



The
Crime and Deviance Channel

**Updates: Masculinity and
Working-Class Community**

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Simon Winlow (2005) "Masculinity and Working-Class Community" in Winlow, Simon and Hall, Stuart "Youth Identities and Violence in the Night-time Economy,": Oxford: Berg

Background Winlow focuses on why young working-class

males are more likely to be violent. He argues that the answer lies in the changing nature of the economy in the late 20th and early 21st century. He notes that traditionally working-class masculine values were mainly lived out at work – in the factory, down

the pit etc. Manual work was generally regarded as the epitome of working-class masculinity. Leisure, e.g. drinking at the weekends in the working men's clubs was merely an extension of work. Men often socialized with the men they worked with.

Analysis Winlow notes that male crime in working-class communities was limited by opportunity and consequently working-class males were far from free to become any kind of criminal they liked. Working-class men and youth in Sunderland were denied access to criminal career hierarchies. Consequently, what criminal or deviant behaviour that existed was often shaped by or mirrored hegemonic masculinity, i.e. men's violence towards men involved a masculinity of status competition and bravado among peers. Winlow notes:

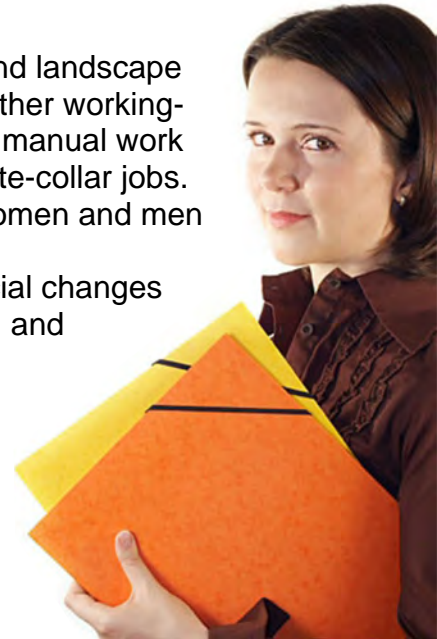
'For many working-class males, the fact of not letting another invade your personal domain or bodily space; either in a pub or elsewhere, was crucial, as was a willingness to defend that domain irrespective of the odds of a successful defence'.

A masculine hierarchy based on toughness, willingness to confront and fight, the extent to which violence is employed, viciousness etc is the result of these processes. Perceptions of honour and shame are central to this hierarchy in that it is important to 'real men' how they view themselves and how they perceive themselves to be viewed by others. Even 'taking a beating' may amplify a male's honour in the eyes of others.



Interestingly, money was of very little importance in this hierarchy. Little working-class crime in Sunderland in the industrial 20th century aimed to yield financial reward. Crime which did yield financial reward often involved the threat of violence, i.e. protection rackets.

However, Winlow notes that the industrial economy and landscape has undergone radical change in Sunderland and in other working-class communities. There has been a huge decline in manual work and a parallel increase in the number of low level, white-collar jobs. These new service sector jobs are mainly aimed at women and men often end up experiencing long-term unemployment. Winlow argues that these profound economic and social changes have had an effect upon working-class masculinity and criminality in North East England. In regards to masculinity, men often cannot express their manhood through work or the breadwinner/provider role today because of unemployment.



In some neighbourhoods, long-term unemployed young men have become accustomed to being out of work and being on benefits, i.e. an underclass has developed. Winlow argues that these young men increasingly value delinquent behaviour because it offers a release from boredom and access to status. In this world, the gang or subculture becomes all important because it provides thrills, protection, mutual support, friendship, prestige, and enough income to buy fashionable clothes, alcohol and drugs.



Winlow suggests that the nature of masculine criminality has also changed because of these economic changes. Criminality is no longer just about obtaining status or injecting excitement into a dull existence. It is also an entrepreneurial concern – a means of getting money. Crime and violence have become careers in themselves. Money can now be made from violent ability and repute illegitimately (e.g. through protection rackets, drugs, stolen cars, loan sharking etc) and legitimately (e.g. through being employed as a bouncer

or security consultant). Violence is still a source of status but

Winlow points out that

‘it has taken on new uses, meanings and interpretations and can be used as a tool with which one can fashion a criminal career, as an ‘instrument of commercial control...It has become a valued skill in an increasingly diverse illegal marketplace, a means of obtaining an income and cultural status, the gateway to the new hierarchical criminal milieu’.

Steve Chapman

