The Nuclear Mentality:

An Outgrowth of the Masculine Mentality[1]

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ABSTRACT

Evidence will be offered in support of the thesis that nuclear war is the ultimate act of violence. Since men in patriarchal culture have been and continue to be the perpetrators of the large majority of violent acts, it is no surprise that men would be more willing than women to risk initiating this ultimate form of violence. The same factors that account for the greater willingness of many men to behave violently in personal situations likely also account for the nuclear mentality—a perverted outgrowth of this culture's notion of masculinity.

The bombs are not the cause of the problem, but only the symptom of the deranged thought processes of man's mind. (Caldicott, p. 287).

Fifteen years before the nuclear age was born with the explosion of the first atomic bomb on July 16, 1945, Sigmund Freud concluded his book *Civilization and Its Discontents* with a prophetic statement:

Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know this, and hence comes a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety (Schell, p. 156).

Although Freud probably did not intend to place the entire responsibility on men, his use of sexist language made him more accurate on the issue of responsibility than he deserves credit for. Certainly women too experience the unrest and unhappiness. But it is primarily men who have sought to gain control over the forces of nature, and it is men who invented nuclear weapons capable of destroying the whole world in a very short space of time.

Throughout *The Fate of the Earth,* Jonathan Schell, like Freud, uses the terms man, mankind, and men, generically. Like Freud, what he fails to recognize is that women have played a very different role from men, not only in the development of nuclear weapons, but in the arms race and in war in general. The polarization of the sexes into two different roles, two different psyches, and two different sets of standards has helped to bring us to the brink of annihilation.

In her chapter on "Etiology: Missile Envy and Other Psychopathology," Helen Caldicott offers one of the best analyses I have come across of why men have brought the world to the horrifying turning point that challenges us today. My major disagreement with her rests on the issue of biological versus sociological causation. It has yet to be proved that "One of the reasons women are so allied to the life processes is their hormonal constitution" as Caldicott says (p. 294). Nor do I believe that men and boys are *naturally* more fascinated by killing (p. 296).

It is, however, true that some of the real or imagined biological differences between the sexes have been used as a justification for sexism. I also believe that these differences have made it more difficult for women as a class to pursue their own interests (for example, mothers have universally been assigned the primary responsibility for child rearing, which in turn often results in women doing what is best for their children rather than for themselves. While this may be commendable behavior from a moral point of view, it has put women at a greater power disadvantage *vis-a-vis* men.) Whether or not women are "naturally" more emotional and nurturant than men, or men are "naturally" more ambitious and violent than women is a subject for future research. What we know for sure now is that the entire social structure and mainstream culture assumes these differences and reinforces them.

According to Schell:

It means something that we call both pornography and nuclear destruction "obscene." In the first, we find desire stripped of any further human sentiment or attachment— of any "redeeming social value," in the legal phrase. In

the second, we find violence detached from any human goals, all of which would be engulfed in a holocaust—detached, that is, from all redeeming social value (p. 158).

It also means something that pornography has so little appeal to women, and that one aspect of the polarization of the sexes is the greater inclination of males than females to be violent. Since nuclear annihilation—and the threat of it that hangs over our heads—is the ultimate act of violence, this relationship between gender and violence is an important one deserving further elaboration.

It is my study of violence, a subject I have been working on for the past thirteen years, that has been my avenue into understanding the relevance of gender to the nuclear threat. It is this study which has also led me to see both violence and the nuclear threat as feminist issues.

The extent of male violence is a striking phenomenon. For several years now nine out of ten people arrested for violent crimes in the United States are males (*Uniform Crime Reports*). If there were a race or social class that was responsible for 90 percent of all violent crimes, the members of that group would be considered pariahs and subjected to severe prejudice and discrimination. But since it is the gender which holds virtually all the power in society that is responsible, the primary male face of violence is rarely even acknowledged. When I point this out, my observation is frequently treated as a hostile one toward men. Sometimes people question the statistics, as if police throughout the nation are so chivalrous toward women that they refuse to arrest them for violent crimes.

Although the rape rate in the United States has been increasing at a more rapid rate than have other major crimes of violence for which national statistics are obtained, *all* these crimes—homicide, aggravated assault, robbery, and rape—have increased alarmingly over the years prior to 1981. (The decline since 1981 is attributed by many to the fact that males born during the baby boom are no longer at the most violence-prone stage of their lives[2].) For example, the rate of homicides per 100,000 has nearly doubled from 1959 to 1981 (Russell, 1984, p. 143).

In addition to the increase in crimes of violence reported to the police, the homicide rate per 100,000 people in the United States—probably the most reliable single indicator of the overall rate of violent crimes—is substantially higher than that of any other western nation (Wolfgang and Ferracuti). In 1960, for example, when the homicide rate in the United States was 4.5 per 100,000, it was 1.8 in West Germany, 1.7 in France, 1.5 in Australia, 1.5 in Greece, 1.4 in Canada, 1.4 in Italy, 1.1 in New Zealand, .9 in Portugal, .9 in Switzerland, .8 in Spain, .7 in Belgium, .7 in Sweden, .6 in England, .5 in Denmark, .5 in Norway, .3 in the Netherlands, and .2 in Ireland (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, p. 275). This means that the homicide rate in 1960 was 23 times higher in the United States than in Ireland.

Not only is a blind eye turned to the fact that males are much more disposed to use violence than females, but the majority of perpetrators of crime—men—are still widely regarded as the superior sex, as better equipped to play leadership roles in the home and in society at large. Clearly our culture embodies the old adage that "might makes right." One manifestation of domination is that what is considered truth and reality is also established by the dominating force. In the case of violence, this means that the relationship between maleness and violence is ignored.

I experienced one of many examples of this blindness when I served as an expert consultant for the California Commission on Crime Control and Violence Prevention. In 1980 this Commission was assigned the awesome task of trying to discover the root causes of crime. From this understanding they hoped to develop effective strategies for preventing and controlling crime in California. Despite the availability, credibility, and validity of the statistics that show a 9:1 ratio of male to female perpetrators of crimes of violence, the Commission refused to come to terms with and try to explain this fact. Since the gender factor is perhaps the single most important one in analyzing violent crimes, their proposed solutions were largely irrelevant. The thousands of dollars the Commission spent to try to unravel the root causes of violent crime were largely wasted.

Aside from the greater willingness of males to use violence, different patterns of violence for men and women are also evident. Quite frequently stories appear in the press about men who, when their desire to get what they want is thwarted, kill the person they cannot control rather than feel defeated. Sometimes these men then kill themselves. Women on the other hand more often kill in self-defense, or because they believe this is the only way to prevent continuing abuse and persecution[3]. (Some examples of such cases are described in my book *Rape in Marriage*, 1982[4].)

The following are two examples of the male pattern which—because most of the leaders of nuclear nations are men—pose the greatest danger for the instigation of a nuclear war.

Because of despondency over the failure of his third marriage, 42 year old Gilbert Macias killed his wife, Jennifer, their baby daughter, and two other people. He then shot himself. According to Captain Alex Michaelis: "He said he couldn't live without her. For that reason, he killed her and his daughter" (Carroll and Magagnini).

Taking his 14 month old daughter with him, Macias visited his estranged teenage wife in a futile attempt to win a reconciliation with her. An argument ensued whereupon Macias shot his wife with a .22 caliber pistol, hitting her in the head and abdomen. He then telephoned his sister and told her that he'd killed his wife and planned to kill the baby and himself. His sister notified the police. After forcing their way into Marcias' home, the police found four bodies—the child, Macias himself, and a former roommate of Macias and his girlfriend.

Macias' suicide note partially blamed the murdered couple for his wife's disaffection. Mrs. Macias had moved out of their $150,000 home on the morning of the murder. Captain Bob Dale commented on the multiple murders as follows: "My gut feeling is that it's a marital problem, a guy with a pretty heavy marital problem" (Carroll and Magagnini).

Gilbert may well have had serious marital problems; so did his wife. Macias' response to feeling that he could not live without her went beyond despair and suicide; he killed her and three other people including his own daughter.

The next example of this mentality involves a father who tried to kill his son. In February 1983, seven-year-old David Rothenberg was taken on vacation in Southern California by his father. According to a newspaper account David was dragged from a burning motel room on March 3. His father had intentionally set the room on fire because he was disturbed by fears that his estranged wife would not allow him to visit his son again. Mr. Rothenberg pleaded guilty to attempted murder and arson. He received the maximum thirteen-year sentence (*San Francisco Chronicle*, September 24, 1983).

Mr. Rothenberg appears to have found it easier to burn his son alive than to contemplate the possibility that his ex-wife would prevent him from seeing his child again. It seems that he found it preferable to suffer the permanent loss of his child than to allow his ex-wife to have control of the situation.

This kind of mentality is similar to "Better Dead than Red" thinking, which holds that it is better for the whole world to be annihilated than for the United States to lose a war.

The predominantly male pattern of killing a wife, child, and/or other innocent people out of distress about losing them, is one which places all our lives in jeopardy. There is no way of knowing which of our leaders might react to the threat of a personal or political loss by attempting to take the whole world with them.

Just as most people appear to be blind to the fact that violent crimes are predominantly perpetrated by males, so do most people refuse to acknowledge that it is men in power who are largely responsible for the nuclear world in which we now live, and for the imminent danger of annihilation that we face. In order to correct this situation, it is helpful to understand its historical roots.

Male domination preceded the invention of nuclear weapons by many centuries. The development of these lethal arms has been the culmination of a long history of male-dominated governments for whom military superiority over other nations justified the expenditure of enormous resources—even while people living in these countries starved for lack of basic human needs. The male leaders of the United States—as well as those who govern some other patriarchal countries—have been willing to consider sacrificing the lives of millions of people in the pursuit of what they perceive as our national self-interest. Some of our leaders still purport to believe that such a catastrophe could be survived. Although the development of nuclear weapons shares its patriarchal history with previous war technologies, the lethality of these weapons is so much greater than all others developed before them that they deserve a unique analysis and response.

Some argue that it is only ruling class white males who are responsible for the development of nuclear weapons and the concomitant threat to our survival. These people believe that it is therefore inappropiate to point a finger at the male gender as a whole.

But while all males are not violent, violence is not more prevalent in the upper classes—except of course in scope. Since upper class men have more power, their violence is often expressed in different ways from that of lower class men or men of color, and often has considerably more evil and destructive consequences. However, there is no reason to believe that most lower class men would behave differently from upper class men if they had the power that upper class men have. This conclusion is based on crime statistics which indicate that men in powerless positions in society are even more prone than are men in powerful positions to commit murder, rape, robbery with violence, and aggravated assault.

Given the way males and females are socialized, there *is* reason to believe that fewer women would behave as men do if they had the same social power that men enjoy.

The explanation commonly given for the overrepresentation of lower class men among rapists is that physically coercive tactics are the chief ones available to them. Furthermore, since conquest and subjugation are recognized ways of asserting masculinity in this society, rape is often the most accessible way of proving "manhood" for lower class men. Middle and upper class men are, of course, responsible for a great deal of rape. However, they can more readily buy power or obtain sexual favors by virtue of the power positions they have. In addition, they have access to more avenues other than the sexual one for asserting their masculinity, such as economic or political conquests, and/or the subjugation of less powerful people.

A study of the behavior of males in all-male institutions is instructive on this point. For example, numerous studies and personal accounts reveal the widespread occurrence of rape in male prisons and jails. These studies also show that the rapists are the ones who are regarded as having proven their manhood because of the power, conquest, and subjugation involved in rape, while the victims are regarded as having lost their manhood. Indeed, they are often referred to as women. Men of all classes and ethnic groups, at least in the western world, share a conception of masculinity as associated with domination, power, conquest, etc. When ruling class men lose a war, or some economic or foreign policy venture, their sense of masculinity is often threatened. Conversely, they also engage in certain ventures in an effort to prove their manhood. The recent invasion of Grenada by the U.S. government was an example of symbolic biceps flexing, following almost immediately, as it did, a surprise attack and heavy losses of American soldiers in Beirut.

The findings of the few studies so far conducted on women in prison bear little resemblance to the findings on men. Although there is violence and even rape in female prisons, the extent is minimal compared to what happens in male prisons. Instead, women inmates are reported to organize themselves into pseudo-family arrangements which involve strong affective ties, with or without sexual relationships. Women are not nearly as prone to violence as men; behaving in a dominant and aggressive fashion plays no equivalent role in establishing their sexual identity.

Similarly, although token women like Margaret Thatcher may try to prove they are "man" enough for their jobs, the gender identity of most women in power positions is not threatened in the same way that men's sense of maleness is threatened when they fail to get what they want.

Nuclear war is the ultimate act of violence. Since men in patriarchal culture have been and continue to be the perpetrators of the large majority of violent acts, it is no surprise that more men than women would also be willing to risk initiating this ultimate form of violence. The same factors that account for the greater willingness of many men to behave violently in personal situations likely also account for the nuclear mentality, which is a perverted outgrowth of this culture's notion of masculinity.

But what are these factors? First is the prevalent definition of masculinity, of what it takes to qualify as a successful male in this society. Aggression, toughness, strength, determination, adventurousness, daring, fearlessness, courage, competitiveness, are all examples of "masculine" qualities. Masculinity is also defined as the absence of "feminine" qualities such as tenderness, vulnerability, empathy, compassion, sensitivity, and nurturance. The traits identified as masculine may be either positive or negative, constructive or destructive, appropriate or inappropriate, depending on the context within which they occur. Being fearless, for example, in the face of real danger can be fatal, while at other times it can save lives. Being adventurous can lead to useful discoveries or provide fun and laughter, but being adventurous about the use of nuclear weapons could lead to mass murder.

As with qualities that our culture regards as masculine, most of those defined as feminine may also be positive or negative, constructive or destructive, appropriate or inappropriate in different contexts. To feel compassion for one's oppressor, for example, can result in doing nothing to stop the oppression, while to be compassionate toward people who are starving can lead to giving them food or trying to change the policies responsible for their plight.

However, since men who evince these so-called feminine qualities are considered unmasculine, and since to be unmasculine is considered to be a terrible defect deserving of pity or contempt, many men are unwilling (even if they are capable) to behave in a way that suggests "femininity" even when it would be appropriate. Similarly, women often will not act in ways regarded as masculine, even when appropriate, for fear that they will be derogatorily regarded as masculine[5].

This division of human qualities into male and female categories results in much inappropriate behavior by both males and females. When compassion is what is called for in men, they may not have enough of it. When aggression or

assertiveness is called for in women, they may not be able to rise to the occasion. The implications of this polarization for our current predicament, living as we do on the threshold of oblivion, are enormous. For it is the rule of masculine qualities, cut off from the feminine ones, that has contributed greatly to landing us in the current tragic situation that Caldicott so aptly calls nuclear madness. It has resulted in a kind of culturally-induced insanity that could lead to the demise of the whole world. An important step in the prevention of such a catastrophe is to work to end the polarization of human characteristics. We must make more headway than we have made so far in changing popular notions of masculinity and femininity. On a person-to-person level, attempts to meet the masculine ideal often result in a great deal of violence. The same is true on the national and international levels. Caldicott expresses a similar view as follows:

> These hideous weapons of killing and mass genocide may be a symptom of several male emotions: inadequate sexuality and a need to continually prove their virility plus a primitive fascination with killing (p. 297).

Our culture's notions of masculinity and femininity do not exist in a vacuum. They are attached to the roles of the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the subordinate. It would not be possible to change these ideas while men continue their rule over women.

Nor is the integration of equal numbers of women into previously male dominated hierarchical organizations a satisfactory solution. These very hierarchical organizations are a product of this polarization. If there were a true integration of so-called masculine and feminine qualities, the very structures of our society would be different. For example, if men were to take equal responsibility for the rearing of their children (which would certainly be necessary in order to end the polarization of traits and roles discussed), the occupational structure would have to be radically altered, the notion of what constitutes full-time work would be transformed, etc.

Nuclear war is a feminist issue because the danger of its occurring is highly related to the fact that the United States is a patriarchal nation in a community of other patriarchal nations. Despite a few token women leaders, the governments that have participated in the development and buildup of nuclear arms have all been male dominated. Given the relationship between the masculine mentality and the nuclear mentality, it is hardly surprising that the nuclear mentality is so widespread throughout the world.

An example of the intricate interconnectedness of the masculine mentality and the nuclear mentality is provided by Schell in *The Fate of the Earth*:

> It is a symptom of the schism between what Einstein called our "thinking" and the reality around us that when our strategists set out to think their "unthinkable" thoughts they feel obliged to quite deliberately leave the rest of their human equipment—their feelings, their moral sense, their humanity—behind. For the requirements of strategy in its present form force them to plan actions that from any recognizable moral point of view are indefensible. One strategic thinker, in a striking inversion of the usual understanding of ethical obligation, has said that an "iron will" is required if one is to recommend the slaughter of hundreds of millions of people in a nuclear attack—a point of view that is uncomfortably close to that of Heinrich Himmler, who told the commanders of the SS that in order to carry out the extermination of Jews they had to be "superhumanly inhuman." In both statements, it is not obedience to our moral feelings but resistance to those feelings that is presented as our obligation, as though moral feeling were a siren call that it would be weak to give in to and that it is our duty to resist. Once the "strategic necessity" of planning the deaths of hundreds of millions of people is accepted, we begin to live in a world in which morality and action inhabit two separate, closed realms. All strategic sense become moral nonsense, and vice versa, and we are left with the choice of seeming to be either strategic or moral idiots (pp. 194-195).

Schell appears unaware that he is describing here a split between thinking, feeling and morality that is particularly characteristic of the masculine mentality. Our educational institutions foster this split, focusing as they do on the development of the mind, ignoring feelings morality—except in so far as they themselves are the subject of study. It is not surprising then, that feminists have attacked these values in academia, and have worked to invent new pedagogical techniques that recognize the need for the integration rather than the separation of thinking, feeling, and morality.

Schell proceeds with his insightful remarks flawed only by his failure to understand the significance of gender to his analysis:

> On this "thinking" [strategic thinking] almost no bounds are set, and the slaughter of whole populations and the extinction of man become all too "thinkable." But the divorce of thought from feeling, of strategy from

morality, and of planning from action are all only mani-
festations of the more fundamental divorce between the
pre-nuclear basis of our whole approach to political life
and the reality of our nuclear world. The reason we
cannot bear emotionally and morally to face the actions
that we "think" about and plan and the reason the aim of
all of our strategic planning must be to prevent the
actions we are planning to take are the same: the actions
we have in mind, which risk the termination of our
species, are irredeemably senseless (pp. 195-196).

Ronald Reagan authorized the expenditure of millions of
dollars in 1984 to set up a national center to help state and
local police track down serial murders who, by the way, are
almost always male. Presumably, he is not anticipating that
his own behavior, as well as other members of his administra-
tion, past U.S. presidents, advisors, military men, should be
of interest to such a national center (*San Francisco Chronicle*,
July 11, 1984). As Helen Caldicott points out:

> In this society anybody who contemplates murdering a
> single individual is considered either mentally unstable
> or a potential criminal. But people within this adminis-
> tration are making statements about nuclear war that
> contemplate the death of hundreds of millions of human
> beings. The same moral and legal restraints should be
> applied to these people as to ordinary citizens who con-
> template the death of only one human being (p. 35).

Referring to the members of Congress in 1984, Caldicott
explains why she thinks our leaders are so criminally
inclined: "These people, mostly men, practice psychic numb-
ing.... They have never morally, ethically, or emotionally
contemplated the logical consequences of their daily actions
as they vote to prepare the earth for a global holocaust." (p.
302).

Caldicott also observes that:

> It is never the people who make the decision to kill who
> get killed. It is the boys who usually don't even know
> what the dispute is about, let alone understand the
> intricacies of international politics. The old men act out
> their fascination with killing, their need to prove their
> toughness and sexual adequacy by using innocent
> pawns. This dynamic has been occurring for thousands,
> if not millions, of years. Now it must stop because any
> conventional superpower war will almost certainly
> escalate to nuclear war (p. 306).

Although it is not quite true that it is *never* the people who
make the decision to kill who get killed, Caldicott's overall
analysis here is sound. But I do not agree with Caldicott's
explanation for why male leaders have always been so cava-
lier about other people's deaths:

> How many leaders of the world have ever watched the
> miracle of the birth of a baby? How many leaders of the
> world have helped a child to die and supported the
> parents in their grief before and forever after? Each life is
> as precious as any other, and the magnitude of suffering
> involved in a single death is vast. Yet because these men
> do not understand these values in their souls, they have
> produced the lethal equipment and ordered the deaths of
> hundreds of thousands of people in the past and possibly
> hundreds of millions in the future (p. 306).

No. It is not enough that men witness the birth of a baby,
the death of a child, and the grief of parents. The distorted
values and psyches to which Caldicott refers are a product of
the sexist society and the sexist world we live in.

In conclusion, the threat of nuclear war is a threat to the
survival of all human beings on this planet. The oppression
of women, people of color, poor or lower class people, lesbi-
ans and gay men, young and old, disabled people—all
become secondary in the face of the possibility (or probabil-
ity) of the total annihilation of large portions of the human
race in a nuclear holocaust.

But the very real threat to everyone's survival posed by
nuclear war is not what makes it a feminist issue. Nuclear war
is a feminist issue because the threat of nuclear obliteration is
a consequence of the distorted values, psyches, and institu-
tions that sexist arrangements have bred. This insight pro-
vides a guide to more effective and radical efforts to prevent a
nuclear catastrophe. We must face the fact that at this point in
history the nuclear mentality and the masculine mentality are
one and the same. To rid ourselves of one, we must rid
ourselves of the other.

NOTES

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   their helpful criticisms and comments on this article: Jill Hall,
   Meredith Graham, David Russell, Donna Warnock, and most par-
   ticularly, Elissa Melamed who critiqued two different drafts of this
   article.
2. See my book *Sexual Exploitation* (1984, p. 143f) for a more thorough
   discussion of these statistics.
3. One reason that the percentage of females arrested for crimes of
   violence is as *high* as ten percent is that when women kill, it is often
   in self-defense. This explains why almost as many women kill men
   as men women (16% and 18% respectively). This virtual equality in

the inter-gender murder rate contrasts with the finding that 62 percent of all murders are male on male, and only 4 percent female on female (intra-gender) (Mulvihill and Tumin, p. 210).

4. See also *The Burning Bed* for a detailed account of why Francine Hughes set her husband Mickey on fire when he was asleep, burning him to death (McNulty).

5. For women to behave in a "masculine" way is not perceived as derogatorily as it is for men to behave in a feminine way. Joan of Arc, for example, gained some of the status that accrued to the more powerful male role. Men who behave in a "feminine" way have nothing to gain, except in the eyes of those who subscribe to a feminist philosophy.

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America Comes Out As The World's Top In Anything

America comes out as the world's top in anything.
She is always proud of being Number One.

In Hiroshima.
Mr. Kiyoshi Kikkawa was labelled, "Number One Atomic Bomb Sufferer."
On the entire surface of his back
Keloid' like lava, have risen;
The five fingers of his now crooked right hand
Have ceased to move,
And are turned inward, sticking to each other,
The entire hand twitching due to atomic bomb disease.

On Longerup Island,
On the grave-post of Lekoji, the son of john Angine.....
There you see an inscription:
'Number One Hydrogen Bomb Sufferer.'
Lekoji, who had been the victim of an atomic bomb test explosion
When he was but one year and one week old.
Suffered from goiter
And was sent to an American hospital to be operated upon.
Lekoji was fortunate enough to regain his health,
Going back to his native island to resume his happy school life again.

But soon after
Numberless spots of purple colour
Appeared on the whole body of Lekoji,
And the scrota swelled.
He was called out by the United Energy Commission in October 1972,
And he was transferred to Washington
From a hospital in Hawaii.