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Crisis of Masculinity or Masculine Opportunity?
An Overview

Introduction

I would like to start the article with a general reflection. The use of the term "crisis" is probably at its peak and the term is applied to a number of walks of life as well as various academic disciplines. One may even be of an impression that the world is immersed in a massive crisis, of a previously unheard of calibre. Such common use of the term causes some people to form an opinion that the world used to be better, more just, and free of crises. I think the illusion of a better world gone with the wind, may influence a negative assessment of the transformations of masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and the family, that we can observe in the contemporary societies.

The issue of a masculinity crisis is an area of interest of diverse academics: specialists in sociology, psychology, pedagogy, cultural anthropology, history, and philosophy. Authors who write about the masculinity crisis present varied points of view on the world, they call up different theories, and value social change connected with female emancipation in different ways. This all causes the issue of a masculinity crisis to be viewed from different angles, where different indicators of the crisis are presented and different phenomena are associated with it. In Poland, masculinity crisis gathered the interest of academia in the early 21st century. A valid voice in the debate belonged to Zbyszko Melosik and his book *Kryzys męskości w kulturze współczesnej* [Crisis of Masculinity in Contemporary Culture]. Melosik (2002, p. 7) writes that when typing the phrase "crisis of masculinity" into Google's search engine in the early 21st century we would get ca. 20 thousand website addresses. In October 2014, the same search phrase returned more than 90 hits in Polish (kryzys męskości) and around 1.7 million in English[1]. One may therefore say that the notion of the crisis of masculinity is of interest to a rising number of academics and journalists, although in my opin-

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[1] Accessed on October 8, 2014. The English phrase used was "crisis of masculinity".

ion the knowledge on the crisis of masculinity is actually low among the Polish society[2].

The goal of this paper is to characterise the different ways of understanding the crisis of masculinity in subject literature. I will mostly reference academic publications, but in order to present the issue more fully, I will occasionally refer to popular science literature as well as web articles. Additionally, I would like to voice my personal opinion on the crisis of masculinity.

The term "crisis of masculinity" in the context of the transformation of relations between women and men, as well as the category of masculinity itself, came into common use among Western academics in the last decade of the 20th century but men's identity issues had been described much earlier. Some of the books and articles from the 1970s and 1980s, even though they do not contain the term "crisis of masculinity" itself, do describe the said crisis to a large degree. Therefore, wherever necessary, I will use those publications in this paper.

One can say that currently in Poland as well as in other countries of the Western culture there are two competing paradigms of masculinity. The traditional paradigm sees masculinity in domination and specialisation in given areas. It is based on the dualism of gender roles, and the asymmetrical character of male, female, and children's traits. It entails the need to quench feelings and emotions[3]. The new paradigm of masculinity emphasises the equality and partnership of man and woman, treating these values as fundamental in the creation of the new social order. It includes the concepts of androgyny and self-fulfilment, understood as the drive towards complete humanity. This paradigm allows a man to exhibit both masculine and feminine traits. The man's life motto becomes co-operation, not domination, and he is a partner to women and children. The new version of masculinity – as opposed to the traditional paradigm – does not handicap non-heterosexual sexual identities (cf. Arcimowicz 2003, pp. 25–27). The patriarchal vision and the modern vision of masculinity fight for just one of them to attain the status of truth. In reality, though, few men fulfil all the requirements of the patriarchal imperative in their lives. There is a relatively small group of men who support all the postulates of the modern vision of masculinity. A vast majority of men from the contemporary societies of the West fulfil the values and patterns that continue the elements from the patriarchal and the modern version of masculinity[4], although the intensity of the traditional and the modern traits can differ, with an advantage of one option or the other (Arcimowicz 2013, pp. 173–179).

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[2] I am formulating the thesis based on conversations with the students of a few Polish universities during my Master's and Bachelor's seminars as well as during classes in anthropology of culture and sociology of culture.

[3] The traditional paradigm of masculinity largely overlaps the version of hegemonic masculinity which was described by the Austrian sociologist Raewyn Connell (1995, pp. 71–86).

[4] One also needs to remember that a similar phenomenon can be observed on the macro scale, i.e. some societies differ in their levels of patriarchalism (see Malinowska 2002; Walby 1990).

In my opinion, different approaches to the crisis of masculinity stem from two different visions of masculinity, although with some approaches the crossing of the two concepts of a man can be observed.

Ways of understanding the crisis of masculinity

The first approach assumes that the crisis of masculinity arose in association with female emancipation, whose effect is the weakening of the traditional model of masculinity. The approach builds on the understanding of traditional, patriarchal masculinity, associated with men dominating over women, to be an ahistoric category which cannot be (re)negotiated. The traditional paradigm of masculinity which accentuates the specialisation of women and men in specific walks of life is seen as a clear and the best model. Robert Bly claims that the transformation of the traditional model of masculinity accumulated the difficulties in men-women relations. Attempts to abandon the traditional model are interpreted as ones that jeopardise the social order (Bly 199). According to the conservative authors that support their claims on the biological essentialism, female emancipation facilitates the creation of problems in intimate relations across genders as well as the division of roles within a family (cf. Bly 1990; Clark 1994; Dobson 1994).

In the 1960s and 1970s the development of feminism in the US and Western Europe caused the weakening of the traditional paradigm of masculinity and the increase of social rights for women. The feminist movement was the subject of a harsh critique on treating biological differences as the fundamental criterion for depreciation of the feminine gender and assigning additional value to the masculine one. Women gained a number of privileges which used to be the domain of men. However, in the 1980s a strong counterattack on women's rights was observed – a so-called backlash, or the attempt to take back the winnings of feminism. Susan Faludi (1992, pp. 56–92) says it is a largely camouflaged phenomenon. In the United States and subsequently in other countries, a number of social movements and organisations emerged which voiced the restitution of the authority of fathers in families and the return of the pattern of traditional masculinity to sons, as well as anti-feminist sentiments. There were also opinions suggesting that the unfavourable position of women is an effect of feminism. According to Faludi (1992), the mass media twist the truth and falsify facts, giving the impression that the activities which improved the position of women actually turned it for the worse. According to the author, one of the main goals of the backlash is to push women back into their accustomed roles.

The conservative men's movement established in the United States is an association of opponents of women's emancipation and homosexuals[5]. The key person

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[5] In the United States and other countries there exist a number of men's social movements that voice different opinions. In this work, the conservative, anti-feminist and homosexual-hostile men's

in the organisation was Robert Bly. One of the forms of restitution of men's lost "true" masculinity and psychic strength was through camps at holiday resorts. Their meetings were supposed to give rebirth to the wild men. Participants built shacks, beat on drums, drew wild roars from their chests and all was meant to help rebuild masculine identity (cf. Faludi 1992, pp. 343–344).

Another group that attempts to rebuild the past strength of the traditional model of masculinity and restitute gender dimorphism are the Promise Keepers. In 1996, their conferences, held in 22 American states, drew over a million participants. In October 1995, a manifestation of men at the Washington Mall with over a million participants was a major event. The organisation focuses on the specific role of a man, who should lead the family and not allow women to take over this role (Peterey-Mroczkowska 1998, pp. 82–91).

The second approach combines the crisis of masculinity with identity issues of contemporary men where, according to the researchers, the problems do not result from female emancipation but are largely a consequence of the patriarchal model of masculinity. Roger Horrocks, a psychologist, in his *Masculinity in Crisis* (1994), claims that if a large group of men feels unhappy, withdraws from social life, does not cope with everyday problems, avoids responsibility, and appears aggressive towards other men and women, it can be said to suffer from a crisis of masculinity. It needs to be said, however, that Horrocks considers the patriarchal masculinity, the macho masculinity, to limit and cripple men. In his view, men ought to abandon the patriarchal attitude towards women as well as rethink their masculinity (Horrocks 1994, p. 25, in: Mizierska 2003, p. 182).

Horrocks' ideas converge with the position of researchers who built the foundations for the so-called "men's studies" in America in the 1970s and 1980s. Herb Goldberg and Joseph Pleck criticised the traditional paradigm of masculinity and pointed to the need of changing it. In his *The Hazards of Being Male* (1976), Goldberg shows how much spontaneity and sensitivity a man loses when assuming a stereotypical masculine role. The author is heavily critical towards traditional concepts of masculinity which also contain the command to be hard and not to show one's own weaknesses because it significantly limits the man's humanity. In his 1979 *The New Male*[6], the American psychologist formulates an opinion that the traditional paradigm of masculinity is a paradigm of self-destruction (Goldberg 2000, p. 13).

The third approach towards the crisis of masculinity associates the said crisis with the discomfort men feel when different models of a man in contemporary culture clash. The approach takes into account the assumption that the traditional model of a man is not an optimal solution, at least for some men, but there is no good alternative to it (cf. Wojnicka 2010). Elisabeth Badinter points to two

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movement will be called "a conservative men's movement", while men who are the descendants of the women's suffrage movement as well as the gay liberation movement will be called "pro-feminist men's movement".

conflicting models of masculinity within contemporary culture. According to the first model, which she calls a "hard" man, the definition of masculine identity is done through the following rules: no feminine elements, being a winner, hard rules, relying only on oneself. According to Badinter, this model is a threat both to men and women because it does not allow to satisfy a large portion of emotional needs. The opposing model is a "soft" man, being the antithesis of the former. However, the new model leads to some men not being able to cross the border between childhood and adulthood and not being able to free themselves from being dependent on their mothers or partners. She claims that neither of the described models influences the condition of men positively (Badinter 1993, pp. 118–138, 160–162).

Similarly to Badinter, other authors voiced opinions of the lack of alternatives to traditionally understood masculinity, although some articulated the problem of the crisis of masculinity to a larger degree than the French academic did. In *The End of Masculinity* (1998), John MacInnes says that the crisis of masculinity is a fact and a common occurrence. The author brings up some negative aspects of the traditional model of masculinity as a severe crisis of the said model, however failing to find an alternative model that could replace it. He assigns the status of a utopia to the new androgenic pattern (McInnes 1998, p. 46), also claiming that in the contemporary societies of the West some traits that used to be treated as typically masculine such as strength, courage, independence, strength of spirit, and sexual initiative – are currently increasingly often used as starting points to assaults on men. McInnes claims there are no positive models of masculine roles *(Manly Virtues and Masculine Vices;* in: Melosik 2002, pp. 10–11).

The fourth approach perceives the source of the crisis of masculinity in the crisis of heterosexuality and its hegemonic standing in culture (Melosik 2002, pp. 35–47; Skoczylas 2012). Heterosexualism makes up one of the main elements constituting the traditional paradigm of masculinity (see: Arcimowicz 2003, pp. 34–36, 56–57). As of the 1960s, the activities of gay and lesbian social movements in the societies belonging to the Euro-American culture questioned heterosexuality as the only allowed sexual norm. Works of authors associated[6] with gay and lesbian studies played a major part here, followed by research and theoretical concepts developed as part of the queer studies (see: Seidman 2006, pp. 11–12; Baer, Lizurej 2007, pp. 14–15; Corber, Vallocchi 2003, pp. 3–4). As of the 1980s, many films and series as well as other media coverages from the culture of the West started to feature positive images of sexually unnormative people. It needs to be added, though, that the alteration of the approach of the media towards sexual minorities is the consequence of not only changes of morality in sexuality as well as larger tolerance towards people of non-normative sexual orientation but also because of eco-

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[6] Goldeberg's *The New Male* was translated into Polish and published by Bertelsman Media under a somewhat misleading title, probably a consequence of marketing aims: *Wrażliwy macho: mężczyzna 2000* [Sensitive Macho – the 2000 Man].

nomic reasons (see Arcimowicz 2013, pp. 144–148, 409–428; Leo 2001, pp. 101–123; Tropiano 2002, pp. 109–128; Melosik 2002, pp. 35–47). Research conducted in the United States and in Poland shows that sexually un-normative people form a few per cent of the society. Among non-heterosexual men there is a higher percentage of those who earn salaries above the average and whose education is higher than that of heterosexual men (cf. Solomon 2016; Izdebski 2012, pp. 386–388). Advertisers and broadcasters, in the time of hardening competition, need to take this into account, and therefore the number of broadcasts directed at un-normative people is growing.

At this point, it is worth recalling the thought of Anthony Giddens (1992), who remarks that one of the reasons for the weakening of heterosexuality as the only acceptable norm is the separation of sex from procreation. Sexual revolution and the popularisation of contraceptives opened new possibilities to heterosexual people, previously accessible only to homosexual people (see Skoczylas 2012). Also, it needs stressing that the category of sexual orientation by itself can be losing its meaning. Better recognition of human sexuality has led to the discovery of such categories as asexuality or autosexuality.

The weakening of the normative influences of heterosexuality leads to the crisis of masculinity because traditional gender and sexual identities need to be always binary: masculinity versus femininity, heterosexuality versus homosexuality (Traister 2000, p. 293, in: Skoczylas 2012).

The fifth approach combines the crisis of masculinity with the global crisis. According to the Austrian physicist and philosopher Fritjof Capra (1982), in the last 20 years of the 20th century the world found itself in the position of a deep global crisis. The author of *The Return Point* writes: "It is a complex, multi-dimensional crisis whose facets touch every aspect of our lives – our health and livelihood, the quality of our environment and our social relationships, our economy, technology, and politics. It is a crisis of intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions; a crisis of a scale and urgency unprecedented in recorded human history" (Capra 1982). The author claims that defining the reasons for the current crisis of civilisation is impossible if one takes a fragmentary look, and this is the prevailing perception of reality by most of the scholars, which makes it impossible for them to comprehend the most pressing problems of the contemporary times. These problems are of a systemic nature, which means that they are closely interconnected and interdependent. According to the philosopher, the phenomenon which carries the deepest meaning to the changes of the social, economic, and political system is a slow and resistant, but also inevitable, dusk of the patriarchal system. Capra and other authors claim that there is a need to free academia from the element of humans dominating over nature, while voicing anthropocentric and androcentric sentiments (cf. Capra, Steindl-Rast, Matus 1992). Capra signals the existence of a feedback loop between the patriarchal approach and the global crisis of the contemporary world, starting with the assumption that androcentrism is the reason behind the crisis and that the only way to leave it behind

would be to change the traditional paradigm of masculinity and assign more importance to women in the construction of the new social order. His point of view is closely related to the reflections on the condition of the world as voiced by New Ageists.

The sixth approach assumes that the crisis of masculinity is more of a product of discourse than an actual social problem connected with the identity and psychic issue of contemporary men. According to some authors, a discursively constructed crisis of masculinity is not a new phenomenon, and the discourse itself intensifies at times when the traditional gender order seems to be endangered. Elahe Haschemi Yekani (2011, p. 9), a culture expert, draws our attention to the fact that crying over the alleged crisis of masculinity seems a periodically recurring phenomenon. This is confirmed in the research of Michael Messner, an authority in men's studies. The American sociologist claims gripes over the weakening traditional masculinity appeared in the Unites States at the turn of the 20th century[7]. They were connected with first-wave feminism. The actions of female Americans led to some changes in the system of the law: making women independent of male wardens, reform of the system of education that allowed girls to become educated. These changes were perceived by a lot of men as a threat to their dominating position. In the public debate, women's increased presence on the job market and better education were criticised, and opinions were voiced that the changes would cause the feminisation of the society. As a consequence, in 1910 The Boy Scouts of America were formed, whose aim was for the "real men" to be able to instil "real manhood" in boys. American football, brutal and traumatic, became the most important sports discipline in the USA, attempting to form the symbol of men's strength and power (Messner 1994, pp. 102–114). It can be said, therefore, that the roots of Faludi's backlash, a 1980s reaction of conservative men to the achievements of second-wave feminism, appeared much earlier.

The seventh approach is represented by those authors who say there is no crisis of masculinity. It often intertwines with the approach stressing the discursive construction of the crisis of masculinity. Researchers doubting in the sense of using the term "crisis of masculinity" refer to the broadening of the term or definition of masculinity (Gardiner 2014; Duch-Dyngosz 2013a, 2013b). The new vision of a man includes behaviour patterns that entail men crossing the traditional gender binarism – for example a pattern of a child guardian or a sensitive partner to a woman. According to a team of researchers from six countries (Austria, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Norway, and Israel) a man's work-based gender is currently evolving to the form of a caring masculinity and active participation in daily housework (Puchert, Gartner, Hoyong 2005; in: Kwiatkowska, Nowakowska 2006, p. 17).

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[7] Badinter refers to the French and English crises of masculinity of the 17th and 18th centuries. She writes about the emergence of "dandies" – men wearing makeup, tights, buckled shoes, and wigs, who spoke with emphasis (Badinter 1993, pp. 29–32).

Crisis of masculinity or masculine opportunity?

Here, I would like to offer my own viewpoint on the crisis of masculinity. I think the term cannot be used *en bloc* in reference to all the behaviour patterns of men functioning in contemporary culture. If I were to use the term "crisis of masculinity", I would need to do so in reference to the patriarchal paradigm of men, although even in this case I would be tempted to speak of the "transformation of masculinity".

In my opinion, it is important, and by all means positive, that apart from the traditional paradigm of masculinity, some countries have fully-fledged new patterns of masculinity, while in some – including Poland – such patterns are emerging[8]. Masculinity can have many faces and men can build their identities making use of different values. The emergence of new models of masculinity creates the possibility of choosing cooperation, allows to exhibit features that were traditionally considered masculine and feminine, and in some situations allows to attain a person's full individual potential.

I generally agree with the position of those authors who consider the crisis of masculinity to be largely a discursive construct. I am not denying the fact that some men, in connection with the social changes and female emancipation, can have trouble defining their identity and finding themselves in new roles, as confirmed by some studies (see *Species. Praktyczny przewodnik po świecie młodych mężczyzn* [Species. A Practical Guide Through the World of Young Men] 2008, pp. 6–25). However, more problems, even though they are often unknown, are caused by the patriarchal paradigm of masculinity (see Friedan 1993, pp. 173–180; Chmura-Rutkowska, Ostrouch 2007, pp. 277–286). What seems like a crisis to some may be an opportunity to others, and here I mean heterosexual women and men who abandon the patriarchal vision of masculinity, sexually- and gender-unnormative people. When we look at the transformations of the category of masculinity from a wider perspective, we can conclude that the rejection of the patriarchal paradigm of masculinity based on such values as domination, power, or uniformisation, may be the beginning of the construction of a new world order where justice, freedom, and diversity will be valued to a larger degree than nowadays. The search for one great alternative to the patriarchal paradigm of masculinity is not a good solution, as in it I see the danger of replacing one hegemony with another. I think that there is no need to search for an alternative to the traditional model of masculinity by force; it is just enough not to interfere in the development of new patterns of masculinity.

The defendants of the patriarchal social order consider the division between the family and public areas, where the former is dominated by women and the

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[8] The growing force of the new paradigm of masculinity can be observed not only in the growing participation of men in childcare and housework but also in the emergence of pro-feminist men's movements in Northern America and some European countries (see Śmietana 2006; Wojnicka 2010).

latter by men, as a natural state which should not be changed. This clashes with the right for everyone to make decisions related to their lives, which ought to have higher priority than the cultural compulsion of everyone behaving in the same way, in accordance with their gender. It needs to be added that the societies of the West started to develop fastest when women received rights similar to men, and started to receive an education and to work outside the home. It is not at all well when the definition of one's path of life is dictated by ideological pressure and legal compulsion. Democracy is not about enforcing unification, but rather about creating the conditions for every person to realise their personal patterns. There is no single ahistorical, universal masculinity; there are a number of masculinities. Potentially, in a given society there exists a number of equal yet different concepts of masculinity.

Final remarks

One needs to remember that the most important publications on the category of masculinity are related mostly to the societies of the West, and that the authors most often analyse masculinity in the context of their own cultures. Most of the English-language literature on men has a strong ethnocentric and/or class-centric vision. Raewyn Connell claims the discourse on masculinity is mostly constructed on the basis of the lives of a few per cent of people living in one cultural area and at one time (Connell 1993, p. 600). The supporters of biological essentialism, but also some more progressive authors, often forget about the deep diversification of men in individual cultures of the world. Many authors also fail to recognise, strange as it may seem, that the patriarchal model is a relatively new social system in the history of humanity. Archaeological discoveries and the research of academics from other fields indicate that in the later Palaeolithic and the Neolithic ages, i.e. 40–3 thousand years BC, there existed egalitarian societies, or even such in which women played the dominant role (Cameron 1981; Gimbutas 1987; Campbell 1988; Brach-Czaina 1997; Krzak 1994, 2007; Bachofen 2007).

According to Linda Brannon, we can distinguish three contemporary categories describing men and their reactions to the changing roles of women. The first is formed by traditional men, lamenting over the changes, failing to find gains from female emancipation for themselves, treating women as rivals. The second is populated by men at the transition stage who are able to interact with a woman as a partner in an intimate relationship. These men do not always support the emancipatory drives of women, but they try to adjust to the changes on the role of women by altering their behaviour. The third category is that of progressive men, supporting the feminist movement and especially the concept that the traditional gender role is harmful to men (Brannon 2002, pp. 554–555). As history shows, as early as the 19th century a large group of men, including well-known persons, supported the claims of the suffragettes (Brod 1987, p. 269; Shiffman

1987, p. 295). However, both nowadays and in the past, the pro-feminist men are in a minority.

In the discussion on the crisis of masculinity, it is often stressed how weak men are, how little or nothing depends on them. However, when we check who possesses actual power, who makes the most important decisions, it turns out that the disproportion of power between men and women, to the advantage of the former, is still large. It also needs to be remembered that abolishing sexual discrimination *de iure* will not mean that actual equality of men and women in all areas of life will appear automatically. It is a process, stimulated by legal solutions, but one needs to keep in mind that the solutions do not guarantee its complete success.

I think the emergence of new patterns of masculinity is a chance of liberating from the pressure of the traditional paradigm that associates masculinity with domination and violence. It is not about creating a cultural pressure that commands all men to realise their life patterns, but rather about pointing to the deficiencies of the existing model of gender socialisation and creating the possibilities of the equal functioning of different patterns of masculinity. In Poland, there exist dynamic tensions between the traditional and the new gender models. There are attempts to halt the transformations, but evolution cannot be stopped, only merely retarded.

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Summary

Crisis of Masculinity or Masculine Opportunity? An Overview

In this article the author provides a critical overview of the debates around the status of men. The ways in which these kinds of problematics have emerged are discussed at length to highlight the kind of polemic which continues to inform the moral panic surrounding the plight of men who have acquired the status of the "new disadvantaged".

Keywords

masculinity, crisis, progress, change, social research.