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# ADDRESS

## THE END OF MEN?: GENDER FLUX IN THE FACE OF PRECARIOUS MASCULINITY

JOAN C. WILLIAMS\*

I wanted to start out very briefly talking personally to Hanna Rosin, who expressed a bit of existential terror about the hookup culture. I really admired her depiction of it. I have been watching, because older feminists are extremely down on this. I disagree: I think it's complicated. The downsides of the hookup culture have been well documented. The upside, though, is that people don't have to lie to themselves and to each other. But mostly to themselves. Because when my generation was coming up, in order to hook up with somebody, you had to convince yourself you were in love with him. And you know what? I'll tell you a little secret. You weren't.

Let's proceed to *The End of Men*.<sup>1</sup> What really jumped out at me from the book was the personal pain quotient she captured: the unemployed husband whose wife derides him as a loser; the unemployed man whose wife makes fun of him for buying dress socks when he hasn't had a job interview in months; the blue-collar guys who feel "humiliated and fucked"; the former miners now on Oxycontin; the unemployed sheetrock worker whose daughter's mother saw him waiting at the bus stop, just looked him in the eye, and drove straight on.<sup>2</sup>

Rosin's reporting is stunningly good. But is this really a story about gender or a story about class? What Rosin documents is the end of a way of life. As she aptly observes, "What dried up was a path to the middle class and all of the familiar landmarks that went with it."<sup>3</sup> Isn't the drying up of this path to the middle class really the story?

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\* Distinguished Professor of Law, Hastings Foundation Chair, and Founding Director, Center for WorkLife Law, University of California, Hastings College of the Law. This is a version of an address I gave at the Boston University School of Law Conference, "Evaluating Claims About the the "End of Men": Legal and Other Perspectives." A video of these remarks is available at <http://www.bu.edu/bulawreview/symposium/evaluating-claims-about-the-end-of-men/>. Many thanks to the editors of the *Boston University Law Review* who edited this Essay and to Linda McClain, Kate Silbaugh, Kristin Collins, Michael Harper, and Khiara Bridges. Special thanks to Hanna Rosin for being such a good sport.

<sup>1</sup> HANNA ROSIN, *THE END OF MEN: AND THE RISE OF WOMEN* 51 (2012).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 51, 57, 89.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 81.

The most important thing about the heartbreakingly brief Occupy Movement is that it gave us a language to talk about what is happening to the top one percent. The past twenty-five years have been pretty sweet for them. But it has come at the cost of eviscerating the path to a settled middle-class life. For two generations after World War II, men in the middle could deliver the house, the car, the washing machine, with only intermittent part-time work from their wives.<sup>4</sup> Since then men's median income has fallen nearly thirty percent.<sup>5</sup> Today, one in five men are not working, and even when the recession is over, one in six will not be working, according to Rosin.<sup>6</sup>

To me, that is the story of the end of the American middle class, not the end of men. Rosin struggles hard to account for the fact that the people who left the middle class so bereft are a very powerful group of men who have not "ended" in the least. "Yes, women still do most of the childcare," she says, "[a]nd, yes, the upper reaches of power are still dominated by men. But given the sheer velocity of the economic and other forces at work, these circumstances are much more likely to be the last artifacts of a vanishing age rather than a permanent configuration."<sup>7</sup>

Actually, I looked this up. At the current rate of change, it will take 276 years for there to be an equal proportion of men and women serving as CEOs of the Fortune 500 companies.<sup>8</sup> And it will take ninety-seven years for there to be an equal proportion of men and women in Congress.<sup>9</sup>

Sure, as Rosin points out, women are forty-five percent of law firm associates.<sup>10</sup> But in law, as elsewhere, women are allowed in on the ground floor. That does not mean they reach the top. Only fifteen percent of law firm equity partners are women.<sup>11</sup> If you had told me when I graduated from Harvard Law School in 1980 that in 2012 only fifteen percent of partners would be women, I would have told you that you were out of your mind. To quote the most recent Annual Survey of the National Association of Women Lawyers, "The bad news is that along every dimension of comparison, and in

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<sup>4</sup> JOAN C. WILLIAMS, *RESHAPING THE WORK-FAMILY DEBATE: WHY MEN AND CLASS MATTER* 59 (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Dylan Matthews, *Wages Aren't Stagnating, They're Plummeting*, WASH. POST WONKBLOG, (July 31, 2011, 11:10 AM), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2012/07/31/wages-arent-stagnating-theyre-plummeting/> (reporting data showing men experienced a "plummet of 28 percent in median real wages from 1969 to 2009").

<sup>6</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 86-87.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>8</sup> Joan C. Williams & Rachel Dempsey, *What Works for Women at Work: Four Patterns Every Woman Should Know* 301 (Mar. 14, 2013) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 117.

<sup>11</sup> NAT'L ASS'N OF WOMEN LAWYERS & NAWL FOUND., *REPORT OF THE SEVENTH ANNUAL NAWL NATIONAL SURVEY ON RETENTION AND PROMOTION OF WOMEN IN LAW FIRMS* 3 (2012).

spite of law firms' expressed support for gender equity, women have not made significant progress either economically or in reaching leadership roles during the seven years the Survey has measured the impact of gender in law firms."<sup>12</sup> This is not a portrait of the end of men.

Rosin, with her astute reporter's eye, identifies some of the very specific reasons why the gender revolution has stalled. She notes that women have to be more flexible and intelligent than men and explains that "[b]eing an average performer was not an option for women."<sup>13</sup>

This is very true. Thirty-five years of experimental social psychology studies document in very grim and consistent detail that women need to show more evidence of competence than men in order to be judged equally competent.<sup>14</sup> Due to descriptive gender bias, women have to prove themselves over and over again – a pattern I call "prove it again!"<sup>15</sup>

Rosin also discusses the work of the psychologist Madeline Heilman, noting that women also have to walk a tightrope, because high-status jobs – all of them – are coded as masculine.<sup>16</sup> Then women need to behave in masculine ways in order to be seen as competent. But we all know what a woman who is "too" masculine is called, and it begins with a "B." So you have to choose between being liked but not respected, and respected but not liked, in careers where getting ahead requires being both respected and liked.<sup>17</sup>

Women have to walk this tightrope between being too masculine and too feminine – a tightrope that men don't have to walk. Walking this tightrope takes a lot of political skill, which is one reason why women need to be savvier than men in order to succeed in traditionally male careers. Rosin reports a "fairly simple explanation" for why women do not reach the top.<sup>18</sup> They don't ask, and they negotiate less.<sup>19</sup> And we've all heard this explanation. But Rosin has read the same study I have read. Both men and women are less willing to hire and show less willingness to work with women who negotiate, and also see women who do negotiate as less likeable.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>13</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 203 (quoting a female investment banking analyst).

<sup>14</sup> Williams & Dempsey, *supra* note 8, at 11-18.

<sup>15</sup> For an introduction, see *Prove It Again!*, GENDER BIAS LEARNING PROJECT, <http://www.genderbiasbingo.com/proveitagain.html> (last visited Apr. 5, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> See ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 210-11.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*; Williams & Dempsey, *supra* note 8, at 90-91 (citing Laurie A. Rudman, *Self-Promotion as a Risk Factor for Women: The Costs and Benefits of Counterstereotypical Impression Management*, 74 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 629, 629 (1998)).

<sup>18</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 207.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 207-08.

<sup>20</sup> Hannah Riley Bowles et al., *Social Incentives for Gender Differences in the Propensity to Initiate Negotiations: Sometimes It Does Hurt to Ask*, 103 ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAV. & HUM. DECISION PROCESSES 84, 85 (2007).

Women don't negotiate because they're not idiots.<sup>21</sup> They know that they will encounter pushback if they do. To blame the stalled gender revolution on women's defects as negotiators is to use past discrimination to justify future discrimination.<sup>22</sup> A colleague, Erika Hall,<sup>23</sup> and I have just completed 127 interviews of highly successful women, asking them about the four patterns of gender bias, of which "prove it again" and "tightrope" are only two.<sup>24</sup> We have not talked about by far the strongest pattern of gender bias: "maternal wall" bias triggered by motherhood.<sup>25</sup> The last of the four basic patterns is that of "gender wars": when gender bias against women turns into fights among women.<sup>26</sup>

Only five of the 127 women interviewed reported never having seen gender bias – and three of those had founded their own businesses. I actually interviewed one woman who said she really wanted me to interview her when I met her at an event. She had been out on her own for a while so she had not needed to deal with this stuff. But now, her kids were a little older, and she was going back into a corporation, so she knew she was going to have to deal with all this. She figured the interview was sort of like a tune-up that would help her transition.

A key reason that women do not advance further and faster is that office politics are far trickier for women than for men. That is why I have organized the New Girls Network<sup>27</sup> and have co-written (with my daughter) *What Works for Women At Work*.<sup>28</sup> The book and the website teach women how to spot gender bias and – even more important – gather the strategies successful women have used to navigate a world still shaped by bias. The website has a column called "Ask the New Girls," which received the following comment:

I just want to say how delighted I am that this site was created. I am an associate at a large national firm, on top of being a single mom to two young children. I went through a painful divorce during law school (to someone that felt I was getting a little too "important") and since then I have been trying to reestablish myself and my children . . . . To say that it is difficult being a woman of color attorney with young children and no

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<sup>21</sup> Joan Williams, *Women Don't Negotiate Because They're Not Idiots*, HUFFINGTON POST (Jan. 1, 2013, 5:40 PM), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joan-williams/women-dont-negotiate\\_b\\_2593106.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joan-williams/women-dont-negotiate_b_2593106.html).

<sup>22</sup> WILLIAMS, *supra* note 4, at 139.

<sup>23</sup> Erika Hall is a Ph.D. candidate in Management and Organizations at the Kellogg School of Management.

<sup>24</sup> Williams & Dempsey, *supra* note 8, at 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 142-43.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 216-17.

<sup>27</sup> NEW GIRLS' NETWORK, [www.newgirlsnet.com](http://www.newgirlsnet.com) (last visited Apr. 5, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Williams & Dempsey, *supra* note 8.

spouse is an understatement, but I strive every day to be the best mom, friend, daughter, sister, and attorney that I can be.<sup>29</sup>

A brave woman. An impressive woman. But not a picture of Woman Triumphant.

Here is the picture I see. It is an image of elite men still on that invisible escalator that privileges them by designing schedules around the supported-by-a-homemaker breadwinner, prioritizes merit around masculinity, and rewards office politics around “mine’s bigger than yours” games – including the kinds of games played by those who almost bankrupted the country.<sup>30</sup> This group is more than happy to hear pronouncements about the end of men. “Finally, someone is talking about our problems,” a male partner at a big law firm commented to a woman partner, who of course then immediately emailed me.

This is definitely not Rosin’s intention or goal in *The End of Men*. Unfortunately, it may be one result because the real story is not about the end of men. It is a story about class differences among men.

The elite, as I have noted, are doing just fine. The disenfranchised poor are not. For them, first work disappeared, then marriage.<sup>31</sup> Rick Banks has told us why. Women often see men who are unable to provide for their families as undesirable partners.<sup>32</sup>

Underclass men ultimately turned in large numbers to the only pathway realistically open to them to work hard and provide: the drug trade, as depicted so violently and poignantly in *The Wire*.<sup>33</sup> Something similar is now happening to white men; when it happens to white men, of course, it’s big news. “[T]he way I was brought up, it’s a man’s responsibility to take care of his family,” Rosin quotes one man as saying.<sup>34</sup> As I argue in *Reshaping the Work-Family Debate*, this inability to fulfill ideals of manhood is infinitely painful for working-class men.<sup>35</sup>

Why don’t these guys get their act together and go to college? It’s actually not a mystery. Men do not like the idea of incurring large debts, because they

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<sup>29</sup> See Katherine Ullman, *Ask the New Girls: “Girls” and Some Praise*, NEW GIRLS’ NETWORK (Aug. 31, 2012), <http://www.newgirlsnet.com/ask-the-new-girls-girls-and-praise/>.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. CATHARINE MACKINNON, *Difference and Dominance: On Sex Discrimination*, in FEMINISM UNMODIFIED: DISCOURSES ON LIFE AND LAW 32, 36 (1987).

<sup>31</sup> NAOMI CAHN & JUNE CARBONE, RED FAMILIES V. BLUE FAMILIES: LEGAL POLARIZATION AND THE CREATION OF CULTURE 121 (2010); WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON, WHEN WORK DISAPPEARS: THE WORLD OF THE NEW URBAN POOR 25 (1996).

<sup>32</sup> Ralph Richard Banks, *Are African Americans Us?*, 93 B.U. L. REV. 681, 685 (2013); see also RALPH RICHARD BANKS, IS MARRIAGE FOR WHITE PEOPLE?: HOW THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MARRIAGE DECLINE AFFECTS EVERYONE 2-3 (2011).

<sup>33</sup> *The Wire* (HBO television broadcast 2002-2008).

<sup>34</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 85 (quoting one of the underemployed men in Alexander City, Alabama, whom Rosin interviewed).

<sup>35</sup> JOAN C. WILLIAMS, UNBENDING GENDER: WHY FAMILY AND WORK CONFLICT AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT 158-60 (1999).

feel they should be able to support a family. Ironically, it may be precisely the pressure of the breadwinner ideal that causes these working-class guys to make choices that make them unable to be breadwinners.<sup>36</sup>

Now, as we all know, black men lost access to the breadwinner ideal several generations ago. I remember when I was in college, circa 1974, I opened *The New York Times* one day and saw that forty percent of young black men were unemployed in the inner city, and I thought, “Wow, are we up a creek.”<sup>37</sup> That has never changed.<sup>38</sup> But it is now happening to white working-class men. They, too, are seen as unsuitable marriage partners, and so marriage dries up and single motherhood booms.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps, as Rosin suggests, the solution is for these guys to take pink-collar jobs.<sup>40</sup> But why can't I get over the sense that this is the professional elite, whose men retain their access to high-quality jobs of robust masculinity, exhorting working-class men to embrace dead-end pink-collar jobs that (they feel) feminize them?

Working-class women traditionally have had very low expectations, given the low-paid and dead-end pink-collar jobs they are trapped in.<sup>41</sup> That is true. Are we saying that the solution to spiraling income inequality in the United States is for non-elite men to lower their expectations, too? I notice that we are not asking the men who shipped blue-collar jobs abroad to take dead-end feminized jobs. Is the proposed feminist solution to make access to normative masculinity, in work and in marriage, a class-linked privilege?

Rosin's embrace of the term “matriarchy” is equally troubling. She acknowledges “the contradictions of the new striving middle-class matriarchy” with her amazing anecdote (what an amazing reporter – how does she find these people?) of the woman who fell asleep in the elevator between the first and the fourth floor because she was so exhausted, between working, going to school, and taking care of her kids.<sup>42</sup>

To call these women matriarchs disserves them. These are vulnerable women left holding the bag, not castrating matriarchs. As we saw in the

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<sup>36</sup> John Schmitt & Heather Boushey, *Why Don't More Young People Go to College?*, 55 CHALLENGE 78, 80 (2012).

<sup>37</sup> Jerry Flint, *Rising Joblessness Bewilders Young Blacks*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 10, 1977, at 23.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Samreen Hooda, *Unemployment Rates Highest Amongst Black And Latinos*, HUFFINGTON POST (Sept. 10, 2012, 5:08 PM), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/10/unemployment-rates-highest-amongst-black-and-latinos\\_n\\_1871453.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/10/unemployment-rates-highest-amongst-black-and-latinos_n_1871453.html).

<sup>39</sup> And, like clockwork, Charles Murray blames the victim. See CHARLES MURRAY, *THE STATE OF WHITE AMERICA, 1960-2010*, at 182 (2012).

<sup>40</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 261-63.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* at 130.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at 15.

welfare debates, calling them matriarchs has really concrete consequences in terms of public policy.<sup>43</sup> None of those consequences are good.

The most profound insight that Rosin uncovers is that “[t]he real issue here is not the end of men, but the disappearance of manhood.”<sup>44</sup> This is unbelievably astute, and I would love to hear more about it. The challenge, as Rosin recognizes, is to encourage gender flux and rip open the straitjacket of conventional masculinity.<sup>45</sup> Denying non-privileged men access to normative masculinity, though, is not the answer. Encouraging new visions of masculinity for rich, poor, and the middle alike – that’s what will work.

One clue about how to proceed comes from Carla Shows and Naomi Gerstel’s study that compares physicians and emergency medical technicians (EMTs), which Rosin cites.<sup>46</sup> It’s pretty fabulous. The study showed that male physicians just work extraordinarily long hours, and that their wives are really, really ticked about this because the men are very uninvolved with family life.<sup>47</sup> It also shows why the physicians resist their wives’ fury: they prove their manliness by working very long hours.<sup>48</sup> The best quote is actually from a Silicon Valley engineer:

Guys constantly try to out-macho each other, but in engineering it’s really perverted because out-machoining someone means being more of a nerd than the other person. . . . It’s not like being a brave firefighter and going up one more flight than your friend. There’s a lot of see how many hours I can work . . . . He’s a real man; he works 90-hour weeks. He’s a slacker; he works 50 hours a week.<sup>49</sup>

Hours became the measure of professional commitment just when women started to enter these careers. I am not a conspiracy theorist, but it is an

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<sup>43</sup> See Angela Onwuachi-Willig, *The Return of the Ring: Welfare Reform’s Marriage Cure as the Revival of Post-Bellum Control*, 93 CALIF. L. REV. 1647, 1669 (2005).

<sup>44</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 97 (quoting Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary).

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* at 263.

<sup>46</sup> Carla Shows & Naomi Gerstel, *Fathering, Class, and Gender: A Comparison of Physicians and Emergency Medical Technicians*, 23 GENDER & SOC’Y 161, 162 (2009); see also Dan Clawson & Naomi Gerstel, *Unequal Time: The Normality of Unpredictability for Doctors, Nursing Assistants, and EMTs* (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author).

<sup>47</sup> See Shows & Gerstel, *supra* note 46, at 181.

<sup>48</sup> For discussions of the connection between long hours and masculinity, see Marianne Cooper, *Being the “Go-To Guy”: Fatherhood, Masculinity, and the Organization of Work in Silicon Valley*, in *FAMILIES AT WORK: EXPANDING THE BOUNDS* 5, 7 (Naomi Gerstel et al. eds., 2007) (discussing the intertwining of masculinity and work hours among computer engineers); Katherine C. Kellogg, *Making the Cut: Using Status-Based Countertactics to Block Social Movement Implementation and Microinstitutional Change in Surgery*, 23 ORG. SCI. 1546, 1553 (2012) (discussing the link between masculinity and long hours among surgeons).

<sup>49</sup> Cooper, *supra* note 48, at 7.

interesting correlation. Suddenly the one metric upon which women could never compete became the gold standard for professional commitment. Note, too, how the engineers assert their dominance over firefighters, who, quite literally, risk life and limb, thereby turning their pencil-pushing jobs into the true measure of heroism.<sup>50</sup>

The EMTs are far more involved in their kids' daily lives.<sup>51</sup> They swap shifts quite regularly in order to pick up their kids from daycare, to feed them dinner, or to take them to the doctor.<sup>52</sup> But that does not mean that the EMTs have embraced feminized roles. Not a bit. The EMTs felt free to use this strategy because their masculinity was already proven. Being an EMT is a highly masculinized career, and these guys appeared to work more hours than their wives.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, these working-class guys use the same strategy that we women have used. As women entered into traditionally masculine roles, they continued to fulfill traditionally feminine ones, most notably the well-dressed woman and the good mother.

The EMTs felt free to share the care because they worked in a context where they felt their masculinity was secure. That is how gender flux works. Gender roles are so profoundly intertwined with identity that people do not just jettison the traditional role. We make new friends and keep the old. Simply ripping away access to gender ideals is not a good recipe for flux. In fact, as *The Wire* illustrates so unbelievably poignantly, if men's access to the provider role is blocked, they will just find access to a different hyper-masculinity.

That process is already well underway. That is why guns are such a volatile political issue in the United States among NASCAR men. Listen to how we literally name these men after a dangerous sport that involves speed and risk. Masculinity is precarious, as Joseph Vandello, a social psychologist, has documented.<sup>54</sup> The resulting anxiety emerges in Rosin's quote from the TV show, *Work It*. "Women are taking over the workforce. Soon they'll have all the money and the power, and they'll start getting rid of the men. . . . They'll just keep a few of us around as sex slaves."<sup>55</sup>

Fueling masculine anxiety in this way is not a fruitful path to reconstructing gender.<sup>56</sup> To achieve the goal that Rosin and I both share, we need to start

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<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> See Shows & Gerstel, *supra* note 46, at 179.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* at 176.

<sup>53</sup> This information was not published in the study but can be inferred from the results. E-mail from Naomi Gerstel, Professor, Univ. of Mass., to Joan Williams, Professor of Law, Univ. of Cal. Hastings Coll. of the Law (Mar. 30, 2013) (on file with author).

<sup>54</sup> Joseph A. Vandello et al., *Precarious Manhood*, 95 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 1325, 1325 (2008).

<sup>55</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 55 (quoting *Work It: Pilot* (ABC television broadcast Jan. 3, 2012)).

<sup>56</sup> WILLIAMS, *supra* note 35, at 172 (discussing reconstructive feminism).

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deconstructing masculinity at the top of our very unequal distribution of income in an economy driven by the frantic pursuit of precarious masculinity. In a blog post I coauthored with Sharon Meers, we quoted a businessman, about to take off on his own private plane, who spotted the Gulfstream V owned by a friend and remarked, “Someone’s \*\*\*\* is always bigger.”<sup>57</sup>

Here’s the crucial message. The economy is not about BSDs. Rosin points to Steve Carell’s character in *The Office* and asserts that “the paternal white boss . . . has now become a punch line.”<sup>58</sup> Well, maybe a man in a routine white-collar job selling paper has become a punch line. Maybe an out-of-work blue-collar guy has become a punch line. But the men who hold economic and social power – they are not a punch line. To achieve the goal Rosin and I both share, we need not to advise working-class men to accept the humiliations meted out to pink-collar women, but to invent new masculinities that appeal to men. To accomplish that, we need to start with the men at the top.

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<sup>57</sup> Sharon Meers & Joan Williams, *Boys Gone Wild: The Mine’s Bigger Than Yours Market*, HUFFINGTON POST (Dec. 10, 2009, 4:36 PM), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sharon-meers/boys-gone-wild-the-mines\\_b\\_387748.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sharon-meers/boys-gone-wild-the-mines_b_387748.html).

<sup>58</sup> ROSIN, *supra* note 1, at 15.