

Newspapers' portrayal of masculinity in 1914/1915: How did newspapers contribute to the strengthening of masculine frameworks at the time of the Great War?

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Abstract: *In 19th century New Zealand, masculinity was often located in the genre of 'hard men taming the wilds of the hinterland'. Although they might have worked in groups, it was usually a solus existence. Their individual characteristics of physical toughness, endurance and mental fortitude helped comprise the ideals that became embodied in New Zealand men.*

As men migrated from the rural areas to the cities for a more stable way of life, they still sought ways to validate their masculinity based on these constructed ideals. This occurred particularly in the face of a perceived 'feminised' life, especially if employed in 'administration' roles.

Introduction

This paper explores the myths, stereotypes, and rhetorical descriptions of our 'heroic troops', and what the expectations of 'real men' were during the Great War. It investigates the role newspapers played in establishing these myths and stereotypes and how they were appropriated and reinforced to establish the parameters and ideals for what constituted a clear masculine framework in 1914/1915.

The motivation for this paper was to identify and analyse emergent male stereotypes and myths that developed as a result of immigration. How did these stereotypes and myths evolve and what role did newspapers play in the creation or affirmation of masculine ideals at the outbreak of the Great War? The paper examines these ideals and how they became embedded in the symbolism of the soldiers of 1914/1915 and explores what function newspapers played in fortifying these archetypal examples of Pākehā masculinity.

This paper is foundational in its exploration of media constructs at the time of the Great War; therefore, it is limited in its scope and investigation of national newspapers. It is intended to be selective, to highlight a New Zealand Pākehā masculine perspective.¹ I also acknowledge that newspapers worldwide engaged in similar rhetoric during this period but wanted to examine specific details pertinent to the New Zealand newspapers and the effect on the country's masculinity. Harper, examining the significance of the Great War in establishing a New Zealand identity, says, "New Zealand nationalism and a sense of identity had been born" (cited in McGibbon, 2007, p. 32). But, more importantly, the assumption that we were different, not British, not Australian, but New Zealanders, was created at this time.

The pioneer image becomes legend

Manhood is viewed as something not simply grown into but achieved or earned (McDonough, 1997, p. 2).

The definable frameworks that became a symbol of New Zealand masculinity in the late 19th century were shaped by the geography and the subjugation of the land. Phillips (1996, p. 38), explores these pioneering characteristics and how they influenced the creation of these frameworks; "The conditions faced by Pākehā men in frontier New Zealand produced a distinctive set of attributes and values within the male community". Early explorers were challenged by what lay ahead of them as they sought land for settlement. Their characteristics were the result of years of hard work in unforgiving bush many miles from any semblance of civilisation. These characteristics were becoming synonymous with what was associated with the performance of the more overt constructs of New Zealand masculinity "In this environment a respect for strenuous muscular performance became a central element in the male culture" (Phillips, 1996, p. 17). 'True' masculinity appeared manifest in the characteristics of endurance and strength. As the nation became more colonised, these characteristics became well established in the minds of the populace. He suggests they symbolised everything 'honourable' and desirable about what the nation and particularly what the nation's masculinity represented. "From about the 1890s

¹ The connotation of the word Pākehā has evolved much over the past 150 years. Pre-1815 it simply referenced a "white person" (Briggs, 1990). It was also used to describe someone from Britain who settled in New Zealand;

nostalgia and a search for national identity raised the pioneer image into legend” (Phillips, 1996, p. 39).

As the male population migrated to the towns and cities, these now urbanised men sought out opportunities to ward off what they saw as the damaging influences of ‘soft’ or feminised clerical jobs “as society became more bureaucratic, organised and urban, so men clung to images of exaggerated physical prowess” (Phillips, 1996, p. 266). The Great War became a catalyst for newspapers to define and intensify masculine frameworks. The troops and the uniforms they wore seemed to embody the more manifest characteristics that held fast to the strict ideals of New Zealand masculinity. These characteristics became woven into the nation’s psyche and were utilised to great effect to enhance recruiting during the early years of the war.

Here the beginnings of a shift in how society classified New Zealand masculinity occurred. The attributes of our pioneers had always referenced the individual. As the newspapers’ rhetoric continued, the soldier’s uniform became embedded in the symbolism of courage, valour and strength; it also became a unifying force in defining the influence and authority of the masculine collective. “The need to shape minds and bodies finds in the uniform a valuable aid, it is a training, an element in the education of controlled power” (Craik, 2004, p. 29). The previous reverences associated with the nation’s individualist culture and pioneering characteristics were used for immense effect by newspapers that gave way to a constricted masculine collective.

Constructing New Zealand masculinity

Early settlement of colonial New Zealand is characterised by the pioneers who survived in the harsh conditions that greeted them. Months or years of physical toil and hardship, of going it alone, gave rise to a breed of men who became the symbols of the country’s manhood. Most of those who emigrated to New Zealand in the 19th

later a fair-skinned person born in New Zealand. By the 1960s it defined “a person in New Zealand of predominantly European Ancestry” (Ausubel, 1960). For this paper, I intend it to mean of ‘non-Māori’ descent.

century were from Scotland, England and Ireland,² New Zealand was seen as a “man’s country” (Phillips, 1996, p. 4). They were most likely to have come from rural regions of Britain. They were versatile, ‘jacks of all trades’; this was a fresh start for them – “to emigrate to New Zealand was to throw off effeminate chains and become a man” (p. 4). The early explorers and settlers confronted and subdued the back blocks of this new country; their characteristics began in part to symbolise the country’s ideals. These ideals helped shape the constructs that established the narrow parameters of what it meant to be called a ‘real man’. These men in turn outwardly became symbols of the country’s worth and the essence of New Zealand masculinity. “Although society came to commemorate a selective view of the pioneer settler the traditions of the male community did not die” (Phillips, 1996, p. 40).

New Zealand had established a culture of conditioning young men to be toughened up for “hard masculinity” (Beynon 2002, p. 27) by rigorous training, especially in all-male organisations. This was to develop discipline and to ward off the “damaging influence of the feminine” (p. 27). Boys were often sent off to boarding school to experience and adopt the attributes of true colonial masculinity. “True manliness had to be taught to boys and its virtues (grit, self-reliance, determination, leadership and initiative) acquired in male company” (Beynon, 2002, p. 28).

By the early 20th century New Zealand adolescent males were nurtured on a diet of soldier heroes. These heroes “attained a Christ-like stature in terms of ‘moral manhood’, patriotism and bravery-unto-death” (Beynon, 2002, p. 31). Adventure literature of the time instilled in the hearts and minds of young New Zealand men the need to grow into and to exemplify the ideals of the Empire, “the brave British soldier - hero serving the Empire” (p.31). These narratives helped establish a need to emulate their warrior heroes, to affirm their masculinity and honour. They engaged in rituals and contests to fine-tune and exhibit their readiness to participate. After all, the

² Men who emigrated to New Zealand in the mid to late 19th century were in the main a reflection of the rural communities that they hailed from. They were not specialised to any degree; they were predominantly labourers, miners, basically nomadic by nature, they “worked part of the year on the land and other parts of the year in other occupations” (Phillips, 1996, p. 60). The significance of this, was the can-do attitude, the “number eight fencing wire” (Phillips, 1996, p. 265) persona that became symbolic of New Zealand and New Zealand masculinity.

‘making of a man’ was at stake, they needed to demonstrate physical strength and courage; their character was tried and tested.

This influence established a clear set of physical and behavioural guidelines expected of New Zealand boys and men. With the slow disappearance of ‘boys to men’ rituals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there were impediments for men wanting to obtain their acceptance into manhood. This was especially relevant to those men who worked in the towns and cities employed in non-active or more ‘feminised’ administration roles.

At the outbreak of war in South Africa, New Zealand responded willingly to the call from Britain for troops. New Zealand had realised its dependency on British arms and troops during the Māori Wars. The colony had survived because of the imperial troops; it had a debt to pay. The Boer War established the beginnings of a Pākehā male stereotype in war; newspapers reported that the soldiers exhibited courage, strength and the ability to withstand the brutal conditions. It is of little surprise that by the final stages of the conflict, war had become representational of New Zealand masculinity.

The motivations New Zealand felt in supplying troops during the South African conflict again came to the fore in the weeks prior to the outbreak of the Great War. McGibbon (2007, p. 50), closely examined the challenges for entering or not entering the war in his article, ‘The shaping of New Zealand’s war effort, August-October 1914’. As a Dominion of the British Empire “the King’s enemy was entitled to attack New Zealand... formal neutrality was not an option”. There was also a clear economic reason, “By 1914 roughly eighty per cent of New Zealand’s exports went to Britain” (McGibbon, 2007, p. 53). We needed to keep faith with the ‘Mother country’; the country’s export future depended on it, sea routes had to be kept open, “New Zealand’s trade on the high seas was vulnerable to enemy commerce raiders” (p. 53).

As a seminal moment in the affirmation of a New Zealand masculine framework, the war of 1914 was without parallel. Men seized the opportunity to enlist, “By the end of the first week of the war 14,000 had enlisted” (First World War census, 2008). For some this was an opportunity to break the monotony of their mundane lives, a chance for adventure, for King and country. For a good many men it was a chance to prove their manhood. The latter of these motivations was used to powerful effect to encourage, cajole and embarrass young men to enlist. The characteristics of strength, endurance and courage were at the time significant in establishing an unmistakable New Zealand masculine framework, “Not surprisingly, given the traditional prominence of warfare for masculine prestige, an updated and idealised version of the soldier provided one form of masculine claim on the nation and vice versa” (Dudink, Hagemann & Tosh, 2004, p. 27). The Government of the day appropriated and subverted these characteristics in their rhetoric to further patriotism, protectionism and ultimately recruitment. These characteristics became embedded within the soldier’s uniform and became symbolic of the masculine ideal.

The propaganda machine had steadfastly determined that “fighting for the Empire was essential to manhood” (Phillips, 1996, p. 163). Although over half of the New Zealand men who went to fight either died or returned a casualty, Phillips reports that “Total casualties were 58,004 – fifty-eight per cent of those who went overseas” (p. 163), and that the foundations of the nation’s masculinity were now firmly entrenched in the deeds of these men and their “triumphant manhood” (p. 163). The nation viewed the troops as the embodiment of New Zealand manhood, “the Great War established the soldier as the shining personification of the New Zealand male, indeed New Zealand itself” (p. 163).

Fanning the flames

Newspapers took a leading role in the propaganda machine by further fanning the flames of patriotism with their hyperbole and symbolism of New Zealand soldiers. This I am suggesting contributed to the embodiment of the stereotypes and myths built up round the pioneers becoming embedded in the soldier’s uniform, thus creating an unmistakable framework round the masculine ideal. The *Evening Post* declared

that men would be expected to “uphold the honour of the Dominion, and to prove that the soldiers of New Zealand are worthy to rank with the first of the rest of the forces of the Empire” (Speeches, 1914, p. 3).

Reporters took special interest in the soldier’s progress from enlisting, training and embarkation. Phrases like “New Zealand’s soldier sons... liberty men” and oratory describing the soldiers as “certainly a fine body of men, broad-shouldered, stalwart, lithe, able-bodied young fellows” (For the front, 1914, p. 8), were commonplace in late 1914. The *Evening Post* was keen to report their progress, “there was not one thing in physique, set-up, marching, or anything else that those who know the British soldier could find wanting in the men who formed the column” (Speeches, p. 3). The press’ accolades recounting the men and how the nation viewed the departing troops left no doubt in the readers’ minds what encompassed ‘real’ New Zealand masculinity.

A fine body of men

The nation’s pride swelled as hundreds and thousands of people lined the streets of towns and cities to view the spectacle. They were buoyed by the hyperbole from the nation’s press; the *Evening Post* reported that “the huge crowd was stirred to a pitch of enthusiasm and applauded heartily” (Speeches, 1914, p. 3). The population became captivated by the reports; after all their belief in the men warranted their tributes, “The swinging lines of the sturdy, cheerful manhood thrilled the vast assembly at the park. One could go the length of this country and fail to find better men; New Zealand has given of her best” (Speeches, p. 6). Newspapers embraced the national fervor, penning terms such as “splendid gallantry” (Worthy, 2002, p. 186) when referring to the troops ready to embark for the shores of Egypt and Gallipoli. The much-anticipated encounter at Gallipoli prompted the *Otago Daily Times*, May 7, 1915, to state that the landing would prove “one of the most remarkable victories in the history of the world” (as cited in Phillips, 1996, p. 164).³ This persistent rhetoric resulted in a day of

³ Although New Zealand troops achieved much acclaim on the battlefields of Europe, Gallipoli remains an enduring focus for the country’s ANZAC day parades and memorials. It is seen as the pivotal engagement for when the country became a definable nation within the Empire. “The Gallipoli campaign during the First World

celebration. Such was the flare from the ‘heroic flame’ that *The Dominion*, June 25, 1915, suggested and rigorously debated that the words “our men” should replace the word “King” in our national anthem:

*God bless our splendid men
Send them safe home again
God bless our men
Keep them victorious
Patient and chivalrous
They are so dear to us
God save our men* (cited in Phillips, 1996, p. 164)

Underlying all these motivations was still the need to prove our worth. The nation, particularly the men, needed to validate that they were the measure, the epitome of what was expected of New Zealand masculinity as well as that of the Empire. The *New Zealand Herald* acknowledged on May 7, 1915, that the Gallipoli campaign confirmed the tenacity and courage of the Turkish soldiers, “finest of defensive soldiers” (as cited Worthy, 2002, p. 187). Newspapers referenced the need for New Zealand to demonstrate their manhood as exemplars of British masculinity; this could only be established “if they succeeded in a war against a more or less equivalent enemy” (Worthy, 2002, p. 187). Even after the disastrous campaign at Gallipoli, much applause was proclaimed from the local press. The *Otago Daily Times* wrote in April 1917 that the performance of New Zealand soldiers in war “Gallipoli” was the vindication of our total manhood” (Worthy, 2002, p. 189). It seemed that the nation’s press, instead of discussing the failure, focused their rhetoric on the actions and honour that the troops brought to the nation. On April 26, 1916, the *New Zealand Herald* described the troops’ “marvellous daring” (as cited in Worthy, 2002, p. 189), *The Press* wrote in April of 1917 that Gallipoli had “sealed with glorious victory and glorious death their undying and unshaking loyalty to “Alma Mater Imperatrix”, the Empress foster-mother of them all” (Worthy, 2002, p. 189). Key words such as ‘Honour’, ‘Gallantry’, ‘Courage’, ‘Valour’ and ‘Bravery’, and phrases like “dyed red with the blood of heroes”, “superb soldiership and heroism” and the “courage, excellence and manhood of the Anzac soldier” (as cited in Worthy, 2002, p. 190),

War has frequently been identified as the critical moment in the formation of New Zealand national identity” (Cooper, 1999, p. 85).

were liberally spread throughout the nation's newspapers. One reporter from the *New Zealand Herald* summed it up in May 1915:

though we knew they would not be found wanting, wherever they went or whatever they were set to do, it is none the less satisfying to learn that they have shown the mettle of their pastures at the Dardanelles (cited in Worthy, 2002, p. 187).

Sir, Enrol! Enrol!

As the press reported the action and courage of New Zealand troops in their first real test of manhood in the Gallipoli campaign, it became clear that many more troops were now needed in Europe. The constant reporting from the press about the nation's pride in its men in 1914 started to give way to focusing on the men who seemed somewhat reluctant to enlist in 1915.

Enrol in your thousands... every man between the ages of 18 and 45, who are at all physically fit, to place his name on the roll of honour of those who are willing to do their part in keeping our national prestige flying high (*Enrol*, 1915, p. 10).

The press did not refrain when describing these men as "shirkers, wasters, anti-militarists, etc, must be brought to their bearings" (*Enrol*, 1915, p. 10). Feelings started to run high when they believed able-bodied men were avoiding their duty as 'real' men.

I again noticed the large group of young men, apparently fit, who were doing the hard work of looking on... I wonder what their parents can think of them, as also their sweethearts, that is, if they are not too selfish to have one. I heard a young girl a few days ago express the opinion that if she had a young man who was physically fit, and did not offer to go to the front, she would 'chuck him'... I again say to those who are still hesitating, 'Go ye and do likewise.' Your country needs you, show your manhood. (p. 10).

The ramifications

Interestingly enough the newspapers' rhetoric and the ideals they espoused, appealed especially to those in the cities. Office workers and city dwellers were more than eager to enlist. Even after the scale of the war casualties were reported, few men refused the call to enlist. It seemed prudent not to challenge the masculine ideals "the man who was not prepared to fight was not worthy of the name of man" (Phillips, 1996, p. 159). The ramifications, if you did not believe in or conform to these ideals, were cruel "the man who was not prepared to fight suffered mercilessly at the hands of society" (p. 159). Phillips gives an example of how intensely men felt this need to conform by means of a story about a soldier, who on returning from Gallipoli to train recruits, overheard rumours doubting his ability to fight any more. He promptly applied to be sent to France where he died a week later. War was how men were taught how to be men, to determine how they 'measured up'.

Returning troops repressed their experiences and their feelings of grief and guilt; they maintained their silence, thereby preserving the ideals of colonial men. "There is a 'Great Silence' about the experience of returning from the Great War" (McGibbon, 2007, p. 157). Most men did not feel they measured up or wanted to measure up to the high expectations or pedestals the New Zealand press had placed them on.

In 1918, New Zealand newspapers still embraced the ideals of patriotism, nationalism and the Empire. Even with the war at an end, these essentialist ideals still had a significant hold on the nation and its notions of masculinity. So resilient were these ideals that even after surviving the trenches, the chains of courage, glory and honour were difficult, if not impossible to break. The result being that most returned servicemen maintained the subterfuge; they concealed any cracks that might challenge their masculine identity. This, combined with the ongoing Government and newspaper patriotic rhetoric, ensured that the country's emerging youth still regarded war as the ultimate test of true masculinity.

Conclusion

I propose that the authority of the newspaper's hyperbole, especially at the beginning and early stages of the Great War, was instrumental in authenticating and strengthening the previous insubstantial framework round New Zealand masculine ideals. The newspaper constructs of 1914/1915 clearly validated the very narrow parameters expected of men in the enactment of their gender.

New Zealand troops of 1914 felt they encapsulated everything that was virtuous about their country and their masculinity; they spoke unmistakably of courage and honour. They came to believe in the rhetoric that suggested that by just simply wearing the uniform, they were transformed. It gave them permission to believe in the ideals encoded in the uniform; it made them into 'real men', a hero in the eyes of the nation. McGibbon (2000, p. 544) suggests that the symbolism embedded in the soldiers' uniform leaves no doubt to this by "instilling pride in their wearers and impressing the civilian community, they serve as drawcards". The newspapers played on this. The uniform's ability to remove any vestige of the individual within, combined with its singular representation of men, was a boon to the press. This representation became reported on, referenced to, and finally symbolic of the qualities of courage and endurance, death or glory.

While the Great War enabled men to throw off the shackles of the increasing feminisation of their roles and jobs, it also placed men in an untenable position. This impossible position of being seen as soft, therefore effeminised, resulted in a very restrictive masculine framework. The newspapers' unwavering reports of bravery, courage and glory authenticated the almost impossible and perilous performances expected of New Zealand men. Beynon (2002, p. 11) clearly states this; "In thinking of 'masculinity – as - enactment', it must be remembered that those who do not perform their masculinity in a culturally approved manner are liable to be ostracised, even punished". The men who fought on Gallipoli and on the fields of Flanders had much to live up to and to die for, as the high expectations of the newspapers' rhetoric weighed upon the men. The mere fact of being male and a soldier automatically suggested an expectation.

The newspapers' portrayal of New Zealand soldiers during the Great War made men want to believe they were the match, in fact more able-bodied, resilient and enduring, than both their allies and their enemy. Sons of the Great War veterans sought validity in the same ideals; newspapers had clearly linked the constructed ideals of masculinity with war, an unmistakable male framework was validated, after all "males had to prove themselves in war" (Phillips, 1996, p. 212).

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