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**It's all over, boys: the
end of male supremacy**



(and it's a man
who's saying that)

The ascent of

Women are the superior gender and will dominate in society, one brave (male) professor tells Barbara McMahon

Hillary Clinton is in contention for the US presidency, Angela Merkel runs the biggest economy in Europe and Sheryl Sandberg is chief operating officer of the world's most successful social networking site — is it any wonder that men feel threatened? Perhaps that explains why they have reacted so furiously to claims in a new book that women are superior to men and about to outstrip them.

In *Women After All: Sex, Evolution and the End of Male Supremacy*, the biological anthropologist Melvin Konner argues that women are not only the better sex, but are especially dominant in ways that will count in the future. When more women call the shots the world will be safer and more efficient, the 68-year-old professor predicts, because men are responsible for most of the rotten things that happen in the world.

"I can forgive some women for looking back and saying, 'Why did we ever invent males?'" he laughs, speaking at his office at Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. "Most men aren't guilty of violence, sexual or otherwise, financial corruption or warmongering but the minority that is guilty of those things has put a very strong stamp on human history."

Konner seems remarkably cheerful for an author being inundated with criticism. His inbox is stuffed with furious emails from what he says are angry and insecure men. "You just can't put a label on your kind of stupid," spits one, while another rages that women have never achieved excellence in engineering or wanted to conquer the "intellectual unknown". There are downright rude responses too. "There seems to be a lot of latent male hostility to women's growing success," observes Konner dryly.

While this touchiness is understandable, the fact remains that there are fundamental differences between the sexes that are not just a matter of culture or upbringing, he says, although both play their roles. There are intrinsic genetic and physiological differences between men and women and one of the most important is in the brain.

"The area of the brain that is pivotal for violence, which is called the amygdala, is larger in males and is highly responsive to

testosterone, which is far higher in men than in women," Konner says. "On top of that, the part of our brain that can inhibit the amygdala, thus restraining violence — the front lobes — are more active in women than men. So the impulses toward physical aggression are not as strong in women and their ability to inhibit them is greater."

There are other differences, such as in the hypothalamus, which influences sexuality. Men are born with "a kind of sexual drive that is detached from affection and throws caution to the wind" and will ruin their careers, break up families and cause all kinds of havoc for a few moments of physical pleasure. Women lack these biological tripwires.

In a career spanning more than four decades, Konner has helped us to understand the evolution of human behaviour or, as he puts it, "why we do what we do, think what we think and feel what we feel". His seminal scientific work *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit*, which looked at the roots of aggression, the basis of attachment and desire and the foundations of mental illness, still influences generations of researchers. He was also one of the first to record how turning away from a palaeolithic diet — the foods consumed by our prehistoric ancestors — contributed to the endemic and chronic diseases of modern civilisation.

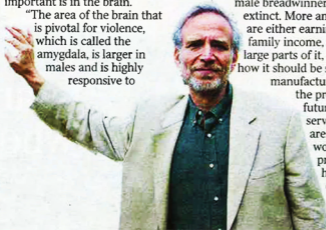
In *Women After All*, Konner charts how traditional gender roles in the western world are relatively recent — only about 12,000 years old. The small-scale nomadic cultures we once lived in made it hard for men to exclude women from decision-making. With civilisation, men built a "military, economic and political conspiracy" to prevent women having meaningful roles.

Yet — and this is what has really put the wind up his critics — the pendulum of power is swinging ever faster in women's direction. In the past men's physical strength and genetic differences let them dominate; now many of the characteristics women have are more valued and necessary.

Girls are doing better than boys at schools, colleges and universities. The traditional household, propped up by a male breadwinner, is becoming

extinct. More and more women are either earning all the family income, or contributing large parts of it, and deciding how it should be spent. With manufacturing in decline,

the professions of the future, such as service industries, are more suited to women. "For procreation we have increasing evidence that children can grow up quite nicely, thank



woman: time to accept it



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you, without necessarily having men in the household and I would say we are at most a few decades away from same-sex biological reproduction," Konner says.

"It will be possible in the not too distant future for a woman's skin cells to be re-engineered to make a sperm that you would use to fertilise her partner's egg. They won't need a man at any step in the process," he predicts, "and because two women don't have any Y chromosomes, all the babies would be girls."

The same could be done with re-engineering a man's skin cells to trick them into developing an egg to be fertilised with the sperm of his partner. "Then you would have a baby produced from the genes of two men but they would still need a womb so they can't do it without a woman."

He says women could eliminate men by joining two women's DNA, but most don't seem to want to. "I spoke about this with one of my daughters and she said, 'Dad, men are fun to have around.' So, no, we're not likely to witness the end of men. It could mean — and it will take many generations — that men become a

shrinking and smaller minority of the human race and that women will be more or less in charge of deciding how many men to keep around for certain services. It's a sort of science-fiction scenario that's quite fun to contemplate, but it's not too far away."

In his book, Konner says that Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi and Golda Meir are often rolled out as proof that women can be just as warlike as men; but they had to imitate men to get to the top, he says. A new generation of female leaders, led by Merkel, the German chancellor, are doing things on their own terms. If women leaders go to war in future, it will be out of necessity and for rational reasons, not because of ego, he claims.

Hanna Rosin's book *The End of Men* heralded some of the same shifts and was widely praised, but Konner has been surprised at the level of vitriol he has received. There have been many straightforward "**** you" responses.

He agrees that a lot in his book will upset people. "It's bound to offend a certain kind of man who hasn't figured out things are changing faster than they can control and that they're changing for the better," he says. "I've

also had some kickback from women who question my optimism and say that conditions for women haven't improved that much but I'd say to them that they're not taking a long enough historical perspective.

"Part of the motivation for the book was that I'm a man. It's always good for a woman to write a book saying how great women are but it's liable to be interpreted as special pleading, so maybe it was time for a man to step up."

Even in third-world countries, women are forging ahead. "We all know that the best way to spend a dollar in the developing world is to teach a girl or empower a woman," Konner says. "I think women in these countries are not going to put up with the patriarchal restrictions that have been placed on them for very much longer."

There is no doubt that the American scholar is a strong supporter of the female sex. "In my two years with the bushmen of Botswana, I saw women of matchless skill and courage bring home 70 per cent of the bacon" — really nuts, vegetables, and fruit — while doing 90 per cent of the baby and child care, not to mention facing unassisted childbirth with calm courage. So much for the idea that the working mother is something new," he says.

Konner's mother raised him and his brother despite her deafness. He has been married twice. Marjorie Shostak, his late first wife, joined his field work, raised their three children and wrote the anthropological standard *Nisa: The Life and Words of a Kung Woman*. His second wife, Ann Cale Kruger, made her name in child psychology and runs programmes to protect girls at risk of commercial sexual abuse.

"I delivered 35 babies in medical school and attended the births of all three of my children and my grandson, which is about as close as a man gets to the magnificent achievement of bringing life into the world," he says.

"In my own little lifetime I've seen countless women fight for their rights and they have changed the world. When I compare the lives of my grandmothers, two strong and capable women, with the life my soon-to-be-born granddaughter will be able to have, I can only stand in awe at what women have accomplished for themselves and their great-great-granddaughters and think, 'What will do next?'"

He says jokingly that he hopes women will allow men to stick around and maintain some sort of usefulness. So he cannot be too down on males. Shouldn't we give men a break? "I think so, provided that we don't let it stop the momentum. Men have a lot to offer but I think we will all be better off if women are allowed to exert a stronger and moderating influence."

So we have to be patient with men. "They have a lot of adjusting to do," he says mischievously.

Women After All: Sex, Evolution and the End of Male Supremacy by Melvin Konner is published by WW Norton, £16.99

Women like Hillary Clinton, Sheryl Sandberg and the lawyer Amal Alamuddin will become increasingly dominant, says the anthropologist Melvin Konner, below left

“Men could become a smaller part of society