



# Masculinity in Question in Time of Unemployment in Wendy Holden's *The Full Monty*

Jenny M. Djundjung  
Stefanny Irawan

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## Abstract

*Men see masculinity as a form of identity as an individual as well as a group. This identity is usually attached to the jobs men have because of the traditional gender work division where men is put in a role as a breadwinner of their families. When they are out of work, they also lose their sense of identity, hence, their sense of worth as they think that they are on the brink of losing their masculinity. This is the condition that befalls the three male characters, Gaz, Dave and Gerald, in *The Full Monty*. They feel that they have lost their masculinity when they lose their works thus, they hold on to ways that they think can preserve their sense of worth.*

**Keywords:** *masculinity, male gender role identity, unemployment, emasculation, The Doctrine of Two Spheres*

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In a simple way, as it is defined in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1995), masculinity is the "quality of being masculine", whereas masculine is "having the qualities or appearance considered to be typical of or appropriate for men". As a concept, however, masculinity is not that easy to be defined. Georg Tillner (1997), a researcher specializing in masculinity at University of Vienna, defines that "masculinity is commonly understood as a form of identity, the (real or normative) gender identity of men which cannot be isolated from other dimensions of identity, e.g. ethnicity or work" since all of those "aspects of identity are intersecting and overlapping, are constantly combined in individual acts". In other words, masculinity as a concept is not only of individual identity but a shared gender identity in men in general, in relation to other dimension of individual and social lives.

Based on the definition above, it is reasonable that Burrm (2002) comments that any understanding of masculinity is simultaneously broad and narrow in scope. Broad in scope because we are dealing at once with a characterization of masculinity that must obtain over a population and narrow because any conception must be specific to each individual within that population. Putting it all into other simpler words, masculinity is a concept of being a man, that is owned by every man and is very much shaped by the perspective and beliefs of the society in general.

Even though masculinity can be a shared universal concept, the concept is not fixed. It will undergo changes from time to time and it owns unique specification from place to place. Masculinity must be observed and discussed in accordance with its time, condition, and any other elements connected to it. Hence, the talk of masculinity in time of World War II would not bring up the exactly same points as the discussion of masculinity in the present. Masculinity as believed by British male might be different from the concept believed by Indonesian male. If there are so many influencing variables

towards the discussion of masculinity, then, the concept of masculinity would somewhat be different in time of unemployment, like the one happening in Britain during the Thatcher's era.

The unemployment that hit Britain at that time was not of any ordinary one. It was a mass unemployment due to the privatization policy concerning the high inflation around the country. The policy was indeed meant for good purpose of giving more freedom and power to individual instead of to labor union elite or state. Thatcher saw state intervention upon markets as inappropriate and ineffective since the market itself is the most effective way of allocating resources within an economy, in which a better communication of needs, demands, cost, etc can be established (Thatcherism, 1994). As the privatization policy went on, many state-owned industries—most of which were of coal and steel—were turned into private-owned. This resulted in the closure of those industries until they were ready to operate as private industries. The result was a massive unemployment in industrial towns. Workers, who were mostly male and who had worked in these factories for generations, lost their job and money; they have no other means to support their families.

The mass unemployment that is being pictured above in Thatcher's era is exactly what *The Full Monty* pictures. *The Full Monty*, before being taken into a novel, is a phenomenal British comedy film whose script was written by Simon Beaufoy, a screenwriter from United Kingdom, telling about a story of unemployment during Thatcher's era in Sheffield—a town famous for its steel industry. It was known as the center of cutlery and sharp-edged products in England, in mid 1970's that produced steel tools of excellent quality in a large number (About Sheffield, 2002). Beaufoy tells a story about six men namely Gaz, Dave, Gerald, Horse, Guy, and Lomper facing the fear of inadequacy and loss in hard times. Broke, out of work and on the verge of losing their wives and children, they come up with a desperate, brilliant plan: perform like Chippendale dancers and strip for cash! The film, made with a low budget of about \$ 3 million but outstandingly became a box office in Britain itself and gained \$200 million worldwide, is commented by Peter Cattaneo, the director, as “a very contemporary story about the effects of long term unemployment.” The concept of *The Full Monty* is of “men trying to cope with a feeling that society does not have a role for them anymore” comes from Umberto Pasolini, the producer (Film Reviews, n.d., para. 2).

Later on, the international-awards winning film is being made into a novel. Wendy Holden, a journalist and a writer well known for her comical contemporary fiction novel such as *Simply Divine* and *Bad Heir Day*, was chosen to write the novel based on the screenplay. This novel also becomes a success, a bestseller. Holden is said to have done a good job on it: “Whether you've seen the Best Picture-nominated film or not, you'll enjoy Wendy Holden's sensitive re-creation of this brilliant and original comedy” (Wendy Holden, n.d., para 1).

The novel even helps the reader in getting a better understanding of the film since, as a novel, it can use “god-like” or omniscient point of view in delivering the story. The readers' review as posted at amazon.com states that Holden's work may “flash[es] out the situations and characters, exploring their motivations and ruminations in ways that the cinema cannot” (Editorial Reviews, n.d., para. 1). Thus, this novel serves as a great complement for understanding the film.

Just as in the film, this novel tells about six men dealing with the problems they encounter as the result of being unemployed in their town, Sheffield. However, among the six characters, three of them – Gaz, Dave, and Gerald – experienced the worse ones. As men with families, unlike the rest of the characters, they are badly struck by the



unemployment which places them in a difficult situation: Gaz might never see his son, Nathan, anymore since he is unable to pay for the custody; Dave views himself as being inferior to his wife; Gerald has no courage to tell his jobless condition to his wife as well as to admit his powerless state in front of his former subordinates. We choose the three characters – Gaz, Dave, and Gerald – to be analyzed because they are the ones who hold clear and direct responses towards their unemployed condition including the masculinity issue within. Moreover, compared to Lomper, Guy, and Horse, those three characters are being presented in a more detailed way in the novel. All those problems encountered by Gaz, Dave, and Gerald are not merely some kind of serious personal problems with no in-depths meaning. Instead, behind those problems lies a thick air of issue on masculinity experienced by those unemployed men.

For men, unemployment is, unfortunately, not merely about losing a job. There lies another meaning beyond that. A job means much more than just a way of earning money. A job is an embodiment of their masculinity. It is understandable since first of all, a job is men's authority or even responsibility according to the classic segregation of both sexes' world known as "The Doctrine of Two Spheres". Men "work and the outside world" is entrusted to them while "home and children" have always been given to women's care (Brannon, 1996), because men have always been considered as the physically stronger sex – 'strong' is listed in men's stereotypical traits while 'weak' is for women's (Lips, 1988). Therefore, a job or the working world is always considered as men's world, and it makes men attach their masculinity to it. Furthermore, a job is viewed as an embodiment of men's masculinity because it plays a significant role for one to gain status, success, pride, power, and independency – they are tangled in a chain reaction resulted by a job that men have. How can they be linked to masculinity? It is because all of them are the elements considered by the society, as some of the things men need to possess or show in order to be regarded as masculine. They are included in the success element or "The Big Wheel", one out of Brannon's (1996) and Poston's (2002) five themes of Male Gender Role Identity (Anti-feminine element / "No Sissy Stuff", Aggressive element / "Give 'Em Hell", Self-reliant element / "The Sturdy Oak", and Sexual element / "Man-as-sexual Initiator or Controller"), which is none other than "the Victorian ideal of manhood [functioning] as the dominant conceptualization of masculinity in our society" (Pleck in Brannon, 1996). Since a job has so many meanings concerning masculinity, the losing of a job can seriously mean a disturbance upon one's manifestation of the traditional concept of masculinity.

The three characters of the novel being discussed here face some kind of problem in implementing the socially and historically constructed masculinity. The condition would, at least, influences how they see their masculinity or their being masculine men. Yet, the three of them react differently to their emasculated condition.

## **Gaz's Defense of His Masculinity**

Responding to his unemployed condition and the troubles it brings upon the question of his masculinity, Gaz tries one and every other way to save his sense of masculinity. Gaz is a macho man, the kind of man who dislikes the idea of him being emasculated, or even worse, of him being in a masculinity crisis. Therefore he knows he has to save his badly battered masculinity. In doing so, Gaz chooses to exercise other themes or elements of the Male Gender Role Identity other than "The Big Wheel", the one being robbed by unemployment.

The first reaction of all that he makes is concerning the sexual element or “Man-asexual Initiator or Controller.” This reaction is delivered towards his being no longer the breadwinner and the head of the family, which also means being dependent on his wife. Being jobless, he has his wife earned everything that the family needs is too much for Gaz to take. It is written that feeling “miserable at his financial castration and unable to cope with being a househusband, he started drinking too much and not long afterwards he began fooling around.” (p. 45). Gaz felt that his pride as well as his power in the family had dissolved into thin air when it was Mandy and not he who earned the money to support the family. Moreover, Gaz was being domesticated, as he became a househusband who took care of the house while his wife was working. That particular condition made his masculine ego snap. Gaz turned into a man who drank exceedingly and finally had an affair with other women, one of them was “a barmaid from the local pub” (p. 45).

From the way I see it, two interrelated things can be derived from the fact that Gaz had been sexually involved with the barmaid (and later on with other women). First, there is insecurity within Gaz regarding his masculinity. When Mandy takes over the role as a breadwinner, Gaz – from his masculine point of view – at once, sees himself occupying a lower level in the family. Taking a good look at his condition, he finds himself as nobody but a dependent househusband whose wife is now superior to him in every way. That creates a gap between both of them where Gaz feels himself left in a lower level compared to her without enough ammunition for his masculinity. It is like his existence is being under the shadow of Mandy. Being in that kind of situation is difficult for Gaz to act or feel masculine. As a result, he feels uneasy about it and reacts in defense to preserve his masculinity in question. There is this fear in him that his masculinity has been sucked out of him until the very last drop.

However, he does not stop at that phase. He feels the fear and he knows that he needs to do something or else there will be nothing left to convince him that he has not lost his entire grip over his masculinity. He needs to identify what is left in him of his masculinity and he needs to confirm that he is still masculine. This is exactly what the second point is about: the redemption upon his insecurity. Although this redemption might be as well used to show Mandy that he is still masculine in spite of her being superior to him by functioning as the breadwinner and the head of the family, this redemption is mainly focusing on Gaz himself, the very source of the insecurity. It is he himself who needs to be convinced about how he still owns a bite of this big pie of masculinity even though things have made him feel the contrary. Apparently, the bite that Gaz finds is in the form of exercising his sexual attractiveness. Gaz uses his sexual appeal as a weapon to initiate a relationship with the opposite sex. That action embodies traits such as active, aggressive, adventurous, and confident – all of which are stereotypically put under masculinity (Brannon, 1996; Lips, 1988). Therefore, Gaz’ sexual involvement with the barmaid can be translated as his way of proving to himself that masculinity has not really packed its suitcase and left him. This is to show that even though he is no longer has a job or money, he is desirable as a man.

If that is the case, a question then appears: why fooling around with a barmaid when he has a wife? In other words, why not performing his ability to be sexually attractive to his wife? The answer lies in the personal detachment between Gaz and the barmaid. Their relationship is purely between a man and a woman with no special bonding. The relation is based only on physical attraction. Moreover, what is more important than that is how Gaz finds himself standing equally with the barmaid. He does not feel inferior in his relationship with her. He does not come to her as a dependent unemployed



man, and she is not the provider of his daily needs. He comes to her plainly as a man and she is plainly a woman to him, therefore, this physical-attraction-based kind of non-relationship works well for Gaz.

That is exactly what is not happening between him and Mandy. With Mandy, it cannot be just a man-and-woman having sex. Mandy sees him in his capacity as a husband and he sees Mandy in her capacity as a wife. And now, as unemployment sets in, Gaz can no longer perform his roles as the breadwinner and the head of the household. Possessing no pride and power as an ex-breadwinner who is now being fed and fulfilled by her, he inevitably sees himself come to her as a defeated husband. Feeling low about himself, he seems unable to think positively. Gaz thinks people also see him the way he sees himself, including Mandy. Therefore, he thinks Mandy would see him as nothing but a useless, dependent, and defeated husband. Intimidated by that particular point of view, Gaz fails to picture himself as someone sexually attractive and sexually desirable for his wife. If he loses the feeling of how attractive he is in the eyes of his wife, how can he appear attractive? As a result, Gaz finds a difficulty to initiate a sexual relationship towards his wife. It is much easier for him to have an affair with the barmaid in the non-existent relationship that they have, so that he can have the redemption he needs upon his insecurity over his masculinity.

His being seductive to women in general can also be seen as another version of an act of salvaging his sense of security. He is always trying to grab their attention by giving “his most winning smile” and picking up lines such as, “all right, babe?” (p. 20) or “you all waiting for me then?” which is said when he sees women line up to see the Chippendales’ show (p. 22). He teases them to show the fact as well as to get some kind of acknowledgement that he still appears masculine to them derived from the response they give him. Even when the women turn him down and thus makes him a little upset, he still picks up a boastful line like, “well, you know where to find me when you’re tired of looking at them poofs” (p. 22). This is a very boastful attitude coming from him since physically speaking, those Chippendale dancers whom he called as ‘poofs’ are better shaped and groomed compared to him. He does not care at all. Flirting, to Gaz, has turned into an activity to calm his insecurity of losing his sense of being masculine.

Gaz is carrying out anti-feminine element or “No Sissy Stuff” in his attempt to make some money during the hard time. First of all, he refuses the sewing job offered by Mandy, his ex-wife. Responding with “Two pound fifty an hour in black hole of fuckin’ Calcutta? No thank you” (p. 46), he mocks the idea of him doing a job in a clothing factory, a place and an activity he sees as feminine. The word ‘Calcutta’ he is using refers to the city Calcutta in India, a city in one of British Commonwealth countries where people work as cheap, disrespected labors. Thus, the use of that word can be translated into how Gaz thinks of the clothing factory as a low prestige-working place with a low prestige job. Worse, it will place him among women, doing the same work as they do: sewing ladies’ underwear – an idea far from being masculine. Although Gaz needs the money, he prefers giving a ‘no, thank you’ answer. From the way he sees it, it does not and will never fit him. Sewing has always been attached to femininity for it is usually done at home by women, and home– since the Victorian time – has been made as women’s kingdom; a feminine area. (Brannon, 1996) Thus, the sewing job is too feminine for someone like Gaz who previously worked in a masculine place – a steel factory – with thousands of men, doing heavy and masculine job. Taking the job might make him look like a sissy and that would be a stigma for his masculinity.

Gaz' pride is just so big that instead of doing that kind of decent but feminine job, he prefers stealing things such as cars (p. 51) and steel girder from the steel factory he used to work at (p. 8) – another aggressive reaction. Despite the fact that cars, steel girder and – again– steel factory are things closely related to men and masculinity, the activity of stealing itself possesses a masculine atmosphere since it is an action seen as daring, adventurous, and definitely non-religious – the adjectives which are exactly being traditionally attributed to men (Brannon, 1996). Thus, by stealing, Gaz sees himself performing something masculine compared to doing anything that has something to do with femininity such as sewing. Therefore, Gaz likes stealing better than doing a legal but feminine job. Looking at how things are, we conclude that Gaz just puts masculine pride on top of his job criteria list and he is unwilling to betray it in one way or another.

However, the firmly gripped idea of having only masculine job seems to be shaken by the fact that he – along with his friends – finally performs as male strippers just like the Chippendales. How can male strippers be viewed as a masculine thing to do? How can it be different with the sewing job refused by him? It turns out that there are two masculine elements within the decision of being male strippers: the aggressive element or “Give ‘Em Hell” and the self-reliant element or “The Sturdy Oak”.

The aggressive element of performing as male strippers lies on the fact that it was Gaz who came up with the idea. He is actively, aggressively looking for a way out from the difficult, emasculated condition that he is in. That makes him masculine since ‘active’ is one of the masculine stereotypes (Brannon, 1996). This is surely very much different from accepting Mandy's offer. Accepting is a passive action. Therefore, accepting her offer would make him own a job in a passive way; and according to Brannon (1996), ‘passive’ is a feminine stereotype.

The self-reliant element of being a male stripper comes through the fact that he would be in charge of himself. He would be the master of himself. That would not happen if he accepted Mandy's offer. Gaz's acceptance of the job offered by Mandy will result in his working under her supervision. This means that Mandy will be dominant over him, while referring to the gender stereotypical traits, ‘dominant’ ought to be performed by a man instead of a woman (Brannon, 1996). As for the strip-dancing scheme, Gaz does not have to put himself under any women's command. Once again, he is in charge of himself. And even if he has to be under one's control – the choreographer's, that is – in this dancing scheme, at least it will be Gerald, and Gerald is not a woman.

Furthermore, another justification of Gaz performing as a male stripper comes from the reason behind it. The main reason is his love for his son, the one “who had kept him going through all those terrible dark days after Mandy left” (p. 55). However, there is an extra reason: to keep the father-and-son relationship, which can be seen as one of the forms of male bonding. The father-and-son relationship occupies a special place for men, especially the ones coming from the working class like Gaz. Fathers tend to build a better and closer relationship with sons than daughters (Strong et al, 1998), since sons are the suitable agents to perform masculine activities together with the fathers (Lips, 1988). There is a kind of male pride that fathers feel within the relationship with their sons since they are both male and together they do masculine activities. Moreover, as fathers provide an important impact on children's sex-role development (Stevens-Long, 1984), father-and-son relationship can contribute more male pride for the fathers since within that relationship fathers can exercise their masculine traits and role to be taken as models for their sons' sex-role development. Thus, the father-and-son relationship also



serves as a place where fathers gain their masculine pride by setting up masculine attitude for their sons to follow. In this role they serve as teachers teaching it all to the next generation to follow this model and in which position they are being looked up to by their sons. The masculine atmosphere of the male bonding within the father-and-son relationship is the one that Gaz is defending.

Gaz's persistence in keeping the father-and-son relationship is also supported by his unemployed condition that makes the relationship and the male pride become more and more important and is developing into a sensitive issue for him. Unemployment has made him unable to fulfill his role as the wage earner of the family – the basic required role of either being a father, since the role becomes men's greater concern when a child is born in the family (Stevens-Long, 1984), or being a man and husband (Strong et al, 1998). This unemployment has taken away almost all of his masculine territory and left only few behind – one of which is this father-and-son relationship. Therefore, as a man, husband, and father who has failed his role as the breadwinner of the family and lost almost everything, Gaz surely would give everything he can to keep what is left from his broken marriage. He probably has lost Mandy and also his role in providing for the family, which affects many aspects of his life, but he would not give up his fathering rights and the male pride left being snatched away from him. He just cannot let go what can possibly be the last fortress he has from either his family life or his masculine pride.

Another justification of Gaz being a male stripper is the goal that he has. Through this 'job', Gaz aims to get all the money he needs and reunite his broken marriage because "he knew that Mandy was only with him [Barry, Mandy's new boyfriend] for the money and the security for Nathan that he [Barry] could offer her" (p. 186). From his point of view, nothing else but money becomes the barrier that prevents him, Mandy, and Nathan to reunite. Money was the root issue of their broken marriage; therefore, it is exactly the remedy of fixing all up. Then, since this stripping project has a chance of giving him quite an amount of money, Gaz is also aiming at reuniting his family besides winning over the custody issue.

The big frame of this goal that Gaz has in his mind of starting all over again with him, Mandy, and Nathan back as one family they used to be may, however, mean something else. It may mean the restoration of some aspects of masculinity he lost because of his unemployment. Gaz would have his status, pride, and power back as a father and a husband as he would have enough money to provide his family's needs for some times. Thus, the strip dancing, which seemingly looks like a feminine activity as a way out, would actually be a means that Gaz used to regain some of his loss of masculinity.

Concluding all the responses made by Gaz, just like what is written in the earlier part, Gaz is responding the feeling of being emasculated in the time of unemployment by exercising the other four elements of masculinity: sexual element or "Man-as-sexual Initiator or Controller", anti-feminine element or "No Sissy Stuff", the aggressive element or "Give 'Em Hell", and the self-reliant element or "The Sturdy Oak".

## **Dave's Submission of His Masculinity**

Dave is different from Gaz. Despite the fact that the unemployment disturbs him – like what is shown by the line: "It had all gone to cock" (p. 19) which means everything turned into nonsense– as much as it annoys Gaz and every other man, Dave does not show the same kind of rebellion that Gaz does towards the situation or the life he now

lives in. The whole thing that is happening around him does not make him snap or desperately do anything to save his male ego. Instead, Dave performs a more passive attitude by trying to adjust himself to the changes happening around him at the first place. However, later on, Dave shows a more active, but still non-radical attitude in responding to the situation after he finds out that his passive responses fail to make things better for him.

Dave delivers a passive reaction, because Dave sees how the table has turned, and therefore, one needs to follow the game. Dave portrays the whole situation as a reversing of roles. Since it is now the women who “earn the money to spend” (p. 10), women have the money and consequently, along with the money, comes the status and power too. Meanwhile, men sit “around at home, doing housework” (p. 10). Putting it into other words, women, including his wife who works as “a sales assistant at the smart new Asda supermarket” (p. 19), have become masculine due to the power and the money they have, and on the other hand, men are being feminized since they are now dependent on their wives – just like it has been stereotypically categorized that ‘power’ belongs to masculinity and ‘dependency’ to femininity (Brannon, 1996). Therefore, for Dave, this situation created by unemployment is not a one-way migration; instead, it is a swap. A reversal of role has been created, and he has to go with the flow, as the choices are only being the masculine one who earns money, or the feminine one who is dependent. Dave has failed the earlier one, so he has to perform the second option. This marks the beginning of his passive reactions.

With such background of thoughts, Dave obediently stays “at home, watching daytime telly, secretly bingeing and picking at the food while he made dinner, ready for when Jean came home from work” (p. 19). It is also a small wonder for one to find Dave with “a floral pinafore tied tightly around his belly, doing the housework” (p.25). Those are the things he has to do as the feminine agent of his house.

Unfortunately, there is another thing that the feminine agent of a house must do: meet the requirement of being “expected to shape up, keep fit and get sexy in order to keep hold of their meal tickets” (p. 19). It has always been women who pay attention to their appearance, making sure that they look attractive in the eyes of their husbands so that their husbands will stay with them and provide for their needs instead of abandoning them for other more attractive women. This is in line with Lammana’s writings in a sub-chapter about women’s role in her book, *Marriages and Families, Making Choices Throughout the Life Cycle*, that for a woman who is “fortunate to have a man in her life, she [a woman] does all she can to please and keep him” (Lammana & Riedmann, 1985. p. 30). As the situation has changed now, this doing-everything-to-please-and-keep falls on men’s shoulder, or so Dave sees it. In short, he finds himself now under a requirement to appear attractive before his wife’s eyes; that is if he does not wish to be neglected by her for a more attractive man. And again, this is more about a must instead of a choice to make.

Although other men may find it not that bad, for a man who has “rounded features” (p. 8) with a “bulging beer gut” (p. 65) or a very big stomach, and who has “been overweight for as long as he could remember” (p. 19), to appear attractive is really a serious issue. Dave has always found his physical appearance a problem for him since a long time ago, but it was not so troublesome since “he was still the man of the house, bringing the money in and able to keep Jean happy” (p. 19). However, it is different now, as he becomes the dependent one. So when unemployment sets in and he loses his job, the weight problem started to become more crucial than ever, as it does not help him either to feel masculine in any way or to carry out the present necessity of being





physically attractive. What he gets is merely the pain of feeling that he has nothing to be proud of as a man.

The situation is made worse by the stripping project that he takes part because of Gaz's persuasion. As the project goes further and further, Dave's fear "at the thought of having to take his clothes off with the light on" (p. 86) in front of many people grows more and more. It is because he is aware that physically, he certainly does not fall in the category of someone whom the public wants to see in a striptease show. It would only make him a laughing stock of the entire city. It is hard for him to withdraw from the project since it has gone quite far and it is done in the name of friendship and brotherhood, especially with his best mate, Gaz. Dave has to move on.

With all those factors, Dave becomes a man who cares so much about his physical appearance –something that is usually done by women (Brannon, 1996). He gets himself to a strict diet of "jacket potatoes and baked beans" (p. 144) with cheese crackers as "the only between meals snack he allowed himself" (p. 18) and even tries putting cling film around his chest and huge belly with a hope that it will sweat him out and thus reduce the fat (p. 160). He also develops a high level of sensitivity when it comes to his body. He is deeply hurt, feels angry and annoyed by words such as "tubby" (p. 62) – short and fat – or "fat bastard" (p. 166). Towards this kind of attitude, Gerald told him: "Fat, David, is a feminist issue" (p. 120). This is very much true since "being fat is a subject of special concern to women" (Lips, 1988, p. 13). Men usually do not take their being fat as an issue that they really need to care about. Thus, I can say that Dave reacts femininely in viewing his appearance. In fact, he has broken the anti-feminine element, the "No Sissy Stuff".

Sadly, all of his attempts come to no avail. He is still a big man as he has always been. Seeing that his wife is doing well in her new role as the breadwinner of the family whereas he fails in his attempts of turning himself to a more physically attractive man, Dave feels embarrassed and guilty. Dave sees the situation as an imbalance swap since he fails in performing thoroughly what is expected from someone dependent. This seriously affects one particular aspect of his marriage life: his ability to have sex with his wife. They "hadn't had sex in months" and "the last few times they did [have sex], it was very perfunctory, almost automatic" (p. 101). Even worse, he refuses to "undress in front of his wife unless wearing boxer shorts almost up to his armpits" (p. 152) and when he lies on the bed next to her, he is "anxious for his wife not to examine him too closely in his skimpy clothes" (p. 100). Dave seems to see himself as a good-for-nothing man for he fails in being either masculine, by being the breadwinner, or feminine, by looking attractive. Being in such condition, Dave suffers a serious inferiority in the presence of his wife.

Feeling how everything is cornering him, Dave decides to be more active in responding to the whole situation. Emerge in him the urgency to break free. He needs an immediate, instant escape. Apparently, he sees the escape coming towards him in a form of the position as a security guard at Asda. Dave simply takes the job without much consideration even though the job only pays him "about a third of what Dave had earned as a welder at the steelworks" (p. 108) and gives him nothing but a "terminal boredom" (p. 109) in circuiting the store, "watching for shoplifters" (p. 192). There has to be a good reason that wins it all. I believe the answer lies within the impact of having the job. Having the job, actually any job at all, during this unemployment means one thing: repositioning one as the breadwinner of the family. He will regain his status, his pride, his power, or in short: his lost sense of masculinity. Moreover, this means that he no longer needs to "shape up, keep fit and get sexy" (p. 19) like what dependent people

should do to “keep hold of their meal tickets” (p. 19). He is free and is not imprisoned anymore by his physical insecurity. The proof can be found from how Dave has his trousers strained “at the waistband after all the canteen nosh he’d been enjoying since he started at this new job” (p. 192).

From the discussion so far, one point is clear: a passive reaction – especially that causes a breaking of anti-feminine element, “No Sissy Stuff” or any other elements – is not the suitable solution for a crisis of masculinity in unemployment time. As a matter of fact, the breaking of one element can serve as a domino effect that brings down another element with it. In this case, it is the sexual element of “Man-as-sexual Initiator or Controller” that is being affected. The conflict within himself in trying so hard to appear attractive that makes him violate the concept of “No Sissy Stuff” causes him to fail in his sexual relationship with his wife.

However, having a new job does not completely solve the insecurity issue that Dave has. The insecurity still exists; it is only being put aside, shadowed by his success in earning money for some times. It becomes clear when he was offered for the last time to join the group in performing their stripping dance. Dave only “wished he had the courage to” because “his embarrassment and insecurities [still] crowded in on him” (p. 209). Again, this is about exposing to the public his latent problem of being overweight. And when it comes to the public witnessing a striptease show, they would only see nothing but physical aspect. Dave is very much aware of it as he says “‘Bollocks to your personality,’ Dave added. ‘This is what they’re looking at, right?’ He patted his stomach” (p. 151). The audience will not excuse his overweight body for his personality. They would simply point at him and says “‘He’s too fat’” (p. 150), which will bring him a complete public humiliation.

The key to solve this insecurity problem turns out to be in his wife’s hand when she accidentally found out his joining Gaz’s scheme of stripping. Instead of laughing and mocking at him, Jean supports him by saying “Me, Dave...I do” (p. 213) as an answer for Dave’s question “Jeanie, who wants to see this dance?” (p. 213) with him pointing to his huge belly. When Jean acknowledges that it is fine with her having him strip dancing, and it would not, in anyhow, lessen her love and admiration for him, Dave gains all the confidence he needs regarding his physical appearance. The acknowledgement boosts his masculinity for he now knows that he is just as desirable as ever for his wife, no matter in what condition he is in. Moreover, his wife’s full support turns this public stripping act into a private one, as if Dave is performing only for Jean, which can be seen from the line: “Throwing his shirt directly into Jean’s arms, Dave flashed her a delighted smile as she clutched it to her face, inhaled deeply and made a ‘Phwoar!’ sound to her girlfriends” (p. 222).

The final resolution he has over this appearance issue also points at the importance of fulfilling one element of male sex role identity, which is “The Big Wheel”, whose essences cover the needs to be looked up to (Brannon, 1996). How his wife loves him still, no matter what, casts a feeling of being looked up to within Dave. Feeling admired, desired, and loved still, he puts an end to his latent insecurity regarding his physical appearance.

To sum up, exercising the success element or “The Big Wheel” can only solve masculinity crisis encountered by Dave. His performing the traditional male role as a breadwinner and the fulfillment of his masculine needs to be looked up to, end his crisis in losing his masculinity.



## Gerald's Preseverence of His Masculinity

Unemployment affects Gerald not in any way lighter compared to the other two characters. It troubles him just the same or even more because Gerald, unlike Gaz and Dave, comes from a middle-class society. Gerald is someone who is more likely to put more value on the essences of The Big Wheel –success, status, and the need to be looked up to (Brannon, 1996) –compared to those who belong to the working-class level, since he has “a standard of living” (p. 81) to keep such as his “suits” (p. 40), one of which is “a sea-green cashmere sweater, casual slacks, shirt and tie” (p. 70), his wife’s “gold jewellery” (p. 72) and “costly weekly shopping trips” (p. 75), and also his “middle-class bungalow with its double-fronted loft extension”, complete with every luxurious items within, on “a well-appointed Sheffield estate” (p. 74). Possessing those things is just like a basic requirement for people of his social class to meet. He needs to preserve it to avoid himself from being looked down or even cast away. In other words, his pride or even identity is strongly attached to the fulfillment of The Big Wheel's concept. And so is his masculinity, since masculinity is indeed the gender identity of men (Fillner, 1997). A man like Gerald identifies his masculinity more as his well being in the eyes of the public in the sense of pride, success, status, all of which bring him respect and power.

Therefore, when unemployment hits him, he is completely aware of how difficult his position and all the responsibilities attached to it have become. Unemployment takes away his job, the source he had always used to achieve the success, status, and pride, while on the other hand, he just cannot step out of the basic requirements of his class since, it will threaten his sense of manliness as it will lessen his pride and perhaps throw him away from his current social status. The loss of success, status, and pride in front of the public would bring deep embarrassment to him, and even worse, it intimidates his sense of masculinity. Hence, in order to keep his sense of manliness, Gerald needs to prevent his appearing in public as a defeated man who has no pride. However, he is doing it not only within the public sphere but also within the domestic sphere. His tendency as a middle-class man to gain his sense of masculinity from the public sphere does not mean that he completely abandons the exercise of his masculinity in the domestic life. Moreover, what he does in the private sphere may also influence the impression of him in the society.

To keep hold of his masculinity in the domestic sphere, Gerald chooses to tell his wife a lie about the whole thing. He does not tell her the fact of his being unemployed. This pretense can help him clutch the about-to-slip-away feeling of masculinity in two ways: it saves his male pride and male ego; and second, it maintains the exercise of "The Doctrine of Two Spheres".

Gerald is a husband who has always been able to fulfill the middle-class needs and lifestyle, and is very proud of it. Therefore, when unemployment threatens his ability to provide and afford such lifestyle, nothing else is being hurt more deeply than his male pride and ego. As it is something that would be very hard to handle for a man who has tasted such life that successfully boosts his masculinity, it becomes difficult for Gerald to “summon up the courage to tell Linda when he got home” (p. 184) about his unemployment. Telling her the truth comes to him as something dreadful because he sees it as not simply about making her sad and ashamed for down grading their lifestyle and no longer living up to the demand of the class, but it is also about making him appear as a defeated man and husband in front of her; a husband who is unable to provide for her anymore, and therefore, he feels as if he has been emasculated.

Therefore, when “by sheer coincidence, he had walked in through the front door [of his house] at 5.45 p.m., dead on cue, even though he’d been officially unemployed for over four hours” (p. 184), the idea of not telling his wife the truth crossed his mind. Moreover, “if he could do that the next day, and the day after that –until he managed to get himself another job– he might never have to break the bad news to her after all” (p. 184). This ‘delay of truth’ certainly was Gerald’s best choice at that time because in doing so, he just could save both his wife and himself from experiencing the pain and shame as he did not have to tell her any bad news and thus, he did not have to appear so helplessly defeated and emasculated in front of her. There will be no signs of him losing all the pride, success, and status, and he will appear as masculine as ever. So, from the way he sees it, the pretense is just like a win-win solution for the time being.

How can this lying that he makes in his domestic life influence the impression of him in the society? The answer is in his wife’s activities with her social group, one of which is “her costly weekly shopping trips to the Meadow Centre with her friends” (p. 75). He cannot prevent her from doing all the activities she usually does. If he refuses Linda’s wish or prevents her from doing what she usually and normally does as a middle-class woman such as shopping and having fancy holiday, it will open a crack to his pretense. Telling her not to do or have those things would only make him lose his pride and ego either as a husband or a man. Worse, the impact would not only be within the husband-and-wife relationship, but it would also involve the public sphere since she has always done those activities with her friends. In fact, she might as well become the victim of embarrassment. In other words, his preventing Linda from doing all the activities would make both him and Linda lose their pride and ego in the eyes of their social circle. As Gerald does not want to feel and appear emasculated either in front of his wife or their social circle, keeping the deceit is the only scenario he has.

This pretense also helps Gerald in maintaining his sense of masculinity because it maintains the practice of "The Doctrine of Two Spheres". A strong indication about the strict existence of the doctrine within their marriage can be seen from how Linda is completely unaware of the very chance that her husband has also been made redundant regarding the fact that unemployment was a national issue at that time and worse, the Harrison steel factory – her husband’s working place – has been closed down. Her being unaware gives such an impression that working sphere truly does belong to a man, not to a woman.

The deceit that he makes is something more than simply a lie or a wish not to break his wife’s heart. The lie that he tells will make everything stay where they ought to be based on "The Doctrine of Two Spheres" and the traditional sex roles. By not telling the truth to his wife, Gerald keeps this unemployment issue –which is very much related to work– to himself. This means that he still makes himself as the only one with the authority over the working sphere. The revelation of the truth would make him share the problem with his wife and thus would create a passage for her to enter this male sphere. Moreover, telling her the truth may lead to her finding herself a job to support the family, just like what other wives do. This means that she would be even more involved in the working sphere and take over his traditional role as a breadwinner. The sphere and the role would not exclusively be his, and as a man, he would be pictured as less masculine. Therefore, he chooses to lie to her as it will keep each other stay within their own sphere and thus, both the concept of masculinity and femininity will still be well preserved.

What he does in maintaining his masculinity in his domestic life, however, cannot be applied to his public life. In this public sphere, the aspect of masculinity that he needs to



preserve is not about pride of meeting the requirements of his class, but it is more about power and authority – the aspects attached to the job itself. In doing so, he just cannot lie to his mates or former fellow-workers since they all know about his being unemployed. Both Gerald and his ex-subordinates know that starting from the day he became unemployed, he had been in no position to perform any authority over them or to be respected the way he used to be. It is only that Gerald seems to refuse the very reality. Since power has always been attached to his job as a foreman, and the fact that power can be seen an aspect of masculinity as it is closely related to being dominant – one of masculine stereotypic traits (Brannon, 1996), Gerald views the loss over the exercise of power as a form of emasculation.

Therefore, to compensate for his sense of being emasculated due to the loss of power, Gerald is trying to maintain as well as establish the hierarchy in the factory in the outside world. He acts as a supervisor over the lower class, the class of his ex-subordinates. He is being bossy, telling them what to do (p. 41) even though he actually does not have that authority anymore, which can be seen from Gaz's response: "You forget, Gerald, you're not our foreman anymore. You're just like the rest of us...scrap" (p. 42). Gerald does not seem to care of how he has lost the right of doing it to those men. Instead, he insists on positioning himself higher than either Gaz or Dave. The explanation lies on the sense of power that he gains in playing the part. By doing so – giving orders and acting as their supervisor – Gerald is re-obtaining the exercise of power that he loses due to unemployment, and therefore, returning his sense of his masculinity back to its fullest. This role-play that he is performing enables him to keep hold of his masculinity. In fact, this role-play is important for Gerald since he gets angry at Gaz's response. He sharply replies, "Shut it. Right?" (p. 42). Gaz's reminding him of his powerlessness makes him hurt; it is just like telling him right at his face that he has turned into nobody because he is unemployed. The issue, however, is not about the number of men who see him as nobody but it is about their reaction that seems to remind him of how he has lost his power and authority over them – the particular reality that he does not want to face. In other words, it reminds him of his sense for being emasculated. This is exactly what makes him show such strong resentment towards Gaz's response.

Understanding that the disturbance over his masculinity comes from the absence of job, Gerald realizes that the answer is only getting himself a new job, not in his attitudes that have been proven to fail in keeping hold of his masculinity. He has been trying so hard to find a new job until there are "deep lines around his eyes" that point, "at the considerable stress he was already under" (p. 41). Gerald's struggle to find a new job is motivated by his understanding that only by having a job he will unquestionably regain all the success, status, pride, and power that he has lost on the day he lost his job, and therefore will no longer be disturbed by the feeling of being emasculated by his joblessness.

However, he knows that he cannot just look for any kind of job. Only a job of the same level as the former one that can bring him money to afford his middle-class lifestyle and therefore, status and pride. Finding a new job for Gerald, unlike for Gaz and Dave, does not simply mean earning money, but also a matter of maintaining his standard as a member of the middle-class society. Further, the new job would not only matter for the sake of public's opinion about him but also for the sake of putting a nice end to the lie he has told his wife as "he whispered: 'She'd never have known'" (p. 81). Therefore, as it has been shown that he only goes and can only go for a job that can give

him back all the masculine qualities of a middle-class man, his looking for a new job functions as his way to simultaneously keep hold and regain his masculinity.

During his fight in maintaining and regaining his sense of masculinity in both the domestic and public sphere, Gerald finds himself another way in maintaining his masculinity, that is the male bonding that he finds in joining the stripping group. Although his joining the group at first was due to Gaz's threats of telling his wife the whole truth, his decision of sticking up until the performance is caused by the brotherhood in the male bonding that he has with the rest of the men. This is just in line with what is written by Scott Swain (as cited in Collamer, 1999) in his article "Covert Intimacy: Closeness in Men's Friendship" that the closeness of men's friendship lies exactly in "the sharing of interests and activities" (p. 177). It is the kind of friendship that makes men feel masculine, compared to conducting a friendship by chatting as the major activity –a kind of friendship that is pictured as women's (Collamer, 1999). Moreover, the feeling of "familiarity" in men's friendship is also conjured by the "shared history" that they have (Collamer, 1999, p. 175), which is, in this case, as unemployed men who struggle to find their way out of the condition. Gerald has found himself a way in boosting his dwindling sense of masculinity by his involvement in the stripping project. These men's friendship more or less compensates for the lost of masculinity he has experienced starting from the day he was made redundant. It is true that he has lost his masculinity in the matter of success, status, pride, and even power or authority, especially on his ex-subordinates, but here he has found a new one in the form of friendship of male-bonding. To Gerald, this can be a new, pleasant, and precious thing since this kind of bonding is hardly found in the middle-class society, the class where he has always belonged; as such solidarity is a characteristic of working class men (Ozum, 1995). In addition, the project does not only give him the masculine kind of friendship, but it also provides him a place to exercise his authority as well as to be looked up to by the other men since he is positioned to be their dancing instructor, regarding the fact that he is the only one among them who can dance well. That is not all, however, since the project also makes him able to be in control over his life as it becomes the only place where he is free from dealing with "the responsibilities, the constraints of his marriage, his position, his so-called 'standing'" (p. 209), everything that usually hinder him from being completely in control over his life. Therefore, Gerald's decision to stay until the end is pretty much understandable since a project that provides so many atmosphere of masculinity in times of his emasculated life is certainly worth taking.

Putting an end to the discussion of Gerald's reactions, we can conclude that Gerald's responses are based on his wish to keep hold of his masculinity which is very much associated to his possessing success, status, pride, and power within the private sphere, and mostly, in front of the public – something typical for a middle-class man. Therefore, the way out that he chooses to save his slipping-away sense of masculinity is by trying hard to exercise the success element of "The Big Wheel". However, unexpectedly, he finds that the stripping group he is joining serves as another way in preserving his masculinity since it gives him the sense of brotherhood of male bonding.

## **Conclusion**

From the entire analysis of the three characters' responses towards the sense of being emasculated in the time of unemployment, we come to some conclusions. First of



all, unemployment does make men doubt their success of manifesting the traditional concept of masculinity since the taking away of job that men used to have becomes not only a matter of taking away their income but also a matter of disarming them from their independency, status, success, power, and pride, which are exactly the traits or characteristics that are traditionally attached to masculinity and become the essence of male gender role identity. Therefore, men may see unemployment as a condition that makes them lose not only their job but also their grip on the historically and socially constructed concept of masculinity that they have always clung to.

The second conclusion is that every man has his own way to exhibit his masculinity. A man can choose to either concentrate upon only one element of masculinity or perform, although not thoroughly, most or even each of the element. Moreover, one's manifestation of masculinity cannot be separated from his other identities such as his personal characters or his social class. Every aspect of one's life is interwoven into one complex factor that influences his way to display his masculinity.

The next conclusion is that the three characters being discussed here are the kind of men who strongly hold and preserve the traditional concept of masculinity. Their view concerning their masculinity is based on and limited to the fulfillment of the traditional concept of masculinity. They believe that it is the only acceptable interpretation of their masculinity. This might also indicate how the traditional concept of masculinity, originated from the Victorian era, has rooted so deeply in the society that the disturbance made upon it may initiate a serious problem that will evoke various critical reactions.

However, although all the three characters suggest how the traditionally constructed concept of masculinity is still strongly preserved, there is an interesting point to be noted. From several facts that can be taken such as: Gaz openly acknowledges his sadness and tears in facing the threat of no longer seeing his son (p. 47, 48), he also openly declares his love for his son (p. 68); Dave cries in the presence of his wife and shows an openness while revealing the stress that pressed up against him (p. 213); and Gerald publicly shows his vulnerability as he cries in front of his ex-subordinates when failing the interview of his first job (p. 81), we can see that there have been a small departure from the rigid concept of masculinity as these "masculine" men exhibit emotional sensitivity, where emotional sensitivity is conventionally regarded as a feminine stereotypical trait. This may just support an argument saying that departures from traditional roles like what is prescribed in the Male Gender Role Identity were started to be made during 1960's and 1970's and yet the features of the Male Gender Role Identity remain a powerful influence of how people think men should be (Brannon, 1996). Those men can be the representatives of some men who openly evaluate the strict traditional concept of masculinity and are heading to what is later on called as the 'new man' that displays more acceptance of emotionality within their concept of masculinity. The old traditional concept is still preserved; however, it is only when men start to loosen up their tight embrace of the historically and socially constructed concept of masculinity, particularly towards the impossible emotionality suppression. Men who belong in the definition of this 'new man' concept deliver a message that being masculine no longer means being cold or emotionally detached in their relationship with women, children and also other men (Collier, 1993). The old equation has changed. Masculinity is no longer solely equals to the manifestation of the traditional concept of masculinity; instead, masculinity equals to the manifestation of the traditional concept plus emotionality.

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