

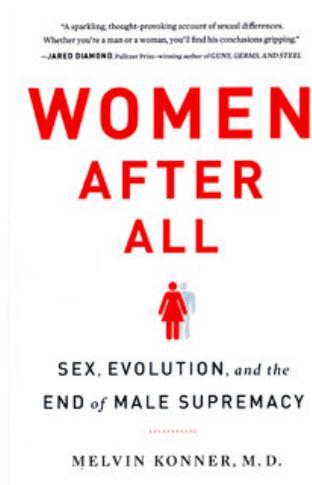
The End of Gender Roles

Doctor and anthropology professor Melvin Konner explores the rise and coming decline of male supremacy.

By [Maura Hohman](#) | April 2, 2015 | 9:00 a.m. EDT



In 2015, gender roles seem to seep into every aspect of society, from TV commercials to talk of a woman in the White House, but they're actually a new societal phenomenon. Of the 100,000 years humans have been on Earth, women have been excluded from power only for the last 12,000. And even more recently, women have started to break away from the identities that color them as less capable than men. But according to Melvin Konner, a medical doctor and professor of anthropology at Emory University, this progression doesn't mean women and men are the same. He argues in his book "Women After All: Sex, Evolution and the End of Male Supremacy" that in the biological battle of the sexes, women and men fundamentally differ – and women come out on top. Konner talked with U.S. News about his anthropological research, the origin of gender roles and, most importantly, their expiration. Excerpts:



What inspired you to write the book?

While studying the development of children in Botswana and London, a colleague and I found one difference consistent in both places: boys are more aggressive than girls. Every culture has this, and it points to something biological and not learned, at least partly. Also, I saw my daughters grow into outstanding young women, and I finally decided that, even though I'm a man, I wanted to weigh in on why women are superior and try to combat the age-old beliefs that people have to the contrary.

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What caused society to establish gender roles?

In hunting and gathering societies, women couldn't be excluded because of the small groups, but around 12,000 years ago, there was a big increase in population density. People settled down and started farming, and the result was that men could exclude women from decision-making and specialized in roles within society. Private and public spaces became separate, and it was possible to relegate women to the home and keep them out of public life.

Why were women excluded from positions of power?

Everything in that era was contingent on physical strength, and that enabled men to develop a worldwide ideology of male supremacy, which became accepted in the so-called civilizations that emerged from

farming societies. It lasted until a couple of centuries ago.

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What parallels do you see between ancient male supremacy and today's?

What Boko Haram and [the Islamic State group] do is a good indication of what men throughout history have done: make war, slaughter their enemies, capture wives and daughters, and use those girls and women for their own sexual purposes. That's been the essence of the male-dominated world for 10-12,000 years.

What progress toward gender equality has been made in the last two centuries?

In the 1800s, women started chipping away at oppression with the establishment of secondary schools for girls, admissions of women to colleges and medical schools and the beginning of the suffragist movement. People say nothing is changing, but that's ridiculous. All over the developing world, there are girls in school who never could go until a few years ago. The number of women in the Senate has gone from 1 to 20 since 1985. The number of women CEOs of Fortune 500 companies has gone from 0 to 25 since 1998. The majority of high school graduates, college entrants and graduates are women. Nearly half of law and medical school entering classes and 40 percent of business school classes are women. I don't think there's any stopping it.

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What are some current examples of male supremacy?

Ninety-five percent of CEOs of Fortune 500 corporations are still male. There are attempts to exclude women from the board rooms of many of these companies. Women are paid 77 cents on the dollar for equivalent jobs. Women are belittled, bullied and subject to sexual harassment and ridiculed for taking time off to have a baby. There's a whole ideology that only men can do certain kinds of things, and it's false.

What's the biggest difference between men and women?

Men will pay for sex; they'll harm for sex, they'll force sex and they'll kill for sex. It's just not characteristic of women to do those things. In all societies, 90 percent of homicides are done by men.

Why do you think male supremacy is nearing its end?

The burst of women's achievement feels like pent-up energy and ability suppressed by thousands of years of wasting half the talent of the human race. Within the last half century, women have proved wrong 12,000 years of claims why women couldn't do certain jobs – because of their menstrual cycles, they're too emotional, don't think logically, might get pregnant, are easily intimidated by men, can't take the stress of public life and leadership. It's the beginning of something new.

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