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It's Not the End of Men

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

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(Vintage Pitney-Bowes Ad)

sued to women?"

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

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

