

These industries are growing. Why are men staying away? ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

JUDY WOODRUFF: We turn now to an overlooked story: why some men are not pursuing certain types of jobs that are mainly held by women.

Our economics correspondent, Paul Solman, has the story. It's part of our weekly series Making Sense, which airs every Thursday on the NewsHour.

PAUL SOLMAN: Out back of their classroom in Columbia, South Carolina, 4- and 5-year-olds are building a fortress with their teacher, Mr. Jamie Browder.

Browder is that rare bird: a man in a woman's world of work, an early childhood teacher in a profession that's been a measly 2 to 5 percent male for years, is desperately looking to up the percentage.

Meanwhile, so many male jobs in industry have gone poof, 5.7 million since 2000 in manufacturing alone, that de-industrialization has become a stock explanation for Rust Belt resentment, even the election of President Trump.

WOMAN: I agree with the fact that Americans should be America first.

MAN: And I think Americans should have first opportunity on jobs.

PAUL SOLMAN: And, in fact, the share of working men ages 25 to 54 has fallen dramatically since 1957, fully 12 percent having dropped out of the work force entirely.

So, why aren't there more Jamie Browders?

Betsey Stevenson has a wry answer: Manly men don't want to do girly jobs.

BETSEY STEVENSON, Former Member, Council of Economic Advisers Member: So, if you look over the last 20 years, we have lost five million jobs in manufacturing and gained nine million jobs in education and health services.

So we're more than making up for the jobs we're losing, but the characteristics of those jobs, the identity associated with a worker who holds one of those jobs, the pay associated with those jobs are different.

PAUL SOLMAN: Different by cultural stigma. And that's true of jobs in home health care, nursing, and early childhood education, like the job Jamie Browder has had and loved for 13 years.

So I asked him, why don't more men go into this profession?

JAMIE BROWDER, 4K Teacher, Meadowfield Elementary: I think it's a lack of information, a lack of understanding how you can contribute to the children's lives, a lack of understanding what you mean to a community.

PAUL SOLMAN: So, men see jobs like grade school teaching as low status, low upward mobility.

JAMIE BROWDER: It's almost like, if you enter the classroom, this is where you will be, and this is where you will spend the rest of your life.

PAUL SOLMAN: You're stuck.

JAMIE BROWDER: You're stuck, and this is the set, scheduled pay. So you will only be able to move yourself up through additional education, which requires money, and then also by just each additional year.

PAUL SOLMAN: So, you can't have a fantasy about striking it rich, you mean?

JAMIE BROWDER: No, no, no. And I think that's almost somewhat anti-American.

PAUL SOLMAN: Professor Stevenson's answer is more gender-specific.

BETSEY STEVENSON: I think they feel stigmatized, like they're going in to do girls' work. These are jobs. They're good jobs. But at the same time, we need to recognize that there are a lot of guys who feel, either because their friends or their community or because of themselves, like, when they take one of these jobs that they are doing something girly. And that feeling is a barrier for them.

PAUL SOLMAN: S.O., you know what that says?

CHILD: So.

PAUL SOLMAN: Excellent. Terrific reading there.

Now, not all men feel this way. I once taught kindergarten. And Jamie Browder obviously wasn't hindered by the girly work stigma. But, in fact, says Browder, being a man is a key asset for fellow teachers.

JAMIE BROWDER: Because I think you offer a different perspective. They want to see what a man would say, because there's a lack of men in that particular school, say, our school right here. So, how do you see this? What should I do in these situations?

PAUL SOLMAN: A different perspective, what diversity so often brings to the table. Also, as a male in the classroom, Browder gets to be a gender role model for boys at a formative age.

JAMIE BROWDER: Very few times I can remember when there was actually a female student brought to me and said, they need a role model.

PAUL SOLMAN: But, with Browder, it's a regular occurrence.

So, shouldn't more men do as Browder does and buck the stereotype?

Economist Nancy Folbre isn't so sure.

NANCY FOLBRE, University of Massachusetts Amherst: That question makes it sound too simple, as though, if guys could just get over their social norm obsession, they could really go out there and get a good job and make the economy better. And I think that's a kind of silly proposition.

PAUL SOLMAN: Look, says labor economist Teresa Ghilarducci, the stigma of women's work has a basis in reality.

TERESA GHILARDUCCI, The New School: Female-dominated jobs are stigmatized because they're lower-paid. If we're going to attack patriarchy and stigma of women vs. men, then we should attack it on an economic basis, and use that old fashioned idea of comparable worth, bring up jobs that women have to the same level of the equivalent jobs or comparable jobs that men have.

PAUL SOLMAN: Now, like the rest of us, Browder wouldn't turn down a raise, but he says:

JAMIE BROWDER: I think there's an underestimation of the pay.

PAUL SOLMAN: How much do you make?

JAMIE BROWDER: Over \$50,000.

PAUL SOLMAN: And you have summers off.

JAMIE BROWDER: And summers off, and also take home additional work to gain additional income.

PAUL SOLMAN: And Browder's wife also works, lifting them well into the top half of American household incomes, and very comfortably middle-class in South Carolina.

So, again, what's keeping men away?

JAMIE BROWDER: I think it's also helped that I have had professional development, done tons of reading about, how do you approach children when they are exhibiting challenging behavior, they are needing your help?

And what comes through in all of those readings and professional development is to inner spaces being calm. You have to be calm. You will de-escalate a situation if you remain calm.

PAUL SOLMAN: Browder's point is that he has loads of education compared to most American men, barely one in three of whom gets even a four-year bachelor's degree.

JAMIE BROWDER: Are they willing to go through the training, you know, pay for the education, the continuous recertification? Are they ready to undertake all of these steps to get to this space?

PAUL SOLMAN: But to Betsey Stevenson, our cultural definitions of gender roles play a bigger part in keeping men away, and not just from pre-K classrooms.

BETSEY STEVENSON: When we think about things like home health care aides, people tend to think of that as a very female job. But, in truth, that's a job that's about physically lifting, moving, restraining people. And those jobs require great physical strength that you could imagine a different culture where we said, oh, those are jobs for men.

PAUL SOLMAN: Stevenson isn't blaming manly men for not doing girly jobs. She just wants to change the connotations of manly and girly, or ditch the adjectives entirely.

But that will take time, says Jamie Browder, which means we should focus on the next generation.

JAMIE BROWDER: Let's look at our young boys and say, instead of trying to enforce this masculinity onto them, let's start to look at different ways of being. Let's look at being able to show them and give them opportunities to have - to be the nurturers. Let's put them in places where they can really take care of others. And I think that's where the work, in my opinion, should come.

PAUL SOLMAN: Because the men right now aren't going to be going into this profession?

JAMIE BROWDER: I don't think so.

PAUL SOLMAN: Because it's too much work, too predictable, too much preparation?

JAMIE BROWDER: Right, not enough mobility.

PAUL SOLMAN: And it's not manly, yes?

JAMIE BROWDER: I look at this as very manly. This is the work that men should do.

PAUL SOLMAN: But the stereotype is that it isn't.

JAMIE BROWDER: The stereotype, yes.

PAUL SOLMAN: In Columbia, South Carolina ...

Sorry. Sorry. I'm busy. I'm working on building a castle with bricks. Talk to you later.

Economics correspondent Paul Solman reporting for the PBS NewsHour.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Great story.

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