

MEN NOT AT WORK

THE MODERN ECONOMY IS BETTER SUITED TO WOMEN, SAYS **HANNA ROSIN**, AND MEN HAVE SO FAR BEEN UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO ADJUST.

BY MATTHEW BUDMAN



“FOR WOMEN, THERE’S STILL THE QUESTION OF DIVERSITY AT THE VERY TOP,” SAYS HANNA ROSIN, AND INDEED, ARTICLES AND BOOKS CONTINUE TO LAMENT HOW FEW FEMALE CEOS AND DIRECTORS POPULATE THE CORNER OFFICES OF CORPORATE AMERICA. BUT JUST A LEVEL OR TWO DOWN, WOMEN NOT ONLY HAVE ACHIEVED EQUITY—IN MANY INDUSTRIES AND PROFESSIONS, THEY HAVE SURPASSED MEN, AND THAT FACT HAS ENORMOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR BOTH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES.



Rosin’s new book, *The End of Men and the Rise of Women* (Riverhead), ventures far beyond the workplace, but that’s where the story begins: with male-dominated professions waning and men failing to adapt to new economic realities. The result is men losing power and authority both at work and at home. Even as ambitious women continue to struggle with “having it all” issues of balancing careers and family, men increasingly grapple with an unfamiliar feeling of dispossession.

The End of Men grew out of a 2010 *Atlantic* article that drew feedback both positive and negative. “I’ve heard two main negative reactions: that I’m antifeminist and that I’m anti-men,” she says. “Men’s groups may agree with me on their circumstances, but to hear a woman say it is hard. Positive reactions have come from single mothers and struggling single women; they have really appreciated hearing articulated what is changing in power dynamics between men and women and how we can recognize what these new family configurations are.”

Rosin is a senior editor at *The Atlantic* and founder of DoubleX, the gender-issues section of *Slate*; she is married to *Slate* editor David Plotz, with whom she has three children. Rosin spoke via Skype from her Washington, D.C., home.

I HAD ASSUMED THAT “THE END OF MEN” WAS SOMEWHAT HYPERBOLIC. AND IT’S TRUE THAT YOU DON’T ENVISION MALES DISAPPEARING ALTOGETHER. BUT THINGS DO SOUND A LITTLE BLEAK. WHEN DID EVERYTHING START GOING WRONG FOR MEN?

Everything started going wrong for men when the manufacturing era started to end, maybe forty years ago. But you could also say a hundred years ago, when office work came into play, when brawn—sheer physical strength—started to become less important.

YOU CITE “THE GROWING DEMAND FOR SOFT-SKILLS JOBS” BEGINNING IN THE 1970S.

That’s more or less when we started to appreciate the creative economy and measure people skills. But even before

that, in the literature of the ’50s, like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, men were beginning to rebel against office life as something that is unmanly; reading, you start to get a sense of the work world as something that men feel constrained by and that seems to play to natural strengths of women.

AND AS YOU WRITE, “THE MODERN ECONOMY IS BECOMING A PLACE WHERE WOMEN HOLD THE CARDS.” WOMEN WORLDWIDE DOMINATE COLLEGES, TWELVE OF THE FIFTEEN FASTEST-GROWING JOB CATEGORIES ARE PRIMARILY FEMALE, AND MEN ARE INCREASINGLY CONCENTRATED IN INDUSTRIES THAT ARE FADING AWAY.

College is a big part of the picture because, whether we like it or not, college is a precursor to success these days. Some people argue against that and don’t want it to be true, but it *is* true. For reasons researchers can’t quite figure out, women are much more successful in getting college degrees; in fact, school at all levels seems to play to the natural abilities of women.

But the jobs that seem to be growing, the jobs we think of as stepping-stones to the middle class, are heavily dominated by women. And ironically, they depend on old stereotypes about nurturing—for instance, about nursing. Women are half of medical-school graduates and, in some countries, more than half of doctors. England is having a national conversation about the feminization of the medical industry because so many doctors are women. The healthcare industry has actually grown at about the same rate as the manufacturing industry has shrunk.

WHEN YOU REFER TO “THE NEW FEMINIZED ECONOMY,” IT SOUNDS AS THOUGH IT INCLUDES EVERYTHING BUT CONSTRUCTION AND MANUFACTURING. IS THERE A “MASCULINE ECONOMY” ANYMORE?

I don't think there's any growing economy we'd call masculine—except technology, which, at the top, is still dominated by men. And I don't think any economist thinks that the manufacturing era is going to come back. It's never going to be what it was.

FROM A CORPORATE PERSPECTIVE, SHOULD EMPLOYERS CARE WHETHER THEY'RE HIRING MORE MEN OR WOMEN? IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE WHY SCHOOLS STRIVE FOR GENDER PARITY, BUT WHAT ABOUT COMPANIES?

Yes, companies should care about gender parity. This is a conversation I had with a lot of the young founders of tech companies. They approach this very clinically—not as a politically correct matter of “It's really nice to have a lot of women around” but by reading decision-making studies that talked about the value of diversity in decision-making and how it's better to have multiple perspectives. So for the bottom line, it's better to have diversity.

In the '80s and '90s, companies strained to have diversity as one of their values; now it's more moving past diversity to having women in actual positions of leadership. We have a lot of diversity in the manager class, and we have a lot of diversity in the lower executive class. The question is what happens after that—how to get more diversity in the upper executive class.

OF COURSE, IN TECHNOLOGY THE CONVERSATION MAY BE ABOUT HOW TO BRING MORE WOMEN IN, BUT IN A LOT OF OTHER INDUSTRIES, THINGS HAVE ALREADY TIPPED THE OTHER DIRECTION. AT WHAT POINT DO SOME COMPANIES—LIKE COLLEGES—NEED TO WORRY ABOUT HIRING AND PROMOTING MORE MEN?

I think there will be a point very soon where we have to start worrying about diversity and men at the entry level, in the same way we started worrying about diversity and men at elite colleges. The natural next step is to worry about men graduating from elite colleges and getting entry-level jobs. This idea may sound absurd to feminists, but it's the natural next step.

I've read about companies in China where, like in a lot of Asian societies, hiring and promotion are very much determined by exams. But so many women are getting ahead that they've started to agonize about that and worry about bringing men forward.

NOW, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH A BIG PART OF WHY WOMEN ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN THE NEW ECONOMY IS WHAT YOU CALL “A TRADITIONALLY FEMININE SET OF TRAITS—SOCIAL SKILLS, CARETAKING, AND COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOR.” YOU WRITE THAT “TRADITIONALLY FEMININE ATTRIBUTES, LIKE EMPATHY, PATIENCE, AND COMMUNAL PROBLEM SOLVING,” HAVE REPLACED “THE TOP-DOWN AUTOCRATIC MODEL OF LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESS.” BUT ARE GENDER ROLES SO FIXED? ELSEWHERE IN THE BOOK, YOU LOOK AT CLAIMS BY EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGISTS THAT WE'RE ALL HARDWIRED TO PLAY FIXED SOCIETAL ROLES, AND YOU INSIST THAT THINGS AREN'T SO RIGID.

They're not so rigid. I think we're in a transition moment now: It's not so much empathy and nurturing that's valued in the economy when we talk about leadership skills

as collaboration. There are still slightly different ways that women make decisions. They're not necessarily *nicer* about making decisions, but there are certain things they do consistently, like take others' views into account, and they tend to be a little bit more cautious. So this is a long continuum.

I am not of the view that there are fixed traits. It'd be *much* easier if I

“It's not so much empathy and nurturing that's valued in the economy when we talk about leadership skills as **collaboration.**”

argued my book that way and if I believed that, because then I could say, “There are certain feminine traits, and the female mind works this way, and that's what the economy wants.” But I think, after reading much of the literature on this, that we don't have enough information to conclude that. There's a broader continuum than we think, and women have moved far along the continuum in terms of aggression and dominance while still retaining some of the other qualities like empathy and collaboration, whereas men are a little more rigid on that continuum, at least in this moment. They haven't been allowed to, for cultural reasons and maybe some neurological reasons, move quite as far as women.

That's why I put my chapter on violence in the book, in order to scramble the picture a little bit, to show that

we've long thought that men dominate because they're aggressive, but we can see how far women have moved on that aggression-and-dominance scale.

SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT WHEN WOMEN RUN THE WORLD, WE SHOULDN'T ASSUME THAT WORLD WILL BE MORE GENTLE AND NURTURING AND COMPASSIONATE?

I don't think so! I do believe it might be more collaborative; there might be a different way of making decisions; and it might be slightly less risk-taking, if that's how we want to define aggression. So I feel those traits are fairly consistent among women. It may change a hundred years from now, but I think it'll take a long time. But I do not think the world will necessarily be nicer or more gentle. I don't think that's necessarily true.

There's research—albeit very limited research—showing that women consistently do make different decisions with money. Norway is our live example of this, because they have mandated that women sit on corporate boards. They've done the first series of studies on what happened in Norway, and women do make slightly different decisions, and those slightly different decisions do in fact affect the bottom line.

IT RESULTS IN MORE LONG-TERM THINKING, RIGHT?

That was the idea—that women don't make as quick, short-term, what after the Wall Street crash we started to call testosterone-driven decisions. They make slightly longer-term decisions that affect the bottom line in the short term. Now, we would like to think that in the long term they won't affect the bottom line; we don't know that for sure. We don't have the evidence yet.

After the Wall Street crash, people started discussing reckless decision-making with regard to gender—for instance, analyzing how many trades a

single man makes per hour versus how many trades a single woman makes per hour. We began to reevaluate *aggressive* as *reckless*. Think about *The New York Times* theory of how Lyme disease brought down JPMorgan: Ina Drew was in charge of the various traders and kept the bank out of the banking crisis for three years. The year that the disastrous London trades were made at JPMorgan, she had Lyme disease, and she was gone so much that she wasn't around enough to soothe everyone's egos and keep them collaborating.

Now, do I actually believe that testosterone rages on Wall Street trading floors are responsible for bad trades? I don't believe that any more than I believe all those old studies about estrogen and hormones and how they affect the way a woman walks and what she looks like and whom she's attracted to. What's interesting to me is the culture of science—how we've started to look at and evaluate these situations differently now that we're starting to accept that women can be top leaders.

AND YET THERE ARE ALMOST NO FEMALE CEOs, WHICH YOU CALL “THE ULTIMATE PROBLEM.” SHOULD WE EXPECT TIME TO SOLVE THAT AS WELL, AFTER TODAY'S MALE CEOs RETIRE? IS IT, AS YOU PUT IT, “THE LAST GASP OF A VANISHING AGE”?

I think it's partly a question of social policy and partly a question of time. The situation looks unstable when you look at these hierarchies; it's unsustainable. We have such a huge number of women in the middle-executive ranks and almost none at the top. So I think partly time will solve this problem—the next generation will not look like that. But we can't just sit still and wait for it to happen. The workplace needs to look at itself and address some of these questions.

CONSIDERING THAT WOMEN HAVE LARGELY TAKEN OVER HR FUNCTIONS, WHY ARE CORPORATE CULTURES AND HR POLICIES STILL SO INFLEXIBLE?

Economist Claudia Goldin talks about how some professions, most notably law firms and Wall Street, are absurdly rigid and very old-fashioned in terms of what they demand. But we're getting closer to a tipping point. Anne-Marie Slaughter, in her *Atlantic* piece “Why Women Still Can't Have It All,” describes how many women want certain things and want to behave in certain ways in regards to their children, and how that doesn't match today's typical workplace, which is fairly inflexible in terms of accepting that there are so many ambitious women in the workplace. She and I agree that America, for whatever reason, is extremely slow in incorporating and accepting the entry of women at all levels of the workplace.

The hope is that the younger generation of workers will change things. Their demands are not that different from mine, as a 40-year-old woman with children: how they want to work, how much they want to dedicate themselves to work, and their sense that they don't need to be loyal to any one place. Maybe in the next generation, the workplace will open up a little bit and become more flexible in different industries, allowing more women to rise where they're naturally headed anyway and create a more humane workplace.

YOU WRITE THAT SILICON VALLEY IS MANAGING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF AMBITIOUS WOMEN WHO WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH THEIR CHILDREN WITHOUT DESTROYING THEIR CAREERS.

They have not solved the ultimate problem: There are not huge numbers of women at the top in Silicon Valley. On the other hand, those firms are remarkably flexible, and they seem to me to be relatively gender-blind even though they're male-dominated,



because they're younger and newer and don't have a century of historical operations as workplaces. Women there have told me story after story of walking up to a boss and saying, "I just had a baby; I want to take the baby traveling with me; you have to pay for it." And the answer is usually yes, for all the reasons it *should* be yes: "We value you, we spent the last decade training you, and you're the best person for this job. So sure—do what you have to do for the next couple of years, and we'll have you back after that."

DO YOU EXPECT OTHER INDUSTRIES TO LEARN FROM THE TECH INDUSTRY AND RETHINK FLEXTIME AND OTHER POLICIES?

Yes. People admire Silicon Valley; they want to emulate it; they want to be the workplace of the future. Nobody wants to be called backward and hidebound and stuck to traditional rules.

WHO HAS THE FURTHEST TO GO?

Whenever there are studies done about blockage to the top, researchers almost always cite law firms: Why is it that they have a huge number of women graduating

from law school and taking entry-level jobs but can't quite make it up to partner? We used to think there was something wrong with the women; now we think there's something wrong with the law firms, which are failing to retain talent that they've trained.

SURELY, BEFORE TOO LONG, A COUPLE OF MAJOR LAW FIRMS AND WALL STREET FIRMS WILL FOLLOW THROUGH ON THEIR RHETORIC AND BECOME MORE FLEXIBLE, MAKING IT SAFE FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW SUIT.

Here and there you do see amazing, small programs that work really well, and they closely measure their

productivity—how many hours people work and how it affects the bottom line. There's a small program at a huge law firm in Los Angeles, and there's a firm in London that's been remarkably successful in creating a slightly more flexible partner track that women have been able to take advantage of.

I would like to get to a point—in society as well as in the workplace—where no choice carries a stigma, where we don't automatically ask what's wrong with a woman who has a baby and, like Marissa Mayer at Yahoo, comes back to work two weeks later, and where we don't ask what's wrong with a man who wants to stay home and take care of that baby.

We need to open our minds to what men can do and what is acceptable for men to do at home. Until it genuinely becomes acceptable for a man to make the decision, without stigma, that he for some period of time is going to be the one taking care of the children . . . Imagine a world in which that was true. It would be *so* much easier for women—everyone would get used to the fact that there's a parent at home and that parent is the father. So we do have a long way to go.

THESE ARE ATTITUDINAL SHIFTS THAT WE ALL NEED TO MAKE, RIGHT? AT ONE POINT IN THE BOOK, YOU DESCRIBE MEETING A STAY-AT-HOME FATHER AND HAVING A REFLEXIVE REACTION.

I tell the story of a stay-at-home father whom I saw, during the day, doing a project with toddlers, and I was startled. I'm trying to get over that initial instinct I have—the way I view men—and think, "This is fantastic."

It's not just that men are rigid in what they're willing to do—we as a culture are rigid in what we accept that men can do. And it's different in different parts of the country. When I was doing research in Alabama, you



wouldn't *believe* how rigid roles are in terms of what jobs are acceptable. A *teacher* is barely an acceptable job in some towns there, and it would really help men out if they could work as teachers. By contrast, in places like San Francisco and New York and D.C., where I live, the roles are a little broader—though still not that broad.

Maybe in the same way that the country is going through a transition in how we think of gay people getting married, we have to do the same thing for straight men who are doing what we think of as traditionally feminine things during the day—and not think it's a big deal.

THE BIGGEST QUESTION IS WHETHER MEN CAN, OR WILL, ADAPT TO "THE WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE." WHY HAVE MEN BEEN SO SLOW TO ADAPT? WHY ARE THERE STILL SO FEW MALE NURSES AND SCHOOLTEACHERS?

It's a great question. It's only at the end of the book when I started to grapple with this rigidity and, in many places, the failure to break out of the macho warrior box. We're so used to thinking of women as the ones who are oppressed that it took me a whole book to realize what a bind men are in, how hard it is for men to change or adapt.



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And already, young, urban, progressive men are becoming accustomed to being much more active fathers and having different kinds of jobs and switching traditional roles with their partners—maybe their girlfriend is a lawyer and they’re doing more creative work. They’re still a transition generation, but maybe they’re the tip of the iceberg. It’s a slow coastal-to-middle-America progression of men becoming used to taking on these identities and roles, and I think the economy is going to force that on people without it being painful or embarrassing, in the same way that women not having children until much later is becoming slightly more acceptable.

Sociologically, in the century that women have entered and become half of the workforce, there should have been an equivalent shift for men and domesticity, in terms of what men do at home, what men do with children, job choices men make. That *should* balance out. But it hasn’t worked that way at all: The women’s roles have changed a lot, but the men’s roles haven’t changed very much. That’s the journey we have yet to travel.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL FINALLY FORCE MEN TO EXPAND THEIR CHOICE OF WORKPLACES? AS YOU NOTE, WHEN A TRADE BECOMES SEEN AS A “WOMAN’S

PROFESSION,” WAGES FALL, MEN FLEE, AND PRESTIGE DRAINS AWAY.

The “typewriter paradox.”

BUT IF MEN SHUN EVERY ONE OF THOSE PROFESSIONS, MANY MEN WILL BE LIMITED TO CONSTRUCTION JOBS.

It’s true. I asked every nursing school, pharmacy school, and teaching school I visited, “Are any men staying with the program?” And there’s a little bit of hopefulness: There are men coming in as nurses and teachers and pharmacists. Not huge numbers yet, but some.

Some professions will be easier to break than others. One can’t imagine a huge influx of men into the nursing field anything soon, but there’s no reason why there isn’t an influx of men into the teaching field.

The tide has gone all in one direction: women taking over men’s professions and men refusing to go near women’s professions.

THROUGHOUT THE BOOK, YOU DISCUSS WHY WOMEN ARE ADJUSTING SO MUCH MORE EASILY TO NEW ROLES THAN MEN ARE. AS MY WIFE SUGGESTED, IT CAN’T HURT THAT THERE WAS—IS—A NATIONAL WOMEN’S MOVEMENT THAT HAS BEEN DISCUSSING THESE ISSUES FOR FORTY YEARS, WHILE THE CLOSEST THING TO A MEN’S MOVEMENT HAS BEEN BASED ON IRON JOHN.

That’s a big problem. The things that make men less successful in the new economy are the same things that keep them from banding together into movements. Susan Faludi’s *Stiffed* addressed this pretty extensively. There isn’t a men’s movement for more paternity leave or for retraining men for certain jobs or colleges. Whenever there’s a program for, say, retraining, it’s never initiated by the men, unlike women, who have accomplished so much by banding together to break down barriers. I wish the men would do the same thing.

“Some women insist that the man is the head of the household **even though** he’s not working and hasn’t been the breadwinner in quite a while.

YOU TALK ABOUT “THE WORKING-CLASS MEN OF THE SOUTH, WHO OPENLY MOURN THE OLD CHIVALROUS WAYS AND GRIEVE FOR WHAT THE NEW ECONOMY HAS ROBBED FROM THEM.” DO THESE MEN SEE WOMEN’S GAINS COMING AT THEIR EXPENSE?

I had to force those conversations to happen.

WELL, THEY’RE UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS.

I was actually just back in the Alabama town I write about and talked to more people, so it’s fresh in my mind. It’s not something that is acknowledged or talked about openly. The wives would laugh at me: “Yes, I pay our mortgage, and I’ve had a bigger paycheck for a decade, but if you want to keep your marriage together, you don’t talk about that.” And certainly the men didn’t want to talk about being secondary.

BUT THEY HAVE GIVEN IT SOME THOUGHT.

This is a live issue only because it is a central philosophy of the church that the man is the head of the household. That is no joke—they teach it at youth groups; they discuss it when talking to young men and women before they marry; they talk about it on Father’s Day. And while they don’t talk about gender dynamics changing, there are small changes in the ways they dis-

cuss the issues. Instead of “head of the household,” they say “*spiritual* head of the household,” which means biblically ordained by God to be the head of the household. It used to mean *breadwinner*; it doesn’t anymore.

When women talk about being *submissive*, they put the word in quotes now. Their mothers will ask, “Are you really submitting to him?” because they see what happens when the wife is making more money and the husband is at home.

WHAT HAPPENS?

Life takes over: “Honey, did you do the laundry? Have you gone to Wal-Mart yet?” You start to behave like the boss.

These families are still trying to figure it all out. Some women insist that the man is the head of the household even though he’s not working and hasn’t been the breadwinner in quite a while. The man-as-protector role persists even for stay-at-home dads; it has to do with strength and physical size; it’s always told to me—and it’s very poignant, actually—in terms of emergencies. I would ask women, “How is he still the head of household if he’s not earning money?” And they would say, “Look, if something bad happened—an emergency, or if someone broke into the house—he would be there for us.”

What survives strongly is the idea of the man as the hero and the savior in a theoretical emergency; I wrote about this in relation to the Aurora theater shooting, in which three men were shot protecting their girlfriends. Sometimes it comes up in a Christian apocalyptic sense: You have to be prepared because the country is going to seed and we’re losing our greatness, and *that’s* the moment you’ll see men rise as men—when you’ll understand what it means to be a man.

IN THE END, YOU MANAGE TO SOUND UPBEAT: “IN MY HEART OF HEARTS I BELIEVE THAT MEN . . . WILL EVENTUALLY LEARN TO DECODE THE NEW FLEXIBILITY, AND WILL BEGIN TO ADOPT IT FOR THEMSELVES.” IS THAT REALLY WHAT’S IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS, OR DID YOU JUST NOT WANT THINGS TO SOUND SO BLEAK FOR YOUR TWO SONS?

It is in my heart of hearts because of this long struggle I went through with the brain-science books. I really wanted to believe that men’s brains are one way and women’s brains another way, so I read the literature—and things are just not that fixed and determinative. We can only conclude that there’s a huge amount of room to move, for men as well as women. ■



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