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## It's Not the End of Men

Contra Hanna Rosin, the problem isn't men; it's traditional gender stereotypes.

ANN FRIEDMAN | June 10, 2010 | web only



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suited to women?"

With each step that American women have taken on the road to equality, detractors have fretted about what their advancement means for men -- particularly the "manly man." The lumber jack. The quarterback. The captain of industry. Clint Eastwood.

Sure, we occasionally see articles lamenting the end of traditional femininity and the difficulty of finding a submissive woman who derives all of life's pleasure from nurturing her family. But a far more common modern lament is the demise of masculinity. In 2000, Susan Faludi explored "the betrayal of the American man" in Stiffed. In 2001, Christina Hoff Sommers decried The War on Boys. In 2005, New York Times columnist David Brooks wrote that "this is turning into a woman's world," and Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens published a book about "saving our sons from falling behind in school and in life." In 2006, Harvey Mansfield eulogized Manliness, and a Newsweek cover story again warned of an impending "boy crisis." Last summer, in Foreign Policy, Reihan Salam declared the economic crisis a "he-cession."

The latest contribution to the masculinity-crisis meme is "The End of Men," a cover story in this month's Atlantic by Hanna Rosin. Women are outperforming men in schools, at work, and at home, she argues. The global economy is shifting in such a way that it favors "female" characteristics, and male-dominated industries such as manufacturing, construction and finance are declining. "As thinking and communicating have come to eclipse physical strength and stamina as keys to economic success," she writes, "those societies that take advantage of the talents of all their adults, not just half of them, have pulled away from the rest." What if, she asks, "the economics of the new era are better

It's disappointing that, despite a history of sharp observations about gender and 5,000 words to work with, Rosin makes the same oversight as all of the other hand-wringing articles about the state of the American male. She thinks the problem is men; really, it's traditional gender stereotypes. The narrow, toxic definition of masculinity perpetuated by Rosin and others -- that men are brawn not brains, doers not feelers, earners not nurturers -- is actually to blame for the crisis

Unlike some other chroniclers of the so-called decline of masculinity, Rosin acknowledges men are not biologically predisposed to jobs that require strength and aggression, just as women are not biologically destined to be better thinkers and caregivers. Yet her underlying assumption is that the growth industries we currently consider to be "women's work" (nursing, home health care, food service, child care) will always retain that designation. Maybe it's just my feminist idealism talking, but I fail to see why these "nurturing professions," as Rosin dubs them, must forever be the province of women. Not once does she posit what would happen if we stopped writing articles that reinforced the stereotype that men are best suited to the manufacturing and finance sectors.

While Rosin does include a paragraph-long caveat about the persistence of sexism and discrimination, when it comes to women's economic achievement, she fails to dig much deeper than anecdotes. Sure, college-age women tell her they hope to become surgeons and marry men who will be primary caregivers. But research shows that few women actually realize this domestic arrangement-- they tend to marry other high-achieving men who expect their own careers to take precedence. Many of the fastest-growing, female-dominated industries, which do not require a college education, are among the lowest paid. And while there are a handful of female CEOs and senators, women have yet to crack the glass ceiling with any sort of critical mass. (Rosin's piece, I should note, appears in *The Atlantic*'s annual ideas issue, in which only three out of 15 "ideas" articles are written by women. How bold of the editors to apply some affirmative action to advance the careers of men in the "thinking and communicating" magazine industry, where they are at such a disadvantage!)

When it comes to what determines which Americans succeed in this economy, race and class completely overshadow gender. Yet the conversation keeps returning to the decline of men. "The working class," she writes, "which has long defined our notions of masculinity, is slowly turning into a

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Finally, in the weakest section of her article, Rosin trots out some pop-culture examples to prop up the notion that women are truly dominant -- and men are now the second sex. Demi Moore has a much-younger husband and the "cougar" is a cultural phenomenon. In the most-watched music video of the Internet era, Lady Gaga and Beyoncé kill a restaurant full of people. On the flip side, she points out, nearly every popular Judd Apatow movie features a romantically challenged loser -- who, according to Rosin, represents the neutered downfall of the American man.

This is what I don't get about her argument -- and most other plaintive cries that we are on the verge of losing American manhood forever: If the, as she terms them, omega males of *Knocked Up* and *The 40-Year Old Virgin* are representative of the way men live now, shouldn't they be ideally positioned to take advantage of the nurturing and cerebral jobs that are the core of America's new post-masculine economy? These aren't testosterone-fueled brawny men who are desperate to find a job in the manufacturing sector. Rosin can't seem to make up her mind: Are American men aggressive brutes who need to make a living on their physical strength? Or are they omega males, cowed by high-achieving women?

Perhaps the answer lies in the success of these high-achieving women. In previous generations, women busted all sorts of gender stereotypes in order to get their piece of the economic pie. While there were various schools of thought among feminists about how to best make the case for hiring women, all involved reshaping popular notions about women's abilities. Women could be firefighters and floor traders, CEOs and carpenters. The best man for the job just might be a woman, or so the 1970s slogan went.

It's long past time we also acknowledge that the best woman for the job might just be a man.

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