterism or Partnership? Marriage and Masculine Identity in the Lower Middle Class, 1870–1920," *Journal of British Studies* 38 (1999): 291–321.

insult invited immediate challenge.[21] Gentlemen fought duels, and workers fought with their firsts, but these were only the more formal of a range of encounters that shaded off into common assault. The Evangelicals, who exercised such a profound influence on the middle class, demanded a revolution in masculine values. For an externally validated honor they sought to substitute the internal spring of "character," one of whose manifestations was physical self-restraint. The duel had by 1850 been consigned to history, largely as a result of the pressure of bourgeois respectability.[22] Men of the respectable classes were expected to observe a code of behavior that minimized casual slights to others. Only in the "rough" working class did a culture of physical confrontation persist. Here the code of honor still prompted men to resort to violence in the heat of the moment and to stage fistfights to resolve disputes.[23] As Andrew Davies's vivid account of "scuttling" in turn-of-the-century Salford shows, what would later be called gang warfare was integral to the street life of young working-class men.[24] Yet overall there was a massive reduction in male violence. There is considerable anecdotal evidence that urban artisan culture became less violent in the early nineteenth century.[25] In the latter half of the century we have persuasive quantitative evidence. Between 1850 and 1914 trials for indictable offenses declined by one-third (over a period when the population of England and Wales doubled).[26] As the Criminal Registrar put it in 1901, what had occurred was "the substitution of words without blows for blows with or without words."[27] In two particularly critical areas—juvenile crime and domestic assault—the statistical base is inadequate for any trend to be determined, but in general the link between masculinity and violence was much weaker in 1914 than it had been in 1800.[28] As Martin Wiener has commented, "at every level of the criminal justice system, men were increasingly expected to exercise a greater degree of control over themselves than ever before."[29] This process is still poorly

[21] Robert B. Shoemaker, "Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London," *Social History* 26 (2001): 190–208. Shoemaker points to some important ways in which masculine reputation was already counting for less before 1800.

[22] Donna Andrew, "The Code of Honour and Its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700–1850," *Social History* 5 (1980): 409–34. See also Robert B. Shoemaker, "The Taming of the Duel: Masculinity, Honour and Ritual Violence in London, 1660–1800," *Historical Journal* 45 (2002): 525–45.

[23] John E. Archer, "'Men Behaving Badly?' Masculinity and the Uses of Violence, 1850–1900," in *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850–1950*, ed. Shani d'Cruze (Harlow, UK, 2000), 41–54.

[24] Andrew Davies, "Youth Gangs, Masculinity and Violence in Late Victorian Manchester and Salford," *Journal of Social History* 32 (1998): 349–69.

[25] Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*.

[26] V. A. C. Gatrell, "The Decline of Theft and Violence in Victorian and Edwardian England," in *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500*, ed. V. A. C. Gatrell, Bruce Lenman, and Geoffrey Parker (London, 1980), 240.

[27] Quoted in Gatrell, "Decline of Theft and Violence," 241.

[28] For juvenile crime, see Heather Shore, *Artful Dodgers: Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge, 1999), and Davies, "Youth Gangs." For domestic assault, see Martin Wiener, "The Victorian Criminalization of Men," in *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America*, ed. Pieter Spierenburg (Columbus, OH, 1998), 208. Hammerton (*Cruelty and Companionship*, 39–42) sounds a strong note of caution. For a more optimistic reading, see Nancy Tomes, "A 'Torrent of Abuse': Crimes of Violence between Working-Class Men and Women in London, 1840–1875," *Journal of Social History* 11 (1978): 328–45.

[29] Wiener, 'Victorian Criminalization of Men," 206.

understood, but it must certainly be attributed to something more profound than improved policing.

The hegemonic standing of these masculine traits was expressed in a coherent public discourse of manliness. Given the extensive primary documentation on the subject, it is not surprising that manliness is one of the best-studied aspects of nineteenth-century masculinity. It is most often treated as part of the educational agenda of the reformed public schools, or as an area of applied theology.[30] Both of these approaches lose sight of manliness as a mundane standard of conduct that was rooted in everyday social relations and long predated the Evangelicals or the "muscular Christians." In fact, manliness had much more to do with one's standing in the sight of men than with one's standing with the Almighty. And although many men doubtless internalized some of its precepts, manliness had little to do with personal authenticity or interiority. It preserved its early modern origins as an external code of conduct, policed by one's peers. Its core attributes were physical vigor, energy and resolution, courage, and straightforwardness. Its public face was "independence"—the capacity to make one's own way in the world and to be one's own master. Bourgeois manliness was of a piece with these traditional understandings. Probably the most powerful practical consideration reinforcing the work ethic was anxiety about maintaining the means of independence, at a time when the free play of the market was more unpredictable than ever. Where bourgeois manliness took a more distinctive path was in emphasizing the domestic affections and in proscribing interpersonal violence. In these two areas Evangelicalism provided significant reinforcement, but it would be quite wrong to suppose a convergence between bourgeois manliness and the Evangelical attempt to establish Jesus Christ as the manly exemplar. Manliness was essentially a secular standard.[31]

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So much, then, for the closely related cluster of masculinities that made the most decisive mark on British society between 1800 and 1914. To say that does not, of course, mean that bourgeois masculinity amounted to a norm for society as a whole or that any variation from it was deviance. Its hegemonic status must be carefully qualified. Youthful aspirants to bourgeois masculinity commonly experimented with forms of leisure and sexual expression that conflicted sharply with the hegemonic values of industry and continence.[32] The aristocracy was far from toeing the bourgeois line: neither land ownership nor the public service that so

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[30] For the reform of public schools, David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning* (London, 1961); J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester, 1987); Claudia Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857–1915* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991). For applied theology, see Norman Vance, *Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature* (Cambridge, 1985); Donald E. Hall, ed., *Muscular Christianity* (Cambridge, 1994); David Alderson, *Mansex Fine: Religion, Manliness and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Manchester, 1998).

[31] Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 110–14, and "Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 12 (2002): 455–72.

[32] Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, vol. 2, *The Tender Passion* (New York, 1986), 352–90; Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford, 1995), 72–103.

often went with it conformed to the work ethic as understood by Carlyle or Samuel Smiles.[33] Above all, the unskilled working class was largely untouched by bourgeois masculinity. It is extraordinarily difficult to get past the derogatory label of "rough," which was applied to them so casually by the propertied classes. Only a handful of scholars have shed light on the masculinity of the urban poor, and we know even less about the rural poor.[34] The material is certainly too thin to permit any statement about continuity or change over our period. But the overall impression is that the bourgeois code cannot have touched more than 40 percent of the adult male population (on the basis of the computation of classes made by Dudley Baxter in 1867).[35]

That is one reason why it would be a mistake to confine the analysis of nineteenth-century masculinity to a class perspective. In recent years there has been a greater emphasis on masculinity as a marker of sexual difference whose meaning in some ways transcended distinctions of class. The manifestations of sexual difference—in dress, speech, moral profile, and allotted sphere of life—have long been a staple of Victorian studies. They have become analytically sharper as a result of Thomas Laqueur's thesis concerning the transition from a "one-sex" model to a "two-sex" model of reproductive anatomy.[36] This distinction was further illuminated by Dror Wahrman's conclusion that in the late eighteenth-century world "gender collapsed into sex"—by which he means that cultural markers of gender now tended to run in the same groove as the binary model of bodily difference.[37] Not only were the reproductive roles of male and female more sharply differentiated than ever before; the range of approved sexual behavior was narrowed down to privilege penetrative sex, which emphasized the all-powerful libido of the male and the passivity of the female; and the secondary sexual characteristics that had been the subject of a good deal of playful parody now rigidified into their Victorian stereotypes.[38] In moral discourse there was hardly any overlap between the active, rational, resolute male and the emotional, nurturing, malleable female. The two sexes were essentialized, and woman was constructed as "other" in a more absolute sense than ever before.

While we now know a good deal about how this shift in perception played out in cultural and social terms, explanation lags behind. Laqueur's two-sex model surely adds up to more than the ideological face of the separation of home and work. It points to more deep-seated changes. Two suggestions have been made. First, the sharpening of sexual difference and the "othering" of women might be interpreted as a strategy to smooth over class divisions by playing up men's shared identity as "men."[39] The currency enjoyed across classes by the central tenets of manliness lends some support to this view; translated into political rhetoric, manliness had distinct connotations of social leveling, as the debates around the ex-

[33] David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, CT, 1990).

[34] Notably Davies, "Youth Gangs."

[35] Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989), 29.

[36] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, 1990).

[37] Dror Wahrman, "Percy's Prologue: From Gender Play to Gender Panic in Eighteenth-Century England," *Past and Present*, no. 159 (1998): 113–60, quote on 156.

[38] Tim Hitchcock, "Redefining Sex in Eighteenth-Century England," *History Workshop Journal* 41 (1996): 73–90.

[39] Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, 2.

tension of the suffrage in the 1850s and 1860s show.[40] Yet to be effective, the belief that gender trumped class as the basis of social identity would have had to permeate the working class, and there is little evidence that this was the case. Polarized notions of sexual character did not sit well with dual-income households, which were the reality in a majority of working-class families. Nor did popular culture subscribe to the convention of the passive and passionless female: as J. S. Bratton has pointed out, music hall song portrayed women as having an equal if not greater sex drive than men.[41]

Laqueur himself has suggested a different line of explanation: that the rise of two-sex thinking was a defensive reaction on the part of men to a more egalitarian political climate. The French Revolution launched the ideals of natural rights and democratic representation into the realm of practical politics, thus undermining not only traditional notions of rank, but traditional notions of gender hierarchy as well. Polarized theories of sexual difference were an attempt to stem the tide by denying to women those mental and moral attributes that qualified men for their public roles. Men were fitted for responsibility in the public sphere—and women were disqualified—by their natures.[42] Radical politics was torn between sexual egalitarianism and a restatement of male supremacy, as the debates within Chartism showed.[43] In fact, Laqueur's argument is more persuasive when extended to the late nineteenth century. In this period men had to deal with not only a revival of feminist polemic but also material improvements in the position of women that diminished masculine privilege. The legal reduction of the powers of husbands in the 1870s and 1880s, the advances in female education, and the growing independence of young single women (symbolized by the New Woman) all prompted an intensified discourse of sexual difference. Manliness was now redefined as a synonym for the toughest and most exclusive male attributes. It denied men's emotional vulnerability and reinforced their monopoly on courage and stoicism.[44] It was asserted more emphatically than ever that women did not share these attributes; indeed, it was stressed that women's mental and reproductive powers would be impaired by aping men's intellectual pursuits. Men's investment in ideas of sexual difference was thus a defensive response to improvements in the status of women. At the turn of the century the campaign for women's suffrage prompted from the "anti" camp some of the most extreme statements ever made about the respective natures of men and women.[45] The patently reactive quality of this separatist culture has prompted some recent scholarship to speak of a "crisis" of masculinity at this time.[46] There was certainly a sense of gender crisis running through some of the most influential texts of the period—from Rider Haggard's

[40] Tosh, "Gentlemanly Politeness," 468–71; McClelland, "England's Greatness," 97–101.

[41] J. S. Bratton, *The Victorian Popular Ballad* (London, 1975), 159–62, 184–88, 192–99.

[42] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 194–207.

[43] Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*, 220–32.

[44] Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning*, chap. 4; J. A. Mangan, "Social Darwinism and Upper-Class Education in Late Victorian and Edwardian England," in Mangan and Walvin, eds., 135–59; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 182–89.

[45] Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London, 1978), 56–81.

[46] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York, 1986); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land*, vol.1, *The War of the Words* (New Haven, CT, 1988); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London, 1991).

early novels in the 1880s to Baden Powell's *Scouting for Boys* in 1908. But for the notion of crisis to hold, much more work will need to be done on the tone of gender relations outside the literary elite.

One undeniable casualty of this intensified emphasis on sexual difference was the limited degree of tolerance shown to homosexual men prior to the late nineteenth century. A polarized understanding of the sexes entailed a sharper distinction between heterosexual and homosexual activity, with the latter seen as inherently transgressive.[47] Significantly, the way in which this intolerance was expressed was through the slur of effeminacy. During the eighteenth century, "effeminate" referred to a man who was drawn too much to the company of women, who loved luxury and display, and who neglected his physical and martial accomplishments. Its wide currency reflected a culture in which there was considerable ambiguity about the dividing line between masculine and feminine.[48] For most of the nineteenth century the charge of effeminacy was leveled less frequently because the markers of sexual difference were more clear-cut. By the end of the century, as the trials of Oscar Wilde demonstrated, "effeminacy" had become a principal signifier of homosexuality—and a highly negative one that, along with the slur of "degeneracy," turned the homosexual into the most threatening "other" of all.[49] Michel Foucault saw this period as a turning point not only in the hostile labeling of homosexuality, but in the creation—through a "reverse discourse"—of a homosexual identity speaking for itself.[50] Jeffrey Weeks's pioneering history of homosexuality in Britain was strongly influenced by Foucault's analysis, but more recent scholars have tended to see the emergence of the modern homosexual as a much more gradual and uneven process, initially confined to a small Bohemian coterie and continuing well into the twentieth century.[51] However, on the intensified hostility toward homosexuality at this time there is little room for argument. It was a measure of the embattled quality of hegemonic masculinity that it bore down so heavily on a sexual minority whose tastes were indulged with relative discretion. But as well as introducing troubling ambiguities into the conventional polarization between the sexes, homosexuals also symbolized a rejection of bourgeois masculinity, in seeming to place personal gratification above the demands of work and in undermining the authority of the domestic ideal. Homosexuality had become a powerful metaphor of decadence and subversion.[52]

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[47] Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700–1800* (London, 1997), chap. 5; Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650–1850* (London, 1998), 72–85.

[48] Michèle Cohen, "Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England," in *English Masculinities, 1660–1800*, ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (London, 1999), 44–61; Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society: Britain, 1660–1800* (London, 2001), 128–35, 143–52.

[49] Alan Sinfield, *The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment* (London, 1994), 25–47, 109–26.

[50] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London, 1981), 1:42–44, 100–102.

[51] Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1977); Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885–1914* (Cambridge, 2003); Matt Houlbrook, "A Sun among Cities" (PhD diss., Essex University, 2001).

[52] Sinfield, *The Wilde Century*; Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York, 1993).

At first sight my inclusion of an imperial dimension might suggest an elaboration of the theme of "otherness." As a result of the blossoming of postcolonial scholarship in recent years, counterimages of blackness, located primarily in the colonies, are now seen as having been central to the construction of metropolitan masculinity in the modern period. Indeed, this is one of the most original achievements of the new cultural history, with important implications for British identities today.[53] But in terms of understanding nineteenth-century masculinities, this may not be the most important meaning of empire. The empire was inscribed in British masculinities not only as a source of imagined "others," but as a space where redundant masculinities could flourish, both in fantasy and in actual experience.

Britain's imperial reflexes were essentially a negative response to the pace and direction of social change brought about by industrialization. Such a perspective may call to mind Joseph Schumpeter's "atavistic" theory that imperialism was not so much a stratagem of advanced capitalism as a deep-seated reflex of the pre-bourgeois social order.[54] In the case of Britain Schumpeter's denial of economic rationale is scarcely convincing, given the global reach of its commerce and its financial dealings. But as an aspect of national *mentalité*, empire represented an escape from some of the most pressing features of modernity. In popular culture, and in the aspirations of those who tried their fortunes there, the colonies stood for old values and redundant lifestyles.

In the first place, the colonial world was hardly an advertisement for the bourgeois work ethic. Proverbially it attracted the black sheep, the misfit, and the desperado. It stood for adventure rather than disciplined occupation. Between the 1850s and the 1880s, that image was succinctly symbolized by the gold and diamond fields that opened up in Australia, Canada, and South Africa. They held out the prospect not only of wealth beyond the common run, but of wealth acquired by luck rather than prolonged effort, and they were bitterly deplored by moralists for that reason.[55] But the majority of the 1.5 million men (roughly 50 percent more than the number of women) who emigrated to the colonies from mainland Britain during the long nineteenth century had no such prospects, and they certainly did not anticipate a free ride. Nor is there any evidence that they rejected the work ethic. Their quarrel was not with hard work as such, but with the way in which the conditions of early industrial capitalism denied labor its just reward. Recent scholarship has established that the typical emigrant was not totally destitute, but his decision to emigrate usually stemmed from adverse economic conditions.[56] Many emigrants were unemployed; others had been ruined by one of the periodic financial crashes.[57] These men hoped to establish their independence, not in the cutthroat commercial atmosphere of Britain, but in a society where land (or the dignity of a free artisan) was freely available. With land they

[53] Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (London, 2002), and "Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment," in *The Post-colonial Question*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London, 1996), 65–77.

[54] J. A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes*, trans. Heinz Norden (London, 1951).

[55] David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s* (Sydney, 1994); Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto, 2001).

[56] Robin Haines, *Emigration and the Labouring Poor: Australian Recruitment in Britain and Ireland, 1831–1860* (Basingstoke, 1997).

[57] See, e.g., A. F. Hattersley, *The British Settlement of Natal* (Cambridge, 1950).

could marry and secure a full masculine status. With free access to game, they could fulfill that deep-seated aspiration to hunt, which the English gaming laws were dedicated to repressing.[58] As one Natal settler recalled of his departure from Britain in the 1840s, he sought to be "promoted very rapidly to 'captain on my own quarter deck.'"[59]

Most emigrants were married or intended to marry as soon as they had the means: their aim was to establish a household on traditional patriarchal lines. But in a different vein—and one much more fully expressed in popular culture—empire was associated with freedom from domesticity. Outside the most settled parts of the empire, there was less social pressure to marry, and less possibility of doing so, given the demographic preponderance of male immigrants. The ports, trading posts, mining settlements, and bush farms offered a comparatively undiluted homosocial environment.[60] The same went for the administration and the armed forces. Men who entered any of these occupations were putting off marriage for the foreseeable future, and for many this was a positive attraction—a means of evading the dead hand of domestic routine. By the late nineteenth century, when men of the middle and upper classes were becoming increasingly restive at the constraints of domesticity, there is considerable evidence for the empire's attractions as a men-only sphere in both popular literature and individual life histories: it was the bachelor's patrimony. Much of the popular appeal of imperial heroes like Gordon, Kitchener, and Baden-Powell lay in their total renunciation of the domestic (unlike Nelson or Wellington). From the 1880s, bourgeois marital ennui was perfectly mirrored in adventure fiction—not just Henty, who built on an established juvenile market, but Robert Louis Stevenson and Rider Haggard, who made big inroads into the adult market. The message was clear: the colonies stood for homosocial camaraderie, to be enjoyed either in the imagination, or by going overseas.[61]

The adventure fiction of the period is also notable for its preoccupation with violence. In juvenile literature the high point of violence has been identified in the 1870s; for adults in the 1880s.[62] As Richard Phillips has written of Rider Haggard and his circle, "never before, in respectable Victorian literature, was violence so graphic, gratuitous and light-hearted, so calculated to entertain."[63] This literary aspect both reflected and deepened an association between empire and a level of violence far beyond what was tolerated in Britain. Indeed, I want to advance the speculative argument that overseas violence became more attractive as the legal and social suppression of male violence proceeded at home. Martin Wiener does not even pose the question of what the sharp decline in assaults and

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[58] This is a recurrent theme in letters home from settlers overseas. See, e.g., Poulett Scrope, ed., *Extracts of Letters from Poor Emigrants Who Emigrated Last Year to Canada and the United States* (London, 1831), 14–15; *Sidney's Emigrant's Journal* (12 October 1848), 13.

[59] George Russell, autobiography (1873), 65, Killie Campbell Library, Durban, South Africa.

[60] For the early days of British settlement in New Zealand, see, e.g., Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male—a History*, 2nd ed. (Auckland, 1996), 2–42.

[61] Tosh, *A Man's Place*, chap. 8.

[62] Patrick Dunae, "Boys' Literature," *Victorian Studies* 24 (1980): 105–21; Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire* (London, 1997), 69–70.

[63] Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire*, 70.

the end of dueling meant for the British Empire.[64] But it is at least worth considering the suggestion that a masculine culture not yet reconciled to the outlawing of interpersonal violence was drawn to the empire as a career posting and as an imaginative space where physical assertion could be given free rein. Social control in racially stratified colonies was much more crudely applied than in Britain. Whether it be the settler disciplining his domestic servants, the district administrator punishing tax defaulters, or the governor suppressing civil commotion, positions of authority had a summary aspect in which legal process easily tipped over into overt violence. Reports of disorder or mutiny in the colonies seemed to touch a particularly sensitive nerve in Britain, suggesting that impulses of punishment and revenge, which had been repressed at home, could be indulged in the less-regulated world of the colonies. That would seem to be one explanation for the strong tide of opinion running in favor of Governor Eyre after his brutal reprisals in Jamaica (439 executions and six hundred floggings).[65] The battle of Omdurman is another case: the horrific casualties on the Sudanese side (eleven thousand dead as against a mere forty-eight in Kitchener's army) were hailed as "revenge" for the murder of Gordon thirteen years earlier.[66] The "civilizing process" in Britain was bought at the price of an intensified appetite for bloodletting in the colonial world.[67]

The appeal of empire to men might be summed up by saying that it represented an unequivocal assertion of masculinity, a place where autonomy could be achieved without constant negotiation with the opposite sex. As a powerful rhetorical reinforcement of "difference," its appeal was particularly strong when conditions for the attainment of masculinity in Britain became problematic. The classic instance concerns the lower middle class during the 1890s. One of the few certain conclusions about the social composition of jingoism is that clerks were prominently represented. Office work was a traditional route into the middle class for the upwardly mobile working-class man. But in the late nineteenth century large corporations and some sections of the civil service began to recruit female typists and telegraphists as a cheaper and more "docile" workforce. Female clerks grew rapidly in numbers, until by 1911 they accounted for nearly one-third of all commercial clerks.[68] Male clerks opposed this trend not only because they feared redundancy or wage reduction, but because their gender status was on the line. Office work had long had overtones of effeminacy. The more polarized the attribution of gender characteristics, the more uncomfortable these overtones became. With the entry of women into office employment, they became insupportable. Gregory Anderson's work on Manchester provides suggestive evidence of how strongly male clerks reacted to this slur on their manhood.[69] Young single clerks were also prominent in public manifestations of jingoism, notably the Mafeking celebrations on the

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[64] Wiener, "Victorian Criminalization of Men."

[65] Bernard Semmel, *The Governor Eyre Controversy* (London, 1962); Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, 243–64, 406–24.

[66] P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1977), 240.

[67] In Kipling's *The Light That Failed* (London, 1891)—published a few years before Omdurman—Dick Heldar does not flinch from killing Sudanese in battle or at placing himself in the line of certain death. His appetite for frontier violence is his way of resolving a failed relationship with a "new woman."

[68] Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester, 1976), 56.

[69] Ibid., 56–60.

streets in 1900. This same group was strongly represented in the City Imperial Volunteers and the Imperial Yeomanry who fought in the Anglo-Boer War.[70] The clerk who cheered on the army, or better still enlisted, was less vulnerable to the charge of having soft and useless hands. Noisy enthusiasm for the empire allowed him to rise above the demeaning feminine associations of his occupation. Jingoism acted as a displacement of fundamental male anxieties.

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During the long nineteenth century, the codes of masculinity observed by the middle and upper classes were modified in accordance with the requirements of an entrepreneurial, urbanizing society. In an economy committed to the free market, the work ethic, the cultivation of the domestic sphere, and the curtailment of interpersonal violence, all had their place. But, in spite of a coherent, high-profile moral discourse (i.e., manliness), the hegemony of bourgeois masculinity was heavily qualified. More than half the male population lay beyond its remit. That the laboring poor were routinely damned for shirking and skiving, for wife-beating, and for assaulting each other in public places was partly a middle-class way of confirming their own identity, but it also reflected the reality of a working population that lived by quite different masculine codes. That class division was ameliorated by an essentializing ideology of gender, which implied that distinctions between men and women were more fundamental than divisions between classes. This ideology boxed both sexes into a very constricting self-image, and it had the secondary but draconian consequence of ostracizing same-sex behavior more severely than ever before. But here too the project of an overarching ideology proved elusive. What little work has been done in this area suggests that within working-class culture there was a continuing adherence to something like a one-sex model.

One of my main objectives has been to show how closely integrated imperial impulses were with the gender regime in Britain itself. At one level imperial commitment signaled a disengagement from the masculine norms prevailing in Britain. This might take the form of seeking to recreate the past, notably the link between smallholding and independence for which so many emigrants looked. Or it might involve an attraction to masculine values whose expression at home was curtailed—adventure, male comradeship, and licensed aggression. At another level, imperial commitment beckoned as an unequivocal avowal of "hard" masculinity, a means of evading the charge of failed manhood. It reinforced a man's sense of his own masculinity, not only in his own estimation, but more importantly in the eyes of others. Ultimately, the colonies provided a sphere in which military aspirations could be safely indulged—in most cases with relatively little danger to those who enlisted, and with no danger at all to those who applauded from the sidelines in Britain. The normalization of war feeling without experience of the reality was of course one reason why the nation was gripped by patriotic militarism in August 1914.

[70] Richard N. Price, "Society, Status and Jingoism: The Social Roots of Lower Middle-Class Patriotism, 1870–1900," in *The Lower Middle Class in Britain*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick (London, 1977), 89–112.