Requiem For the Male Marginalisation Thesis in the Caribbean:
Death of a Non Theory

Violet Eudine Barriteau ©

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ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>CAFRA</td>
<td>Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action</td>
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<td>CARICOM</td>
<td>Caribbean Common Market</td>
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<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<td>CGDS</td>
<td>Centre for Gender and Development Studies</td>
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<td>CXC</td>
<td>Caribbean Examination Council</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>Development Fund for International Development</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisations</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>UWI</td>
<td>University of the West Indies</td>
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<td>WAND</td>
<td>Women and Development Unit</td>
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<td>WICP</td>
<td>Women in the Caribbean Project</td>
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Primary school teaching and teacher education shifted from being male dominated to being female dominated as a result of the intention of those holding central positions in the society to restrict black men to occupations related to agricultural and industrial labour; to stifle the possible emergence of militant, black educated men who could possibly overthrow the power structure; to loosen the hold of the church on the education system; and to limit the upward social mobility of black men in society. In a real sense the black woman was used against the black man [Errol Miller 1991: 125].

Are males being marginalized? Certainly not, if the main factor being considered is power. Despite the increasing percentage of women at the University of the West Indies, it is the men who are elected to the seat of student power. At community level, whether the issue is dons or youth club leaders, there is no marginalization of males. And as far as the churches are concerned, women’s over-representation in the membership and ministering groups, but under representation in the leadership echelons is well documented (Austin-Broos 1997; Toulis 1996). The marginalization discourse always ignore these facts [Barry Chevannes 1999: 33].

To argue that women can overpower men simply on the basis of increased income or occupational status is to incorrectly presume that income or occupational dominance form the sole basis of men’s control over women [Keisha Lindsay 1997: 14].
REQUIEM FOR THE MALE MARGINALISATION THESIS IN THE CARIBBEAN: DEATH OF A NON THEORY

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

In this paper I examine the thesis of male marginalisation and the construction of Caribbean masculinity against the background of changes in Caribbean political economy and gender systems in the late twentieth century. As expressed in the works of Errol Miller, social commentators and the general public, the thesis of a wilful or deliberate marginalisation of Caribbean men is a product of changes in gender systems in the late twentieth century Caribbean. The examination of this thesis juxtaposed against changes in Caribbean political economy has to be informed by the policies introduced by Commonwealth Caribbean states since the first United Nations World Conference on Women in Mexico City and the beginning of the first decade on women, both in 1975.

Focus on Men

My analysis centres on investigating existing discourses on Caribbean men. I dissect the major contributions to the discourse on marginality and masculinity to isolate its core assumptions and concerns. I examine the assumptions of the earlier marginality thesis and contrast this with the thesis of the ‘Marginalisation of the Black Male’ as developed by Errol Miller. I identify the sharp divergences between the two notions of marginality and then present and classify the contributions of other key stakeholders to this debate. As the examination of the various analyses unfolds I make


2 The review of the literature reveals only Errol Miller as a scholar has theorized the marginalisation of the Caribbean male. Most academics (feminist or other) reject it. See Barry Chevannes 1999, Mark Figueroa 1997, Keisha Lindsay 1997, and Barbara Bailey 1997. However the Caribbean public and some academics, who admit to not researching the area, accept the thesis as an article of faith. See Dawne Bennett 13 March, 2000; Daily Nation 9 March 2000; Sunday Advocate 12 March 2000.
explicit the foundational assumptions underlying the theorizing in this field. Education (that is access, enrolment, participation, performance, and achievement) emerges as the arena in which both academic analyses and popular perception locate male marginality. In popular discussions co-education in particular has been targeted as one of the main contributing factors to the marginalisation of males, even though in several CARICOM countries co-education is not the educational norm, especially at the secondary school level. The larger context is changing economic and social roles for Caribbean women. Public commentators hold women, "responsible for the destruction of families, high rates of divorce, male economic and social marginalisation, and the comparatively poorer performance of boys and men at every educational level. Repeated newspaper articles and editorials warn of the damage done to boys by being raised in female-headed households, attending coeducational schools and being taught primarily by female teachers" [Barroteau 1998A: 437; 1994 283].

This fuels the need to continue to expose the problematic, contradictory and gendered assumptions in the region on gender equality. It is the right of every boy and girl, every woman and man, every citizen to participate and enjoy the resources of the state unencumbered by denial of access to these resources, or experience any prejudices in their distribution.

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1 These terms are critical and are defined as:
Access - the proportion of existing places in relation to the age cohort in the population.
Enrolment - Being registered and pursuing a course of study.
Participation - Active involvement.
Performance - Level of attainment in relation to set criteria.
Achievement - Academic achievement is an overall measure of the extent of participation and levels of performance in relation to the age cohort. See Centre for Gender and Development Studies, February 23-25, 2000.
MEASURING MEN’S MARGINALITY AND GENDEREquality in Caribbean Gender Systems

If Caribbean men are marginalised how can we determine this marginalisation and what would we need to know to introduce policies that would create conditions of gender justice? The concept of gender justice is pivotal to discussions of marginality. The investigation requires measures to determine male marginality and some means of assessing attempts to attain gender equality. I apply a comprehensive model of gender analysis I developed when I theorized Caribbean gender systems [Barritteau 1998B]. In this framework I define a just gender system as one in which there are no asymmetries of access to, or allocations of status, power and material resources in a society, or in the control over and the capacity to benefit from these resources. There are no hierarchies of gender identities, or the meanings Caribbean society give to masculinity and femininity. In an unjust gender system there is unequal access to and distribution of material resources and power [Barritteau 1998B: 192]. Accordingly the thesis of the marginalisation of the male implies that Caribbean gender systems are unjust for men.

In sifting through the different contributions on the marginalisation of males and Caribbean masculinity I focus on the two principal dimensions of gender systems, material and ideological relations of gender. The material dimension exposes how men or women gain access to or are allocated the material and non material resources within a state and society [Barritteau: 1998B :191]. Focussing on this makes visible the distribution of economic and political power and material resources. The ideological dimension indicates how Caribbean societies construct and maintain

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4 I thank Gemma Tang Nain for pointing out the need to add control over and benefiting from resources to a discussion of the material dimensions of gender.
beliefs and expressions of masculinity and femininity. The statements of public officials, the bureaucratic and social practices of institutions and individuals, and representations in popular culture provide evidence of what society expects or deems appropriate expressions of masculinity and femininity. Collectively these reveal the gender ideologies within a society.

I use measurements of access to and distribution of material resources and non material resources of status, power and privilege as well as an investigation of the gender ideologies informing the gender identities of Caribbean men. The analytical framework exposes the interactions of the ideological and material dimensions of gender for Caribbean men and illuminate many of the perplexing concerns surrounding contemporary expressions of masculinity. Gender ideologies reveal what Caribbean society expects of men and how men in turn construct their gender identities. These ideologies establish sexually differentiated, socially constructed boundaries for manhood and expressions of masculinity [Barritteau 1998B: 191].

In determining whether gaps exist between a formal, juridicial, gender equality and experiences that would indicate the relative disadvantages of men, this analytical frame seeks answers to the following:

♦ What are the policies, legislation, prejudices, practices that penalize or reward men?
♦ What are the deeply entrenched, policies of the state and its institutions that marginalize men?
♦ What are the contents and effects of the gender identities men subscribe to?
♦ what part do these play in expressions of masculinity that are viewed as problematic?
♦ What are the recommendations in the literature for dealing with marginality if it exists?
♦ And how do these address concerns for gender justice and equality?
In this analysis I prioritize the activities and policies of the state. Once we are interested in designing policies the activities of the state become central. If there are existing gender inequalities for men or women, actions by the state (ostensibly motivated by a desire to serve the best interests of all its citizens) would be insufficient to combat unequal gender relations. As I have argued the policies states implement may reproduce existing gender asymmetries, they may intensify them, decrease them, or even use them to advance the interests of the state but these policies will not be gender neutral. To move towards gender neutrality the Commonwealth Caribbean state must confront the inequalities that exist in distribution of resources and in the hierarchies imbedded in contemporary meanings of masculinity and femininity [Barriteau 1998B: 189]. By legislative or executive decisions the state can introduce, remove, or retard, broad sweeping policies on gender equality. It is within the pores of society gender relations are experienced and meanings internalised as to what being a man or a woman constitutes in the Caribbean. The organisation and experience of social life is the final arbiter of the reality of gender justice. The existence of marginality for Caribbean men will not be determined by the particular biases feminist or other investigators bring to research. Rather it would be revealed in the daily experiences of men.

Men’s Marginality in Families Vs The Marginalisation of the Male Thesis

The opening quotations identify divergent views on the notion of a problem that has engrossed the Commonwealth Caribbean for the past decade. If, in terms of state interests the 1980s belonged to Caribbean women, the decade of the 1990s was dominated by debates on the ideas that Caribbean men were in crisis and that they were increasingly marginalised in the policies and practices of states.
In the 1980s other independent Caribbean states joined Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Grenada in institutionalizing state mechanisms to monitor gender inequalities for women. Several countries introduced legislation to remove the more blatant aspects of institutionalized discrimination against women. Caribbean women increasingly participated in the labour force in larger numbers. This was influenced by the diversification of Caribbean economies which began in the 1960s with various industrialization strategies of development and expanded educational opportunities. Women began to penetrate professions that were once historically male dominated. A politicised, organised women’s movement, evident in the growth of several women’s organisations and NGOs with an explicit concern for women’s well being, became very vocal and very visible. Founded in 1985, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, CAFRA, became the best expression of this. By 1986, within the University of the West Indies, women’s studies programmes were emerging out of Women and Development Studies groups on the three campuses. They were themselves an outcome of the Women in The Caribbean Project, WICP, 1979-1982 and the establishment of the Women and Development, WAND, in the School of Continuing Studies, UWI in 1978.

Internationally the United Nation world conferences on women called attention to deplorable conditions existing for women and developed strategies for monitoring the improvement of these. Some donor countries made the existence of women in development programs a conditionality for qualifying for foreign aid. Others used their development agencies to promote programs to assist women. However by the end of the decade there was a fear that Caribbean states had gone too far. They had surrendered too much to the interests of women at the expense of men and the first rumblings of ‘men in crisis’ and ‘the marginalisation of the black male’ was being heard [Daily
The public rumblings were preceded by the publication in 1986 of *Marginalization of the Black Male: Insights from the Teaching Profession* by Errol Miller, Professor of Teacher Education at UWI, Mona. This was republished in 1994 and he followed this with *Men at Risk* published in 1991.

Professor Errol Miller was the first and only Caribbean scholar to theorize the idea of men at risk and the marginalization of the black Caribbean male. He offers the following as to what is happening to men in the changing political economy of the Caribbean:

*The description of Caribbean societies points to lower-strata men's marginal positions in the family, role reversal in a small but increasing number of households, boys' declining participation and performance in the educational system, the greater prospect of men inheriting their fathers' position in the social structure, the decline in the proportions of men in the highest-paying and most prestigious occupations and the decrease in men's earning power relative to women's especially in white collar occupations. While some men, particularly in the highest social strata, have been able to maintain their traditional position in the family, educational system and labour force, the majority are being eclipsed by women rising in all these areas [Miller 1991: 97].*

In the 1980s Miller developed the idea of men's marginality as victim hood, however analyses of the idea of the marginalisation of the black Caribbean male existed since the 1950s in anthropological and sociological studies of Caribbean families, however it differs substantively from Miller's conceptualization of marginality.

In a review of the earlier literature on Caribbean men and families, Christine Barrow reminds us of the anthropological and sociological roots of the idea of men's marginality which is vastly different to how it is posed today [Barrow 1998]. She states:

*Male marginality' emerged in the structural functional studies of the 'matrifocal family' among the 'lower class negroes.' Accordingly, the familial roles of men, defined as father and conjugal partner, are perceived as limited to providing economic support and occasional discipline and as woefully inadequately performed. Men are peripheral to the family - their place is everywhere [Barrow 1998: 339].*
Christine Barrow challenges the early thesis of male marginality in family life. In the process she unearths a much larger, overlooked role of men in kinship systems. She states, "Perhaps in their anxiety to disassociate themselves from the theme of matrilineal African origin, functionalists searched for men as fathers and husbands and ignored their insertions into the kinship system as brothers and uncles" [Barrow 1998: 341]. Barrow does not accept that men have been as marginal to family structures as the structural functionalists concluded. She feels these social scientists misunderstood Caribbean family structures, kinship networks, types of relationships and therefore men's roles within them.

The structural functionalist discussion on men and marginality identifies men choosing to limit their roles to that of economic provider and disciplinarian. Accordingly the three dominant premises shaping mid twentieth century notions of Caribbean masculinity are:

♦ Kinship relations which fall beyond the boundaries of nuclear units and household boundary are of no consequence

♦ That the significant male family roles are those of co-resident conjugal partner and father, and that, as such, Caribbean men are 'irresponsible'

♦ That men have no real place within the family they are 'marginal' [Barrow 1998: 343].

Barrow states the functionalists found only these roles and came to those conclusions because they confined their investigations to nuclear type family structures which are notoriously problematic for Caribbean women and men. For Christine Barrow the roles men chose involved much more expanded involvement. She cites evidence from a study of 92 black Barbadian males to challenge the premises of the functionalist literature:
Although the problem of marginal fathers and 'outside' children persist, social fathering of a few emerges at least as importantly as the biological fathering of many. Within his family, the extended family the real man strikes a balance between potentially conflicting identities, roles and relationships. Although men receive validation of their masculinity outside of the family, their masculinity is also located within it. Virility is central to their identities but some also spoke of 'resisting temptation' [Barrow 1998: 356].

Barrow highlights a significant fact that has been overlooked. A key point on understanding the earlier analysis of men's marginality, is that men chose their roles. Whether the man had a narrow or a more extended role the key point is that he exercised choice. He was the agent of his actions. He defined the expression of his masculinity to encompass roles that he sanctioned. Barrow sees men in a wider variety of roles. The structural functionalists saw only provider and disciplinarian and limited functioning in that capacity. The issue of a marginal role in families involving choice of activities or the extent of involvement is critical. By the time Errol Miller theorises marginality, the Caribbean, working class man is the victim of an overarching conspiracy that leaves him as a pawn in the hands of those conspiring for his ultimate demise.

CONSPIRACY THEORY OF MARGINALISATION AND REGRESSIVE MASCULINITY

In his 1986/1994 work, Miller states his purpose is to probe the situation of black men in America and the Caribbean and in particular to uncover the causes of the marginalization of so many black males in the society [Miller 1994: 3]. The work examines the teaching profession in Jamaica but offers generalisations for the entire Caribbean. He arrives at a number of conclusions in his case study of the marginalisation of the black male in Jamaica. He does so very cautiously by seeking to qualify each of these statements. Some of these include:
Primary school teaching and teacher education shifted from being male dominated to female dominated because 'those holding central positions in the society' wanted to restrict black men to agricultural and industrial labour occupations [Miller 1994: 125].

They wanted to loosen the hold of the church on the education system [Miller 1994: 125].

They wanted to limit the upward mobility of black men in the society [Miller 1994: 125].

They wanted to stifle the emergence of militant black educated men who could overthrow the power structure [Miller 1994: 125].

"In a real sense the black woman was used against the black man. In essence the logic seems to have been that if social advantage must be conceded to Blacks through teacher education and elementary school teaching, then allow black women such advancement instead of black men" [Miller 1994: 125].

Miller concludes that the experience of black Jamaican men in being marginalized will become the experiences of all males of subordinate groups in patriarchal societies and goes on to list seven different groups of men regionally and internationally who can expect to share the fate of black, Jamaican men. He attributes the creation of the women's lobby to the process that marginalises the black male rather than adverse conditions in women's lives forcing organization and articulation. Miller's underlying thesis seems to be that men have an a priori right to the resources of the state over and above women and attempts to correct for the explicit denial of women's political and economic relevance is designed to punish men. Miller arguments have been construed in popular discussions to mean women are to blame for all the educational problems men, especially young men, are experiencing [Miller 1994: 124-31].
Miller's theorizing has a curious mixture of fixed, static assumptions and elements of dynamism. He places the core ideas within the theory because subsequent arguments depend on their foundational structure. However he provides no justification as to why a particular course of action (pivotal to the internal coherency and therefore the working of the theory) is more preferable:

The marginalization hypothesis is that patriarchs, men of the dominant group, in defending their groups' interests from challenges from the men of other groups in society, will relax their patriarchal closure over education, employment, earning and status symbols, thus allowing their women and women of the challenging groups most of the opportunities that would have gone to the men of the challenging group. The double purpose of this strategy is to punish the male challengers by keeping them in their traditional place and to defuse the challenges by dividing the challenging group at the most fundamental level of social organization, the family. The unintended consequences are: the creation of circumstances which would lead to the liberation of women and the regression of men of the challenging group to patriarchy practised in the personalistic idiom [Miller 1991: 166].

It would be useful if Miller could explain why it is more satisfying to reward women of the other group. He also needs to clarify the cohesion that his hypothesis implies in the family structures of the working class, the challenging group.

Miller blames international development institutions, UN agencies and the World Bank for marginalizing black men in Jamaica:

Certainly UNESCO, the World Bank, US AID, and CIDA, which aided and assisted successive Jamaican governments since 1962 in expanding education, cannot stand aloof from the fact that their interventions have left black males in Jamaica more marginal in the Jamaican society than their grandfathers were. The full implications of this are still to be experienced. The recency of these interventions makes it still early to realize fully the entire extent of the social repercussions for family life, employment, religion, relations between the sexes, and the social structure [Miller 1994: 124-31].

In a recent paper Miller states that the essence of his work is not to deny feminist scholarship in respect to findings and claims concerning the marginalisation of women within patriarchy. Rather it is to add the dimension of the marginalisation of men of subordinate groups within societies in
which race and class have been actively contested as criteria for organizing society [Miller 1997: 36]. In this essay Miller has modified his earlier position. His conclusions bear repeating since they are unknown and are closer to feminist analyses of gender relations in the region. He states he does not hold the view that male under achievement is caused by the pedagogical approaches of female teachers in schools or the socialization practices of single mothers in the homes (These are all popular arguments in the Caribbean). Rather he views the feminization of teaching, the matrifocal forms of an increasing number of households, the poor participation of boys in school and the underachievement of men at the workplace as symptoms of the intense conflict and competition among various groups that comprise society. Miller's final statement is that the observed patterns are not the result of the absence or presence of male role models but the changing definition and apportionment of the roles themselves [Miller 1997: 44].

He prioritizes race/racism in his analysis and insists black women were deliberately used against black men. [Miller 1994: 129]. Miller attributes to black male teachers the potential to liberate Caribbean societies. He identified them as the targeted enemies of racist, white elites who denied them social, economic and political power by giving this to black female teachers. Without citing the research findings he states, “Co-education in Jamaica and the Caribbean cannot continue to ignore the research findings that conclude that both boys and girls perform better academically in single sex schools” [Miller 1994: 127]. In so doing he identifies co-education as the main contributing factor to the marginalisation of men in the Caribbean. However this observation raises further questions. If girls perform better in single sex schools, why do they continue to out perform boys in co-ed institutions as the popular beliefs hold?
Whether this is so or not the majority of people believe this. The belief in this idea is now so deep seated it is within the realm of popular ideology. In Barbados two male principals, one of whom was educated at a co-educational school, recently called for a study of the real effects of co-education on boys. “I don’t think that these single sex schools were prepared enough for the change. I’ll not stick my neck out and say it is co-ed because I’ve been in co-ed for many years and I never felt intimidated by girls” [Daily Nation 27 March, 2000: 5].

Miller's arguments have been and continue to be used by the Caribbean public to advocate a return to single sex schools, closing women’s bureaux, excluding girls from extra curricular programs, and blaming women for high divorce rates and a variety of social ills.

Economist and Senior Lecturer, UWI Mona, Mark Figueroa proposes in place of the marginalization thesis, the notion of a gender privileging dialectic which explains the experience of male educational underachievement as an ironic outcome of historic male privileging [Figueroa 2000: 1]. Figueroa analyses data from secondary and tertiary level institutions (in Jamaica?) and integrates into his analysis questions of male gender socialization, expectations, self-image and sexuality. His premise is that historically the ‘male gender’ has been privileged in Caribbean society. Accordingly men have occupied a wider social space, controlled more resources, maintained a higher social position and exercised greater power [Figueroa 2000: 1-2]. The dialectic of privilege comes about because, “inevitably the underprivileged carve out for themselves spaces which they hegemonise and within which the freedom of the privileged group is restricted”[Figueroa 2000: 2]. In a discussion of gendered educational achievement Figueroa offers some complexities on educational performance:

♦ Male students generally underachieve with a widening gap at the higher levels.
There is a shift from an overall dominance of males in practically all fields to a situation where women first come to dominate in the least prestigious of the humanities based disciplines, then in practically all the more arts based disciplines, and ultimately achieve parity in the natural sciences, though with a greater preponderance of females in the 'softer' sciences.

This reversal from general male over achievement to under achievement is particularly exaggerated in the English-speaking Caribbean (especially Jamaica).

Despite all [of] this men continue to dominate the top of the academic pyramid [Figueroa 2000: 3-4].

In the search for a solution Figueroa cautions we must first pose the problem correctly. He explains that the issue has been posed as one of male under achievement but in reality the problem is one of highly differentiated gender achievements which need to be understood in relation to an underlying history of male privileging. "The solution therefore lies in challenging the structures of male privileging that foster gender inequalities and result in negative outcomes for men and women, boys and girls. Approaches based on the male marginalisation perspective are likely ultimately to exacerbate the problem [Figueroa 2000: 8]."

A FEMINIST RESPONSE: WHAT MARGINALIZATION?

Keisha Lindsay’s work, *Caribbean Male: An Endangered Species?* [Lindsay 1997] represents a systematic, sustained critique of all the arguments Miller offers in his theorization of marginalization. She declares a re-analysis of the data surrounding women’s participation in the family, the workplace and the classroom, casts doubts on both the extent and significance of
women’s participation in these arenas [Lindsay 1997: 1]. Further Lindsay maintains that male marginalization stems not from any concrete material reality, but from a gender biased methodological frame which recognizes some data sources and ignores, or invalidates, others [Lindsay 1997: 1]. She suggests that far from advancing any fundamental reordering of gender constructs, the marginalization thesis perpetuates the age old patriarchal mandate - that of woman as ‘lesser,’ inferior being [Lindsay 1997: 1]. Lindsay advises that to make sense of Caribbean women’s apparent dominance over men in education, employment and the family the answer could be found in the wealth of statistical data addressed by neither Miller nor other proponents of the marginalization thesis [Lindsay 1997: 1]. In response to Miller using the family to locate the origins of men’s marginalization. Lindsay effectively destabilizes the seeming coherency of Miller’s assumptions [Lindsay 1997: 4].

**Women and the Family**

Lindsay states the Caribbean family has long been characterized as matrifocal. Miller and others give as evidence the number of female headed households in the region. However, Lindsay comments that these scholars often fail to recognize there is no implicit correlation between female headship and actual social and economic power within the family structure or in the wider society. Lindsay advises that headship status itself is not economically empowering for Caribbean women, and that the opposite may be true. She reported that in Jamaica households headed by women were more likely to experience economic deprivation. While female heads are equally involved in work as male heads the pattern of their occupational distribution is markedly different [Lindsay 1997: 5].
Quoting Joycelin Massiah, she notes that the simple notion of headship ignores the process by which decisions are made in families - that the status of household head may not correspond with the actual social and psychological power which women have in decision making processes [Lindsay 1997: 4].

**Gender Ideology and Education**

By focussing entirely on enrollment levels of females relative to males in the educational system, Lindsay charges that Miller failed to recognise the perpetuation of patriarchal sex-role stereotyping at all levels of the educational system [Lindsay 1997: 6]. Citing research by Jeanette Morris to substantiate sex-role stereotyping, Lindsay asserts that more girls than boys sit exams in sciences but are obtaining a lower proportion of the higher grades. “Girls obtain a larger number of grades 3, 4, and 5 which suggests that they are attaining a minimum level of competence but are failing to reach an acceptable standard for continuation of their study in science” [Morris 1989: 3; quoted in Lindsay 1997: 7]. Lindsay declares that Morris’s research challenges Miller’s assertion that, “since the 1980s girls have begun to perform better in sciences at the ‘A’ levels than boys” [Miller 1991: 78; quoted in Lindsay 1997: 7].

**Women in the Workplace**

Lindsay contends that the belief that greater female participation in the labour force poses an implicit challenge to male domination is flawed. “While women are participating in the labour force in greater numbers, their participation continues to be shaped by sex-role stereotyping [Lindsay 1997: 8]. She provides evidence of occupational stereotyping at the UWI that is also supported by Figueroa [1997] and Hamilton [1999]. She cautions that when Miller warns that women are making significant inroads into formerly, white-collar masculine, managerial and professional occupations, his statement obscures the fact that traditional female occupations such as teaching and nursing
account for the majority of female professionals [Lindsay 1997: 8]. She adds Miller’s marginalization thesis is correct in asserting that Caribbean women are decreasingly involved in agriculture. What he does not acknowledge is that male participation in agriculture is also on the decline and that women who remain are at levels below that of men [Lindsay 1997:10].

Keisha Lindsay concludes that the marginalization of the black male thesis is fundamentally flawed at the epistemological level. Accordingly its limitations is not just in its inadequate [and selective] use of existing data but in the way it systematically [and wilfully] invalidates women and women’s experiences [Lindsay 1997:10]. I go further. Miller’s theorization gives to men as a group a priori rights to whatever resources are available whether of the state or civil society. If citizens are distinguished from non citizens by ‘rights,’ a foundational assumption in Miller’s theorization is the belief that male citizens have a right of first born citizen, the right of primogeniture within the Caribbean state.

A COMPENSATORY APPROACH TO CARIBBEAN MASCULINITY

Professor Barry Chevannes, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Mona Campus of UWI has written extensively on Jamaican and Caribbean masculinity but he does not accept the hypothesis of the marginalization of the black or other male [Barry Chevannes 1999: 33]. What concerns Chevannes primarily is the negative stereotypes of Jamaican and Caribbean masculinities most of which he sees as grossly exaggerated or contradictory of the realities he has discovered in a range of national and regional research initiatives. He has produced considerable research on Caribbean men and fatherhood, sexuality, and the construction of masculine gender identities. His findings force a nuancing and often a rethinking of some of the generalizations of men and gender relations.
Where Miller sees Caribbean men as the victims of a conspiracy of elite male power brokers, international development institutions and a compliant even if powerless, pawn-like women’s movement, Chevannes identify the problematic character of Caribbean masculinities as originating in the gender identities men cultivate and the deliberate distortions of men’s social behaviour. He attributes part of the responsibility for these negative stereotypes to the women’s movement. I have labelled his work compensatory and corrective because it is dedicated to:

- Redeeming and correcting what he identifies as distortions of masculinity
- Creating a gender agenda for men.

With Janet Brown he states:

We as project directors were reinforced in our belief that Caribbean men need their own ‘gender agenda.’ The word ‘gender’ in the minds of most of our informants has become equivalent with women’s issues. Discussion of gender usually implies redress of women’s experiences of patriarchy and subordination with men cast as the perpetrators by their direct action or by default [Brown and Chevannes 1998: 3].

In 1998 Brown and Chevannes published a report on a two year research project which they conducted in six communities in Jamaica, Guyana, and Dominica. The project sought to correct a deficiency in the literature on men’s family roles and provide material which would facilitate an understanding of gender related issues within Caribbean communities [Brown and Chevannes 1998: 6]. They identified five clusters of tensions and distrust that emerged in discussions between women and men:

- Double standards of fidelity for men and women and the modes of behaviour which result
- Meanings ascribed to ‘manhood’ and their inherent contradictions
- Challenges to the ‘natural order’ of male headship posed by economic hardships, women’s liberation, media images, and the incursions of North American values and norms, with their resultant power struggles
- Issues concerning family finances
Mixed messages about men’s roles in the domestic division of labour; debates on levels of domestic violence [Brown and Chevannes 1998: 7].

The researchers identified eight areas of evidence to substantiate their conclusion that men possess a detailed understanding of their contributions and perceptions of their roles in family life. This corresponds with Christine Barrow’s research on Barbadian men. However there are several contradictory areas of the findings and analysis which, while not eroding the contributions of the overall observations, indicate a need to rethink the certainty of some of their positions. These are especially apparent when they attempt to articulate a different (that is beyond the conventional, stereotypical) understandings of the behaviour and roles of boys and men in families. For example, ‘the mother-son bond’ is often perceived as having the effect of sons remaining ‘sons’ as adults, while daughters are raised to become independent, resourceful helpmates. I have heard public commentators blame women for coddling sons and sowing the seeds for irresponsible adult partners. Yet Browne and Chevannes found that abandoned male children far exceed girls, and that street children are more often male. Where is the mother-son bond for these abandoned boys? [Brown and Chevannes 1998: 9]. Their research findings indicate that the gender ideologies governing the division of labour transcend religion and culture. In an Indo-Guyanese Hindu community and a rural, Christian, Black Jamaican community they found identical, sharp, gendered divisions of labour affecting boys and girls [Brown and Chevannes 1998:17-21].

They summarised their research findings in three broad clusters:

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5 However the purpose of this paper is not to interrogate the inconsistencies in the literature but rather to summarize its contributions to understanding marginality and masculinity. This will be done elsewhere. See, Eudine Barriteau, Requiem for the Male Marginalisation Thesis in the Caribbean: Death of a Non Theory. Centre for Gender and Development Studies, Cave Hill, (forthcoming).
Caribbean Manhood

Manhood is clearly defined but increasingly difficult to achieve and comprised almost exclusively of three elements

- Sexuality/Sexual identity
- Man’s primary role as economic provider
- Scriptural Authority for man as family head

Man/woman Relationships

Man/woman Relations are characterized by high degrees of distrust and disillusionment

- Differing views on male-female fidelity
- Man should have ultimate power and authority
- Expectations of men as primary source of family finances
- Division of domestic labour across traditional gender lines
- Domestic violence results from broken relationship contracts

Parent/Child Relations and Practices

Traditional child rearing strategies are becoming less effective

- At the core of traditional strategies is the concept, ‘tie the heifer, loose the bull’
- Gender distinctions and assumptions are central to most child-rearing strategies
- Children as insurance
- Domestic chores commonly shared along gender lines
- Leisure activities more acceptable for boys
- Social skills/values invested more in girls
- Disciplinary practices vary
- Physical affection reserved for younger girls, but as they grow older, affection from fathers - and particularly stepfathers - is often seen as inappropriate
- Contradictory sexual identity messages

Of the three main areas sexual behaviour, education and crime [Chevannes 1999], Chevannes examines on the question of what is wrong with Jamaican males in the 1999 Grace Kennedy Lecture, I focus on the first two. Chevannes concludes with some unexpected findings and imaginative
recommendations. These underscore his position that men are not marginalised even though there are areas of intervention necessary to alter negative inputs into the cultivation of men’s gender identities.

**Sexual Behaviour and Fatherhood**

On male sexual behaviour he accepts, “that in Jamaica multiple partnerships are a feature of male sexual behaviour” [Chevannes 1999: 5]. In a 1985 survey he conducted, “I found that only fifty percent of the males I interviewed acknowledged that they had more than one partner. However, many more indicated that they would have liked to have had more, implying that lack of finance was the limiting factor”[Chevannes 1999: 5-6]. In a 1991 survey with Claudia Chambers they found women also had multiple partners and these were motivated by the need for money and feelings of sexual independence.

Chevannes states the available data does not substantiate the charge that Jamaican men are sexually irresponsible. The data does not reveal any information about sexual responsibility or irresponsibility. Instead the data generated by his research show that men may provide higher levels of material and moral support for pregnant partners than is popularly perceived [Chevannes 1999: 9]. He rejects the idea that it is characteristic of Jamaican men to run from commitment of any sort in particular, paternity. In other words men may have multiple sexual partners but it did not mean they did not want to father their children [Chevannes 1999: 5]. He found that fatherhood was an important dimension of the construction of male gender identity which men regarded with pride [Chevannes 1999: 7]. The two key components of fatherhood his respondents identified, ‘providing’ and discipline, are the same two elements the structural functionalists defined as men key roles in families over forty five years ago.
EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE

On education Chevannes revealed some startling findings that contradict many of Miller’s assertions and also popular beliefs within the region on male performance, male underachievement and education. His findings validate or support research conducted by Barbara Bailey [1997], Mark Figueroa [1997; 2000], Marlene Hamilton [1999], and Keisha Lindsay [1997]. Chevannes questions the general perception that:

Females are outperforming males. Females are more conscientious in their school attendance, graduate with higher marks and are preparing themselves better for life by going on to institutions of higher learning. There they win proportionately more honours and graduate in larger numbers than the males [Chevannes 1999: 10].

He discovered higher attrition rates of boys throughout the school system and higher attrition ratios for all students in rural schools. Attendance and attrition was directly affected by the type of school, location and the sex of the student with boys in rural all-age schools at the greatest possible disadvantage [Chevannes 1999: 11]. He concluded there are gender biases operating in the selection of certain subjects as against others, and that there is no evidence to substantiate the belief that girls routinely outperform boys, but ample evidence of gender performance both ways in a number of subject areas [Chevannes 1999: 15].

Chevannes notes that although more females than males sat the Caribbean Examination Council, CXC, examinations in 1997 young men performed slightly or clearly better than young women in nineteen of thirty-five subjects. They received more grade 1 and grade 2 passes [Chevannes 1999: 12]. The nineteen subjects are; Agricultural Science (double award), Agricultural Science (single

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6These are all academics at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus working in different disciplines but arriving at very similar conclusions on the intersection of gender and education.
award), Agricultural Science (crops and soils), Art and Craft, Building Technology, Chemistry, Clothing and Textiles, Electrical/Technology, Electricity/Electronics, French, Home Management, Information Technology, Integrated Science, Mathematics, Metals, Principle of Accounts, Principle of Business, Technical Drawing, and Woods. Young women performed marginally or slightly better in sixteen subjects; Art, Biology, Caribbean History, Craft, English Language, English Literature, Food and Nutrition, Geography, Mechanical Engineering Technology, Office Procedures, Physics, Religious Education, Shorthand, Social Studies, Spanish, and Typewriting. However when Grade 3 passes are added young women performed better in five more subjects. Chevannes correctly concludes that the argument that females are outperforming males cannot be substantiated by the outcome of the 1996-1997 CXC examinations, especially since Grade 3 is still not accepted as a pass. "In any case if girls were in fact better achievers than boys, this should have shown itself in the higher levels as well [Chevannes 1999: 14].

However Chevannes makes an observation that I find problematic and I disagree with. "I would like to propose that under-performance of the males in English Language has far more important consequences for them than the under-performance in Mathematics for the females"[Chevannes 1999: 15]. English Language is a foundational subject for all subjects requiring much reading and sound language skills. Similarly Mathematics is a foundational subject for the sciences and many women who do not hold certification in high school mathematics cannot proceed to careers in medicine and other related fields. Chevannes comment is even stranger when he admits that the English results for girls are also routinely weak. [Chevannes 1999: 15-16].
In a 1997 study Barbara Bailey reached similar conclusions about the performance of boys and girls in secondary schools. She stated the results indicate the typical sex-linked patterns reported universally:

In the academic grouping, boys outperformed girls in all except two of the science-based subjects. In the case of Physics and Chemistry there were slight differentials of 1.15 and 0.31 respectively in favour of girls. Boys as a group are therefore outstripping girls in the sciences. The reverse was true for the Humanities where girls outperformed boys in the seven subjects subsumed in this grouping. In the technical grouping the sex-linked patterns remains almost intact. In the male dominated grouping (Technical Drawing, Woods, Metals, Electrical Technology, Building Technology, Mechanical Engineering Technology), as is expected males outperformed girls in all subjects except for Building Technology where the performance differential was 3.71 in favour of girls. This difference is, however, almost insignificant given that only 43 girls as against 460 boys sat the examination [Bailey 1997: 28].

The reverse was true for the Humanities where girls outperformed boys in the seven subjects subsumed in this grouping. In the technical grouping the sex-linked patterns remains almost intact. In the male dominated grouping (Technical Drawing, Woods, Metals, Electrical Technology, Building Technology, Mechanical Engineering Technology), as is expected males outperformed girls in all subjects except for Building Technology where the performance differential was 3.71 in favour of girls. This difference is, however, almost insignificant given that only 43 girls as against 460 boys sat the examination [Bailey 1997: 28].

Mark Figueroa links the recent interest in ‘Male Academic Under performance’ to the emergence of women in non traditional academic and professional areas. He declares that:

A lot of the popular discussions and some of the research on “Male Academic Under Performance” have been rooted in male supremacist consciousness. That is it is taken for granted that males have the right to the preeminent positions they have held in patriarchal societies. As such when women come to challenge men in a field that men formally dominated, this is a matter for concern. If the field has no prestige attached to it or if it is in decline then it can be handed over to women with little or no regret [Figueroa 1997: 5].
Like Chevannes and Bailey, he concludes it is not true to say that males are underperforming at all levels and with respect to all courses of study. He states an examination of statistics for entries and passes at various levels of the educational system will demonstrate that the main characteristic evident is that boys and girls perform differently in different areas [Figueroa 1997: 2].

Figueroa makes three critical observations:

♦ Males have been underperforming for years in certain areas and continue to do so but those areas are never a matter of concern

♦ When male academic under performance is being discussed concern is never expressed in the areas where their performance is weakest

♦ Startling areas of female academic under performance receive little or no comment from those who are headlining male academic under performance.

♦ In a discipline where females are getting more passes than males the spread of passes within each sex group is often better for males. At the CXC level more girls sit and pass mathematics, chemistry and biology but of the boys who sit and pass the examination a higher percentage of the boys achieve grade 1 passes [Figueroa 1997: 2-4].

He notes that at the CXC level female entries in such crucial technological subjects as technical drawing and electricity/electronics are still below 10 percent and even lower for technical vocational subjects such as metal, woods, mechanical engineering and building technology.

Tertiary Level

Chevannes observes that the deeply rooted gender biases in subject selection discovered at the secondary level continues at the tertiary level. He examines data from the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies and the University of Technology, Jamaica. Men pursue the more
technologically and vocationally based subjects while women pursued the ones in the humanities or liberal arts. In data he collected on the enrolment pattern for men at the University of Technology between 1996-7 Chevannes found male dominance in Building Architecture and Engineering while the areas dominated by women are Commerce, Hospitality and Food Science, Science and Health Science, and Technical Education. For the period under review men made up 45 to 48 per cent of the enrollment [Chevannes 1999:16]. At the University of the West Indies (Mona Campus) more men enrolled in the faculty of Pure and Applied Science while, up until the mid 1990s, women predominated in the faculty of Education and Arts, followed by Social Science. Now Social Sciences predominate for women. More significantly, in terms of achievement Chevannes reports that in the 1990s, “Men have been graduating with consistently higher rates of first-class honours but consistently lower rates of upper and lower second-class honours” [Chevannes 1999:17]. Chevannes adds the only way it can be said that women are outperforming men at UWI is in outperforming men gaining second class honours. Again this would prove a difficult fact for many people to accept given the widespread belief that women dominate in numbers and performance throughout the UWI. Another significant observation is that by narrowing their interest to pursuing tertiary level education in the technical and applied subjects, men, in far greater proportions are denying themselves the overall benefits of higher education. “Put another way, tertiary education is Jamaica is not sufficiently attractive to them” [Chevannes 1999:17]. The implication for policy makers is how to make university education attractive to men.

Mark Figueroa points out that at UWI women constitute fewer that 20 per cent of undergraduate registrations in engineering, while men constitute fewer than 20 per cent of undergraduate registrations in arts and education and in the case of nursing this falls below 10 per
cent. He states this is where male academic under performance is at its most dramatic but this is not seen as a cause for concern.

Pro Vice Chancellor Marlene Hamilton examined whether or not the University of the West Indies is a progressive university for women. She considered the question of women’s access to UWI as students and as academic and or administrative staff to attempt to gauge the impact they have had, or are having, particularly within the university setting [Hamilton 1999: 3]. Hamilton concludes, during the academic year 1998/99 there were no female Deans and there have been only five in the fifty year history of the university, of 68 heads of departments seven are women, of the 115 professors twelve were women [Hamilton 1999: 23]. Also looking internally at the UWI, Figueroa notes that although women have made up the majority of the students since 1982/83 in 1993 men held 92 per cent of the appointments at the level of reader and professor and 83 per cent of all appointments at the level of senior lecturer [Figueroa 1997: 2]. He adds that in 1997/98 only 11 per cent of readers and professors were women and this was so despite the fact that women had comprised more than 35 per cent of the student body for over 40 of the UWI fifty years of existence [Figueroa 2000: 3].

Barbara Bailey examined the awarding of undergraduate degrees at The St. Augustine and Cave Hill campuses for the 1994/95 academic year. In keeping with the enrolment pattern, 57 percent of women gained degrees to 43 percent men. The women were clustered in the Faculty of Arts and General Studies and the majority of men graduated from the faculty of Engineering and Social Sciences [Bailey 1997: 29]. Finally, as it relates to analysing data from UWI, Figueroa states a major defect is that we do not really know how many of Caribbean nationals are studying abroad and their
gender ratios. "It is possible that more men go abroad and as a result the gender imbalance among tertiary students is not as strong as it appears at first sight" [Figueroa 1997: 9].

MIGRATION, MARGINALITY AND MASCUINITY IN THE REGION

In addition to the problems posed by attrition and low attendance particularly of boys in rural areas, Chevannes comments on a problem in Jamaica that I have found particularly worrisome in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. He states, "I wish to call attention to the veritable army of fourteen and fifteen-year olds who are, as it were, demobilized every year, but who, unlike Caesar's army, are without land or pay, and must fend for themselves [Chevannes 1999: 11]. In Jamaica this group of students are too young to enter vocational academies or the country's national youth service. According to Chevannes they are socially immature with no fully developed skills, entering a society unprepared for absorbing them [Chevannes 1999: 11]. In Barbados this group is 16 years old and a fresh group is disgorged into the society every July. Mass migration outlets for Caribbean unskilled labour have dried up. Many of the young men in this group of school leavers turn up on the blocks, unemployed and eventually unemployable.

Elsewhere I have argued that contemporary Caribbean governments seem unaware of the significance of migration in Caribbean societies [Barriteau 2000 (forthcoming)]. They seem unaware because there is no public policy that explicitly addresses this. Migration has been an institutionalized aspect of Caribbean society [Momsen 1987: 346] and male migration has had a significant impact on the character of Caribbean society. Male migration dominated from the 1900s to the 1950s. It contributed to the growth of female headed households, women's comparative economic autonomy and the much misunderstood phenomenon of matrifocality in the region.
The World Bank reported in 1993 that the Caribbean region has the highest rate of migration in the world (Mondesire & Dunn 1995: 11) underscoring the critical economic role of migration in Caribbean societies. Perhaps the most singular contribution is the fact that migration absorbed surplus labor and acted as a safety valve for social pressures on narrow state sectors with restrictive welfare and employment generating capacities.

Caribbean governments have yet to devise a comprehensive policy to deal with the thousands of young women and men who swell the ranks of the unemployed yearly and who unlike their grandparents’ generation cannot as easily migrate in search of work [Bariteau 2000 (forthcoming)]. When Miller states that young Jamaican men are even more marginal in their societies than their grandfathers were, he does not factor in this critical dimension but instead blames the investments of international development institutions in building the educational infrastructure in Jamaica. Chevannes is aware of both the gender and social and economic dimension of this challenge to the stability of Caribbean societies, but more immediately the future of these young men and women.

**MALE GENDER IDENTITIES AND CHANGING GENDER ROLES**

In the construct of masculinity and the gender identities males acquire as they journey through relations of gender to learn what is acceptable behaviour for boys and men, there are many conflicting and contradictory messages. Brown and Chevannes identified some of these in their 1998 work. Prevailing gender ideologies define masculinity in opposition to femininity and rank the feminine as less valuable. Accordingly, in popular perception women have everything to gain by acquiring characteristics and professions associated with masculinity while men have everything to
lose. This is why Figueroa states no one cares if males under perform in humanities or nursing since gender ideologies posit these as feminine areas of study. Boys who want to succeed in an area defined as feminine is seen as behaving in a “gender inappropriate fashion” and also displaying a lack of ambition [Figueroa 1997: 14].

However more insidious and damaging for young men is the notion that academic work itself is feminine and to like to study, to enjoy books, to want to do well in schools is ‘girlish,’ effeminate and not the stuff that makes good men. Even while many public commentators are bemoaning girls taking over in academic performance none of them say to young men you have to put in an effort of one hundred per cent at school. You have to take your school life seriously. Instead they concentrate on demonizing co-education, female teachers, female headed house holds and women in visible, high profile, professions. They do want boys and young men to perform better but by sending contradictory messages they create a view of a wounded masculinity that seems an almost inevitable fate. Speaking at the opening of the All Saints Primary School, Prime Minister Owen Arthur of Barbados, told his audience he knew every cave, gully and field and when every fruit tree was in season. “It seems to me that boys need to be allowed to develop their identity at a time when girls are developing more quickly than themselves” [Barbados Advocate 19 January, 1999: 3A]. A June 24th newspaper article is headlined, “PM: Schools Need Proper Male Figures.” It would have been helpful for the Prime Minister to have told the pupils of his alma mater that in addition to enjoying the caves and the fruit trees as a boy, he also studied very hard especially since he has been an academic member of staff of the UWI, before becoming Prime Minister [Barbados Advocate 24 June, 1999 : 4].
The significance of these beliefs about what is appropriate expressions of masculinities do not remain at the realm of ideology but instead have material outcomes. These affect women and men at the individual level and cumulatively either impede or facilitate societal change. Barry Chevannes correctly states that Caribbean males and females are socialized to identify domestic (reproductive) work as women's work and activities outside of the domestic sphere as male. That is the reality of the existing gender ideologies. It also represents an area that has to change. This change is not because of any feminist agenda to emasculate men, or effeminize boys, but because changes in Caribbean political economy and gender systems in the last thirty years require a reorganization of work in the domestic sphere. After centuries of denial and exclusion Caribbean women have gained entry into the public sphere and are acquiring skills in areas that were once, legally or in terms of ingrained prejudices, out of bounds. As a sex group they already have skills to perform effectively in the domestic sphere. Boys and men must acquire and value those skills as necessary for the organization of life.

I do not agree with Chevannes characterization of boys performing chores associated with the household as 'female' tasks. Similarly that when girls perform chores traditionally associated with the 'outside' that these are 'male' tasks. I also find his naming the performance of these as 'cross-gender tasks' problematic. I am establishing a distinction between how phenomena are perceived in society and how intellectuals explain or theorize their existence. These chores do not belong to females or males and their performance should not be conceptualized as cross-gender. They are chores that are required for the running of households. As Gemma Tang Nain points out, boys and

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7For a thorough analysis of this, see Eudine Barritteau, 1998B.
men should be socialized to do these tasks since their performance is burdensome to women and girls; they should be shared among all those who benefit from their completion.

One of the major contributions of theorizing gender and the methodologies of gender analysis was to break apart that simplistic unity between biology and an inherent, static, naturalised sex identity. Gender analysis shows that several characteristics, beliefs, and behaviours assumed to be biologically and rigidly male or female are instead product of gender ideologies that serve particular purposes at particular junctures in a society's development. The best proof of that is the changes in the gender identities of Caribbean women over the course of the twentieth century. As Lindsay and Figueroa demonstrate, the discourse on male marginalisation is fed more by the fear of the changes in the gender identities of Caribbean women than any solid evidence that men are being marginalized in Caribbean society, even though there are micro and meso-levels for policy interventions. If what it means to be a woman was fixed in biology it would not have been possible for women to undertake the multiplicity of roles and responsibilities they now do. In disagreeing with the suggestion by the male marginalization approach that special incentives should be created to attract boys into schools, Figueroa notes, “the evidence shows that it is the readiness of girls and women to be flexible and adjust their identities that has enabled them to benefit from new opportunities” [Figueroa 2000: 9].

The challenge facing us as a society is to have boys and men, girls and women also see masculinity as a much more fluid concept than is currently understood.

Much of what is considered to be appropriate expressions of masculinity is burdensome to men especially when economic circumstances prevent their fulfilment. The ideology of man-the-breadwinner is pervasive even when difficult to meet, and even though Caribbean women have also been performing those roles. It is necessary that boys and girls be socialized to see the significance
of everyone contributing to the well being of the family. They should come to believe that contributions to the well being of the family include women as breadwinners and men as nurturers. The irony is that in the Caribbean is that this situation already exists and has existed for a long time, but the ideology lingers that this is an aberration. More and more Caribbean economies are being driven by tourism. Several jobs in this sector will seem like women’s work especially at the lower end skill level. It is important that Caribbean young men and women do not exclude themselves from gaining skills in new or expanding economic sectors because of archaic, erroneous understandings of gender identities.

SUMMARY OF THE ANALYSIS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Miller Male Marginalization Thesis

The first point to note is the ‘Marginalization of the Male’ thesis should be correctly termed, ‘The Miller Male Marginalization Thesis.’ Outside of his attempt to theorize the marginalization of the black Caribbean male, no other writer or author has done so. Several public commentators and Men’s Rights advocates have accepted his assumptions and premises as given and contributed

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analyses based on his foundational arguments, but they have not tried to devise an explanatory framework for male marginalization.

**Need for Regional Research and Data Base**

All the research of the marginalization of the male has been done on Jamaica. The contributors to either side of the debate based their research on Jamaican data and even when they offer generalizations applicable to the rest of the Caribbean the data base is Jamaica. While there are commonalities there are certain economic, political, and social features of Jamaica that are not duplicated elsewhere. The theoretical and empirical arguments contributed by all these researchers are valid. However I do believe that before any new policy can be designed the region needs a data base that fills the gaps on broad issues on men and masculinity in the region. Although there is a near universal dismissal of co-education not all Caribbean countries have coeducational schools throughout the educational systems. For example Barbados is almost totally co-ed from the primary through tertiary levels, Trinidad and Tobago has significantly less co-educational school systems. The elite or top secondary schools are single sex. How are the girls performing in Trinidad and Tobago in comparison to the boys? Rural school settings will not have the same implications in Antigua that it would have in Jamaica yet what we now know about rural schools increasing the likelihood of higher dropout rates and lower attendance is based on Jamaica. Historically the impact of migration has been greater or manifests itself differently in different territories. Whereas all Caribbean people migrate, smaller territories like Carriacou, and Montserrat, experience a different type of migration. Women have traditionally played the breadwinner roles in the absence of seafaring men in the former. In the latter the population has been dislocated because
of the eruption of the Soufriere volcano. How has this impacted on men, women and families there? A phenomenon of the Caribbean in the 1980s is the greater migration of women in search of work [Mondesire and Dunn 1995]. Have men taken up the caregiver roles in families? The societies in the British Dependencies or Overseas Territories are affected by regional migration, the implications for women and men are different and of course, for children. Are men of those territories disadvantaged by these migration patterns and by the laws governing citizenship, belinger status and the right of children to inherit their father’s property?

Fathers and Spouses

Barry Chevannes has theorized fatherhood in particular and Caribbean masculinity in general to produce a more complex, richer understanding of how Caribbean men construct their gender identities. He concludes that fatherhood is a critical component of men’s gender identity. They regard it with pride. Two constituent elements revolve around supplying. As fathers they believe their role is to supply resources for their children and to provide discipline. There may be contradictions in that the actual delivery of these may fall short of their expectations of fulfilment. The key point is that men believe this is what makes a man a father and in turn reinforce manhood. The core expressions of fatherhood that Chevannes discovered were observed by anthropologists some four decades ago. This indicates that these features do reinforce some core self identified beliefs about masculinity and fatherhood as an expression of that.

Men’s relationship with women as boyfriends, partners, husbands or spouses is still a very problematic area and in need of serious investigation and intervention strategies. Men need to begin to identify being responsible, loving partners as part of their gender identities. Barrow, Chevannes and the structural functionalists uncovered how critical the role of father is to men. There is a great
deal of ambivalence around the role of lover, partner, friend. Not enough Caribbean children see their mothers and fathers negotiating life’s problems. Both women and men need to learn how to build stable relationships based on trust and respect. Just as Fathers Incorporated have been helping men negotiate fatherhood there is need for a similar intervention to help men negotiate ‘partnering’ from a position of trust and security. Many men assume it is their right to engage in multiple relationships with financial capability being the only restraint [Chevannes 1999]. The double standards in society guarantee greater tolerance and acceptance for men doing this even though has Chevannes as pointed out women also engage in multiple partnering.

**Differentiated Gender Achievements**

Mark Figueroa theorizes the gender privileging dialectic to replace Miller’s Marginalization thesis. Although he uses the term ‘male underachievement’, Figueroa suggests the problem is really one of highly differentiated gender achievement. He is the only male scholar to explicitly call for solutions that challenge the structures of male privilege that encourage inequalities and result in negative outcomes for women.

Errol Miller and many public commentators in the region are convinced Caribbean men are marginalized. Barry Chevannes, Mark Figueroa, and Keisha Lindsay are convinced they are not. Chevannes and Figueroa isolate specific disadvantages males experience with the education system. Figueroa also points out that women’s ongoing negative experiences are ignored. In one of the opening quotation Chevannes poses and answers the question are men marginalized? And answers. “Certainly not.” [Chevannes 1999: 33].

In attempting to ensure that young men participate fully in reaping the benefits of education and be a socially developed, well rounded citizen we should be careful about generalizing from particular
disadvantages and prejudices that may exist, to a generalized position that boys and men are doomed to conditions of marginality and irrelevance in Caribbean societies. Chevannes reminds us that there is high visibility of male unemployment. There are proportionately more unemployed young women than there are young men. Unemployed young women do not hang out on the block or town squares. Neither do unemployed young men spend free time working in their yards or around the homes where they live. A well kept secret or a point that for ideological reasons of gender is less interesting, is the fact that female unemployment in Caribbean countries historically has been higher than male unemployment and continues to be so. Again Barbados provides an illustration. In 1998 the overall employment rate fell from 12.2 per cent to 11.8 per cent. Male unemployment fell by 2 percentage points to 8.3 per cent.[Central Bank 1999]. However female unemployment actually rose and closed the year above 15 percent [Central Bank 1999: 8]. Based on a fourth quarter survey in 1999 the unemployment ratio fell to single digits of 9.8 per cent. Female unemployment also declined, but while for men it was 6.7 percent for women it was 13.1 percent [Sunday Sun 27 February, 2000:1].

To determine the extent or existence of male marginality the questions arising from the analysis of gender systems presented earlier in the paper are answered.

❖ Men like women have equality of access to the educational resources of the state.
❖ There are no state policies or legislation that currently deny or previously denied men access.
❖ There are no state sponsored types of discrimination against men.
❖ Quantitatively, girls have an advantage over boys in education systems in the Caribbean, because of the pattern of participation in the educational process qualitatively girls are at a disadvantage [Bailey 1997: 29].
There is no evidence to suggest that girls routinely out perform boys [Bailey 1997; Figueroa 1997; Chevannes 1999].

However there are several factors arising in material and ideological relations of gender that impede boys and young men from participating fully in the educational system.

Barry Chevannes has identified serious problems of the lower attendance and higher attrition rate for boys at all levels of the educational system in Jamaica with boys attending schools in rural communities experiencing the highest ratios.

Co-Education and Gender Differentials in Educational Performance

Beyond the passionate debates we do not know enough about the impact of co-educational school systems on boys and girls. Through comparative research at the regional and national level, we need to identify whether a causal relationship can be established between girls overall better performance, (or out performance of boys) and the establishment of coeducational schools. In a study of Gender and Academic Achievement in the Caribbean 1997, Anthony Layne concluded that

a) girls outperform boys whether they are in single sex or coeducational schools
b) even if one could establish an association or correlation between coeducation and male performance one cannot jump to establishing a causal relation [Layne 1997].

In Barbados a policy was introduced in 1976 to make schools coeducational to guarantee girls greater access to secondary education. There were less ‘grammar’ or grade 1 schools for girls. Within their schools science and mathematics were neglected. Since coeducation the girls who perform well⁹ are seen as enjoying positions of achievement that would have gone to young men or ‘naturally’ belong to them.

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⁹Many girls also do not perform well and leave schools without certification like some boys.
We need to determine the factors that make university education less appealing or attractive to young men. Chevannes found an average of 45 percent to 48 percent enrollment of men in the University of Technology where as at the UWI it is about 35 percent. UTECH is supplying the programs that these men find lucrative for the job market. Is it that the university does not have the degree options to attract more men? If the UWI responds by introducing these programs what will the reaction be to the women who want to pursue them? Why are the other degree options less attractive? Tracking career aspirations of young men in high schools can yield some clues.

Boys and Schools

I agree with Chevannes that there is need for a conscious effort to make schools more attractive to boys. I wish to qualify this by adding these initiatives should never alienate girls. Programs should always be designed to target and accommodate at risk students, however the particular interests, concerns and challenges of being a young Caribbean man needs to be factored into the planning to develop the educational potential of our young men.

I support Chevannes suggestion that schools initiate rites of passage rituals to help young men negotiate the transition from boys to men [Chevannes 1999: 38]. I recommend a similar program for young women but the programs should target boys and girls separately and involve differing inputs. He notes that adolescence is a period of transition in which the adolescent is biologically an adult but socially a child. He further states pregnancy and motherhood serves as a rite of passage for young women while for young men there is nothing. What if young women do not have children as teenagers (as we hope they do not) what is their rite of passage? Chevannes' recommendation is very powerful and he provides detail as to the content and the form of the program. These can fill
a void for young women and men who for whatever reasons do not have close relationships with their fathers or adult male relatives

**National and Regional Policy.**

Barbara Bailey evaluated four regional policy documents on education to discover CARICOM’s position on gender and education [Bailey 1997: 29].

The documents are:


Bailey concludes that with the exception of the Report on the status of women there is a deafening silence in respect of any attention being paid to sexual inequalities and gender issues. There were two references to gender issues in the 1993 report, one was the need to establish gender equity in training, recruitment and decision making processes at the tertiary level. Bailey states the second drew attention to the relationship between the world of school and work and was in fact and unacknowledged reference to earlier work by her [Bailey 1997: 29]. This underscores the need for national and regional policy informed by the complexities of Caribbean societies and the specific
needs of boys and men with education. A policy that is shaped by a commitment to gender justice and gender equity will not discriminate nor tolerate conditions of discrimination for either sex. Instead it will seek to ensure that biases, and practises that prevent either sex from maximising its potential is harmful to the well being of our societies.