

maintaining traditional male authority in the family, encouraged men's emotional expression.

New sorts of men were portrayed heroically in films, as when Billy Dee Williams and James Caan played professional football players Gales Sayers and Brian Piccolo in the 1971 film *Brian's Song*. Depiction of the depth of their friendship and of Sayers's grief when Piccolo died made *Brian's Song* a new kind of sports movie—one that grounded manhood equally in physical toughness and emotional vulnerability. However, some critics' designation of such films as "male weepies" suggested continuing discomfort with men's sensitivity. Efforts to develop a model of American manhood that embraced emotional honesty continued through the end of the twentieth century, as William Pollack's best-selling *Real Boys* (1998) suggested. Yet the cultural tension between old habits and the renewed appreciation of sensitive men (by men as well as women) persists.

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#### RELATED ENTRIES

Crisis of Masculinity; Fathers' Rights; Feminism; Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory; Homosexuality; *Iron John: A Book About Men*; *Kramer vs. Kramer*; Male Friendship; Masculine Domesticity; Men's Movements; Mother–Son Relationships; *Mr. Mom*; Passionate Manhood; Promise Keepers; Self–Control; Sentimentalism

—John Ibson

## SENTIMENTALISM

A central part of Victorian middle-class culture from about 1830 to the 1870s, sentimentalism shaped cultural constructions of

gender by prescribing types of bodily conduct, including speech, posture, gestures, dress, and proper etiquette among both men and women. The goal of these prescriptions was the same for men and women: to foster perfect sincerity, truthfulness, and candor in social relations. But Victorian sentimentalism had different practical implications for men and women because middle-class Americans assumed women to be naturally expressive of their feelings, and therefore naturally sincere, while men were assumed to be naturally more rational, better able to control their emotions, and therefore less sincere. Sentimentalism therefore required of men a strict standard of proper conduct—a conscious performance of behavior appropriate to given situations—that became basic to Victorian constructions of middle-class manhood.

The Victorian concern with interpersonal sincerity, particularly among men, was a response to the new types of social relations and gender definitions being fostered by the market revolution and urbanization. As American economic life grew increasingly competitive and urban life increasingly impersonal, middle-class Americans feared that men, who were being encouraged to pursue entrepreneurial success in this anonymous urban capitalist marketplace, would be tempted to prey on and deceive others to gain advantage. While the middle class was created by, and benefited economically from, the new market economy, its members worried that the new kinds of economic relationships that supported their status, and which did not require the familiar moral obligations of face-to-face small-town exchange, threatened men's ethical grounding. The cultural archetype of the confidence man—who used false sincerity to gain the confidence of others for the purpose of ruining them—became perhaps the most powerful symbol of the morally unconstrained male entrepreneur.

Sentimental prescriptions for middle-class men were formulated in large part as a counterpoint to this negative model. Fearful of the impersonal competitive marketplace, the middle class rooted their ideals of male conduct in the home or domestic sphere—a social space characterized by a companionate family ideal built around emotive, affectionate, and caring relations. They hoped that men might carry the warm, personal character of domestic relationships into their interactions outside the home as well. Men would thus develop a genuine sincerity, honesty, and trustworthiness that could withstand public scrutiny—a solid "character" both inwardly wrought and socially enforced. Sentimental codes of conduct, then, assumed that the intimacy of domestic interactions provided the most promising basis for a model of manhood that guaranteed social trust in a society comprised of strangers.

The sentimental insistence on sincerity was based on the notion that reason, while a fundamental aspect of masculinity, could be deceptive, but that “feminine” emotion was always a genuine expression of the inner self. Thus, sentimental requirements of manhood were based on gender concepts that called into question men’s capacity for emotional honesty. This problem was further complicated by the fact that while middle-class Victorians condemned any artificial cultivation of mere public image, they valued outward social reputation and deemed it essential to the business success expected of men. They therefore urged the display of proper manners and appearances in public, but also insisted that such surface expressions reflect one’s inner moral principles and true feelings. Middle-class Victorians sought to combine outward conduct and inward sentiment by developing—and pressing with particular urgency upon men—a code of social etiquette called “genteel performance” by the historian Karen Halttunen. Victorians believed that for the truly sincere, adherence to these rules would come naturally.

Victorians devised such strategies of sentiment for a variety of settings and situations. Broadly speaking, sentimentalism provided for three sets of rules that regulated social interaction: (1) rules of politeness and courtesy in public settings, (2) rules of tact, and (3) rules of acquaintanceship. These rules provided a social framework intended to assure that one was not falsely acting sincere, and they also served to mark and reinforce middle-class status. For example, sentimental rules of conduct prescribed that men wear a three-piece suit, a top hat, and, even in summer, a thin overcoat in public. Because the required clothing consisted of luxury items, conformity to the sentimental code indicated that one enjoyed the financial means associated with middle-class status.

Indeed, sentimental conduct was closely tied to the emerging commodity culture being created by the market revolution. Middle-class Victorians perceived sentimentalism as an antidote to the impersonal social and economic relations of market capitalism, and also as a counterforce to the possibility that men might cynically promote false public images in the economic marketplace. But sentimentalism actually reinforced the rules of commodity capitalism and enabled men’s participation in public politics and economic exchange. Because the behavioral techniques men used to signify trustworthiness became a cultural capital that required reciprocation by others, sentimentalism followed the logic of capitalist exchange and extended behavioral patterns suitable to market capitalism into the make-up of the male self.

Sentimentalism further shaped Victorian middle-class manhood by bridging a cultural gap between two important

facets of male public life in nineteenth-century America: involvement in the market economy and participation in a political republic. On the one hand, economic competition was grounded in the pursuit of self-interest; on the other, civic responsibility was supposed to require subordinating self-interest to the collective good. Sentimental manhood provided a way to resolve that contradiction. Men’s activities in the public sphere were motivated not by economic self-interest or political partisanship, but by responsibility to their households and those who depended on them. Men who could display candor and sincerity in their public conduct could outwardly disassociate themselves from their identity as market-oriented beings and present themselves as domestic beings and selfless “family men.” Thus, by claiming the mantle of public virtue and seeming to elevate themselves above their selfish interests, sentimental men could appear well suited to participate in the public sphere.

Sentimentalism profoundly influenced new constructions of manhood that emerged in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the late nineteenth century, the insistence on the primacy of feelings had prompted the emergence of a “passionate manhood” that emphasized the healthy display of an inner masculine savage as a counter to the constraints of urban-industrial life. By the early twentieth century, the superficial display of sincerity (regarded by nineteenth-century Victorians as the art of the confidence man) had become an accepted part of a middle-class ideology of manhood. This development involved not so much a departure from the ideal of sincerity as a redefinition of its gendered core. Managing the body and one’s feelings—once subordinated to the cultivation of genuine inner character—now stood independently as features of true manliness. In an increasingly urbanized and corporatized consumer society, the need to purposefully manufacture appearances to compete with others for the attention and support of superiors in social and occupational settings became increasingly important for achieving personal and professional success.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Americans had long since come to accept and negotiate what nineteenth-century middle-class men (and women) would have considered hypocrisy—the ability to change behavior according to the demands of the situation. Still, emotional sincerity remains important to American cultural constructions of “real” manhood and, indeed, formed the core of the ideal of the “sensitive male” that emerged during the late twentieth century. In 1994, for example, *Time* magazine carried an extensive story about former president George H. W. Bush’s frequent weeping in public. In that same year, the film adaptation of Winston

Groom's 1986 novel *Forrest Gump* became a box office hit, in part because the title character was both a war hero and a quintessentially sentimental man.

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## RELATED ENTRIES

Advice Literature; Art; Body; Capitalism; Confidence Man; Cult of Domesticity; Emotion; Market Revolution; Masculine Domesticity; Middle-Class Manhood; Passionate Manhood; Republicanism; Self-Control; Sensitive Male; Urbanization; Victorian Era

—Thomas Winter

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment, which includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, was part of the wider realm of American power relations and gender dynamics long before it came to be legally defined in the 1970s. Because prevailing gender roles defined the world of economic production and exchange as the domain of men well into the twentieth century, the workplace was a traditionally homosocial male space. Thus, women who challenged their prescribed domestic roles faced the possibility of harassment. Although women have engaged in acts of sexual harassment, such actions have primarily been used by men in public arenas as a mechanism designed to keep women "in their place." Legal controversies involving sexual harassment thus became closely intertwined with larger cultural issues over sex discrimination, women's rights, and appropriate male conduct.

American women's challenges to the notion of the all-male workplace developed along with organized women's rights activism itself. As early as the Seneca Falls convention of 1848, Lucretia Mott urged the necessity of "securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce" (Kerber and DeHart, 209). Women's growing presence in the workforce during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly as a result of the expansion of the service sector, raised concerns over workplace equality and conduct.

At the same time, feminists of the early twentieth century began emphasizing women's right to control their own bodies. But into the mid-twentieth century, women in the United States were frequently blamed for enticing men to rape them, and they were expected to tolerate sexual taunts as natural male behavior. President John F. Kennedy began to address the issue of women's workplace rights in 1961 by appointing a commission on the status of women, led by the former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. This commission was instrumental in the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the inclusion of sexual discrimination in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the attention to sex discrimination in the activities of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, established in 1965.