

THE  
CHRISTIAN  
INSTITUTE

*Who's  
Celebrating  
What?*

The effects of men's sexual liberation  
on men, their children  
and their communities

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## The Sexual Liberation of Men

The last thirty or forty years have seen wonderful advances in the sexual liberation of men in this country. This has occurred generally in the advanced urban industrial world, and is occurring increasingly in the world at large because of the power and ubiquity of the West's opinion-forming media of morality, information and entertainment.

Human sexual intercourse, as in all bisexual species, is more consequential for the female than it is for the male. The female carries the child, gives birth to the child and, as a mammal, is equipped to suckle the child (although the feeding bottle has reduced the importance of this fact). The health of the human mother can be influenced by her pregnancy. Historically human childbirth has been for the mother a major matter of life and death, and in many parts of the world still is.

Equally obvious is the fact that Nature has provided the man with the biological incentive to have sexual intercourse, but no biological incentive, or at best very little, to bear the burdens of parenthood or spousehood. *If* the man is to make a long term contribution to providing love, protection, nurture and training for his child, then nearly all the work must be done by socialisation and social control; by the culture through which *sociological* fathers, as distinct from mere *biological* fathers, are produced.

Sex without these kinds of responsibilities is naturally the mainly unrealised fantasy of human males. It has been available to the very rich and the very powerful in many societies. We all know that John F. Kennedy not only had the book he had been reading in Washington open on the same page on the table of his hotel room when he reached New York; his hotel also had a tunnel to neighbouring hotels where he could keep his trysts without having to brave the waiting press in the lobby. I'll deal with King Solomon later.

Until 30 or 40 years ago in this country, these privileges were denied to ordinary men. Possible sexual activities were closely monitored by nearly every adult who came into contact with a mature couple. The intention was to ensure that, as far as possible, before a man had sexual intercourse with a woman he should undertake far-reaching, long-lasting and wide-ranging commitments to his possible child and the mother of his possible child. It was not until the Lambeth Conference of 1930 that the Bishops of the Church of England accepted that there could be a morally sound reason for practising sexual intercourse *within* marriage, when it could not lead to a child being conceived.

If we look at the countries European Union, we can see what has happened with industrialization and urbanization. The European Union carries out social surveys called the Eurobarometer. In 1990 the Eurobarometer looked especially at families.<sup>1</sup> What are families for? The question was put, what is the most important role of the family in society? The answers they received were wide ranging. 68% of the people interviewed in Portugal, 63% in Greece, and 58% of those interviewed in Spain said that the family was about bringing up and educating *children*. Right down at the bottom was the United Kingdom where only 24% thought it was to bring up and educate children; 'families' (what are families?) are about personal *adult* fulfilment.

### **The Erosion of Marriage and the Family**

The social institution of *formal marriage* placed upon the man binding obligations concerning procreation; child care; childrearing; and the care of adults for one another that cannot be replaced from either professional or commercial sources. With increasing success and speed that control has been shaken off.

The man's duties towards his children and the mother of his children have been privatised - made into his own - from being a public and quasi-compulsory affair in three ways:-

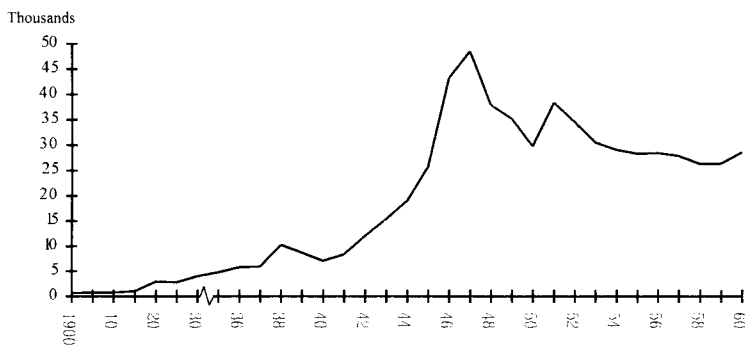
#### (i) *Divorce*

Firstly, there has been an increase in the freedom for fathers to leave their spouse and to leave or lose their children. Legal changes though themselves immensely important were, as always, nevertheless much less important than changes in public opinion. The law reached and still reaches only a few crude externals of the immensely complicated, dense and fine mesh web of British society's rules, expectations and practices touching on sexual and childrearing conduct. Forty years ago these rules still ranged from the ban on adultery, to what was permitted in seemly language, to the scarcely perceptible gesture in a given situation. The rules were discussed and enforced, with variations, in Pall Mall clubs and pitmen's quoits games, in bourgeois suburbs and corner shops.

Changes in the law track, and can stimulate, usually unpredicted and often undesired changes in the infinitely complex and subtle social fabric of the time. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century legal divorce was almost unknown in England. There were only 2 or 3 divorces per year for centuries, and the number did not exceed 1,000 until 1914. The Magistrates Act of 1878 permitted separation on the same basis which was later applied to divorce in 1936. Separations under

the 1878 Act ran at a very low rate. The conclusion that the divorce rate depended only on changes in the law can only be derived by completely ignoring this measure and its consequences. The divorce rate did not exceed 10,000 until 1942. (See Figure 1.) That meant that the vast majority of British adults found some way to live permanently with another adult of the opposite sex under the same roof.

*Figure 1: New Divorce Petitions Filed : England and Wales 1900-1960*



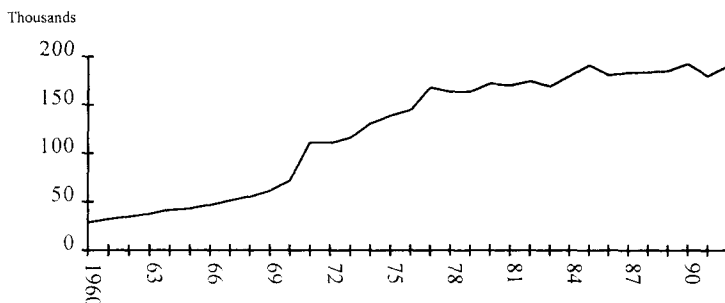
Source : Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS): Statistical Review of England and Wales 1973 II Table 01. Prior to 1936 yearly averages are taken from a five year period.

For thirty years from 1961 the speed of this social change was dramatic. In 1961, 32,000 new petitions were filed. In 1990, there were 192,000. (See Figure 2.) From being a country with one of the lowest rates of divorce in Europe, amongst those with laws that permitted divorce, England became the country with the highest.

In 1971, the first year of the operation of the Divorce Reform Act 1969, 110,000 new petitions were filed. A high proportion of them, however, concerned the relatively unimportant social category of childless couples. Now, nearly as many divorces a year occur where there are *one or more children* in the family (95,000). The volume and the rate of change is really quite astonishing in sociological terms.

Socialisation and social control - which indispensable though the law is, are far more important than the law - have been constantly losing their power to produce, and even the intention of producing, effective and successfully committed life-time partners, that is, husbands and wives in a relationship of life-long monogamy.

Figure 2: New Divorce Petition Filed England and Wales 1960-1992



Source : OPCS, Marriage and Divorce Statistics, Series FM2 No 1 Table 2.1 ; FM2 No 9 Table 2.1 ; FM2 No 20 Table 2.1

### (ii) Cohabitation

Divorce rates only levelled out because a second and even more fundamental change took place. There was a marked growth in the number and proportion of couples who no longer regarded their private project of living together as requiring the formality of marriage. The man was less and less required by the woman, or anyone else in his social circles, to make a binding commitment to the possible mother of his children before he could have, without public censure and other penalties, regular sexual intercourse with her in a common household.

This trend started with the cohabitation of couples who eventually married one another. In 1986-87 married women were asked whether they had cohabited with the man who was to become the husband of their first marriage. Of those married in 1966 (that is, those who by the 1986-87 survey had been married for about 20 years) only 2% had cohabited before marriage. The proportion had tripled to 7% among the women marrying in 1971. It had nearly tripled again by 1976 to 19%. By the end of the 1980's, cohabitation before marriage had become almost as common as not cohabiting before marriage. For all marriages, not just first marriages, cohabitation had become commoner, and among married men, much commoner, 58% had cohabited before marriage.<sup>2</sup> Among 16-19 year-old women living in 'unions' in Great Britain, 13% were cohabitees by 1980. This proportion tripled to 42% by 1986. It had increased almost five-fold on the 1980 figure by 1989, to 62%.<sup>3</sup> By the 1990's 'partner' was the normal term by which even some of the most staid organisations addressed husbands and wives.

The 1960's hope that trial marriages - cohabitation - would be the basis of greater stability when marriage was finally undertaken has not been borne out by the

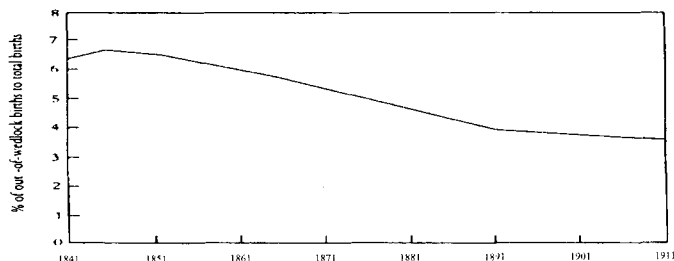
facts: marriages after cohabitation are more likely to end in divorce than marriages without prior cohabitation. And in addition, cohabitation is much more likely to end in lone parenthood than is marriage.

### (iii) *Illegitimacy*

The third change concerns something more than just two adults living together. It concerns the domestic circumstances under which children will be born and brought up. This especially concerns the degree of certainty that any unborn child can have that its father will be permanently committed to looking after it.

Births, marriages and deaths began to be registered in 1836.

*Figure 3: Illegitimacy in England and Wales 1841-1911*

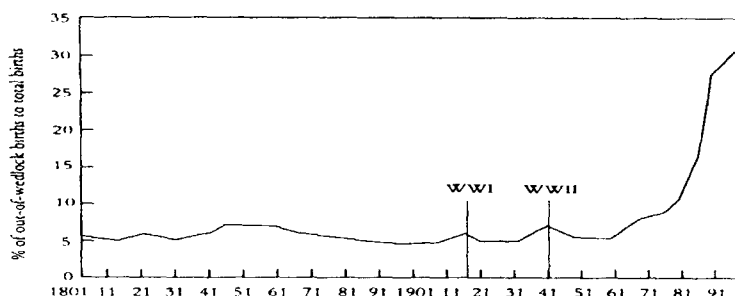


Source: OPCS

What used to be called illegitimacy fell to about 4% or 5% by the end of the nineteenth century (see Figure 3). As with any social science figures we know that there is a margin of error. There was always the effort to have the baby registered as being legitimate in one way or another. At the beginning of the twentieth century a mother and pregnant daughter, for example, might go away and come back with the mother claiming her daughter's baby as her own.

The illegitimacy figure remained at about 4% or 5% for a good part of this century. It rose to 6% during the Great War and to 9% during the Second World War, but dropped again to about 5% again in the early 1950s (see Figure 4). All this was, of course, without the benefit of the contraceptive pill, and before 1928 without the benefit of the cheap and reliable condom.

Figure 4: Illegitimacy England and Wales 1801-1992



Source: OPCS

Illegitimacy increased somewhat later than some of the other indices of family erosion. Still in 1971, only 8% of all live births were born outside marriage. By 1981 by present-day standards the rate was still low, 13%. However, in the 1980's children were born with ever increasing frequency outside of marriage, and account today for well over 30% of all births. In 1991, for the first time, within the category of 'lone mothers' the biggest sub-category was those who had never married. In 1961, among mothers under the age of 20, about 50,000 of the children had been born in marriage and about 10,000 out (the figures were actually 53,000 and 13,000). Today those figures are just about reversed - about 10,000 being born within marriage, 50,000 outside of marriage.

A marker for the sexual liberation of men, and how far fidelity in monogamous marriage is no longer taken for granted as a social rule and aspiration, is provided by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his speech in the House of Lords late last year. Warning against the sin of self-righteousness, he pointed out that Solomon himself had privileged access to all those princesses and concubines, not to mention the rest. The implication of his remarks could only be that we should not get too excited if, from time to time, some royal personage does not quite manage to live up to the sacred vows of marriage for very long. Or if a minister of the crown in Westminster has gone through one or two mistresses. Or if a minister of the cloth has had two or three wives in Norfolk.

Yet in Solomon's case, although he was let off this time out of consideration for his father David and God's unconditional love and forgiveness, God was certainly angry. For Solomon did go whoring after the false gods of his partners just as God said he would. He went whoring after Ashtoreth, the god of the Sidonians and whored after other loathsome and strange gods, and built a high place to

Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. God said quite clearly to Solomon that he had better let a little self-righteousness creep in and set a better example. Otherwise, He would surely rend Solomon's kingdom from him. This seems to me, on strictly sociological grounds, a more sound and more realistic message on sexual fidelity and societal breakdown, on the whole, than the Archbishop of Canterbury's.

When challenged the Archbishop protested that he was against sin. The Times reports him as adding, 'so-called sin'. The qualification probably goes a long way to explain the reaction to the Bishop of Norwich's recent decision that, after two divorces and with the intention to marry the woman he was cohabiting with, a vicar could in no way bear effective witness to the Christian standards of marriage. When the Bishop tried to act on his decision, some churchwardens were shocked to the core by this eccentric and out-dated doctrine of lifelong monogamy. One third of the congregation stormed out of the Bishop's service. The uproar, we read with relief, was partly drowned by the sound of the church organ, for all the world like an old 1930's film of a bar brawl in Shanghai.

As I write, BBC's Radio 4 broadcasts its prestigious Thought For The Day (18 September 1995). Once again it is the post-modernist message of a Rabelaisian God, the creator of sexually passionate beings who (in the religious version of post-modernism) only lightly and indulgently condemns, but forgives, misdemeanours and excesses. The usual list is read out, with the omission this time of Tamar's seduction of Judah: David and his "delicate relationship" with Jonathan, which wouldn't be worth mentioning in this context if it wasn't an active sexual relationship; his relationship with Bathsheba; Ruth's seduction of her drunken, sleepy, near-kinsman Boaz; the eroticism of Salome's dance as she seeks on her mother's behalf John the Baptist to be decapitated and his head delivered to her on a plate. Why, then, are pre-post-modernist Christians so uptight about sexual liberation, when God Himself so obviously relishes this rich display of energy from his -amusingly wayward- creatures? The answer is supplied by the speaker: it is the unconscious envy of Puritans who believe (erroneously) that we have to choose between God and Sex.

Views about marriage and the family are very mixed in Christian churches. Most books on the family which sell well to Christians are still largely and strongly pro-family. Most people do not have a pronounced and urgent opinion on marriage because they take it for granted. The important point is that *those few interested people* who have had, and today do have, a pronounced and urgent opinion on marriage and the family, and who in the past few years have sought to press their case, and have come to be regarded as people to be taken seriously and consulted,

have been *overwhelmingly antagonistic* to the special honour formerly accorded (second only to celibacy and virginity) to the heterosexual relationship within the context of lifelong monogamy.

Leaving to one side moral philosophy, still more the endlessly inventive hermeneutics of post-modernist theology, the empirically quantifiable results on children through cohabitation and lone parenting on the one hand, and on the general body of citizens through the rise in criminality among young men on the other, are now beyond all denial.

### **Empirical facts on family breakdown**

It is a theological statement that Jesus was opposed to family life and that He instructed us to hate our fathers, and hate our mothers, and hate our husbands and hate our wives - and leave them all. It is a theological statement that there are no marriages in heaven and therefore the further away we get from the awful exclusivity of the nuclear family, the nearer we are to realising the kingdom of God on earth. Those are all *theological* statements, repeated *ad nauseum* by post-modernist theology.

If it is true that we are all the products of our genes and successive life circumstances, then it is a moral statement that *no one can be blamed for what he or she does*. A person cannot be *morally* condemned for being one of the beautiful and terrifying boys, beloved of the New Musical Express. He cannot be morally condemned for 'screwing the state' through the housing and social security system, or for publicising eighty-one ways in which you can 'trash' your school.

But by exactly the same theory of human nature and the same morality deduced from it, a person cannot be blamed for beating a burglar up; or be blamed for screwing up the social security system itself so the benefit's not paid on time or at all; or for publicising eighty-one ways to trash the pupil who trashes the school. Post-modernists would like to have, but they are not entitled to have, the luxury of allowing everything they like because moral preferences are not expressible, and condemning what they don't like because they are. Post-modernism certainly gives them no grounds whatsoever upon which they can morally condemn those who morally condemn, say, post-modernist sexual polymorphism. Moral relativism or moral absolutism, this moral content or that moral content, these are statements within the realm of *morality*.

But it is an *empirical* statement that people now are less willing to commit themselves to a lifelong marriage than they were in the 1950's; it is a statement of *fact* that people who have the same level of difficulty in their marriages now are much more likely to divorce than they were in the 1950's.

It is an *empirical* statement that the average legitimate child brought up by both its married parents scores more highly than the average child from the lone-parent household, with the same income and at the same social-class level, on a wide range of measures that nearly all parents want their children to score more highly on. On average the legitimate child brought up by its married parents has higher chances than other children (except, very often, adopted children) of not dying by the time it's one or by the time it's five years of age. It has a higher chance of not being subject to accidents at home, or of not being physically and sexually abused, of scoring more highly on measures of academic competence and of staying out of the hands of the law.

### Switching definitions

It is not certain, but it is not unlikely that this November the Church of England will grant some sort of sacerdotal approval to cohabitation. The equivalence between cohabitation and marriage is now so deeply seated in everyday consciousness that when David Winter, in *Thought For The Day*, wanted an apt illustration of misplaced loyalty, he gave protecting a *husband* who was battering his children. So '*partner*' is not always used. When the term can be used *against* the family, we are suddenly talking not about the partner, but about the '*husband*'.

The word *family* is now used to cover a very wide range of household arrangements. It was officially defined by the UN in its Year of the Family to cover '*any domestic arrangement whatsoever of any single adult, or any number of consenting adults, living together and taking some responsibility for children.*' That meant, of course, that provisions in, for example, the German or the Irish constitutions to protect 'the family' in the old sense were transformed at a stroke to mean precisely the opposite: that they must protect 'any domestic arrangement' equally, and give no special protection at all to legitimacy and life-long monogamy.

From 1983 onwards, the form for entry onto the NSPCC child protection registers which case workers had to complete linked together *married* and *cohabiting* under the one broad category of *natural parents*. Unfortunately for them the

equivalence between cohabitation and marriage that the NSPCC record takes for granted does not apply to the children.

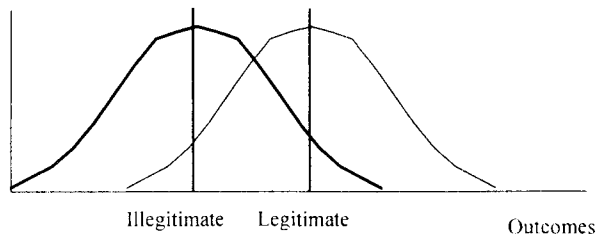
As Robert Whelan showed from his survey of cases of child abuse and risk of abuse in the *Family Court Reporter Survey*: it was 20 times more risky to be a child if both its natural parents were only cohabiting than if both its natural parents were married. There have been 35 public enquiries into cases of undoubted abuse in the last few years, that is, cases of children being battered to death. Accepting that the number of cases is small, and one or two of them changing their category would have made a difference to the precise figures, the results for these 35 show that the child was 18 times more likely to be killed by one of its two cohabiting natural parents than by one of its married natural parents. It was 74 times more dangerous if it was living with its unmarried mother and her cohabiting boy friend.<sup>4</sup>

The family of the legitimate child and its own married parents is superior on measures of personal safety from abuse. However, the ambiguity of the term now means that what is detrimentally true of alternative household arrangements is, by the linguistic sleight of hand of calling them all families, attributed to the married family of the legitimate child. It is on these occasions, too, that the usual practice of calling husbands and wives *partners* is reversed, and partners are referred to *as if they were* husbands and wives. The evils that stem from the *absence* of marriage and legitimacy are thus sloppily, but damagingly and effectively, attributed to the *existence* of marriage in the family.

The astonishing thing is that there are hardly any studies that do not show this pattern of superior results for married parents and their legitimate children. There are either no studies at all that show a different pattern, or they are either so rare and lost in obscure archives as to have never been discovered by me or the colleagues I am working with, or we have missed them and perversely they have never in all the controversies been brought to our attention. In examining the range of research on this subject, we assiduously asked our colleagues who hold the opinion that the family is not deteriorating but is only changing, "*Where, please, is the evidence?*" Quite frequently at the beginning we were directed by optimistic colleagues to studies which did indeed show married families with legitimate children doing badly as compared with children from other backgrounds. But these turned out to be simply a matter of the overlap of two distributions. (Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Outcomes for illegitimate and legitimate children compared

Number



That's the pattern that is always found in studies of human conduct. There is the lowest score and the highest score, the mean score and a distribution about the mean score. One group, in this case the married family, does better on average than the alternatives. Of course *some* in the married heterosexual families will do worse than *some* of those in the unmarried or other families. To say on that basis that there's no difference between the two sets, and that in the case shown in the diagram there is no greater problem with and for illegitimate children, is at best the most deplorable intellectual laxity and at worst wilful misrepresentation. It's exactly as if one were to argue that because some women are taller than some men, men in general are no taller than women in general.

I was met with extreme hostility after giving one of my first papers on this subject. I genuinely and innocently expected that the seminar participants would guide me to the studies that supported their views. The school that maintains that the family is not deteriorating, only changing, was very well represented. Having scored a bullseye in arousing hostility and a zero in my search for information in my morning's presentation. I talked to the deputy director of a very eminent research foundation over lunch. The assertion that the child brought up by both its married parents was not advantageously placed in a wide range of its life-chances was repeated. I said, "Well, where are these other studies that show this? I have come here to find out." I think I can fairly describe the reply as venomous. "You know quite well there are no such studies". Astonished, I said, "What is the argument ...?" The answer: "You are devastating the interests of these poor girls! They need more money! They need our support! What you are saying can be misused!"

So you are deficient in compassion when you say, "Let us look for a system that does not create the problem and especially one that does not multiply the problem in the future". Of course there is the proper and enormously important

role of pastoral care for those who fall foul of life. But social disasters occur when the pastoral role in the here and now is confused with the role of the theologian, the politician, the academic and the commentator in the public media, which imposes the obligation on them to trace the ramifications of policies beyond the pastoral care of immediate victims into wider sections of the population and into the future. *Hard cases make bad law.* The task of the theologian and the academic is to take the wide, large and long view and ask what the final result is going to be. What is going to be beneficial for most people most of the time? We should not keep creating and exacerbating the problem by accepting only or predominantly the unwitting victim's or the wilful deviant's definition of his or her own situation as the basis for long-term policy.

A few months ago a reporter from the BBC radio programme "PM" came to Sunderland to look at the residues of the old respectable working class. As best I could I arranged for her to talk to a gathering of older men and women, mainly from one terraced street of cottages in Millfield (the street where I was born). The reporter was clearly interested and favourably impressed by what she was told and what she saw. But then she turned to the costs, in terms of stigma and repression, of the humane and decent way of life she was hearing about. "*It must have been terrible for the girl who had an illegitimate child...*" Jane Heron immediately agreed, and the microphone was eagerly directed to her. Emily Barnes (let us say) discovered she was pregnant. "*We thought it was terrible!*" "So," said the reporter, "*she was given a hard time in the street?*" Puzzled, Jane Heron said, "*Me Mam used to take her dinner down to them on a plate every day. The other ladies in the street knit clothes for the bairn.*" That to me was a perfect description of the general social ban and stigma which keeps problems to a minimum, combined without practical difficulty, and without agonizing over the consistency of the ethical principles, with warm and supportive pastoral care in the victim's or (not too evil) deviant's small community.

### **Social Ecology**

There is another strange feature of these debates. In physical matters inconclusive evidence which, if valid, would indicate great dangers is taken extremely seriously. Some of the people who argue that there is little to be concerned about as wide areas of social life are deinstitutionalized wouldn't wrap a piece of pork chop in a piece of plastic film before putting it in the fridge. The dangers to their health are too great. They also take seriously the potentially large consequences of a small disruption to physical ecological systems, and I believe they are right in

doing so. But their approach to *social ecology* is entirely different. *Quite obvious* and *gross* changes have occurred in parts of the social system, with strong indications both from empirical studies and on theoretical grounds that some are changes for the worse in terms of what most people want out of life. Instead of alarm, there is complacency .

I was once going down to London. A friend of mine said that I shouldn't discredit myself by being associated with the naive and unscientific notion that crime has increased in the past few years. He kindly and with the utmost good will directed me towards an Open University set book. So I picked up the book, Professor Pearson's *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*, which supposedly proves that the illusion that crime has increased is merely a creation of moral panic. There has always been about as much crime as there is now. To the satisfaction of the Open University and several generations of its students since the early 1980's, he demolishes the uninstructed layman's assumption that there was less crime before the war, for instance, than there is now.

Street crime, he writes, is the really crucial test - people are most sensitive about that than about any other type. He says that between 1925 and 1928 bag snatching increased by 92% in London. Other street crimes increased by 124%. So I went to the University library, a few yards' walk and a few minutes' time, and consulted the source he quotes. The source actually says that now that criminals have motor cars they are not doing the dangerous thing of robbing people in the town. They are going out of London to rob empty, unprotected and unsuspecting houses in the country in peace and quiet. Only very few criminals, Pearson's source says, engage in the daring business of bag snatching. The whole tenor is completely contrary to what Pearson is arguing. I came back and I asked my friend how many bag snatching incidents he thought there had been in the London Metropolitan Police District in 1925. He thought, well, perhaps around 10,000. There were sixty-six. And the Pearson crime wave in London between 1925 and 1928 was an increase from sixty-six cases to 123 cases.

*Faith in the City*<sup>5</sup> was at least old fashioned enough to list single-parent families as one of the six indicators of *urban deprivation*, and therefore, it follows, *something to minimise*. It talks about reducing the isolation of old people living alone. Unemployment is to be reduced. Overcrowding is to be diminished. But we read very little about reducing lone parenthood. Shortly after the report was published, I went to Sunderland Civic Centre to hear a lecture on the Report by one of the commissioners. The practical deduction that he had drawn from all of this was to remove the word *family* from 'Family

Services' on the notice board outside his church. The word family would otherwise continue to be seen by unmarried mothers, and they must not be offended or repelled by the implied reproach.

There are consequences of lone parenthood that reach far beyond the child from the family without fatherhood. Only some boys today are children *from* father-absent families. But all boys and young men, without exception, face their future with progressively reduced social pressure or social training *to become* responsible and competent husbands and fathers. By training, I do not mean the blunt instrument of formal lessons. Training in so complex, demanding and subtle a role, unremunerated in money terms, cannot be taught in classes in the schools if it hasn't been laid down by experience from the moment the child is born. As I have argued on other occasions, fatherhood is learnt like a language. It is either assimilated like one's native tongue or it is not assimilated at all. It is transmitted through the countless messages of reinforcement and restriction that come every day and for every hour and waking minute, from the moment of birth, through parents, other kinsfolk, neighbours and passing strangers. These messages embody the common sense of generations, derived from the experience of ordinary people, as well as the contributions of moral geniuses, of what has proved benign and practicable in everyday life.

The effects of the de-institutionalisation of the family on *all boys and young men, not only those raised in circumstances other than those of legitimacy and married parenthood*, is an issue of fundamental importance. Yet it has been addressed by hardly anyone. Far from the churches giving a lead in the exploration of the long term consequences of post-modernism, those in the Church who have specialised in advocacy in matters of sex and childrearing in recent years have pressed post-modernist social relationships not simply as fact, which is not unreasonable, but as usually covert, sometimes overt, prescription. Yet the effects of socially freeing young men from family responsibilities and making sex, marriage and parenthood the private affair of consenting adults (but not of course consenting offspring) has been an astonishing rise in drug-taking and criminal and generally uncivil conduct among young men.

### **Crime, Housing, Unemployment and Income**

I personally believe that the normalisation of drug-taking, including but stretching far beyond alcohol, does now, and in the near future overwhelmingly will constitute the most serious problem for our society.

Other economic and social issues which due to inertia and cultural lag conventionally preoccupy public attention and media comment today will be recognized as insignificant and irrelevant in comparison. But I will restrict myself to crime, where data are much fuller and more certain.

Crime fell in the nineteenth century. Figures for indictable offences, now called notifiable offences, were first collected in 1857, by which time local police forces were being set up. It was only in 1851 that the urban district population exceeded the rural district population. Until then (and even then) most people were brought up under the old circumstances of the village community; and village communities, unlike the modern city, cannot support and survive with a high proportion of criminal and anti-social elements.

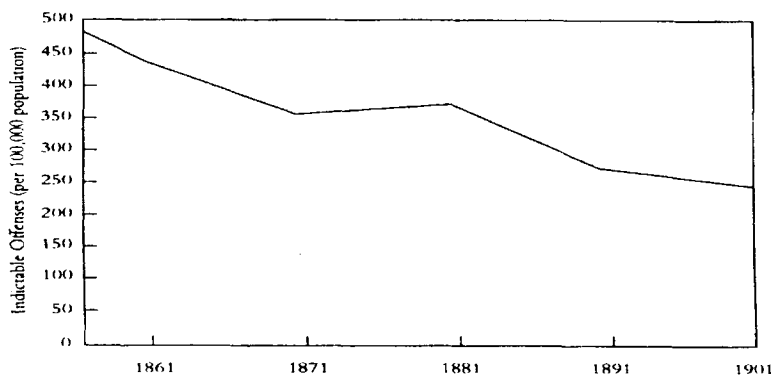
In the midst of the urban horrors of the industrial revolution, 1860 saw about 500 crimes per 100,000 population. The rate per 100,000 fell to well below 300 by the end of the century and before the Great War. It was still only about 1,000 per 100,000 in the mid 1950's. In the twenty-five years of full employment, high economic growth and income redistribution in favour of the poor that followed, the crime rate swept upwards to nearly 2,000 in 1960, over 3,000 in 1970, and over 5,000 per 100,000 in 1980. Today, the rate is over 10,000 crimes per 100,000 population, and in absolute numbers almost as many crimes are committed currently in the Northumbria Police area alone (about 180,000 a year) as there were in the whole of the country 60 years ago (about 184,000). (Figures 6, 7 and 8.)

*Figure 6: Notifiable Offences Reported to the Police excluding 'other criminal damage valued at £20 or under' per 100,000 population England and Wales 1860-1991*

1860	438	1930-34	489
1870	357	1950	1,094
1880	373	1960	1,742
1890	276	1970	3,221
1900	249	1980	5,119
1900-10	258	1990	8,630
1910-14	271	1991	10,007
1920-24	282		

Source: Home Office, Criminal Statistics England and Wales annually from 1857

Figure 7: Crime in England and Wales, 1857-1901  
Indictable Offences per 100,000 population



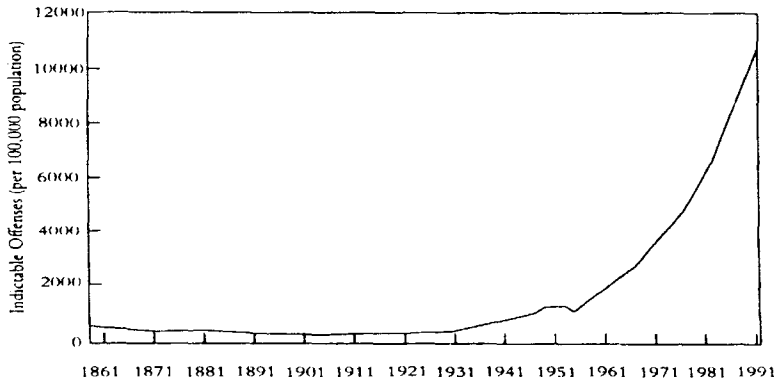
Source: B R Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, England, 1988), pp 776-778

It used to be said until recently, though it is said much less today, that the official statistics on crime are useless. Personally I am quite willing to discuss whether or not we were a low-crime society, and are now a high-crime society, by using whatever other evidence is available. Discrediting the statistics that show a rise in crime does not constitute proof in the slightest degree that crime rates have therefore fallen or remained the same. If the statistics are unusable, then all contributors to the argument are condemned to the same condition either of saying we don't know and we can't know, or of making the best use they can of non-statistical evidence.

I saw a 1929 Ronald Coleman film not very long ago. Bulldog Drummond was called to Godalming by an American girl in distress. She appealed to him to rescue her father, who had been kidnapped and was being held against his will in a house in the neighbourhood. Bulldog Drummond said, "*But this is England. Such things don't happen here!*" The film had to be plausible for the cinema audiences that would view it. Look at the first Sherlock Holmes story *The Study in Scarlet* (1887). When Watson goes to Baker Street to share digs with Holmes he asks why he looks so bored and weary of life. Holmes replies that "*There are no crimes and criminals in London these days*". In a later story he states that a single man, Moriarty, is behind every important crime in the whole metropolis. The first modern spy thriller is *The Riddle in the Sands* (1903) by Erskine Childers. In the course of the novel an intruder appears at night on an apparently unoccupied yacht lying off the German shore. The character who is

new to Germany suggests it might have been a thief. The hero tells him that as they were in Germany, rather than in backward Poland, this couldn't be the explanation. Who could put that sort of thing in a book nowadays?

*Figure 8: Crime in England and Wales, 1857-1991*  
*Indictable Offences per 100,000 population*

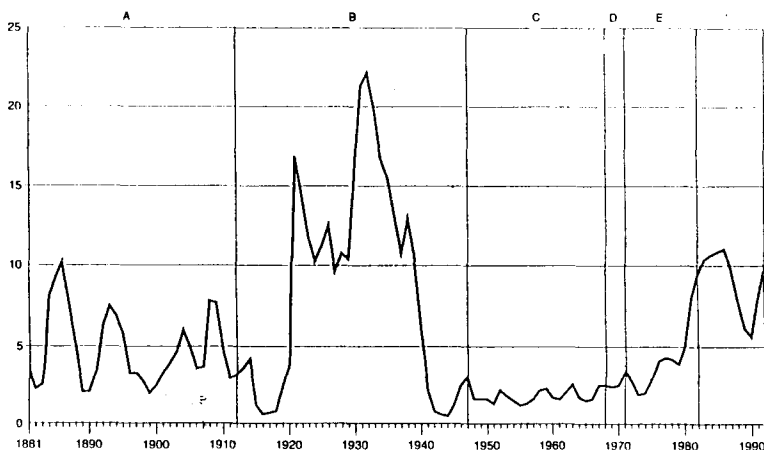


Source: For 1857-1980: B R Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, England, 1988), pp 776-778; for 1981-1991: Home Office Criminal Statistics.

From our present perspective, up to 1955 (which is roughly when the breakdown in the family begins) the crime rate appears as a low and flat line. The figure for robbery is less open to dispute than others. It is defined in much the same way in all societies, and in the same way over time. The rise in robbery in the single year 1990-91 was two and a half times all cases of robbery in England and Wales in the entire inter-war period. Something dramatic has happened to our society. (See Figure 8.)

The first thing that the Archbishop of Canterbury said about the Meadow Well riots and the riots in the West End of Newcastle upon Tyne was that they were a result of bad housing, illiteracy and unemployment. When he said that, he certainly not yet not been to Meadow Well, with its tree lined streets and two-storey council houses with their own gardens. It is true that some of the unoccupied houses had bare roofs. But this was not due to council neglect. It was due to the fact that the local lads could get 25 pence a slate. Of course no one lived in these houses, and no one was expected to.

Figure 9: Unemployment Rates 1881-1992



Source: Employment Gazette December 1993

The increase in crime can't be attributed to rising unemployment as such. Half the period of rising crime, riotous conduct and drug use among men since 1955 was a period of extraordinarily *low* unemployment. Rising crime can be attributed to rising unemployment only if and in so far as the unemployed have come to believe that crime is the appropriate response to it. The average male unemployment in Sunderland between 1928 and 1934 was 34%. There's no comparison between the crime rate in 1934 and today. Unemployment was much worse, and the incidence of crime was much lower. (Figure 9.) Of course it is a combination of factual circumstances and moral response. *Factual circumstances themselves do not create either good behaviour or the problem of anti-social conduct, but the moral judgements people make on how they ought to respond to their factual circumstances.*

Primary poverty of money income and money resources in 1995 bears little relation to such poverty in the past in this country. From top to bottom, we have easier access to everything that money can buy. To make any case at all, the argument must be switched entirely to relative poverty, in the very selective sense of the gap between the richest and the poorest. Of course at any level of wealth and income the accessible wealth and income can be dissipated to create so-called secondary poverty. The measure used is the Gini coefficient. Zero on the Gini coefficient means complete equality of income; 100% would mean that all income was held by one person. Saltow's analysis is the best we have. Researchers financed by the Rowntree Foundation have been among

the most insistent that growing relative poverty explains growing disorder among boys and young men. This is Rowntree's own chosen ground. Yet Saltow's figures using the Gini coefficient show only slight variations in relative poverty in the second half of the 19th century, when crime rates were falling steeply.<sup>6</sup>

The Rowntree Report's own conclusion on this period is that 'there is little evidence of a rise in inequality' in this period, and therefore (I add) necessarily little of evidence of a fall in inequality either.

But what is really astonishing is the Rowntree Report's treatment of recent data. The Report's own figures show a striking *decline* in relative poverty 1961-79, when there was a striking *rise* in male drug abuse and male crime. The average standard of living rose in those two decades by about a third, while the standard of living of the poorest tenth rose by a half. The connection between changing crime rates and changing experiences of poverty depends, therefore, upon the figures for 1979-92, a shorter period which inadvertently allows others to make a political point, for indeed during that particular period both relative poverty on the Rowntree analysis and crime according to any plausible analysis did climb together. The old image of Procrustes and his bed has replaced in my mind with the what might be called 'Rowntreeing', fiercely pruning the data to conform to preconceived notions of social causation.<sup>7</sup>

I am a professional sociologist. The Church of England's approach to sexual liberation in the last few years, which has largely been post-modernist, and its response to the burgeoning bad behaviour (as it used to be called after evil conduct became an obsolete concept) of boys and young men in terms of drug use (including alcohol), crime and riot, is therefore of technical interest to me. With regard to what can be bought and sold for money, during the whole of the period of the growth of this conduct, with historically insignificantly small interruptions, the accessible standard of living of the whole population from the poorest to the richest is raised; while male crime rises. Through the whole of the period, with marginal exceptions, the Welfare State not only exceeds the levels of 1945; but exceeds what was envisaged as possible even by optimists in 1945, while male crime rises. During the whole of the period the quantity and quality of dwellings improves; while male crime rises. During much of the period unemployment is unprecedentedly low; while male crime rises. During much of the period the gap between the richest and the poorest is narrowed through redistributionist taxation; while male crime rises.

Yet the expert advisers of the Church of England have become some of the chief carriers of an explanation for the decline of civility among boys and young men which is not only glaringly falsified by the obvious empirical record of the period in question, but is so neglectful of *secular, cultural* explanations (not to mention religious and spiritual explanations) as to make any historical materialist who is familiar with Marx's and Engels' qualifications of their own doctrine cringe. For the sake of literary symmetry and rhetorical effect it would have been striking to be able to say something similar about Foucault and the Church's post-modernist commentators on the family, but some of post-modernism's poisonous absurdities still lie outside even their range.

I'm a member of the Labour party. The views I hold are set out by Professor A. H. Halsey and me in our book *English Ethical Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 1988), and Professor Halsey put forward views with which I am entirely in agreement in his celebrated Reith Lectures. Unemployment, inequality and poverty are evils which we fully discuss. The deinstitutionalization of the family is a related but separate issue. Crime is a related but separate issue. Growing drug use is also a related but separate and even more serious issue. The growth of all three is primarily due to the decoupling of young men from the commitments and activities which constituted for their predecessors the fundamental meaning of their lives, commitments and activities to which ordinary paid employment was an adjunct. Why do you think my wife's father went down the pit from the time he left school until he was 65, when he wasn't in the perspective of the 1930's 'hopelessly' unemployed for long periods? He went for all shifts and in all weathers, with his tin of cold tea and a jam sandwich for his bait in the dust and darkness of Wearmouth colliery. He didn't do that for himself. He did it because life's meaning was for him his duties to his wife and children, as it was for most of his workmates and male neighbours, in work or out of work, always by today's standards poor and often by today's standards desperately poor, making decent homes of dwellings worse than almost any known today, in the respectable working class of forty years ago.

## Conclusion

Those few in the church who have taken it upon themselves to be the modern experts on the family are influential out of all proportion to their numbers. Today's tragedy is that instead of being the crack troops against the diverse forces of family deconstruction, insidious or blatant, they have in large part deserted the ramparts and are undermining them for the enemy.

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