Definitions of Masculinity in Early Modern England

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English masculinity, or manhood as it was referred to in texts from the time, shifted and adapted throughout the early modern period in response to the many social and economic changes that occurred in this time frame. As a result of this, it is safe to say that at no point during this period was there ever a singular complete and uniform concept of manhood or masculine identity.[1] More to the point, different men practiced manhood and actioned masculine ideals in different ways, as will be explored further. Throughout this article, where manhood is mentioned, it will be in reference to the masculine values and the themes of patriarchy and credit, as these were consistently present in discussions of manhood both throughout the period and in secondary literature. This article will focus on definitions and meanings of manhood to illustrate how the masculine identity was constructed in England at the time. In the period, there were many how-to guides, or conduct books published to teach young men how to be men such as *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government* by John Dod and Robert Cleaver that was a widely circulated text from the time and just one example of the teachings made available to young men. These will be examined to assess the expectations that men were meant to possess alongside secondary literature to evaluate the impact of these expectations.[2]

Early modern manliness centered around a man's credit and patriarchal success that resulted from manifestations of a broad set of qualities or attributes that were escribed to English masculinity of this period. Conduct writers such as John Dod and Robert Clever who stated that 'a man needeth many things' and 'qualities moe, which were too long to rehearse', played a key role in establishing an expectation of what a man should be by naming traits that they deemed necessary for respectable masculinity.[3] These traits included 'strength, industry,

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[1] Bernard Capp,' 'Jesus Wept' but Did the Englishman? Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern England', *Past & Present*, 224 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107.
[2] Mark Breitenberg, "Anxious Masculinities: Sexual Jealousy in Early Modern England," *Feminist Studies*,19.2 (Maryland: Feminist Studies, Inc., 1993), 378.
[3] John Dod and Robert Clever, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government for the Ordering of Private Families, According to the Direction of Gods Word : Whereunto is Adioyned in a More Particular Manner, the Seuerall Duties of the Husband Towards His Wife, and the Wiues Dutie Towards Her Husband, the Parents*

self-sufficiency, honesty, authority, self-government, moderation, reason, wisdom and wit' which were all claimed for patriarchal manhood.[4] Honest respectability was seen as the leading trait for a man to possess for both the achievement of the masculine identity and the betterment of society. By putting these traits into a societal context 'conduct writers insisted that it was not only the terms of manhood that were at stake but the entire social order', showing how the demonstration of these traits was a key pillar of early modern manhood.[5] Over the course of the early modern period, some of these qualities shifted slightly in definition with physical descriptors such as 'sturdy' or 'robust' acquiring a more moral meaning, attesting to a man's character.[6] Each quality had its own range of associations and definitions that differed from person to person, their importance being decided by the circumstances of the individual whether that be class, occupation, age, or marital status. As such, the configurations and order of importance of these traits also varied widely.[7] For example, a single craftsman may have valued industry and self-sufficiency above the rest whereas a married businessman at this time might have thought authority, reason and wisdom were most important. This, to an extent, demonstrates the contradictions of manhood in early modern England as an expectation was set that all men were to reach when the reality was that these standards were unattainable for most men.

The meaning of manhood in early modern England was riddled with contradictions and constraints. Manhood operated on 'three axes of difference', social status, householding status and age, with men coming into manhood around the ages of 30 or 35 due to the association between manhood and maturity and establishment in both the household and business, achieving the masculine ideal.[8] These axes meant that a large number of men, such as those in the lower classes that could not be the sole provider, did not fit into the definition of manhood. While this led to some men obsessing over how to achieve manhood from their position whether through career progression or the stricter governance of the household, there was also

Dutie Towards Their Children, and the Childrens Towards their Parents, the Masters Dutie Towards His Seruants, and also the Seruants Dutie Towards Their Masters, (London: Thomas Man, 1610), 350.
[4] Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 247.
[5] Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, 73.
[6] John Tosh, "The Old Adam and the New Man: Emerging Themes in the History of English Masculinities, 1750 - 1850," in *English Masculinities, 1600-1800*, eds. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 232.
[7] Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England,* 247.
[8] Ibid, 246.

a group who expressed their manhood in direct opposition to patriarchal ideals. Many attributes of manliness were 'subtly and exclusively aligned with the self-styled respectability' of higher-class men, thereby creating an anti-masculine group who were rude and base where the former were honest and moderate.[9] This creation of a group who relied heavily on physical strength rather than intellectual prowess and existed outside of the franchise is an example of how patriarchal manhood in early modern England not only privileged men over women, but also privileged men over men.[10]

The privileging of 'several men above many others' was only one way that men suffered under the patriarchy with the contradictions in defining manhood being near impossible to keep up with.[11] One example of this is how men were expected to stoic and in control of themselves but at the same time were expected to feel 'compassion for the sufferings of others, even if imaginary', throwing away any idea of realism to temporarily favour empathy to the point of fancifulness showing how the 'approved models of masculinity have swung' between firm and delicate forms.[12] This was not the only way in which masculine ideals were self-conflicting, there was a view at the time that obtaining the skills of maintaining polite conversation could not be done without spending time in the company of women and that while the skill was 'essential to the fashioning of a young gentleman' it was also effeminating due to the role women played in honing it.[13] Jean Bernard, a visitor to England in the eighteenth century, marked this as strange, noting how the English men feared 'the company of women' not only due to their concerns over losing their masculinity but also due to the preference of male company.[14] Male friendships were incredibly important in early modern England as 'homosociality alone could secure manliness' and was imperative for preventing men becoming too soft through contact with women.[15] This shows that there were tensions between men and women and that women were seen as an inherent threat to masculinity, a problem that

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Alexandra Shepard, 'From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentleman? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500-1700', *Journal of British Studies*, 44. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 290.
[12] Capp, "'Jesus Wept' but Did the Englishman?" 108.
[13] Michèle Cohen, "Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England", in *English Masculinities, 1600-1800*, eds. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 47.
[14] Jean Bernard and Abbé Le Blanc, *Letters on the English and French Nations,* (Dublin: Richard James, 1747), 24.
[15] Michèle Cohen, *Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England,* in English Masculinities, 1600-1800, eds. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 60.

had to be handled. Overall, in early modern England, there were contradictions within the definitions of masculinity that put men under pressure to conform to impossible standards and a need for 'peer approval in confirming masculine status', making masculinity a public parade with a high public importance.[16]

The term patriarchy in early modern England largely referred to a man's place as head of a household. For men at that time, there were strong links between patriarchy, heading a household and masculine ideals. By leading a family unit, men were able to step fully into manhood in a way that they were unable to do before marriage. Men were expected to demonstrate the ideals of authority, mastery, control and discipline of themselves and their family. While the pressure of fully obtaining manliness was eased through a marital union, married men were introduced to the pressures of maintaining their manly reputation and upholding a new set of ideals. These pressures were only worsened by the fact that the performance of men's household duties was not only seen as 'beneficiary to the family but also to the public and to wider society.'[17] These expectations of men and householding ultimately meant that the 'patriarchal model of manhood… was nonetheless designed to constrain men' as they were to control and confine women, showing it to be a deeply flawed concept.[18]

As mentioned briefly above, heading a household was an opportunity for a man to live out many early modern ideals of manhood due to its association with 'mastery not only of a man's self, but of his subordinates and his resources', becoming 'equated with manhood itself.'[19] Heading a household was presented to men in England as the main objective to be aspired to, an elevation of status that served as the 'precondition of men's political involvement within the wider community.'[20] This made the household a necessary step for the progression of manhood and men within early modern society. Marriage gave men, particularly younger men, numerous opportunities because 'marital status transcended hierarchies of age', allowing men to access spaces and open doors that they were previously excluded from on account of not being mature enough.[21] This was even more important as a significant number of

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[16] John Tosh, "The Old Adam and the New Man," 229.
[17] Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England,* 86.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 70.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid, 75.

householding men were excluded from the franchise due to their age, class, or simply not having a member of Parliament to vote for. Given that the household was approached both as the 'primary unit of society and a microcosm of polity', disenfranchised men were given some political significance for their roles in the family.[22]

In wider society, the home had significant public importance, not only as the 'primary unit of society' but also as a 'highly resonant analogy for the state, and …as the site of production as well as reproduction, this importance was reflected on individual men with their marital status becoming a signifier of their character and eligibility for high ranking positions.[23] However, dedication to the household becoming an indicator of political honesty was also an area of concern for men who were seen as being too devoted to the household, with worries growing that these men would be unable to put aside domestic and familial problems to focus on a cause or goal.[24]

Fatherhood and the masculine identity were deeply entwined. Children were seen as the products of their parents, a reflection of their successes and failures who would go out into the world as individuals and proceed to make an impact on it. As such, not only did fatherhood augment desirable qualities such as judgment and leadership, but it also posed a great risk of undermining a man's authority.[25] When it came to raising sons, fathers were expected to instill values of responsibility, duty, respectability, and self-mastery into their children as well as teaching them how to run a domestic economy through the use of account books and volumes detailing household management, creating generational ideals of masculinity.[26]

In early modern England, fathers were to their sons the primary role model and household educator, a practice that minimized the fear that men who are raised in feminine settings would not grow into a proper young gentleman.[27] More than this, there was an

[22] Ibid.
[23] Shepard, "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentleman?" 282.
[24] Tim Reinke-Williams, 'Manhood and Masculinity in Early Modern England', *History Compass*, 12.9 (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 689.
[25] Reinke-Williams, "Manhood and Masculinity in Early Modern England," 687.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Tosh, "The Old Adam and the New Man," 228.

irrational concern that men who spent too much time in the company of women would somehow become emasculated and gain feminine characteristics and lose familial authority, by extension, becoming subordinate to his wife.[28] Fatherhood for early modern men, it seems, consisted of cycles of men teaching their sons to be like them or better. By being better men than their fathers, these sons would strive more and more for the ideals of manhood which in turn would become more and more rigid and unreachable leading to early modern striving to reach these expectations that constantly floated just above their fingertips.

Women, and their relationships with men, were one of the main ways through which early modern Englishmen secured their manhood as the running of a successful household was one of the greatest expressions of patriarchal success.[29] This is an example of how even though manhood and its ideals concerned and affected women, it was still oriented around men and, to an extent, marked women as an enemy to masculinity. Within the household, women were largely blamed when things went wrong due to being regarded as the more domestic sex with responsibilities with the home. That being said, men could be held as doubly responsible, not only for failings on their part, such as not providing enough income, but also due to the mistakes being seen as them 'forfeiting their authority over themselves and others'; showing further how the ideals of self-governance were not only viewed as something that a man held over himself but also a quality that was extended to his entire household.[30]

Overall, when it came to householding and marriage in early modern England, women were an integral part and were vital in a man fully stepping into manhood. Without women, it would have been impossible for any man to achieve patriarchal manhood.

When it came to householding, the duties and expectations of a husband were detailed in conduct books and how to guides. Examining excerpts from John Dod and Robert Clever's *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government*, the authors clearly link masculinity with

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Shepard, "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentleman?" 282.
[30] Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England,* 70.

provision and exchange in a similar way that femininity and chastity were intertwined.[31] In their conduct guide, Dod and Clever state that the duty of a husband is to 'seeke [a] living: and the Wives dutie is to keepe the house' and that 'The dutie of the Husband is to get goods: and of the Wife to gather them together', demonstrating the partnership required for the effective running of a household.[32] Focusing once again on the role of a man as head of a household, the authors state that the main duty of a husband is to 'get money and provision' because ' It is to be noted, and noted againe, that as the provision of [the] houshould dependeth onely on the Husband' emphasising the economic responsibilities of being the head of a household and reiterating the importance of men as the sole provider.[33]

Overall, Dod and Clever chracterise the duties of a man in the family as 'active and inquisitive' whereas the roles of a wife are more passive and are a response to the actions of the husband, showing that men were expected to lead the household in every aspect from securing money and goods to giving instruction and direction.[34] Dod and Clever were not the only conduct writers to hold this view. Writing ten years after Dod and Clever, Thomas Gataker, in his marital guide *Marital Duties Briefly Couched Together*, envisaged the husband as an elm supporting a vine, the vine being a wife and a family.[35] Gataker echoed Dod and Clever's points by stating that the 'office of the husbande is to maintain well hys livelihood' and that his main role was to 'provide money', showing further the expectation of men to be the sole providers of the family and that their main duties were economic.[36]

The economic emphasis on manhood and the role of men in the household is a prime example of commercial masculinity. Commercial masculinity concerns the expectation that men were the main, ideally sole, providers for the household. Men in early modern England were expected to be financially elevated enough to provide goods and money for their families without the aid or intervention of their wives, children or other relatives. This is another example of how gender standards for men favoured wealthier individuals and those from the

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[31] Alexandra Shepard, "Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England c. 1580-1640." *Past & Present*, 167, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77.
[32] John Dod and Robert Clever, *A Godlie Forme of Householde Government for the Ordering of Private Families, According to the Direction of Gods Word*, 167.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Shepard, "Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England c.1580-1640," 75.
[35] Thomas Gataker, *Marriage Duties Briefely Couched Togither,* (London: William Jones, 1620), 45.
[36] Gataker, *Marriage Duties Briefely Couched Togither.*

upper classes or affluent backgrounds, demonstrating further that manhood was very exclusive and its design kept out the majority of men. In fact, the majority of wives in early modern England and many children were 'vital contributors to the family economy', showing further how unattainable the standard of men as the sole provider was.[37] Caught between an ideal of complete financial independence and a reality of constant financial strain, it was to be expected that husbands would be reluctant to accept monetary assistance from other members of the household until the last possible moment. This can be seen in the following excerpt of *The Weavers' Garland*, a poem from the late eighteenth century that tells the story of a despairing husband discussing his financial decline with his wife.

'Sweet dear and virtuous wife,

My senses are in strife

About this careful life,

For we decline:

Times being grievous hard,

All trading spoil'd and marr'd'[38]

In this verse, spoken by the husband, it is clear to see that the husband is distressed by their financial situation as his industry has suffered a great decline. From this verse it can also be seen that the husband has kept this information from his wife as the trading was already 'spoil'd and marr'd' when he confided in her, showing the pressure he felt to keep up the facade of having complete control over their financial situation. The next verse shows the response of the wife.

'I will the burthen bear,

Along with you:

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[37] Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, 187.
[38] *The Weavers' Garland, or a New School of Christian Patience in Twenty Seven Divine and Moral Lessons Between a Despairing Husband and a Chearful Wife*, (1770), 2.

Our sons and daughters they

Shall work'[39]

Not only does this verse demonstrate the willingness of the wife to aid the household nut it also shows that throughout the entire decline of the husband's business or industry, there were multiple people who could have helped out at any given time, showing further how ingrained and internalized the expectation of the head of the household to be the sole provider was, and how damaging this standard was to many families in early modern England.

Commercial masculinity in early modern England was more than an ideal, it was a moral issue and a signifier of the trustworthiness and respectability of a man. This is made clear in a case in 1591 in which a witness, John Stoddert, was removed from the case as it had been discovered that he was neglecting his patriarchal role as household provider by overspending at alehouses, disregarding his 'function and vocation' of maintaining his family.[40] Men who diverted resources away from the family economy were labeled by English society as being dishonest and negligent, not only because they were failing at providing for their wives and children but also because it was a fathers chief responsibility to 'ensure adequate financial provision' for future generations.[41] As such, economics played a large part in ideas of masculinity and even householding men risked their reputation by failing to provide for their families.

Reputation, credit, and public perception were the pillars that upheld early manhood, without public pressure to conform there would have been no reason to strive to live up to ideals of manhood. The importance and value of credit was emphasised in addresses, conduct books and official documents alike. Men were encouraged and expected to behave a certain way at all times.

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[39] *The Weavers' Garland, or a New School of Christian Patience in Twenty Seven Divine and Moral Lessons Between a Despairing Husband and a Chearful Wife*, (1770), 3.
[40] Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, 186.
[41] Reinke-Williams, 'Manhood and Masculinity in Early Modern England' 687.

Masculinity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was entirely dependent on the state of a man's reputation. A good reputation, and by extension entrance into manhood, had to be earned from peers and then protected against defamation' and slander, making achieving masculinity an extremely public ordeal that was entirely contingent on outside approval and inherently insecure.[42] The public nature of manhood and the achievement of it had the result that conversations and ideas of manliness confused the boundaries of public and private life in political debates and settings.[43] This can be seen with domestic disorder, a private matter that occured in the home, that could damage a man's credibility and standing in the community like John Stodderd in the aforementioned case.[44] Although it could be said that masculinity in early modern England was not entirely superficial as it relied on 'solid inner qualities' that made the man such as reason, courage and many others as opposed to behaviour and appearance, it would only have been the demonstration of such traits and the observation of such demonstrations by other people that they could be accredited to a man.[45] In short, even if inner qualities were the main factor, they were only met with recognition once they had been viewed by a man's peers.

In *Addresses to Young Men*, written by James Fordyce in the late eighteenth century, Fordyce asks the reader if out of 'the many pleasures which you, my friends, promise yourselves in the journey of life, are you not delighted with the idea of being esteemed, honoured, applauded, by your fellow travelers?'[46] By asking this question, Fordyce shows how important peer approval was for young men and also tells his readers that this approval is the highest achievement. Fordyce then doubles down on this by stating that he has found the 'desire of praise… so powerful in the minds of young men', revealing that public perception was one of the biggest motivators for young men in early modern England.[47] Peer approval, once internalised by men at a young age would have led to men conforming to and striving to achieve the ideals of manhood at that time and would have led to them feeling immense amounts of pressure to match up to expectations any way that they could.

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[42] Tosh, "The Old Adam and the New Man," 230.
[43] Reinke-Williams, 'Manhood and Masculinity in Early Modern England' 689.
[44] Tosh, "The Old Adam and the New Man," 230.
[45] Ibid, 231.
[46] James Fordyce, *Addresses to Young Men* (Dublin: John Exshaw, 1777), 70.
[47] Ibid, 152.

Overall, masculinity and manhood in early modern England revolved mainly around the ideas of patriarchal householding and credit. The importance of householding to the attainment of the masculine identity alongside the perceived consequences of spending time in the company of women had the result that women were a necessity for men and their public success in manhood while at the same time being viewed as one of the biggest threats to masculinity at the time. The emphasis of conduct books on credit and reputation made masculinity out to be entirely dependent on other people's attitudes towards an individual, the fact that the validity of a man's manhood was a key part of him as a person in that opportunities could be taken away from a man and he could be vilified for other people's perception. Requirements for achieving manhood were complex and difficult to achieve for a significant number of men. This would have caused a lot of men to feel insecure about their masculinity which, when coupled with the view of women as a threat to masculinity, would have led to strained relations between men and women and some men harboring a tainted view of women.

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