



The Richer Sex: How the New Majority of Female Breadwinners Is Transforming Sex, Love and Family

Liza Mundy

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A revolution is under way.

Within a generation, more households will be supported by women than by men. In *The Richer Sex*, Liza Mundy takes us to the exciting frontier of this new economic order: she shows us why this flip is inevitable, what painful adjustments will have to be made along the way, and how both men and women will feel surprisingly liberated in the end.

The bestselling author and *Washington Post* writer goes deep inside the lives of the couples on this cutting edge to paint of picture of how dating, marriage, and home life are changing. How does this new generation of breadwomen navigate paying for a night on the town? In whose interest is it to delay commitment? Are men for the first time thinking of marriage the way women used to—as a bet on the economic potential of a spouse? In this new world of men marrying up, are women learning to value new realms of male endeavor—like parenting, protection, and a margarita at the ready?

The future is here, with couples today debating who must assume the responsibility of primary earner and who gets the freedom of being the slow track partner. With more men choosing to stay home, Mundy shows how that lifestyle has achieved a higher status and all the ways males have found to recover their masculinity. And the revolution is global: Mundy takes us from Japan to Denmark to show how both sexes are adapting as the marriage market has turned into a giant free-for-all, with men and women at different stages of this transformation finding partners in other countries who match their expectations.

The Richer Sex is a wild ride into the future, grounded in Mundy’s peerless journalism, and bound to cause women and men of all generations to rethink what this social upheaval will mean.

The Richer Sex: How the New Majority of Female Breadwinners Is Transforming Sex, Love and Family Details

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Erik says

Going into this I had one main hope/expectation, that it would confirm the viability of my life plan of getting a job with a law firm, marrying a lawyer, being a secondary earner/domestic support to her more demanding professional aspirations. The conclusion definitely hits hard in this optimistic direction but reading between the lines of the anecdote-heavy, data-light treatment, I saw a lot of reason for skepticism that this change will really happen soon enough for me. It seems that at least for now, the rising economic prospects of women is just making them as tough to deal with as men. The book, like most non-fiction books, feels overwritten (at least given its lack of harder data), but one area that felt distinctly underserved was international comparison. The author talks in some detail about the example of Japan, and the Far East more generally, which is a rather more negative portrait. I would have liked more detail on Scandinavia where arguably gender egalitarianism is most naturally carried out.

Oh, and with all the talk about the impact of this switch on dating dynamics, one thing that received almost no mention was the prospect of women initiating relationships. That men were to be pursuers was not questioned at all, and so long as there is no equality in that onus, I shall consider feminism a sham.

Amelia says

I heard a review of this book recently & decided to check it out, even though I disagree with its central argument. It claims that because American women are currently going to graduate school at higher rates than men, our economy will be transformed: in the near future, women will be the main breadwinners of their families, and the majority of men will become stay at home dads.

My problem with it, obviously, is that it doesn't advocate for equality. The life that the author proposes is a lot like the nuclear, heteronormative, monogamous one we're living now, just with a gender role reversal. It comes across as feminist, but falls short.

I'd like to see it go a few steps further. But I'm only two chapters in, so we'll see, I guess. For now, I'm having fun arguing with it. :)

Eleanor says

I mostly picked this up because I loved Everything Conceivable-- for the subject (IVF) but also for how well written and readable it was--the kind of book that makes me wonder why I don't read more non-fiction.. (until I read something else that is like pulling teeth.)

This book wasn't as good as I remember Everything Coceivable being. The organization/structure seems sort of random and it felt like the numbers from studies were just flung here and there to support whatever the author happened to feel like talking about in that moment of the book. And overall the author basically seeks to support the division of labor at home.. which is fine, except that she doesn't come out and say it and still hangs onto this pseudo unbiased reporter attitude. (the voice is a little in and out in general.) and she also doesn't really construct a great argument or assemble much evidence to support this. (or if she did it was at some random middle portion of the book). it's largely... anecdotes. which are great for illustrating but irritating when that's the main evidence..

those are my concessions - (and the anecdotal proving stuff is all about having one at-home parent. the main idea of the book-- women earning more, how it affects marriage, family, etc-- all well laid out and Not prescriptive.)

- 4 stars because still well written, interesting to read, and most importantly to me-- it made me think about a few things in a slightly different way. (nevermind the thesis of the book.) by the end I was thinking of all the people I know who I would like to read it and wondering how irritated they would be by the suggestion/gift.

I felt like it got a little bit preachy/self-helpy and overly rosy at the end.. where I would put something more thoughtful and considered and opened.. but that bit was in the middle of the book.. back to the weird structuring. But I would say definitely read it! stick it out through the first bit... it gets better and more readable.

I also like to think that maybe the publisher forced/strongly encouraged the author to have a black and white/definitive stance, with "woman as breadwinner" because it's easier to sell books and generate reviews and criticism and discussion that way... and that the author had actually originally hoped to write more nuanced arguments. although that doesn't explain away the random chapters and chapter sections.

Kaci says

Although an interesting read, it seems a little speculative and bias. It argues that society will basically be the same, just reversed. Women will want to work long hours to be the family breadwinner while men will want to stay home and take on the majority of the housework. I was looking for a more 50/50 perspective.

Carly Thompson says

3.5 stars. This is a fascinating account of male/female relations and how women are currently out earning men in some areas and are on track to surpass them entirely in the near future. Mundy looks at the historical background (for centuries men were the breadwinners and women made less money), the current era where women are starting to surpass men, and what this means for marriages and relationships. She interviews couples where the female is the higher earner and also interviews various researchers (economists, sociologists, anthropologists) and reports on their research into the subject.

I really enjoyed reading this; it was definitely thought-provoking about the nature of masculinity and femininity, the division of labor in marriage and romantic relationships, raising children, what a man or a woman looks for in a mate, and working in the information age. I didn't give this book 4 stars because of the author's habit of projecting what she imagines/believes the future to be like. For example: "Women will envy

husbands who are at home, cooking and watching the children. Women will hoard authority. They will not be as nice about all this, perhaps, as they should be. They will complain that men can't do anything correctly. They will text too many domestic reminders and to-do lists. . . ." (p. 112). Also: "In the future, something similar will happen. Women who remain determined to find a partner 'on their level' will travel to seek this elusive species. Women with resources--especially women in big cities with airport hubs--will rescue the travel industry, keeping airlines aloft in pursuit of long-term companions." (p. 203) I found this constant speculation, written in the simple future tense of will to be annoying especially since no one knows exactly what will happen; Mundy's opinions are only conjecture (albeit conjecture based on observing the current situation and making an informed guess.)

I also found that Mundy focused mainly on upper middle class (lots of engineers and executives) and middle class women (she interviewed many Hispanic women in South Texas who worked in education); I would be interesting in how the wage gap is effective lower class women.

A good, but not perfect book about contemporary life.

Christina Mitchell says

So what is the big deal? More women worldwide are educated and earning the money. Why is this such a compelling phenomena? The answer: because it is turning notions of parenthood, relationships, sex, and gender roles on their heads. With that turning comes considerable discomfort.

An educated person knows that society evolves. Those wishing to hark back to the good ole days often forget that them good ole days included women who couldn't vote, slavery, severe class warfare that included child labor and women locked in factories that burned down. It included addicting women who complained to heroine and anti-depressants making them believe they'd gone mad. It meant domestic abuse was hushed up giving wives no recourse but to stay put and take the beating. Thank goodness things change.

Mundy gives extensive consideration to the changes occurring in our society. She speculates on the changes currently in process and what these changes mean for the future. Are these changes bad? Probably not. Absolutely not, if people are willing to adapt. As Mundy advises, it's all about coming to new definitions of male and female, re-defining gender roles. For example, it isn't such a bad thing that men want to stay at home with their children while the women earn the money. If the jibing and ridicule on the social and family front (in-laws, etc.) would knock off the crap, a couple might just find a partnership that works outstandingly well.

Of course, not everyone will embrace change, and this is where the pitfalls lie. More women, more educated women, in tandem with less men and less educated men, mean that marriage is diminishing. Mundy specifically cites women who have remained single, "coupled" up with girlfriends (domestic or supportive relationships with no sexual activity), or simply choose to marry down. If women hang on to notions of traditional marriage, they will have to sacrifice their careers, and have to settle for the potentiality of a lesser income from a man. Men, on the other hand, are either all too willing to let her bring home the bacon while doing little but playing video games all day, or are so indignant at the changes they go abroad to find a traditionally subservient wife.

My opinion of all this: suck it up, cupcakes! Change is inevitable. Women are out enrolling and out graduating men in college. Get used to the idea that they have equal say in a relationship. I have pretty much

done away with the prospect of coupling with a man. I cannot take the bullshit anymore. I no longer care to fight for him to notice me, support me, or applaud me. I will no longer accept a man who is unmotivated, and hell bent on making himself look more dominant by being with a weak woman. I have choices, and I have made mine. I know I sound exactly like the woman these 50s-style men would like to send back to the kitchen. Guess what? I do not answer to them, have to earn their respect, or care with they think. And, that is perfect! There is someone out there who will provide me everything I need emotionally without the competition or hurt ego. Gender isn't a priority. Anyone can fuck anyone else...it's a physical act anyone can carry out (though some are better at it than others). Men had their chance and they blew it. Time to explore other options.

If this all revealing too much, I do not apologize. I am hurt, tired, angry, and disappointed. I want that to come through in this review and I hope I've succeeded.

Z says

A thought-provoking and stereotype-shattering book, which makes use of exhaustive analysis of many statistics, and extensive interviews...we tend to forget what a new thing it is for women to work throughout their adult lives, but it is, perhaps, the most profound revolution in human history. It's not just about money: working gives women independence, autonomy, influence, and the opportunity to develop their abilities and use them to benefit society. It enables women to have a broader perspective on life and the world. It also raises many questions: is it anti-feminist and unfair for a working woman to expect that dinner will be on the table when she comes home from work, and she can sit in the easy chair while her partner cleans up and puts the kids to bed? How should women deal with men who feel threatened by their professional success? And how will men deal with being secondary financially? (There are some inspiring examples of successful and happy male homemakers in this book.)

After reading this book, it is possible to imagine the masculinization of domesticity:
"Wouldn't you feel safer if you worked, and you knew your husband was at home to protect the kids?"
"Women belong in the workplace, men are better equipped to handle disciplining children."
"Men should stay at home, in case something around the house breaks, so they can fix it right away."

This book mostly details women who are successful at work...it mostly ignores the stories of women who are primary breadwinners, but are struggling or barely making it financially...but if I want to read about that, I can read Nickel and Dimed...

T says

I read this book in lieu of The End of Men, which hadn't come out yet at the time and is on a very similar subject, because I had been fascinated by the spate of articles recently on changing gender roles and dynamics. While parts of this book were interesting I found myself frustrated for several reasons.

1. The author tended to take an anecdote or a single statistic and use it to construct a story about how drastically the culture has changed, expanding from that single point as if it alone was evidence of a culture-wide shift. I often wasn't convinced the shift was more than a few of the author's friends so far.
2. The author's understanding and use of statistics was rather questionable at times.

3. While some chapters were evenly written (and the author does make a point of discussing male-focused counterpoints when she can), a number of sections seem to assume that the rise of women is a part of a zero-sum game that men will have to lose in to balance out. I think this is a false sense though, the world is not a zero sum game and everyone can win from less rigid social roles. The author's tendency to write this way hinted at an inferiority complex or a sense of misandry that just seemed gratuitous and distracting.

Overall I didn't get much out of this book that I hadn't already gotten from reading all the articles in The Atlantic's threads around Why Women Still Can't Have It All and The End of Men and similar articles on their new The Sexes channel. I'd recommend you save time and money and go there.

Sara says

There has been some discussion regarding the gender gap in the recovery following a recession which left many young people out of work. In the meantime, it has been argued, women have been taking advantage of the slow job market to become more educated, and thus, more prepared to take the jobs which have been coming available — those requiring skills in technology, written and verbal communication, and administration; meanwhile, men who once excelled at the blue-collar, manufacturing jobs, are falling behind as those jobs are made obsolete by technology or outsourced to other countries. This book takes a look at how this has affected women and their interactions with men and other women, influenced their decisions regarding families and children, challenged them to redefine femininity without emasculating men or trying to become men.

One critic of this book mentioned that the author's idea of the newly transformed gender roles looks a lot like a mere reversal of traditional male/female roles, in which the man now stays at home and takes care of domestic matters, caring for children, and cooking, while the woman has the high-powered, well-paying office job, instead of a more balanced, equal state in which things are evenly shared. I would suggest that the whole premise of the book is that our economy and educational system are promoting inequality, and thus Mundy's description of these effects does show an accurate representation of what will happen if things are not changed. Other books have made the argument that a majority of schools and curriculum are designed such that girls, who tend to pick up more quickly on verbal and written communication, will excel while boys, who tend to mature later and are attracted by action and movement, often do not focus and learn as quickly, thus promoting inequality in education, which can result in less investment in schooling, lower expectations from college and career. "Why Boys Fail" by Richard Whitmire is a great book that looks into this, and makes some suggestions as to how to remedy it.

One of the sections of the book that was most interesting to me was the chapter that examined the role of men and women in Japan, a country which recently experienced a similar recession, wiping out the job prospects of many young people, and in which the women are highly educated. Men and women there are learning to navigate a new style of relating and marrying, which is particularly vital to their country since the population has shrunk drastically and there is a severe lack of younger people to help support the elderly. Although Americans are not yet in this state, it is important to see how other first-world countries are addressing the problem, and what their solutions may look like.

Busy says

As a single woman who is going to get married someday, I am aiming for equality, but I also would not mind if my husband makes more than me. I would love to own my own small business and set my own hours. While I always want to make my own money, it would be wonderful to have a steady income and benefits for my hypothetical family to rely on. This book is a useful thought exercise because it makes women consider, "What if the responsibility falls on my shoulders?" This, and other issues discussed in the book, were ones I had rarely- if ever- thought about, at least not in such concrete terms. I have a graduate degree- to say I'm "marrying down" if I choose someone with a BA is quite frankly something I never considered. The pool of highly educated men- especially American men- is sadly small, one thing that does appear clearly relevant five years later. It was a bit depressing to basically be told I will have to settle for someone without a graduate education. I'm not a snob, but it's a distinct and significant life experience. Going through it means you are much likelier to have something in common with me than people who hasn't. As far as I can tell this is true of any graduate degree, from public administration to biological research to law school to astrophysics. C'est la vie- maybe I'll marry someone with a graduate degree and live happily ever in equality after all. This book was an interesting read, even if I never have to be a breadwoman.

Carina Salazar Foley says

Thought-provoking and well researched. I would like to hear her offer more texture on how the increasing number of female breadwinners can affect structural changes in society. The writer highlights more of a switch in traditional roles than a more progressive standpoint.

Doug Cornelius says

Almost 40% of US working wives now outearn their husbands. Washington Post reporter Liza Mundy argues that "the Big Flip" in gender roles "is just around the corner" in her new book: *The Richer Sex*. Soon "women, not men, will become the top earners in households" and that will transform the dynamics of male-female relationships.

Mundy sprinkles interviews with women and men throughout the book to highlight her positions and theories. She sees the emergence of a country and world where both sexes are "freer to make purely romantic choices" based on individual preference rather than constrained by long-held stereotypes about who should be the primary breadwinner. For large parts of the US economy, you don't need physical strength and stamina to put food on the table and a roof over your head.

Mundy speculates that women are better adapting to the knowledge-driven economy of the United States. Middle skill jobs are disappearing. Men lost 75% of the 7 million jobs that disappeared during the Great Recession. Industrial jobs are being outsourced. That means making the educational leap to higher tier jobs. Women receive 57% of bachelor degrees and account for 60% of graduate school enrollment.

Mundy concludes that the bread-winning woman is dramatically changing the face of marriage and quality of marriage. They prefer a marriage of equals, or at least a man with strong career ambition and intellect. That means women would choose being single to being in a bad marriage. With their earning potential, they don't need a husband for financial support.

Mundy relates the story of a high-powered executive in a lackluster marriage, with a husband that was

resentful of his wife's career. (He didn't have one.) They fought over getting a dog. He thought the dog would absorb too much of her time and affection. She ended up getting the dog and he got mad. Then she had a brainstorm. Get rid of him and keep the dog. "The dog is very supportive of her achievements."

This growth of female breadwinners is not just a US phenomenon. It's happening in South Korea, Japan, Singapore, France, Chile, Ireland, Belgium, Canada, the Philippines, and Norway. As the world economy is starting to rely more on brainpower than musclepower, women are the winning participants in the economy. There is still great inequality. But it's changing. This book looks ahead to where that may lead as women overtake men as the breadwinner.

I first heard of this book while listening to an interview of Liz Mundy on a podcast of C-SPAN's Book TV. (Yes, I'm that much of a geek.) The interview was great and prompted me to run down to the library and borrow a copy. I suggest you do the same.

Ietrio says

I wanted to like this book. I really did. But this is not a study. This is not philosophy. This is sensationalist journalism and click bait. And I was baited. I have to admit it.

Liza Mundy is not a feminist. She is some sort of christian in need of money. Long dead are the days when a journalist can make money by just reporting stuff. And it is normal. This kind of job should have gone voluntary by the time mobile phones started shipping with cameras. And having better grammar should not cover for a dramatic lack of understanding of an issue.

I got the smell of rotten in the beginning. So some people think the woman's inferiority is god given and others thin is 'Darwin given'? And from there the text goes downhill. According to Mundy people will certainly reverse into the Middle Ages, only the roles will be inverted: men with search to marry well and women will have careers. After all, in Mundy's mind everything is about marriage and mating. Just like the Catholic church people do not have to feel good and have friends. No. They should build a nest, just like any common furred weasel.

The text is filled with patriarchy slogans like 'breadwinners'. Sure, the priest still roars about this, but that is modern considering the delivered text is still 2000 years old. But today in the developed world the minimal wage might not give you a shelter, but can give you plenty of food. Or, at least, minimal wage can give you shelter and plenty of water, because Jesus keeps the price of fish high.

The whole documentation is anecdotal. And when possible there is the appeal to authority: X, 'the Nobel prize winner'. Aha!

Christian fundamentalist junk is peering from every corner: so men need 'women whom they love and admire'. How about just friends, partners and colleagues?

Men, also are said to cling to their old status. Only the men in questions never had that authority status. At best the author can argue those men wish the status of their grandfathers.

And everybody has a place, just like in the catholic dogma, so every few pages women have these options and men have these options. And it keeps going and going and going just like the energizer bunny. A lot of

words to say nothing. A lot of words to say how people SHOULD behave and nothing more than 'a hispanic/african/whatever woman I have interviewed said...' when it comes to what people do at the time.

Anyway Mundy's field of understanding is limited to the white christian world. Everything else is the same, only decades/centuries behind. Meaning they are bound to follow the white christian civilization.

The gays are irrelevant, as marriage is made of a daddy and a mommy. In the story. The men are destined to make themselves pretty and learn to cook in order to attract some woman. Only that jobs are automated and cooking can be done better in large quantities. But the gospel tells something that makes Mundy oblivious to this: who does not work should not eat. And as women were used as home drones, now men should do the same because humanity has to regress to the age of the Garden of Eden instead of evolving. So men 'are given' the right to be violent in the family by some supernatural being. The lack of sanction and the education are irrelevant, neither being important for the church.

Mundy is equally inept in economy as in sociology, which does not stop the author from going on with the economic predictions. Again, this is valid for the whole World, only the darkies are too backward to see it happening right now.

The employed vocabulary is disgusting: 'domestication', 'masculinity' (which has to be proven!), 'praise'.

In short, a book about the current changes in gender roles is very needed. And I am not aware of anything like this. This book is rich in words and shallow in research. For example the multiple branches of misogynistic scientism are barely touched with a few references to evolutionary psychology and psychoanalysts.

Still, this book might have been majestic, if written in the days of Virginia Woolf. But for the 21st century, this is a silly book about power, win-lose and conspiracies.

Leah says

A very interesting and thought-provoking book. For me, it was interesting reading this not too long after I read *Half the Sky*. The two books paint two very different pictures of women's lives in the 21st century; the difference between the picture of educated first-world women portrayed by Mundy couldn't be a starker contrast to the women of the third world profiled in *Half the Sky*. The difference, as Mundy emphasizes over and over, is education. In the first-world countries she covers (including the U.S., Japan, and countries in the E.U.), women are beginning to surpass men in terms of education, and more and more women are becoming breadwinners. *Half the Sky* shows the opposite side of the coin: women in countries around the world being denied a basic education simply because they are female. Although Mundy puts a positive spin on her predicted world of female breadwinners and helpful domesticated husbands, I can't help but think that the yawning void between the "haves" and the "have nots" of the world will continue to expand, and the consequences can't be good. But that's not the issue Mundy tackles in *The Richer Sex*. Mundy plants her feet firmly in the world of today's educated, working woman, and explores the many ways in which society, families and interpersonal relationships are affected by women's education and women's earnings. For anyone interested in these issues, it's well worth it to read this book, filled with both research and anecdotal reporting, as opposed to getting freaked out by two-minute television soundbites on the news. And if you don't want to put in the time to read the book (which is actually a pretty quick read), I'd recommend this interview the author did on public radio for a thoughtful discussion of the issues covered in the book:

<http://www.kera.org/2012/04/03/the-ne...>

Felicia Knowles says

Interesting but very repetitive
