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## **Work and Masculinity among Peruvian Urban Men**

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

## **Work and Masculinity among Peruvian Urban Men**

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In the past two decades, an increasing number of researches on masculinity have set out. The main arguments to promote this line of inquiry are that data on gender have been gathered almost exclusively from women and that men have been essentialized and pathologized in these studies. Furthermore it is argued that the study of men and masculinities would deepen our understanding of power and inequality, not only between men and women but also in other social relationships. On the other hand, research on masculinity would elicit material on the experiences, difficulties, motivations and aspirations of men in a number of contexts.

Objective transformations in the conditions of everyday life in recent decades, particularly because of economic adjustment policies and the globalization of modern values are generating profound changes in behavior, replete with new demands, deficiencies and possibilities (Escobar Latapí 1996, Almeras 2001, Chant 2001, Pineda 2001). The latter are not necessarily consciously perceived by men in their own lives or by other members of their nuclear families as has been demonstrated by research involving men all over Latin America. Many men assume that these realities do not and will not affect them, although they are feeling the effects of these transformations in their daily existence

In the present essay I will analyze the representations of masculinity and work that characterize the urban culture of men in Peru today<sup>1</sup>. The central questions posed are males reaffirm and constitute their gender identities through the appropriation of work, how it is redefined through the different stages of the life cycle, and through their negotiation with women in the domestic realm. The paper also analyzes the impact of the undergoing changes of gender relations. Finally, I call attention to the necessity to research and understand how masculine patterns that were considered as pathological may be well explained taking into account the masculine point of view of their contribution to the household and of male supremacy.

### **Masculinity and Work**

Historically, the association of masculinity with the provider role, though corresponding to all patriarchal view of masculinity, has been promoted all over Latin America by a modernizing state seeking to reform working-class masculinity in the interests of nation building and development (Olavarría 2003.) On the other hand, the inability to fulfill such hegemonic model has been leveled as machismo or as a pathological inheritance to be repudiated (Sara Lafosse 1995, Fuller 1995, Melhus 1996, Stern 1995, Gutmann 1996)

This process developed in different ways in Latin America according to the various degrees of industrialization and formalization of the economies of the countries and to

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<sup>1</sup> In order to obtain information on this subject, we interviewed 120 men living in three cities: Lima, Cusco, and Iquitos. The samples were proportionally divided by class origin (middle class or low income sectors) and age (younger and older adults).

the degree of penetration of western culture. In the case of the Peru it was quite irregular due to the informality and enormous fragility of the Peruvian economy. In fact only 46%<sup>2</sup> of the population is involved in formal work. This makes it very difficult to apply the category Work –understood as a stable income– to define the labor activities carried out by most Peruvians. Therefore I will use this concept in its broader sense, that is, as the capacity to earn money for subsistence. However, it should be said that the economy of urban populations depends almost entirely on a money income and that the hegemonic ideology which identifies work with masculine identity has widely penetrated the urban social layers of the Peruvian society (through school, the obligatory military service, the church, the media, among other socialization means.)

According to the gender representations prevalent in urban Peruvian culture, this field is paradigmatically masculine, and though women may participate –and, are even encouraged to contribute to the household budget–, from the masculine point of view (women may not agree) their contribution is codified as extension of their domestic duties or just as an additional help to support the family. In any event, work is not associated with the identity of the female gender. In other words, the fact that a woman works does not affect her femaleness and should she stop getting an income, neither she nor the others would question her gender identity. In the case of males, on the other hand, there is a narrow association between masculinity and work. That they be unemployed or that they do not earn money severely challenges manhood (not virility).

To start earning money means and implies the acquisition of the status of adulthood, it is a prerequisite for establishing a family and the principal source of social recognition. Both the homosocial recreational activities and the domestic life of adult males are defined in terms of being workers. In other words, the time and energy that they dedicate to these will be subordinated to the pace imposed on them by remunerated work. Thus, for example, a father will dedicate to his children the time and spaces “allowed by” his work. Similarly, leisure time is defined as that in which he is free of work obligations.

In fact, the role of the male in a household as well as the activities he carries out there are defined by the fact that he works outside so that when he is at home his functions are perceived to include basically the following: resting, recovering his strength, exerting authority and managing the family resources. Men may –and should– carry out domestic chores, but when they do this, it is perceived as help or as expressions of their personal tastes –not associated to their gender– and not as the contribution that corresponds to them as males within the domestic order.

Work is also the masculine place *par excellence* because it is the space where the male meets his peers. As the areas for masculine socialization decline in adulthood –due to the demanding domestic and work obligations that forces men to restrict their recreational activities–, the place of employment progressively becomes the only homosocial setting. It is an environment that establishes a counterpoint with the home, the feminine space to which males do not entirely belong and in which they are in a subordinate position to the wife or the mother. According to El Zambo a fifty-five-year-old mason of Lima:

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<sup>2</sup> Villarán Fernando, 2000. Working Paper SASE, Lima

for me it means a lot of things, you work to bring something home and it takes your mind off things. At work, you go there, you clean up, you laugh, you tell jokes, because in every home there are problems, but at work you have another kind of happiness, its a second home...

Therefore, it would be interesting to consider whether one of the consolations for alienating working relations of poor men has been the pleasures of the homosocial environment, where the demands and challenges of women may be avoided. It could, also, explain why the challenges to the male organizational cultures of workplaces, and to male exclusivity, arouse such resistance. Male collectivities might be experienced as a refuge as well as a solidarity constitutive of power (Jackson 2001.)

### **Work and Life Cycle**

Men are required to meet standards of masculine performance, which vary over the lifecourse in (inevitably) changing social and economic contexts. Strategies to establish an increasing degree of masculinity start early in life. At a young age, having spending money is a masculine need. To earn an income enables a young man to participate in the exchange of mutual invitations, to participate in activities during which alcoholic beverages are consumed, and in other activities that allow him to obtain a place in the men's networks. According to Sabio, a forty-year-old tourist guide from Cuzco,

The first money earned is a landmark in the life of a young man. It was a great satisfaction because, well, I could look after myself. I could have my first money and could invite people with my own bucks. What I felt when I first earned money was that you feel independent, without commitments and suddenly; it even gives you a certain authority. You know, you earn your money and, then, you are somebody. You can treat people, share, give, and to a certain degree, you can even influence certain situations.

Different interpretations on the meaning of this experience may be established and associated to social class differences. Middle class young people delay their insertion into the labor market because, as a rule, they attend university or a specialized academy. On the other hand, young people from popular sectors start earning money early in life since parents expect their children<sup>3</sup> to start contributing to the family budget<sup>4</sup> as soon as they finish school. Once they establish their own homes, they devote their cares to their own children. However, this transition is often difficult because the family of origin relies on the contribution of the young members to attain better living conditions and this contribution is interrupted when the youngsters move out to start a family. Therefore, it is not uncommon for a male to say that his mother and father objected to his establishing a home.

The importance of the military service in the life of males from popular sectors of the poorest areas of the country should be highlighted (Guzmán y Portocarrero 1992, Fuller 2001.) Not only does this institution transmit masculine values and helps to build up a national identity, but also contributes to create a uniform male culture and to establish solidarity bonds among males who come from different regions, cultures, and social sectors. Furthermore, it provides training and helps men to insert themselves into the

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<sup>3</sup> This demand is greater when the family is headed by the mother.

<sup>4</sup> It should be pointed out that although different reasons are mentioned to demand their contribution to the family budget, daughters are subject to the same kind of pressure.

labor market. However, it also contributes to strengthen the gender segmentation in the labor market.

While during youth work opens the doors of masculine space by giving prestige, in adulthood the primary purpose of work is to provide sustenance for the family. The definitive insertion in the sphere of work occurs when they assume responsibility, that is, when they become providers for the family they establish (Fuller, 1997, 2001.) The arrival of the first child confirms this passage. From then on, responsible work marks the difference vis-à-vis the previous uncivilized and dangerous period when the incomes obtained at work were diverted for entertainment and adventure. If the juvenile stage would last longer, they would spend their incomes in alcohol and friends and would risk to face self-destruction.

Consequently, I suggest that for Peruvian urban men the ability to provide and be responsible for others (and therefore to hold authority over them) constitutes the landmark between work as a way of entering the masculine space and confirming masculinity, and work as the consecration of manhood. The latter entails not only the ability to produce and be accepted by the peers but also to provide for others. These representations may raise a point about altruism and self-interest. There could be a different 'male' version of caring since the significance of being a provider for men suggests that their well-being is highly dependent on their ability to support others, and be able to sustain kin and marital relations<sup>5</sup>.

### **Contradictions**

However, work concentrates and dramatizes the ambiguities and contradictions of masculinity. It expresses the antagonism between the free undomesticated male and the sense of responsibility that characterizes adult manhood (Fuller, 1997:130, Viveros, 1998: 52.) Young people tend to associate entering the labor market with adventure and new experiences that reaffirm their masculinity. Furthermore, earning money allows them to court women and to brag about their sexual or romantic exploits with their peers. Youth masculine culture may stimulate them to abandon their studies seduced by adventure and the personal autonomy that earning money provides<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, over the long term, this may eliminate their possibilities of obtaining better jobs. This tendency may be related to the fact that the job opportunities opened to men from popular sectors do not allow them to accumulate prestige and that, at least in this period of their lives, reaffirming their masculinity is the principal source of accumulating social recognition. However, on the long run, this is a factor that contributes to reproduce and reinforce social boundaries.

On the other hand, the fact that youths in popular sectors, as a general rule, start to earn money earlier and, thus, become potential providers implies that their courting relationships may more quickly lead to living together or getting married. This difference accentuates the gap between social classes because, while middle class young people

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Sylvia Chant (in: Jackson (editor) 2001) dissects the crisis in masculinity in north western Costa Rica and points out that men's worth depends critically on income, on sustaining family relations, and on enduring relations with women

<sup>6</sup> This tendency has been found also by Haywood y Mac An Ghail (1996) among working class school students in the United Kingdom (1996.)

can invest in studies and in developing their networks of male friends, that is in accumulating social and symbolic capital, young men from popular sectors have to spend most of their resources in providing for their families, thus jeopardizing their chances of obtaining better jobs in the future.

Work concentrates and dramatizes the ambiguities and contradictions between the domestic and public spheres. For Peruvian men, circulation among peers is a key strategy to make contacts for future jobs, commerce, services, etc. Thus, the necessity to consume with friends and acquaintances in order to maintain networks of friendship or influences is very important to understanding the masculine culture of work.

Therefore, looking at money from a male perspective also raises questions about how we understand altruism through considering the importance of demonstrating generosity at male gatherings to the performance of masculinity, and the possibility that there may be wider benefits for others from such gender success (Jackson 2001.) However, there is tension between the need of circulating among peers in order to increase or maintain support networks and the need of fulfilling their role as providers. This is often a source of conflict with the family that, for its part, call on men to invest most of their time and resources in supporting their dependents because, according to the set of representations associated with the domestic dimension of manliness, when men already have family obligations, the greatest part of their resources should be invested in maintaining their children. Male success in social relations may produce benefits, which are not only personal, and those who would fail to establish such networks could pay high costs. Thus it may appear that it benefits women to allow men to build social capital through relations with other men, but this, however, also feeds the collectivities of men who stand together in gender solidarities which are also oppressive to women.

As Jackson (2001) points out, looking at masculine work culture lead us to an alternative interpretation of masculine behaviors usually seen as pathological in Gender Studies literature such as men withholding money for individual expenses, particularly alcohol. What is the meaning and the value of the man hanging out with his peers. Is he there representing his household interests in ways which benefit household members as well as himself. Or is he consuming a luxury denied to other household members, defaulting on work obligations, and looking out for his personal interest alone?

### **Work and gender**

Likewise, the representations associated with work express and dramatize gender hierarchies. Since the work place is identified with masculinity, it is designed for the circulation of men and, therefore, in many cases is not pleasant for women. Thus, for example, in Peruvian culture a woman is expected to avoid being away from home while “men belong to the street”. At the same time, the realms in which the construction of masculine solidarity networks that guarantee access to networks of influence, alliances, an support are reproduced through a masculine culture of sports, alcohol consumption, visits to the whorehouse, or stories about their respective sexual conquests. These mechanisms assure monopoly of, or at least, a differential access by men to the public sphere and are a key part of the system of power in which masculinity is forged. Although women may enter into the world of work, they are explicitly excluded from the world of male entertainment where the chains of influence are knotted and the links of male solidarity are reproduced. For example, Dan Patay a 45 year-old TV producer considers that “there is a network of male friendships underlying all this, because how

can you conquer spaces otherwise? Getting drunk, with sharpness and wit. The group of film-makers was very sexist.”

However, during the last decades in Peru, gender relations have undergone significant modifications due to several factors: women have entered the labor market and higher education<sup>7</sup>(Barrig,1981, Fuller, 1993); the decline in fertility rates and the use of modern contraceptive methods (Francke,1984) have modified the size and composition of the family; and women have achieved equal rights. All these factors contributed to an increasing democratization of the family, to a redefinition of the relationships between men and women (Fuller 1993.) Middle class women are now getting a college education and entering the formal labor market while popular sector women have increased their participation in the labor market and become important social actors. Moreover, the influence of egalitarian values transmitted through school, the media and the official discourse of the Peruvian state has led to a questioning of male privilege. As a consequence, there is a noticeable change in gender representations among urban populations. Nowadays it is widely accepted that women have as much of a right to work as men and that both, men and women, should contribute to the household income. There is also an acute consciousness of job-related discrimination against women which is usually discarded a leftover form of *machismo* (which is defined as an abusive variety of masculinity.)

Nevertheless, swimming against the tide of these changes, most Peruvian men perceive female work as a contribution to the family income and consider the sustenance of the home to depend on the male's contribution. Furthermore, they identify masculinity with the ability to command and with authority, characteristics that, according to them, are required for management positions.

Although urban males acknowledge and are aware of the current changes that have taken place in gender relations and of the loss of legitimacy of male privileges, I suggest that this phase lag is due to the fact that their representations of gender and masculinity are firmly rooted in an asymmetric notion of gender and social order. According to this asymmetric notion, the male contribution to the family support in terms of income (obtained at work) is indispensable, whereas the female's is only an additional contribution.

This may be explained by the fact that the division of tasks within the home and men's claim of having pre-eminence in the labor space are founded on gender arrangements which do not depend exclusively on how the public sphere is organized, but also on the principles which rule over the domestic sphere. In the Peruvian society (as in other Latin American countries (Stern 1995), the matrimonial institution is based on two main axes, family reciprocity and solidarity, and gender asymmetry. According to the first, the male owes devotion and respect to his partner, both parties carry on the common project of getting the family going well and, this common goal is what gives sense to their lives. Domestic relations are based on a contract in which the woman provides domestic services and a monopoly over her sexual favors and the man offers a monopoly over his

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<sup>7</sup> Women are 40% of the labor force and 36.4% of the college students population. The latter has raised consistently from a 15.5% in 1960 to a 36.4 in 1990. Source Cecilia Blondet: *Mujeres latinoamericanas en cifras: Peru*. 1993. Ministerio de asuntos Sociales Instituto de la Mujer, España; Unicef Peru and Flacso Chile

sexuality, the fruits of his work, and the prestige that he can accumulate in the public sphere. This relationship is defined as complementary and balanced since together, the man and the woman make the family enterprise possible.

Nevertheless, the contribution of each one of them is sexually differentiated. In other words, women may work outside the home but this activity is not their essential contribution as the female party involved in the marital contract. This would explain why a woman relying on other men (father, brothers, husband) to obtain resources is considered acceptable while the same in the case of a man would mean a loss of prestige and that his male position would be challenged. This also explains why the fact of women working outside the home does not modify the division of tasks within it. Female work is still the “female” contribution to the household. In turn, the male may help within the home, but his role is to provide the resources he obtains outside. Therefore, any task that he may carry out within the home is codified as “support”.

Moreover, the public sphere is defined as structurally superior to the domestic since it is the source of the resources and prestige that assures the material and symbolic survival of the family. The male contribution is considered to be superior to the female contribution because men have to develop skills (intelligence, vigor, ability to command, etc.) Furthermore, the resources they obtain outside the home may be increased: males can earn more money or receive a greater recognition for their achievements. Female resources, on the other hand, are considered to be “natural” because they derive from sexuality, from the capacity to bear children, or from home caring. These resources have a ceiling; they may be better or worse, but not greater.

The above would explain why males perceive themselves as generous, as those who sacrifice and contribute the most, and would also explain why they expect to be treated with deference by women. In brief, this relationship is part of the typical script of the asymmetric reciprocity, “I give you more valuable things so my contribution is greater and therefore you should have special considerations with me, you should be thankful”. These representations on the male contribution show that a male altruistic notion is deeply interwoven in the reciprocal conception of marital and family relationships, and needs to be studied in further detail.

At the same time, as in most Latin American countries (Safa 1992, Fernández Kelly 1993), the model of the man as breadwinner is disappearing to be replaced by the couple who works in order to earn enough to survive. Although men tend to refer to themselves as heads of household and as those responsible for the maintenance of the family, this affirmation does not correspond to reality. In most cases the wife works and the family would not be able to cover its expenses without the earnings of both. I attribute this apparent disjunction between praxis and representations to the above-mentioned representations and to the fact the labor market is highly segmented by gender<sup>8</sup> and that men from low-income sectors generally have jobs that require physical strength and geographical mobility. Both of these are identified with masculinity. Thus, the

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<sup>8</sup> In general, the greatest division of labor by gender can be found in jobs held by popular sectors. Men predominate in construction, heavy industry, fishing, mining, agribusiness, and middle level technical jobs (electricians, plumbers, painters, drivers.)

identification of work with strength and masculinity could contribute to explain why men continue to define themselves, contrary to all the evidence, as breadwinners<sup>9</sup>.

Furthermore, as I have already pointed out, emphasizing masculine features is the most important source for obtaining social recognition among working class men. This would explain why, despite the difficulties and contradictions they live, they are less willing to question or analyze their role as providers. On the contrary, one of their major concern centers around the difficulty of fulfilling their masculine responsibilities. These findings corroborate other studies. Thus, for instance, in research on the challenges that prolonged unemployment imposed to masculinity, Willot and Griffin (1996) conclude that among working class individuals this phenomenon, although implying a loss of self-esteem and a feeling of emasculation, does not lead them to defy the dominant forms of masculinity nor drives them closer to pro-feminist alternatives. On the contrary, vis-a-vis the difficulties facing their insertion in the labor market, they vindicate their position as providers as if it were a prerogative, a right rather than a duty.

Consequently, among popular sector men, this crisis affects their self-esteem and may lead them to have doubts concerning their capability to fulfill their expectations as men, but does not lead them to question the hegemonic definition of masculinity, as this is one of the few ways for them to accumulate social prestige. This, in turn, is reinforced by the identification of the work space with the features of masculinity and with the spaces of masculine socialization that allow men's access to jobs not open to women and to monopolize the means of accumulating social capital. This brings about the fact that the male contribution is seen more valuable and more prestigious which, in turn "proves" that is the man who is really in charge of supporting the family.

Finally, as various researchers have already pointed out (Escobar Latapí;1996, Fuller 1997, 2001; Valdés y Olavarría1998), current changes in gender relations have questioned the legitimacy of masculine dominance but have not meant, a revision (as was the case for women) of the foundations of masculinity which rest upon the identification of maleness with economic responsibility and authority

## **Conclusions**

The representation of work is modified according to the period of the life cycle lived by men. While work for young men is a source of personal autonomy and key to entering the masculine world, for adults the sense of work is based on the capability of being responsible, supporting a family, an accumulating respectability, that is, consecrating manhood.

The significance of being a provider for men suggests that their well-being is highly dependent on their ability to support others, and be able to sustain kin and marital relations. Therefore, it is possible that there is a different 'male' version of caring.

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<sup>9</sup> This has been found in previous studies, for example, in a series of interviews carried out among workers in Lima Guzmán & Portocarrero (1992) conclude that even though the work place has become gender mixed, the presence of women is regarded as an exception to the rule and that the most highly valued features of workers are associated with masculine attributes such as strength, technical skills and ability to command.

## **Questions for future research**

### **Work and life cycle**

In relation to life course it is important to point out that performances of masculinity are age-specific

Looking for different kinds of manliness should imply not only different kinds of men, but trajectories of age

Conflicts centered on money between the family of origin and the family of reproduction

Since masculine identity is strongly bound up with the world of work, what happens when, in old life, men lose their connections with the world of work?

### **Male friendship and homosociality.**

How do men gather, at different stages of the life course, in different regional, class, and -ethnic contexts?

What is the relative influence of friends and family on men and masculine identities?

### **Male networks and social capital**

How should men's expenditure on non-household consumption, particularly drinking, be seen?

### **Men and the domestic**

How to overcome the tendency to emphasize separations, rather than interdependencies in studying household relation?

¿How do men define altruism?

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