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The "recruiting muddle": married men, conscription and masculinity in First World War England

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'The "recruiting muddle": married men, conscription and masculinity in First World War England'

Abstract

Interviewed many decades after the end of the First World War, Mary Morton recalled vividly how her mother's family had made no secret of their contempt for her father's conduct during the conflict: he was – they thought – a 'bounder'. Tellingly, they condemned not his continued civilian status, but the fact that he had volunteered, despite his responsibilities as husband and father. Historians have long recognised the powerful pull of military masculinities during the First World War, as well as the denigration of civilian men and masculinities: this article suggests that the wartime experiences of married men like Mary Morton's father complicate this picture of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. They, it was widely agreed in the early years of the conflict, had responsibilities that tied them to the home front; it was unmarried men's duty to 'go first'. In May 1916, however, the pressing need for military manpower led to the introduction of conscription for all men, without reference to marital status. This article explores the underlying shift in understandings of manly conduct in wartime, from a belief that married men had responsibilities that kept them from enlisting, to a new emphasis on the equality of duty among all physically fit men of military age, irrespective of domestic responsibilities.

Keywords

First World War; Conscription; Domesticity; Military Service; Married men; Single men; Masculinity

'The "recruiting muddle"[1]: married men, conscription and masculinity in First World War England'

Introduction

In October 1914 the Conservative MP Holcombe Ingleby wrote to his son Clement, an officer in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Knowing that Clement was due for the Front he noted that 'Hopes and fears alternate with us. The hope that you will bear yourself like a man … the fear that anything may happen to you', but concluded that 'the business has to be faced, and any man who doesn't offer himself … to his country is a cur'.[2] A number of historians have noted the powerful idealisation of military masculinities during the First World War, in Britain and beyond, as well as the marginalisation and denigration of civilian masculinities.[3] Drawing on Raewyn Connell's ground-breaking research on gender, particularly the concept of hegemonic masculinity, they have shed light on the power and glamour of wartime military masculinities, a status widely denied to civilian men, at least for the duration of the war.[4]

Recent reformulations of the concept of masculine hegemony, including by Connell herself, have emphasised the fluidity of masculine hierarchies – as well as their complex interactions with femininities[5] – and have led to a renewed questioning of the relative power and status of military and civilian masculinities, both in war and peacetime.[6] In his study of conscription in early twentieth-century Finland, for example, Anders Ahlbäck concluded that by the inter-war period 'it was not so much the official ideology of military manliness that engulfed Finnish masculinities, but rather that Finnish men selected elements from the militarized images of manhood and incorporated them into their own knowledge about themselves as men'.[7] Comparing nineteenth and twentieth-century conscription legislation in France and the United States, Dorit Geva has demonstrated that far from showing a clear and incremental acceptance of the state's right to men's military services, in both countries exemption policies continued (albeit in different ways and to varying degrees) to acknowledge and to some extent defer to men's familial authority and to their roles as heads of household and breadwinners.[8]

Similarly, a closer look at the experiences of married men in First World War England points to further complications beneath the apparently straightforward dichotomy of powerful military and subordinate civilian masculinities: this article suggests that here too men with families to support could appeal to well-established notions of masculinity

that stressed the paterfamilias' role in providing for his dependants.[9] Married men who did not enlist – or not immediately – could not thus be dismissed as unpatriotic 'curs'.[10] At least for a time after the outbreak of war, there existed a viable alternative to military masculinities: married men could reasonably claim to be tied to the home front by their family responsibilities. It was single men who were expected to enlist 'first'.

By the beginning of 1916, however, the military's need for more men meant that the distinction between single and married men was starting to break down, leading to the introduction of full male conscription in May 1916. The aim of this article is to explore this period of change, examining the shifting conceptions of masculine duty involved in the passing of the Military Service Act. Using newspaper commentary, reports and correspondence, both in the national and the local press, as well as parliamentary debates and personal material such as wartime diaries and letters, this article considers the shift in understandings of manly wartime behaviour in the months leading up to the introduction of full conscription, from an acceptance that married men could temporarily 'hold back', to a belief in the equality of duty among all physically fit men of military age, irrespective of marital status.

The article begins by outlining the married men's 'agitation' of March 1916, placing it in the context of the Coalition government's evolving recruitment policies, particularly the failure of the 'Derby' scheme, a last-ditch attempt to satisfy the armed forces' manpower needs by voluntary means. The article then analyses attitudes towards single men, and suggests that there was a widespread feeling that many were 'shirking' their patriotic duty, leaving most of the military burden to be carried by married men.[11] Significantly, it was feared that many single men were 'sheltering' in reserved occupations, finding employment in munitions factories to escape military service. It was imperative, it was widely agreed, that they should be made to do their manly duty.

The article then goes on to analyse the further shift in opinion, which threw doubt on married men's claims to patriotism, comparing their record with the sacrifices expected of bachelors such as the only sons of widows, and paving the way for full conscription. The final outcome of the married men's agitation, this article suggests, was an acknowledgment that military necessity could not permit special consideration on the

basis of marital status: by mid-1916, familial masculinity was losing ground to the increasingly powerful link between manliness and military service.

The married men's agitation, March 1916

In November 1915, over a year after the outbreak of war and a few weeks after the Derby scheme had been opened to new recruits, the Prime Minister told the House of Commons that 'The obligation of the married men to serve ought not to be enforced … unless and until – I hope by voluntary effort', or 'in the last resort … by other means the unmarried men are dealt with'.[12] Asquith's pledge, which was subsequently reiterated in enlistment propaganda (Figure 1), reflected a widely held opinion: single men should enlist before married ones because they did not have the same family responsibilities tying them to civilian life.[13]

Figure 1. 'The Prime Minister's Advice to the Young Unmarried Men …', Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster, not dated, c. 1915, Imperial War Museums. © IWM (Art.IWM PST 5062).

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that when in January 1916 the Director of Recruiting, Lord Derby, presented his final report on the scheme, which had closed on 11 December 1915,[14] both he and the press chose to focus on the 651,160 single men who were not exempted from military service, but had nevertheless not attested.[15] *The Times*' headlines, for example, noted the 'Many single men unattested' and 'Large residue of

single men', while *The Daily Mirror* was blunter, announcing 'To-day's great debate on the million single men slackers'.[16]

Lord Derby himself observed that the number of unattested single men was far from 'negligible', and that given Asquith's 1915 pledge, it would be impossible to hold married men to their attestation until bachelors 'have been obtained by other means, the present system having failed to bring them to the colours'.[17] Thus, the Military Service Bill introduced on 5 January 1916 included in its remit only single men and childless widowers aged between eighteen and forty-one. It deemed – in Asquith's words – that those who had no 'exemption or excuse', would be considered 'to have done what everyone agrees it is their duty to the State in times like these to do, and be treated as though they had attested for enlistment'.[18] This 'Bachelors' Bill' passed into law at the end of January, although not without opposition: Labour MPs, for example, suggested that single men were simply 'cheaper' servicemen, but few openly disagreed with the principle that it was their duty to go 'first'.[19]

In the following weeks, however, things did not run quite as smoothly as the government may have hoped. As the Military Service Act came into force on 2 March 1916 and all unattested single men of military age were enrolled in the Army Reserves, married men who had attested under the Derby scheme also began to be called up, starting with those aged between nineteen and twenty-six.[20] As Lord Derby, speaking in Manchester on 7 March, acknowledged: 'The married men are being called up long before they expected to be and long before I expected', but stressed the military necessity for this early call up. He would be disappointed, he added: 'if I thought the patriotism of the married men was only skin deep and that they would not come forward to play their part in this crisis'.[21]

Such appeals to attested married men's patriotism were not particularly effective. On 3 March Robert Saunders, a middle-aged Sussex headmaster, noted in a letter to his son in Canada that newspapers were full of correspondence 'from aggrieved married men who contend they should not be called on till the single had been more effectively dealt with'.[22] Reports soon began to emerge of angry public meetings, such as the one held in Leicester on 8 March, which passed a resolution demanding the suspension of attested married men's mobilisation and their release from attestation, 'as the promise of calling

up single men first had not been carried out'.[23] Further public meetings followed, including in Southport, Sheffield, Coventry and Wigan, where an audience of over four thousand was claimed.[24] Resolutions were passed 'demanding that all single men should be called up for service before any call was made on the married men'.[25]

In a further development, on 11 March it emerged that an independent candidate, Noel Pemberton Billing, had won the East Hertfordshire bye-election. His main campaign issue had been air defence, but it was widely believed that his support of married men had also been important in ensuring his victory. As 'East Herts Elector', a Coalition supporter, pointed out in a letter to *The Times*, Pemberton Billing had won thanks to the votes of attested married men, a group that 'thinks – and with good reason – that the treatment it has received is scandalous'. He warned that unless the government made 'every single man do his duty it will find itself without the support of the country'.[26]

Two days later the first of a series of public meetings was held at Tower Hill, organised by a Leytonstone man, Harry Biner, and attended by an audience of between one and two thousand, which passed a resolution calling on the government to fulfil its pledge of compulsorily attesting all single men – described by Biner to the cheering audience as 'badge-wearers, mothers' darlings and so forth' – before calling up 'family bread-winners'.[27] On 14 March, at a meeting in Manchester attended by delegates from all over Lancashire, it was decided to form a National Union of Attested Married Men, which demanded the call up of all single men before attested married men, as well as the conscription of *all* married men up to the age of forty-one, with adequate provisions being made for their families' support.[28]

The same day, no doubt hoping to emulate Pemberton Billing's success, Thomas Gibson Bowles was adopted by a newly-established association of attested married men as independent candidate for Market Harborough, standing against the Coalition candidate at a forthcoming bye-election.[29] Gibson Bowles called for 'a square deal for the married men', protesting that 'promises made to them by the Government have been violated and the conditions under which many of them were induced to attest have been disregarded'.[30] By mid-March, as *The Times* observed in its 'Political Notes', a 'storm' was 'brewing' in Parliament over the issue, the government having 'got themselves into very deep water', especially after Kitchener's announcement that all attested married

men would need to be called up soon, irrespective of what happened about single men, despite the government's failure 'to devise any measures of relief for the married men from their civil obligations'.[31] Compulsion for all physically fit men of military age was by then being mooted as a serious option,[32] but the notion that single men should 'go first' proved remarkably resilient. A Recruiting Conference on 20 March, attended by a number of Cabinet Ministers and War Office officials, for example, still endorsed 'the principle that all the single men who can possibly be extracted from civil life shall be called to the colours with as little delay as possible'.[33]

In the meantime, the 'rumpus in the country over the question of the single men shirkers'[34] showed little sign of abating. Following an unsatisfactory deputation to Lord Derby, a meeting at Tower Hill decided to establish a Married Men's League, standing for 'Fair play for breadwinners'.[35] Despite set-backs – Gibson Bowles was defeated decisively in Market Harborough and meetings in Newark and London were broken up by soldiers[36] – throughout March and into April 1916 the London-based Married Men's League and the Lancashire-based National Union of Attested Married Men, which by the end of the month was claiming half a million members,[37] continued to organise large meetings, backed independent bye-election candidates and lobbied the government.[38] Increasingly their demands turned to the establishment of a financial scheme 'which will relieve attested married men of obligations … which military service renders impossible of fulfilment', while acknowledging that 'the time has arrived' for the government to 'extend the Military Service Act … to all men up to the age of forty-one'.[39]

By the end of March 1916 the press was noting a similar 'stiffening of the demand for the equal treatment of all men of military age' in Westminster,[40] but the Military Service Bill that was put before Parliament on 27 April made no mention of unattested married men.[41] The government, according to *The Times*, wished to give them a last chance to volunteer, but had misjudged the mood in the Commons.[42] As Harold Cossins, a company secretary living in St Albans, noted in his diary: 'The recruiting question has taken a new turn, for the bill to obtain more men otherwise than by compulsion met with so much opposition in the House that it has been withdrawn'.[43] After being 'fiercely attacked' from all sides, the bill was replaced in May by one that stipulated that 'all men, married and unmarried, between the ages of eighteen and forty-one, are to be compelled to serve'.[44] The Act, apparently 'causing scarcely a ripple of agitation on the

surface of public life', came into operation on 24 June.[45] As *The Times* observed, the military authorities could now 'draw upon the nation's manhood in accordance with the necessities of the situation', rather than marital status.[46] Britain had finally become, according to *The Daily Mirror*, a 'Nation of soldiers': 'Every British subject is a soldier now'.[47]

Married men and recruitment

In September 1915, during a conversation about enlistment, a cart driver told Andrew Clark, the vicar of the parish of Great Leighs in Essex, 'that more of the unmarried men should be made to go first'. The carter, who was married with two children, clearly had a personal interest in the matter.[48] Nevertheless, the belief that single men should enlist first was not limited to married men of military age. Five months later, 'village opinion' in Great Leighs was 'that if the married men are taken before the young ones there will be a civil war in England'.[49]

The belief was not that married men should be exempted from military service, but that there was a proper order in which men should be called up. As 'Late Group' explained in a letter to the *Derby Daily Telegraph*, he had attested in December 1915 because he had been sure 'that before men of my age and family responsibilities would be called upon every eligible man would be taken in rotation of age and extent of responsibilities'.[50] According to Reginald Gibbs, a science teacher in his thirties who lived near Aldershot, and himself an attested married man with six young children 'whom I wish to keep in bread and margarine and boots', it was one thing for married men 'to offer to fight … when the country is in danger of being overrun by foreign armies and quite another to be called up … when the available single men have not been used'.[51]

The main rationale for the demand that single men should enlist first was that married men had 'domestic responsibilities' towards their 'dependants' – wives and children, as well as other relatives – and that their absence would put their homes at risk.[52] Not everybody agreed with this view of male responsibilities. Writing to the *Derby Daily Telegraph* in January 1916, C. Turner suggested that single men were less likely to be effective soldiers than the married. After all, 'if … they have less responsibilities, then they must have … least to gain from any victory'.[53] Others pointed out that the best thing married men could do for their families was to fight for them. In March 1916 'One of the

first' complained to the *Nottingham Evening Post* of 'faint-hearted men', adding that 'if a man has the pluck to marry a woman he ought to have pluck enough to fight for her and his home'.[54]

Most commentators drew different conclusions from the notion of married men's domestic responsibilities. In a letter to *The Times* in February 1916, Arnold Crush, an attested married man from Birmingham, was more typical in complaining that he, like 'thousands of other married men, will … have to leave our homes and businesses to financial ruin, whilst … younger married men, together with hosts of single men without one quarter of our responsibilities, will be allowed to remain at home'.[55] Enlisting, it was emphasised, would have a significant impact on married recruits' families. In May 1916 Gibbs reflected on the possible consequences of the paterfamilias' absence. He feared that – in the worst-case scenario – on his return 'he may find that his wife has consoled herself with another man … or she may have taken to drink'.[56] It was certainly not unusual for middle-class commentators to complain that separation allowances were too generous and had a deleterious effect on the behaviour of servicemen's wives. In November 1914 Andrew Clark's brother-in-law thus complained that 'Lots of women in Dundee are having the time of their lives … It is paying the public-houses splendidly'.[57]

Most contemporaries, however, stressed the potential impact of men's enlistment on families' well-being, rather than behaviour. Frederick Robinson, a middle-aged businessman from Cobham, Surrey, was sympathetic to those married men 'who in consequence of being compelled to serve, will see their homes broken up, and whose wives and children will be reduced if not to actual want, to something very near it'.[58] Although from a very different political standpoint, the socialist editor of *The Herald*, George Lansbury, expressed similar sentiments: it was the 'understandable dread of the future which creates dismay, not fear for one's own skin, but for one's loved ones'.[59] Parliamentary and press discussions of possible government measures that included a moratorium on recruits' financial obligations or grants to assist with expenses such as mortgages or insurance, generally assumed that these would be extended to married men only.[60] The scheme that was introduced in May 1916 was actually open to all recruits, but was nevertheless head-lined as 'Saving homes of the married'. [61]

Married men themselves emphasised their fears about families' well-being, stressing both women's and children's – as well as, to a lesser extent, older men's – dependent status. In a letter to *The Times*, 'A married and attested schoolmaster' pointed out that 'Patriotism might urge us to make the sacrifice … were it not that we must make the sacrifice … vicariously in our families'.[62] Three weeks earlier 'Married slacker' had written to *The Daily Mirror* to explain why he had not attested: he supported not only a wife and young child, but also a widowed mother and sisters, concluding that when he enlisted, 'the people who are dearest to me are going to pay full price for my patriotism'.[63] A few days later 'All in policy' reflected in the pages of the *Nottingham Evening Post* that he regretted attesting while 'there are younger men with fewer children hanging back'. He advocated compulsion for all, so that 'I could look my wife and children in the face, knowing I had not neglected them of my own accord'.[64]

With a wife in poor health and a young child to support on his salary as a company secretary, Harold Cossins was among the married men who decided not to attest. As early as November 1914 he was weighing the conflicting demands of patriotism and family, confiding in his diary that 'I could not possibly give up my position to enlist as Marjorie and John would be left practically unprovided for'. This was not an easy decision: 'it is hard that one cannot serve one's country without risking so much trouble for one's family'.[65] He was still struggling with the same considerations once conscription was introduced: 'If I were free I would go like a shot but I have others besides myself to consider'.[66] A young man with whom Gibbs chatted in January 1915 put the matter more bluntly: 'My first duty is to my wife and children and patriotism be hanged'.[67]

Gibbs himself attested in December 1915, although he opposed the war as one of imperial aggression, because he had been told – wrongly – that men who did not attest would lose the right to appeal against future conscription.[68] He soon regretted his decision, confiding in his diary that he was 'no hero willing and anxious to shed my blood for the defence of mythical principle'. He feared not only 'gushing out my last breath on the muddy soil of Flanders', but also the thought of leaving his children unprotected.[69] Ironically, his desire to stay at home was not necessarily a comfort to them. In September 1917 he described passing his eldest son John while travelling to work in a cab. Back home in the evening, John told him that some of the other boys had

jeered: 'There goes old Gibbs; he ought to have been in the army long ago'.[70] Despite such talk, the continued power of notions of masculinity that linked manliness with the proper discharge of familial responsibilities, rather than military duty, should not be underestimated. Interviewed in later years, Mary Morton recalled that her mother's family had called her father a 'bounder', claiming that he had joined up 'just to avoid his responsibilities'.[71]

Single men shirkers?

In a letter published on 1 January 1916 in *The Daily Mirror*, 'N.W.' observed that married men had responded more selflessly to the war emergency than bachelors. 'N.W.' suggested that marriage tended 'to make a man less selfish … It teaches him … to think of other people. He *must* think of them since he has to provide for them'. The single man, meanwhile, 'is accustomed … to regard the world as invented especially for him'.[72] The *Nottingham Guardian* went further, and suggested that married men's apparently greater willingness to enlist 'seems to show that the older men possess better moral fibre than the younger', who were 'not the equal in industry and "grit" of the men whose places they will soon have to fill'.[73] Not everybody would have agreed with such contentions, but the belief that bachelors' response to the emergency had been a good deal poorer than married men's was widely shared – and was reflected in some recruiting propaganda.[74] (Fig. 2)

Figure 2. 'Single Men..', Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster, not dated, c. 1915, Imperial War Museums. © IWM (Art.IWM PST 5051).

Unsurprisingly, the idea that there was a huge reservoir of single men who were shirking their duty was regularly invoked by attested men's organisations. In April 1916 the chairman of the National Union of Attested Married Men introduced a deputation to Lord Derby by denying that his members 'desired to shirk their responsibilities'.[75] Rather, they resented the injustice of being called up while large sections of what Crush described a few weeks later as the 'shirking and apathetic manhood of the country', avoided military service entirely.[76]

That said, it was not only attested married men who condemned the supposed presence on the home front of large numbers of single 'shirkers'. In September 1915 Robinson was already complaining that 'it is a gross injustice that married men should be taken while single eligibles remain at home stealing their jobs and businesses'.[77] The weeks preceding the introduction of full conscription marked a high point in hostility towards single men. Writing in March 1916 to her son Alf, then serving on the Western Front, Mrs Page asked: 'What do you think of the married men's affairs in the newspapers a bit rough for some of them while there are plenty of single ones ought to go I wish I had my way with some of them, and I am not the only one wishes it'.[78] A few days earlier, during a meeting of the Loughborough Trades Council, a Mr Rudkin of the Shop Assistants Union spoke for many in reviling single men as 'shirkers' who 'swanked about with war badges'.[79] In a letter to the *Derby Daily Telegraph* the following day, Alfred Goodere was just as blunt. He condemned the 'cowardly shirkers, willing to live in ease and safety, whilst married men … break up their homes, and immolate themselves on the altar of sacrifice'.[80]

A particular source of resentment was the perception that many single men were 'dodging military service' by finding work in munitions factories, government offices, or other reserved occupations.[81] In March 1916 a *Herald* columnist pointed out how unfair it was that the single men who had been 'entreated into munitions work as patriots should suddenly be hounded out again as slackers'.[82] Most commentators, however, stressed the number of bachelors who had entered the 'spacious sheep-folds' of reserved occupations in order to evade military service, 'because they love their skins'.[83] 'Skilled munitions man', who described himself as one of the 'single slackers on whom the boys at the front depend for food for the guns', was among those who tried to point to their contribution to the war effort, but such claims were met with scepticism.[84]

In a letter to the *Lincolnshire Echo*, for example, 'Justice' suggested that there were 'thousands of single men without any obligations whatever hiding in the foundries'.[85] A few days later, 'Fair play' asked whether it was right that single munitions workers should earn 'an enormous wage' while married men had enlisted, 'knowing that their wives and children are not properly provided for?'[86] Such 'miserable, mean shirkers'[87] needed to 'be weeded out'[88] of munitions factories and of 'the cowards' castle of certified occupations'.[89]

In January 1916 Lord Derby had lent his support to the idea of substituting single with married men in occupations exempted from military service.[90] A *Times* leader commented approvingly, considering this a useful way of dealing with the young men who were not in uniform because they had 'found an authorized means of evasion'.[91] Not everybody endorsed this 'comb out' of bachelors. In March 1916 Saunders noted that it would be difficult to replace skilled single men, particularly in munitions factories.[92] Speaking in Parliament a few days earlier, the Labour MP J. H. Thomas had pointed out that substituting skilled single men with unskilled married men risked 'upsetting completely the industries' efficiency', adding that 'the 650,000 single slackers were a myth'.[93] A month later the Marquess of Crewe, speaking for the government, also stressed the complexity of manpower issues. Britain, he claimed, was not like a Zulu monarchy of former days, where 'the simple and primitive industries could be carried on by the elder men and women'.[94]

Elsewhere, however, there was a good deal of support for a 'comb-out'. In the early months of 1916 both the government and businesses stressed their commitment to the exclusion of single men from the workforce. Harold Tennant, the Under-Secretary of State for War, explained in Parliament in March 1916 that the government was taking 'energetic steps' to 'reduce to a minimum those who are of military age and physique who are unmarried who have been kept at home to keep industries going'.[95] This rhetoric was echoed in business circles. The day after Tennant's speech, at the annual general meeting of the London department store Swan and Edgar, the chairman reported with pride that that whole male workforce of military age had enlisted, adding that 'the only men now in their employ, other than those over military age or physically unfit, were married men waiting the call of their respective groups'.[96] A few weeks earlier, the chairman of the Car and General Insurance Company had told shareholders

that 'You will, I know, be glad to hear' that of the eligible workforce of 169, only eighteen had not attested, 'all of whom are married men between thirty-five and forty-one'.[97]

It is difficult to assess the impact of the government's and of employers' 'energetic steps', disentangling them from wider pressures on single men to enlist, but it could be considerable. A *Herald* columnist, for example, condemned the ongoing 'middle-age conspiracy against youth', pointing out that young men were finding it hard to obtain employment once they had 'been dismissed to make way for the married "warriors" who prefer to remain at home'.[98] Many would surely have replied that this was just as it should be, and that single men's proper place was in the armed forces, while married men should replace them in reserved occupations.

Responsibilities and equality of sacrifice

Despite the power of the image of older married men forced to abandon their families while single young 'shirkers' hid in reserved occupations, the assessment of men's military responsibilities based primarily on marital status did not remain unchallenged. In April 1916 a *Punch* cartoon showed the absurdity of 'Married men tracking down the single' in order to force them to enlist. (Fig. 3) More seriously, a *Daily Mirror* leader two months earlier had asserted that the main distinction had to be not between married and single men, but between men who were physically fit and those who were not.[99] A few days later 'W.M.' reiterated this point. After all, if a single man had 'a cork leg, his matrimonial error does not outweigh his obvious incapacity for filling up a gap in the ranks'.[100] Others emphasised the importance of age. In a letter to *The Times*, 'Hercules' wrote that to call up a forty-year-old single man of sedentary habits before a young married man of twenty 'used to manual labour would … be a thoroughly unsound … proceeding'.[101]

Figure 3. 'Married men tracking down the single', *Punch*, 19 April 1916, p. 267. [Copyright permission requested]

The patriotism of attested married men, particularly those involved in the married men's protest movement, was also questioned. In May 1916 a *Lincolnshire Echo* editorial was scathing about 'the grievance-hunting agitation' that was attempting 'to get a cowardly and unpatriotic' minority of attested married men 'out of their

bargain'.[102] Two months earlier 'Mother of three little ones' had written to the *Nottingham Evening Post*, condemning the men who were 'trying to hide behind the parrot cry of "Single Men First" '. Her husband had attested and she had no wish for him to 'shirk his duty when his call comes'.[103] Cossins reflected in his diary 'that married men who, like myself have heavy obligations … should not have attested. They were praised for doing so and now … they ask to be let off'.[104]

Frank Lockwood, a twenty-year-old unmarried and unattested apprentice lithographic artist from Linthwaite, was less measured. In March 1916 he noted in his diary that the attested married men 'are whining and squealing and finding fault' and seemed to imagine that 'every single man (whether a munitions worker, indispensable or not) should be called up before a married man was touched'. A few days later, his appeal for exemption having been turned down by the Linthwaite Tribunal, he condemned the 'attested married men, who besides being slackers are also wrigglers … when a man has attested … and then tries to back out … you can hardly call him a patriot – but he poses as such'.[105] Lockwood was not alone in suspecting that despite all the posturing, marriage was simply being used as a pretext to avoid military service. In the village of Great Leighs, there were rumours that a local horseman, recently married, was 'glorying over the unmarried labourers that every one of them will have to go before he is called out'.[106]

Attested married men and their supporters responded by turning the spotlight on unattested married men. In March 1916 'Perplexed' wrote to the *Derby Daily Telegraph*, pointing out that he and his brother, who between them had seven children, had attested, while a relative had refused to do so: 'it seems very unfair for a man with a big family and financial obligations to be called, while the other … (married since August) gets off scot free'.[107] Such men – it was suggested – were also ready to take the jobs and businesses of enlisted men.[108] Gibbs was infuriated by his grocer, Mr Parsons, who, 'with a crafty grin', said of attested married men: ' "They knew what they were doing … didn't they? They did it of their own free will" '. Parsons had not attested, as ' "I knew better". So it seems', concluded Gibbs, 'that the attested married men are not only going to be victimised, but they are also going to be sneered at … as being fools'.[109]

As debates over men's wartime responsibilities became increasingly heated in early 1916, the most significant challenge to a clear-cut distinction between patriotic married men and single shirkers was the argument that single men often had considerable family responsibilities too. Introducing the first Military Service Bill in the House of Commons on 5 January 1916, Asquith set out the grounds for exemption. These included 'the case of the man, though a single man, who is really the support … of … father, mother, sisters, who are dependent upon him'.[110] Unmarried men who had shouldered a paterfamilias' responsibilities, particularly when the father was absent, were thus also worthy of sympathy. In January 1916 a *Lincolnshire Echo* editorial pointed out that plenty of single men were 'the sole support of widowed mothers, others have young brothers and sisters dependent on them'. These men, it continued, 'have nobly shouldered heavy family responsibilities, and in not a few cases unselfishly postponed marriage in order to support their relatives'.[111] Writing to *The Daily Mirror* in January 1916, 'Widow's son' pointed out the difficulties faced by widowed women when they lost a son who was their sole support: 'a young wife is able to return to the business she has given up, but what is a woman of sixty to do?'[112]

By Spring 1916, then, debates over conscription had brought to light a multiplicity of male responses to the war: the actions of men that included attested and unattested married men, married (and single) men who had volunteered before the introduction of the Derby scheme, single 'shirkers' who were (allegedly) hiding in munitions factories and bachelors who were coping with heavy domestic commitments, were all subjected to critical scrutiny, attracting both supporters and detractors. The power of masculine identities that equated manliness with immediate enlistment was thus challenged by alternatives that stressed the pull of family responsibilities and women's and children's dependence on the paterfamilias. By March 1916, however, military masculinities were in the ascendance, as the policy of 'single men first' was gradually replaced by an acknowledgment that *all* physically fit men of military age had equal duties towards their country, domestic responsibilities notwithstanding.

Speaking in favour of the conscription of all adult men in the House of Lords in April 1916, Lord Milner claimed that complete equality of sacrifice was an 'unattainable ideal', given the 'great variety of human circumstances'. This, he added, was 'no reason why you should not have … equality of duty – why the State should not have the same

claim upon every one'.[113] In this Milner reflected a wider shift in opinion away from aspiring to a situation where everybody would be required to make comparable sacrifices, to accepting 'equal liability for all men of military age'.[114] Speaking in the Commons a month later, Winston Churchill stressed that military needs were now so great that it had become 'necessary to compel the willing and the unwilling, the married and the unmarried, the young student and the old, war-broken soldier, the head of a business and the father of a family, to serve in the field'.[115]

A few days earlier Austin Harrison, the influential editor of *The English Review*, had argued in *The Daily Mirror*: 'I fear there must be terrible sacrifice and inequality of suffering, because war is terrible, and the alternative is defeat'.[116] The exigencies of war meant that patriotism and military duties were increasingly thought to outweigh men's domestic and family responsibilities. As J. E. C. Welldon put it in a letter to *The Times* in March 1916, 'the same duty in a crisis of the nation's history lies upon all men', married or single, with or without dependants.[117]

Conclusion

In January 1916 the *Manchester Guardian* warned 'against that future military historian … who will pronounce the voluntary system in England to have been a failure owing to the selfishness of a number of single men'.[118] In fact, there were also plenty of contemporaries who were ready to condemn what they saw as single men's unmanly lack of patriotism. Instead of doing their duty – it was widely believed – they were hiding in reserved occupations and munitions factories, leaving married men to bear most of the military burden, despite all their family responsibilities.

The counter-argument did not challenge the characterisation of both women and children as dependants. Rather, it stressed that many single men had heavy family responsibilities too: the only remaining son of a widowed mother, who had selflessly postponed his own marriage in order to take over the role of paterfamilias, was frequently cited as an example of a man whose domestic burdens made it imperative for him to remain at home. Gradually, however, debates shifted away from arguments relating to married and single men's domestic responsibilities, towards support for the equal treatment of all men, irrespective of marital status. The 'recruiting muddle' was thus resolved by introducing universal conscription, connecting military duty to age-

appropriate and physically fit masculinity, without reference to precedence based on family commitments.

Connell and Messerschmidt have suggested that despite the ever-shifting relationships of power between different masculine identities, 'the gender hierarchy does not have multiple niches at the top', and it certainly seems that in spring 1916 military masculinity proved more powerful than family masculinity.[119] The soldier-hero's achievement of hegemonic status, however, was not a foregone conclusion, even in wartime, and the challenge posed by other masculinities should not be underestimated. The 'acrimonious discussion'[120] over married men's claims for special consideration reveals that far from having withered away, the notion of manliness based on family responsibilities was still a significant one in 1916. Indeed, it remained so even after the introduction of conscription, influencing behaviour, as well as debates and policy. In June 1916, for example, the government announced a scheme whereby 1,000 men over the age of thirty-five were given the opportunity to undertake munitions work rather than be called up: the scheme was only open to married men, who were to replace 'combed out' bachelors.[121] (Fig. 4)

Figure 4. 'Are they down-hearted?', *The Bystander*, 7 June 1916, front page.

Even once the notion of equality of duty among all physically fit men of military age had gained widespread acceptance, there still remained room for alternative versions of masculinity, and the introduction of adult male conscription did not entirely silence

concerns over the hardships faced by married men and their dependants. In July 1916 'Another Soldier's Wife' was by no means unique in her complaint to a Nottingham newspaper about the 'able-bodied, and single men just over military age behind counters in quite small shops doing women's and girls' work, while married men are compelled to break up their families of little children'.[122] The figures of the single 'shirker' skulking on the home front and of the married man forced to abandon his family continued to shadow that of the patriotic serviceman long after full male conscription had come into force in June 1916.

Word count (including abstract, captions, etc.): 9446

Captions

Figure 1. 'The Prime Minister's Advice to the Young Unmarried Men ...', Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster, not dated, c. 1915, Imperial War Museums. © IWM (Art.IWM PST 5062).

Figure 2. 'Single Men..', Parliamentary Recruiting Committee poster, not dated, c. 1915, Imperial War Museums. © IWM (Art.IWM PST 5051).

Figure 3. 'Married men tracking down the single', *Punch*, 19 April 1916, p. 267. [Copyright permission required]

Figure 4. 'Are they down-hearted?', *The Bystander*, 7 June 1916, front page.

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IWM, Documents 4899, Private Papers of H. C. Cossins, Diary.

IWM, Documents 5744, Private Papers of F. Lockwood, 'Notes written by F.T. Lockwood'.

IWM, Documents 12249, Private Papers of H. Ingleby MP, Holcombe Ingleby to Clement Ingleby.

IWM, Documents 98/28/1, Private Papers of A. Page, Mother to Alf Page.

IWM, Documents 11335, Private Papers of Frederick Arthur Robinson, Diary of the Great War.

IWM, Documents 6570, Private Papers of R. Saunders, Robert Saunders to son.

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[1] The terms were used, among others, by Admiral Beresford in a letter to *The Times*, March 18, 1916, 9.

[2] IWM, Documents 12249, October 4, 1914.

[3] See, for example, Hämmerle, Überegger and Bader Zaar, 'Introduction'; Ugolini, *Civvies*, especially chapter 4; Bibbings, *Telling Tales*, especially chapter 2; Gullace, '*The Blood of our Sons'*, chapter 5; Cullen 'Gender and the Great War', especially 229.

[4] The concept of hegemonic masculinity is discussed in Connell and Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity', 829–59; Tosh, 'Hegemonic masculinity', 41–58. A more recent discussion by Connell is 'The Study of Masculinities', 5–15.

[5] For example, Schippers, Mimi 'Recovering the Feminine Other', 85–102.

[6] Explored, for instance, in Chisholm and Tidy, eds. Special Issue on 'Masculinities at the Margins'.

[7] Ahlbäck, *Manhood*, 244.

[8] Geva, *Conscription, Family and the Modern State*.

[9] Fathers' protective role is discussed, for example, in King, *Family Men*, especially chapter 2; Strange, *Fatherhood*, especially chapter 1; Tosh, *A Man's Place*, especially chapter 4.

[10] Married men's wartime duties are discussed in King, *Family Men*, 164–5; Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 94–5. For the continued significance of home and family after enlistment see Meyer, *Men of War*, chapter 1 and Roper, *The Secret Battle*, part 1.

[11] Precise figures on the marital status of servicemen do not seem to exist, but estimates suggest that they were not only predominantly young, but also mostly single: it has been

suggested that two thirds of those who died were bachelors. Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 5; Winter, *The Great War*, 83.

[12] Adams, 'Asquith's Choice', 257. The pledge was noted, for example, in IWM, Documents 11335, 29 January 1917. The Derby scheme is generally interpreted as a final effort to obtain sufficient manpower for the armed forces without conscription: men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one were called upon to 'attest' their willingness to serve and were placed in 'groups' on the basis of age and marital status, but could then return to civilian life. The groups would be called only when required, with earlier groups made up of younger, unmarried men. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, 150–1.

[13] Adams and Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy*, 131–2.

[14] Ibid., 133.

[15] Lord Derby's 'Report on Recruiting' is discussed in *The Times*, January 5, 1916, 4, 8, 9. The report showed that 2,184,979 men had attested, although Lord Derby warned that large numbers would have to be deducted, including men who were exempted because of their occupation.

[16] *The Times*, January 5, 1916, 9; *The Daily Mirror*, January 5, 1916, 2.

[17] Ibid. Few disputed the numbers, although see, for example, Sir John Simon's House of Commons speech, reported in *The Daily Mirror*, March 16, 1916, 2.

[18] *The Times*, January 6, 1916, 9.

[19] Adams and Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy*, 140–1. A Labour conference on 6 January 1916 voted overwhelmingly against the bill. See *The Times*, January 7, 1916, 6. Here too, however, some voices were raised in support of married men's preferential treatment. *The Daily Mirror*, January 7, 1916, 3; *The Herald*, January 15, 1916, 4.

[20] *The Times*, March 1, 1916, 8, 9; *The Daily Mirror*, March 3, 1916, 2; March 6, 1916, 2.

[21] *The Daily Mirror*, March 8, 1916, 2.

[22] IWM, Documents 6570, March 3, 1916.

[23] *The Daily Mirror*, March 9, 1916, 2. Widely reported meetings were held the same day in Cardiff and Portsmouth. The Times, March 9, 1916, 5; *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 7, 1916, 5; *Grantham Journal*, March 11, 1916, 7.

[24] *The Daily Mirror*, March 10, 1916, 2; March 13, 1916, 2; *The Times*, March 13, 1916, 5.

[25] *The Times*, March 13, 1916, 5.

[26] Ibid., March 11, 1916, 7.

[27] Ibid., March 14, 1916, 7. See also *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 14, 1916, 5. Biner was the founder of the 'People's Fairplay League', which stood for 'Freedom, fair taxation and fairplay' and strongly opposed temperance. Biner, *Seven Years.*

[28] The meeting was widely reported. See, for example, *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 15, 1916, 1; *Lincolnshire Echo*, March 15, 1916, 2. 'Indignant meetings' held 'throughout the country' were mentioned in IWM, Documents 6570, March 15, 1916.

[29] *The Times*, March 15, 1916, 5; *Lincolnshire Echo*, March 15, 1916, 2; *Grantham Journal*, March 18, 1916, 7.

[30] *The Daily Mirror*, March 20, 1916, 2; *The Times*, March 16, 1916, 5. Gibson Bowles was a well-known political figure, described in an editorial of *The Burnley News* as a 'lively critic of things in general'. *The Burnley News*, March 18, 1916, 7. His main interest was the Navy, and the naval blockade was a central issue of his bye-election campaign.

[31] *The Times*, March 16, 1916, 9.

[32] Ibid., March 17, 1916, 9; March 23, 1916, 9; *The Daily Mirror*, March 22, 1916, 3.

[33] *The Times*, March 21, 1916, 9.

[34] IWM, Documents 12249, March 19, 1916.

[35] *The Times*, March 23, 1916, 5.

[36] *Derby Daily Telegraph*, March 27, 1916, 2; *The Times*, April 5, 1916, 5.

[37] *The Times*, March 29, 1916, 5. This figure should be treated with caution, although it is clear that the Union attracted considerable, if ephemeral, support.

[38] See, for example, *The Times*, March 25, 1916, 5; March 27, 1916, 10; March 31, 1916, 5; April 1, 1916, 3; April 3, 1916, 5; April 4, 1916, 5; April 4, 1916, 6; April 15, 1916, 5.

[39] Ibid., April 17, 1916, 10.

[40] Ibid., March 30, 1916, 8.

[41] Ibid., April 27, 1916, 7; April 28, 1916, 6, 8, 10. The bill dealt with time-expired servicemen, Territorials and men whose certificate of exemption had expired.

[42] *The Daily Mirror*, April 26, 1916, 3.

[43] IWM, Documents 4899, April 28, 1916.

[44] *The Daily Mirror*, April 28, 1916, 3; May 4, 1916, 2. See also Adams, 'Asquith's Choice', 263.

[45] MacDonagh, *In London*, 98.

[46] *The Times*, June 24, 1916, 8.

[47] *The Daily Mirror*, June 26, 1916, 2. British subjects, that is, who were 'between the ages of eighteen and forty-one, single or married, unless exempted by a tribunal, badged as a munition worker, or medically rejected as unfit'. The exclusion of *all* women from military citizenship could clearly be taken for granted.

[48] BSC, Ms. Eng. Hist. e.110, September 15, 1915.

[49] Ibid., Ms. Eng. Hist. e. 121, February 20, 1916.

[50] *Derby Daily Telegraph*, March 6, 1916, 3.

[51] BSC, Ms Eng. misc. c.171, October 31, 1915; Ms Eng. misc. c.175, March 31, 1916.

[52] See, for example, *The Times*, January 6, 1916, 5; March 10, 1916, 5; March 24, 1916, 9.

[53] *Derby Daily Telegraph*, January 1, 1916, 2.

[54] *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 9, 1916, 3. Similar notions of masculine duty are explored in Gullace, '*The Blood of our Sons'*, chapter 2.

[55] *The Times*, February 25, 1916, 9. On 24 March Crush was one of the speakers at the meeting organised by the National Union of Attested Married Men at Manchester's Free Trade Hall and became its vice-chairman. *The Times*, March 25, 1916, 5; April 29, 1916, 5.

[56] BSC, Ms Eng. misc. c.177, May 14, 1916.

[57] BSC, Ms. Eng. Hist. e. 92, December 1, 1914. See also Wall, 'English and German Families', 93–8.

[58] IWM, Documents 11335, May 26, 1916. Although see also March 30, 1916, when he condemned the attested married men who were 'doing their utmost to avoid serving the country'.

[59] *The Herald*, March 25, 1916, 3. Other contributors were less sympathetic. Ibid., March 18, 1916, 5; March 25, 1916, 12.

[60] Details of a scheme to assist recruits (except officers) with their civil liabilities, including rent, mortgages, rates, taxes and school fees, in addition to the normal separation allowances and up to £104 per annum, were announced in mid-May. The scheme covered all men who had joined up since 4 August 1914. *The Times*, May 15, 1916, 5; May 18, 1916, 8.

[61] *The Daily Mirror*, May 13, 1916, 2.

[62] *The Times*, March 24, 1916, 9.

[63] *The Daily Mirror*, March 2, 1916, 5.

[64] *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 8, 1916, 5.

[65] IWM, Documents 4899, November 30, 1914.

[66] Ibid., May 2, 1916.

[67] BSC, Ms Eng. misc. c.163, January 10, 1915.

[68] Ibid., Ms Eng. misc. c.173, December 9, 1915, December 10, 1915, December 11, 1915.

[69] Ibid., Ms Eng. misc. c.183, November 29, 1916.

[70] Ibid., Ms Eng. misc. c.193, September 10, 1917.

[71] Van Emden, *The Quick*, 21. Most participants to public debates over conscription were men, but women's responses – both public and private – to the repeated association of femininity with dependence and implicit equation with childhood would certainly repay further investigation.

[72] *The Daily Mirror*, January 1, 1916, 7.

[73] Quoted in *Nottingham Evening Post*, January 5, 1916, 3.

[74] See also *Derby Daily Telegraph*, January 4, 1916, 6; *The Times*, January 6, 1916, 3.

[75] *The Times*, April 5, 1916, 6.

[76] Ibid., April 29, 1916, 5.

[77] IWM, Documents 11335, September 17, 1915.

[78] IWM, Documents 98/28/1, March 23, 1916.

[79] *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 15, 1916, 1.

[80] *Derby Daily Telegraph*, March 16, 1916, 2.

[81] *The Daily Mirror*, March 13, 1916, 2.

[82] *The Herald*, March 25, 1916, 52.

[83] *The Times*, March 2, 1916, 9; March 3, 1916, 9.

[84] *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 22, 1916, 5.

[85] *Lincolnshire Echo*, March 6, 1916, 4.

[86] Ibid., March 10, 1916, 3.

[87] From a speech given to an attested married men's meeting in Darlington by Richard Luck, a barrister. *Lincolnshire Echo*, March 25, 1916, 2.

[88] *Derby Daily Telegraph*, March 15, 1916, 2.

[89] From a speech by Will Dyson to a Married Men's League meeting at Tower Hill. *The Daily Mirror*, March 14, 1916, 2.

[90] *The Daily Mirror*, January 5, 1916, 2.

[91] *The Times*, January 5, 1916, 9.

[92] IWM, Documents 6570, March 21, 1916.

[93] *The Times*, March 16, 1916, 12.

[94] Ibid., April 19, 1916, 10.

[95] Ibid., March 15, 1916, 10.

[96] Ibid., March 16, 1916, 14.

[97] Ibid., February 25, 1916, 14. Similar comments were made by companies as diverse as The Merchants' Marine Insurance Company and Spiller and Bakers, a Cardiff-based flour milling company. Ibid., February 10, 1916, 13 and May 8, 1916, 14.

[98] *The Herald*, March 18, 1916, 6.

[99] *The Daily Mirror*, February 28, 1916, 5.

[100] Ibid., March 3, 1916, 5.

[101] *The Times*, January 5, 1916, 9.

[102] *Lincolnshire Echo*, May 9, 1916, 2.

[103] *Nottingham Evening Post*, March 11, 1916, 3.

[104] IWM, Documents 4899, March 11, 1916.

[105] IWM, Documents 5744, March 6, 1916, March 25, 1916, April 3, 1916. In April 1916 the East-Central Appeal Tribunal granted Lockwood a temporary exemption.

[106] BSC, Ms. Eng. Hist. e.122, March 18, 1916.

[107] *Derby Daily Telegraph*, March 6, 1916, 2.

[108] *The Times*, March 18, 1916, 9; March 28, 1916, 9.

[109] BSC, Ms Eng. misc. c.175, March 7, 1916.

[110] Hansard Commons Debates, January 5, 1916, vol. 77, cols 956–7.

[111] *Lincolnshire Echo*, January 11, 1916, 2.

[112] *The Daily Mirror*, January 3, 1916, 7.

[113] *The Times*, April 19, 1916, 10.

[114] *The Times*, April 28, 1916, 6. For the notion of sacrifice in wartime rhetoric, see Winter 'Paris', 3–24.

[115] *The Daily Mirror*, May 24, 1916, 2.

[116] Ibid., May 18, 1916, 5.

[117] *The Times*, March 30, 1916, 9.

[118] Quoted in *Lincolnshire Echo*, January 25, 1916, 2.

[119] Connell and Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic masculinity', 845.

[120] IWM, Documents 11335, March 20, 1916.

[121] *The Daily Mirror*, June 2, 1916, 11. See also IWM, Documents 4899, September 21, 1916.

[122] *Nottingham Evening Post*, July 29, 1916, 3.