Richard Reeves
In conversation with Andrew Kelly

Andrew Kelly: I'm Andrew Kelly from Bristol Ideas. Richard Reeves is Senior Fellow in Economic Studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. He's a former director of the Demos think tank and was Director of Strategy for the Deputy Prime Minister. He's the author of a biography of John Stuart Mill and, more recently, *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That Is a Problem, and What to Do About It.* We're talking today about his new book, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It.* Richard, thank you for joining us.

Richard Reeves: Thank you for having me. Andrew, I'm looking forward to this.

Andrew: This is a subject you've been thinking about for a long time, heading towards three decades in fact, and as you worked on this, you found that most people you talked to were actually worried about boys and men, but you hesitated, didn't you, in tackling it as a subject?

Richard: I was surprised, actually, how many people immediately said, 'Oh, that's interesting. I have ideas on this.' Everybody's had the experience, if you're writing a book, you mention it and someone says, 'Oh, what's that about?' One of my previous books you were kind enough to mention was, 'I'm writing an intellectual biography of John Stuart Mill,' and you could see people's faces, depending on the kind of party you're at, going 'Uh-oh.' But not with this one. As soon as I mentioned I was writing about the problems being faced by boys and men, pretty much everybody would have something to say about someone in their family, their son, their brother, or 'Oh, my husband is struggling.' I think there's a general sense that there's an issue here.

As you say, I've been thinking about this for a long time, and I've been raising three sons to adulthood myself, but one of the reasons why I was both reluctant, but then in the end determined, to write about it is just because it is so difficult to write about issues of gender right now, sex and gender. And particularly, I think, to try and draw attention to the problems of boys and men, from what I would consider to be a broadly centre-left perspective, when there is still so much work remaining to be done for girls and women, not least in the US where I am now. It's really a test of our ability to think two thoughts at once. That's a perilous undertaking at the best of times, and I think perhaps particularly so now. That said, I do think there's an appetite for this conversation.

Andrew: You talked there about having raised three boys, and obviously some of this is based on personal experience, but you've brought together a huge amount of evidence, haven't you, with the data you've been able to gather on this?

Richard: Yes, that was very important to me. As you mentioned, my day job is as a scholar at the Brookings Institution, so that, to some extent, comes with that territory, but also it was very important to me to make the book as authoritative as I could, even above and beyond the reasons I've just given about my day job, because I do think that in some of these areas, there's a tendency for the debates to float free of the facts somewhat, especially if the facts are inconvenient to your prior convictions. So I thought it was important to try and set out as clearly and in as unbiased a way as possible: 'these are the facts'. We can then disagree about how far they're a problem, what's causing them and so on, but let's get some shared agreement about the facts.

In some cases, even just sharing the facts has been quite powerful, because some people don't know, for example, about just how big the gender gap in education is now. Just sharing those facts in an authoritative way I think is useful. But then move to solutions, and that's really, really what I was trying to focus on this book, to

move beyond complaints – this area, like many, is long on lament and short on solutions. Yascha Mounk calls it the Chapter 11 Problem – you have ten chapters of the book on here's everything that's gone horribly wrong in the world, and then, oh, I'd better have a chapter with solutions. So you have, I don't know, early education or something, over and out. I really tried to shift the balance the other way, and I pushed myself to offer some solutions.

Andrew: I think this is really important in a lot of our Ideas Festival work, in fact, where you read a book and the solutions are shunted to the end, whereas in this book, you feed them in throughout the book in the different areas, though this interview will be slightly more conventional in its approach, I think, in how we address this.

When I was reading the book, a number of things jumped out for me very strongly early on. The first was about how when you started looking into this, you realised that things were much worse than you thought. A couple of examples of that are falling wage levels, comparatively speaking for men particularly, and the growth of what we now call the deaths of despair, particularly affecting men, young men and older men.

Richard: That was part of the motivation for writing a book. It's my field to look at issues around family, gender and inequality, so when I was surprised by some of what I was discovering when I looked, I was sort of, 'OK, I'm not sure I should be so surprised.' I'll give you just one example, which is in some ways a small example, but it did set me on the road, which was that in 2020, there was a drop in college enrollment in the US because of the pandemic. Of course, you'd expect that. But there wasn't really a drop in female college enrollment – it was almost entirely male. There was a slight drop in enrollment anyway. But the basic fact was that male college enrollment dropped by seven times as much as female college enrollment in 2020, for reasons that are a little bit complex and nuanced. I had to discover that in sort of Table Four of Appendix Three of a report, and literally no one mentioned it.

I do think there's sometimes just a reluctance even to raise these inequalities when boys and men are on the wrong side of them. So yeah, I just looked at that. I think the fact that men are more likely to die from a so-called death of despair – from suicide, alcohol, drug overdose – is striking. And although I knew that there was a gender gap in education, and that girls and women were ahead, I didn't know quite how far ahead they were, and how big the gap had gotten, because it has gotten pretty big, pretty quickly. It was almost in every direction I looked. And obviously, you mentioned also in the US, most American men earn less than most American men did four years ago, which is an extraordinary economic fact. It's not quite so bad in the UK. But the general trend in male wages has been very, very, if not backward, as it is in the US, then incrementally forward. On a whole range of fronts, it was just like, well, OK, I knew there was a problem here, but the closer I looked, the sharper the problem appeared to be.

What I didn't find was what I thought was a good faith attempt to describe the problem and then come up with some solutions. I looked around and there are lots of books written about this, but they tended to be either very long on lament, as I've mentioned – 'oh, look at this problem' – and short on solution, or very politicised. There are books from the left, talking about toxic masculinity and so on, and the failure of men to adapt, and there are lots of books on the right saying there's a war on men and so on, too. But in almost everything I read, I felt the evidence was being marshalled in service of a political agenda. That's genuinely not what I'm doing here. I thought that was the book that was needed now.

Andrew: I'll come back to the left and right's failure on these. Let's just go through a period time when boys grow up and then go into education and then into work. First of all, how important is the role of have a strong relationship with a father for a boy? We had Barack Obama's classic hole in the heart left by the absence of his father, for example.

Richard: Yes, and actually, in Black circles in the US, there's this phrase sometimes used which is 'post-traumatic missing daddy disorder', because obviously Black families have been hit particularly hard by many of the trends I talk about in the book. I have a whole chapter specifically on Black men. It turns out that fathers are important for sons especially, and for daughters, and in ways that are complementary to but in some cases somewhat different from the role that mothers play.

I think this is a good example of a debate that's moved on over time. There was a period where we just assumed that there was no difference, or at least we wanted to assume that, and that fathers didn't bring anything particular to the party in terms of raising kids. The recent evidence just shows that's just not true, that actually fathers do seem to have an important role in the later outcomes both of their sons and their daughters.

You mentioned sons, and that's obviously true when you look at the data, that boys who don't have a strong relationship with their father do much worse in school, much less likely to go to college, and, in particular, are much more likely to engage in risk-taking activities that put themselves or others in danger. So there's something about the socialisation process, particularly adolescent boys, where fathers seem to play an important role.

But it's not just sons. There's one pretty good study that shows that the mental health of women at the age of 33 is partly predicted by the relationship with their father at the age of 16. So these are quite long-term and long-burn effects here. I think there's been a bit of a tendency on the one hand to say, well, you know, fathers can't do anything that mothers can't do. That's for good reason, because of concerns about single parents and same sex couples, which I think are very good reasons to be concerned about how far to push this argument. But on the other hand, of saying, we need dads to be breadwinners. I think the truth is that we need dads to be dads, and that message is sometimes lost in between these two polar opposites about dads matter because they earn money and dads don't matter. It turns out that dads matter because they're dads.

Andrew: Let's move on to education, which you've already mentioned. You talk about staggering improvements and shifts that have happened in levels of education, attainment of qualifications between girls and boys, and then entering adulthood into higher education. Is it all education levels where this shift has happened?

Richard: Yes, it is. The pace has been different in different places. It's only quite recently, for example, that in terms of PhDs women have overtaken men. In a sense, it's sort of rippled up through the school system. You saw first of all girls overtaking boys in secondary schools, and then in college, and then in postgraduate, and now in PhD. The widest gaps are in post-secondary education. It's really in college where you see the rubber hit the road, and that's obviously where lots of the differences are showing up from what happened before.

I was born in '69. At the time I was born, men were significantly more likely to go to college. By the time I went to college in the late '80s in the UK, women had about caught up with men, and now they've blown way past them. In fact, the gap in college-going, and this is true both in the US and the UK, is much wider today than it was in the '70s. It's just that it's reversed. It's gone the other way around.

What is interesting about it is no one expected this overtaking. The whole push was to get gender equality in education. What nobody predicted was that once the female line caught up with the male line, that it would just keep going. Nobody expected that. I think we're still figuring out how to react to that. But yeah, it's all the way from pre-K to PhD. From early years education to PhD, there's a gender gap in favour of women, and also in every country in the world. A qualification: by that what I really mean is the advanced economy, so in every

OECD country, women are more likely to have a college degree. It's obviously different in some of the less developed countries, but even there the trend is in that direction.

If you see it at almost every level of education in almost every advanced economy, then you, I think correctly, start to think that something structural is going on here. It's not the UK education system, it's not the US economy, it's not the French culture. There's something going on here, which is much deeper than that, which is putting girls at a significant advantage in education.

Andrew: And as you said, it's worldwide. The book includes, for example, concerns in Sweden and in Scotland, where specific targets have now been set, but also in that great bastion of equality in Iceland.

Richard: There's a huge gender gap in Iceland. I think one of the leading Icelandic universities is now 75 per cent female. A lot of leaders of Icelandic universities are really concerned about this. They're concerned about it not only because they're concerned what it means for men going forward, and what that means for their prospects, but also because purely from the point of view of attracting students to your institution, it turns out that there is a point at which it gets harder to attract particularly those of the opposite sex – that seems to be around the 60 per cent mark. If you get much past 60 per cent, boys start to think, 'Do I want to go to a place that's two-thirds women?' Some might, of course, but even young women start to think, 'Well, I'm not sure I want to go to somewhere that's two-thirds women.' So there's this real concern to try and keep that balance.

What actually sometimes happens is a little bit of affirmative action is being employed to get more boys in. But interestingly, in some of the most equal countries in the world, including places like Iceland and Scandinavia, that's where you find the biggest gender gaps in education. That's where the women have really, really gone way past men. It's huge in the UK and in the US, too. They're very gender equal in many ways, but actually, they're becoming more unequal in other ways on this education front.

Andrew: You talk in the book about the importance of biology to thinking about these things. Take us through some of those ideas.

Richard: I really struggled with how much too much to do on this, because, again, it's a very freighted subject. The reason I decided to do it in the end is because I do think there's space here for an attempt to weave your way through the extent to which are men and women really different. And if so, in what ways? And if so, in what ways that matter? That's crucial, I think, that third part of it. And I'm afraid that there is, again – it's easy to play this game, but in this case it's true – that there are some that say, 'Oh, there are really no differences at all, we're still basically blank slates and it's socialisation.' And then, of course, you've got on the other side people using biology to basically justify discrimination and inequality, which is what the first side are afraid of.

There are a number of areas where there just are genuine differences between males and females. In particular, three I focus on, because I think they're the three biggest, are around potential for aggression. I think when 95 per cent of homicides are committed by men, it's hard to think that's all socialisation – around the world, that is. And then in terms of risk-taking, both in a positive and a negative sense, obviously there's a big difference there. And in sex drive, there's a difference there, too.

The question is: how much do those matter? I think that they might matter just in terms of how you interpret patterns. They don't matter in terms of how you should treat an individual. It's very important that we don't change how you treat an individual. It's secondly very important to realise that these distributions overlap, and that these are average differences. So it doesn't really tell you anything about an individual. And thirdly, by and large, those aren't differences that matter all that much.

Now, I say in the book something like ‘the greater potential for aggression that men have on average,’ and every word in that sentence is doing some work. May have been more useful to me in Sparta 3,000 years ago, but it's not very useful at the Brookings Institution. Or practice of a different kind of aggression, you might say. But it's the potential for physical aggression – probably not much use to you, Andrew, in the work that you do. It is a switch that can be flipped, if necessary, and we could talk about Ukraine, potentially, but it doesn't matter. And mostly the same for the others, except in how we sort of think about the patterns of behaviour.

Obviously, and maybe we’ll get to this, but the thing that's lost in this is that the single biggest and uncontroversial difference between the development of men and women, or rather boys and girls, is not *how* their brains develop, but *when* they develop. Girls are about two years ahead of boys in adolescence, and that has some serious consequences for the gaps in education we just talked about. That's not really discussed. By the time we get to 25, most of these differences have eroded and they become trivial and, I think, largely inconsequential, but they matter at 15.

Andrew: This is one of the key solutions we'll come on to. Just one really important thing, I think, over the past - it's difficult to determine now how many years - but there has been the growth of girls and women involved in STEM subjects. I remember when I was at university – I went to Bradford University, and I'm a social scientist, but I knew the engineering students there – I think there was only one woman on the engineering course at that time. Now, I tried to find comparable figures today, and I couldn't get them, but there are certainly significantly more, and significantly more projects underway to encourage even more girls to go from school into engineering. But that has been a significant shift as well, hasn't it?

Richard: Yes, it's been huge, and it hasn't happened by accident. STEM is very important both for our economies generally and then secondly, a lot of those STEM jobs are actually pretty good jobs, and quite influential in many cases. There [was] this huge push, as you say, to get more girls and women into STEM. In the US, where I have the figures – they’re more readily available to me – the number of STEM jobs done by women now is 27 per cent, but that's up from less than 10 per cent only a few decades ago. Engineering has gone from 3 per cent to a bit above 15 per cent. What that tells us is there's still quite a long way to go, and what's happening is there are certain areas where there’s been more progress than others. It's much slower in tech and engineering. Actually, most scientists in the US now are women, and that doesn't include social scientists – most physical scientists in the US now are women.

That's just a huge change, a dramatic change just in the space of decades, but it didn't happen by itself. It happened because of concerted efforts by governments, by philanthropists, by educational institutions, to really promote how important this was, to have role models, to have scholarships…a series of national efforts on the part of institutions to really break down some of these barriers that there were for girls and women. It's been hugely successful. I think we should take great pride in how far that's changed in such a short period of time, even, as you say, just in the last few decades since you were in university. That's a blink of an eye in many ways in terms of time. It may not always feel like that when it's happening. But that's been an extraordinary success.

Andrew: We've been involved in work in this area. We believe culture is about both arts and sciences, and we were involved in a project called Bristol Science City, where one of the chief aims was to encourage more interest in scientific subjects. We did a big project on Isambard Kingdom Brunel for the 200th anniversary of his birth, and a lot of his work was in Bristol. One of our aims there was to try and encourage more – particularly girls – at school to get interested in engineering. But the sadness of all that was we never had any resources to follow that through and to see whether that was eventually achieved, but it was certainly an intention.

I did look at other work that was going on in Bristol in recent years on this, and in 2016, for example, the Council and partners set up the Bristol Boys Achievement Project, because there was concern about underachievement compared to Bristol's average attainments across the board, particularly for boys, and also compared to national data. That project was changed, interestingly, in 2019 to Bristol Aspiring for All, because it was acknowledged that boys continue to do less well than girls and there were still gaps appearing for young girls as well. But there was a particularly marked gap for boys who were eligible for free school meals or the pupil premium and some groups of Black and minority ethnic boys. You do point out, don't you, that you can't divorce this from other areas of inequality.

Richard: Yes, especially the ones you've just mentioned. That's a very interesting project, and I'd be interested to know the history of how it's changed over time, because a side note here is that it is quite difficult to sustain just looking at boys. It comes under all kinds of political pressure, even when the evidence is as strong as it sounds like it is in Bristol, and certainly across the UK, you see these huge gaps.

I do think that the need to look at gender and race and class together is hugely important. In the US, it's particularly important to look through the racial lens, just because of the experience of Black boys and men is just so different to other boys and men. In the UK, race and class, but particularly class. I mean, it's striking that in the UK, on many educational measures, it's white, lower-income boys who are at the bottom of the pile. Now, there are all kinds of reasons for that, including the fact that actually education policy in many of the cities, including London, really has improved, and there are disproportionate numbers of kids from ethnic minorities in those places. So it's not an accident of geography, but it's partly a geographical thing. Nonetheless, the biggest gaps we should be worried about are where you get these intersections between race and class and gender.

In particular, as you just pointed out, the boys from lower-income backgrounds are the ones we should be most worried about. And if you look at the gender gap on almost any measure within a social class, it's just much wider at the bottom than it is at the top. I think one of the problems with having this conversation is that when you talk to a lot of men and women, who are from, say, a middle-class background, to use UK language, they look around and they say, 'Well, the men and the boys I know seem to be doing OK.' That's probably true, by and large. But ask working-class families, go into some of our poor neighbourhoods, and there the gender gaps are really, really wide. So we might be leaning in, to use Sheryl Sandberg's famous phrase, but not looking down.

What we've seen over recent decades is – and this is where I guess two pieces of my work combine – is a narrowing of the gender gap on most measures, and in some cases an overtaking. The gender pay gap, for example, has narrowed, such that in the US now 40 per cent of women earn more than the median man, the typical man. So it's not 50 per cent, we're not at full equality, but it was only 13 per cent in 1979, so that's a huge catching up. The female wage distribution has really, really caught up with the male one, which is great from a gender equality perspective. At the same time, the economic gap has massively widened. The gap between the people at the top of the economic ladder and the middle or the bottom has gotten much wider. So we've seen one gap narrowing, the gender gap, and another gap, the class gap, significantly widening. That's why I think it's incredibly important to look at both of these things or, in the case of race, all three of these things together. We can't just do binary thinking anymore.

Andrew: I also talked yesterday to a project…called CARGO, which is looking at developing classroom resources to address lack of representation in traditional resources and create better material for teaching history in schools. It's led by a visionary poet locally called Lawrence Hoo, who remembers when he was at school none of the books he used reflected back on him his own life, the fact he was Black, or that there were significant Black communities in Bristol – it was all white people that were creating the change that they were discussing. So he's

been developing the curriculum around that, and I think that's a good thing as well, isn't it, in terms of addressing some of these inequalities, to have inspirational stories to look up to at those early years?

Richard: Inspirational stories that recognise the plurality of experience across race and gender, sexual orientation, class, etc., for sure. It's also, I think, important, if possible, to have role models. Not just in books – let's think not just about the books you're reading in the classroom, but who's standing up at the front of the classroom. One of the trends we've seen in recent years, both in the US and the UK, is an ongoing decline in the number of male teachers. If you add male teachers of colour, the picture gets even worse. What you're seeing is that if you're a boy in the classroom, especially if you're a boy of colour, the chances of there being a male teacher in front of the class are getting less and less. I think that's a real problem, and one that's not being discussed or addressed as a problem.

I think it's a problem for a number of reasons, but one of the main reasons it's a problem is because we want the boys sitting in that class to see men in those roles that they can relate to, rather than it being such a gendered profession. It took me ages to persuade my kids that men could be teachers, because it wasn't until they got through primary school that actually they met any male teachers. Primary schools in particular, many primary schools are all female teachers. I think that that's a problem that we're not addressing. [And we need more] male teachers of colour. So let's not just think about who are the characters on the pages of the book, but who's the person giving you the book to read? That matters just as much. I think kids in particular, they tend to believe their eyes more than their ears.

Andrew: In 2017, Runnymede did a report with various other partners into Bristol's schooling and inequality, and that was exactly one of the points that they identified as a problem, that there weren't enough teachers from minority communities teaching in the schools in the city.

Interestingly, I found an old school photograph, and it had all the teachers in the photograph, so I thought I'd count up how many were male and how many were female in 1979, and then I went on the school website to see how many I could work out were female and male now. It's a staggering change. In 1979, 58 per cent of my teachers at school were male. Now, if I've worked it out correctly from the website, 73 per cent are female. I know education has shifted, and there are more teaching assistants and things like that, but I think that's a staggering shift as well.

Richard: Is that a secondary school?

Andrew: Secondary school, yes.

Richard: When you gave me the first number, I thought that must be secondary school. But yeah, that's not an uncommon story. But again, it's just not being discussed. I would be very interested to know did the Runnymede report talk about male teachers as well as teachers of colour?

Andrew: It didn't break it down in that way, and it didn't break it down in terms of boys and girls as well. There may be material underpinning that that I haven't seen, but we're certainly going to look into that more.

Richard: It's interesting that there has been a big push to get more women teaching STEM subjects, and that's part of this push around STEM generally. There's some pretty good evidence that if you take subjects that girls have traditionally struggled more in, for all kinds of reasons, largely I think around socialisation, then having a female teacher really helps. But interestingly, the opposite is true as well. Having a male English teacher turns out to be particularly beneficial to boys. It doesn't seem to matter for girls one way or the other if the English

teacher is male or female. In the same way, it doesn't seem to matter to boys if their science teacher is male or female. But when you get these subjects where traditionally your sex is a bit behind, having a teacher of the same sex really seems to matter.

Actually, Literacy and English are where the gender gaps are a) the widest, for sure, and b) the most predictive for college going. There's a study that I quote in the book that suggests that if we could close the gap in English and Literacy at the age of 16 – this is in England – then we could close the college enrollment gap, the percentage going to college. It's much more predictive of college going than other subjects.

So where are the male English teachers? And, more importantly, where are the policies that we're pursuing to get more male English teachers? Where are the scholarships to get men into teacher training colleges to teach English? There are plenty of scholarships to get women teaching STEM, and men teaching STEM, to be fair, which I'm hugely in favour of, but I want more men teaching literature to boys, because right now there isn't very much of that, and then we wonder why boys are falling so far behind, because they're already behind in that subject, and then they get more female teachers. So take the lessons of the successful STEM campaigns which you just described, and apply them to boys and men.

Andrew: And certainly levels of literacy attainment were one of the main motivators for this Bristol work from what I can see, the boys programme of work. When I was talking with Lawrence, he also talked about – which you've mentioned, and I want to come on to now – is about work and about the traditional role of a man as a breadwinner and how that's shifted as well. Take us through that.

Richard: I think that's, in some ways, the biggest change of all, in terms of its cultural impact. In the space of a generation, the role of the father in the family has been significantly changed. My own father was all kinds of things. He was a swimming coach, he was a last-minute academic tutor, he was a chauffeur, he was an advisor – an amazing, amazing dad. But his bedrock responsibility, like all the men of his generation, was breadwinner.

When he lost work – he worked in manufacturing – his main job was to get another job. Literally in the space of a generation, that's changed. The main reason it's changed is because of the extraordinary success of the women's movement, increasing the economic power of women, which was one of the main aims – I would argue the main aim – of the women's movement, and has been very, very successful. Not finished, but very successful. Now, that's great news, because what it means is that the thing that Gloria Steinem and many other feminists were arguing for is that women don't need men in order to survive in the world in the labour market. They don't need a breadwinner, they can win their own bread, and they can do that even if they have children. So that's, in my view, a wonderful development.

But it does raise some important questions then about the role of fathers. I don't think we've taken that question seriously enough, especially on the more centre-left side of the argument. What it means is that we have to recast fatherhood – this touches a little bit on what we were saying earlier – so that it's not defined in such narrow terms around breadwinning, but it's defined in broader terms. We've expanded the role of women to be much broader so we can incorporate breadwinning as well as caring. We haven't really done the same for men. Men have remained stuck in a little bit of a time warp. What that means is that if they can't fulfil the traditional breadwinning role, which more and more of them can't because of the economic trends…around trade and industrial deindustrialisation and so on, they get benched. Sometimes they bench themselves because they feel they're failing against these cultural norms. They get benched because it's like, well, you're not doing what you're 'supposed' to do. So I really do think that that we've recast women's lives in ways that are complex but largely positive, but we haven't really recast men's lives. The hollowing out of that traditional role of men in the family by the successes of the women's movement is just a byproduct.

I think the bigger point here is big cultural changes, even when they're positive, quite often have some destabilising effects on other institutions and on other people. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't have done it. Conservatives will say, we warned you, we told you this is what feminism would do, so we shouldn't have done it, let's try and go back to the '50s by… I don't know how, inventing some gigantic time machine. But they were right to suggest that, look, this is going to have some consequences to how we think about men, and the left aren't really even asking the question and that's leaving this really dangerous political vacuum, I think.

Andrew: And if you think about the future of work, where men are vulnerable as well, you've got things like growing automation, rapid automation in some respects, you've got, if free trade continues, labour elsewhere. That hollowing out will just continue and continue, won't it?

Richard: Yes. It's important to notice that that in all of the most recent recessions bar the weird Covid one, including some of the ones that impacted my dad, it was men that got hit hardest. They're all 'he-cessions', to use the terminology, and the long-run trend has been to really decimate traditionally male jobs.

Now, at the same time of course, we are creating new jobs, right? We're creating new jobs in services and in particular in what I call the 'HEAL' professions, which are the opposite of STEM – we've talked about some of these already, but in health, education, administration and literacy. So we've already talked about teachers, but growing needs for health care workers, and I include within health social care. In the UK, 85 per cent of social care workers are women.

I know there's been some discussion recently about immigration and so on too, and I should say that I'm very pro-immigration as a general political principle, but we need to stop trying to solve the labour shortages in those areas with only half the workforce. We're not seeing much movement of men into those occupations, even though in many cases they pay as well as some of the ones that they've left. But there's been a problem because it goes against gender stereotyping.

We've seen the desegregation of the labour market on gender terms in one direction, with women moving into what were traditionally male jobs, especially high paid ones, but we haven't really seen movement the other way of men into these HEAL professions, which is where I think we really need to start pushing now. For the men, because that's where a lot of jobs are coming from and, as you say, automation and free trade have disproportionately hit male jobs; for the professions, because they're short of workers; and for the users of those services.

I was just talking to someone recently in the UK, actually, whose dad is in a care home and it's quite helpful to have male care workers when you need incredibly intimate help, say, to go to the toilet, and it's the same the other way around with women. So it's quite helpful to have male nurses, it's quite helpful to have male teachers, it's quite helpful to have male counsellors, psychologists, it's good to have a diversity generally. But in most of those professions, there are fewer and fewer men as a proportion of the occupations, not more. There are three reasons why we should really be helping to get more men into those professions: for the men, for the professions and for the users of them.

Andrew: I was talking with someone who runs a set of care homes in Bristol, and I asked him how many male nurses and carers they had, and they said it's very few, and they certainly want more for the reasons you've said. But they felt that they can't do this on their own, you need to – and you talk about this in the book as well - [it needs] removing some of the stigmas of those jobs, making them more attractive. He wanted to see campaigns

in the media and at schools to say how valuable these jobs are, and how they were equally as applicable to men as they are to women.

Richard: Just think about the way that we've sent female scientists into schools and universities, and in marketing campaigns. We've got billboards and websites and all kinds of campaigns. There's this brilliant movie, *Picture a Scientist*, which is all about the women breaking down the barriers of science, a really well-funded, nicely done documentary. We need all of the same the other way, because there's a great phrase, actually, from the women's movement, which is if you can't see it, you can't be it. So we need to be sending men who are nurses into schools, we need to be providing more scholarships, we need to have all kinds of encouragement, both around social marketing but also putting money behind this too.

I think in just the same way that we do have some scholarships and subsidies aimed at women into traditionally male professions, we now need them aimed at men into female professions to help break down these gender stereotypes around those occupations, because it's not going to happen on its own. It didn't happen on its own for women into STEM or law or medicine – it happened as a result of a lot of people spending a lot of time and money and effort doing it. The same needs to happen for men getting into these other occupations too – it needs to be intentional.

Andrew: We'll just come on to a few more solutions in a moment, but I want to ask you a wider question. You talk in the book about male malaise and about cultural redundancy and growing loneliness – some very sad stories there, particularly from Japan, people there who are very lonely. And then, of course, you've got tied to this the people who voted for Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton, the way that this [loneliness] pushes people sometimes to the extremes, often to the right and to the more populist side. We do have to make some shifts, don't we, quite quickly, but also make sure that this is something which is embedded and doesn't then repeat itself in generations down the line.

Richard: There's a lot there. I think that the politics of this are super interesting. I do think that it's an axiom of political life that if responsible people don't deal with real problems in societies, then irresponsible people will exploit them. That's just a fact about political life. So if there are real problems facing a lot of boys and men, especially those from poor backgrounds - we've talked a lot about what's happening to working-class white boys and men, for example, in the UK, and they don't feel as if those problems are being properly addressed - unfortunately, that does make them much more susceptible to the appeals of populists or populist movements of one kind or another. It was a small gender gap, but it's true that if only women voted, the UK would still be in the European Union. It was men that took us out. And Donald Trump won with the biggest gender gap in recorded exit polling history in 2016. I do think that the vacuum that's created has this effect, potentially, of pulling some boys and men to the right, because they don't feel as if some of these issues are being addressed, and the polarisation you just referred to gets worse.

That's then worsened if you do get these isolation effects that you've mentioned, particularly with some of the drug problems we've seen recently – in the US, and in the UK, to some extent, some of this opioid use and so on – those are really drugs of retreat. They're not drugs you take to go out and party, right? They're not drugs you take to get you dancing all night or chilling with your friends, they're drugs that are really about just numbing pain of one kind or another. In fact, one of the reasons that people who use opioids are so much more likely to die is because they're much more likely to be on their own. We are seeing, it's kind of rising in self-reported loneliness, the weakening of some friendship networks, which seems to be particularly affecting some young men.

All of that added together, with some of the issues we talked about before, which is, to put it at its bluntest, I think, really the loss of a script for mature masculinity, right? What am I supposed to do now, right? What's next? It used to be written for you. I keep going back to my dad, but it's a useful data point, the reason he went to college was because he knew it would help him get a better job, and the reason he wanted a better job was because it would help him raise his family better because he was going to be the breadwinner. So he went to college, and then he got a job, and then when he lost a job, he got another job. There was a very clear script for what his role was going to be, but for the subsequent generation, that script is much less clear. In some ways, it feels like they're standing in the middle of the stage, and someone's torn up the script, and now they're having to improvise. And the improvising can be great, but it can also be very difficult, because we haven't replaced some of those social institutions with new ones. Some of the result of that can be dislocation and isolation. Unaddressed, dislocation and isolation really do become fuel for the populist fire.

Andrew: There's an interesting new book out on Birmingham by Richard Vinen, which is published by Penguin. We've just done an event on it and there's an interview on our website. From that you read, in the 30 glorious years after the Second World War, you might not have a job on a Friday but you could walk into a new one on Monday, there were so many jobs around, particularly in the motor industry. But that has shifted. It's quite an interesting book for some of the things we're talking about.

Let's move on to some of the solutions. There are some not necessarily simple ones, but easy ones. When it comes, for example, to employment of Black people who might have spent time in prison, just simply banning that box that they have to tick about previous criminal record is a good idea, isn't it?

Richard: No, it's not. It turns out not to be a good idea.

Andrew: Oh, right!

Richard: This is one of these inconvenient truths, unfortunately. This is where social scientists earn their money, but it's also, again, because it goes counter. So the thinking here is that if we're asking people to say whether they’ve got a criminal record or not on an employment application, then if they tick ‘Yes, I've got one’, they're not going to get the job. In the US in particular it's Black men who are so much more likely to have one that is going to affect their employment chances. So there was a huge movement to ban the box, which I think has now spread more generally – in other words, don’t ask the question, just don't ask if they have a criminal record.

There's very good evidence now that the result of that is to reduce the employment of Black men, not to increase it. The reason for that is instructive, which is that because employers are fearful that Black men are criminals, if they can't rule that out with the box, they presume that they might be, so they take the safe course of action and just don't hire any Black men.

So an inadvertent consequence of a very obviously attractive policy, which I supported, but robust evaluation shows, whoops, had the opposite effect. And again, it's a good example of, like, do we update our priors when the evidence changes? Do we, as Keynes famously said, ‘when the facts change, I change my mind.’ So I've changed my mind on ban the box because I see the evidence as doing exactly the opposite of what it was intended to do, so we need to do something else.

But the deeper problem that you speak to is absolutely right, which is that any kind of school to prison pipeline is one to be addressed. There are some parts of the US, including the neighbourhood that my godson grew up in, in Baltimore, and I have a whole chapter about Black men which I start with a story about him, in that the small neighbourhood he grew up in, the boys who grew up who were born there in the 1980s were more likely

to be in prison in their early 30s than to be married. The marriage rates were lower than the incarceration rates in that area. And this was obviously the war on drugs, the war on crime and so on, the consequences of that are obvious. This is where, again, a focus on boys and men is very important. It is boys and men who are disproportionately excluded from school, suspended or excluded, thrown out, expelled. It is disproportionately boys and men who end up in prison for one thing or another, which has these consequences. These are areas where a male focus is entirely appropriate in public policy because it is boys and men who are the ones who suffer most if we bungle criminal justice policy.

Andrew: Going on to some other areas. In early years, you talk about more equal allocation of childcare, but also generous paid leave for mothers and fathers. I remember my mother and father, they had five children, and I can't remember my father having more than a day off in his time. But what would generous mean in this sense?

Richard: Well, how generous it seems depends on whether you're saying this from the US or, let's say, Scandinavia, but I think the principle at stake here is that it should be equal paid leave for mothers and fathers, and it should be independent. In other words, it should not be transferable between them. That's quite a big thing to say, because previously, and I've changed my mind on this, and even when I was in government, when we introduced some of the current parental leave policies in the coalition, I thought it was better to let parents choose between themselves how the leave was going to be allocated. But the problem with that is, given current gender inequalities and current norms, mums take much more of the leave, which has a much bigger effect on the labour market.

More importantly than that, though, is that it sends a signal, like dads are less important than mums, back to where we were before. So I propose six months paid leave for mothers and fathers for each child, and importantly, they can take that at any point in the childhood. We ignore adolescence at our peril, and sometimes a discussion about paid leave and generally about parenting assumes that it's kind of done by five. That's just completely wrong and been a real problem in public policy, actually. Adolescence turns out to be in some ways as consequential a period as the early years but is very neglected. I think, actually, it's a great time to take some time off. My brother is using a lot of his parental leave to take some time off now and his kids are 14, he has two boys, and he says, this is a great time for me to spend some time with them. They're in secondary school... I think that's incredibly wise.

Andrew: One of the biggest proposals is that boys should have an extra year in the classroom. Tell us about that.

Richard: Boys should start school a year later, and I'll say why, and then come back to the extra year part. The reason why boys should start school a year later is because they mature more slowly than girls. That's a fact that every parent knows, and every teacher knows. So just holding boys back – if girls start at four, boys start at five, say – what that means is that they're developmentally much closer.

By changing the chronological age, you make them developmentally more similar, and in particular in adolescence. So by the time they roll through to secondary school, if the boys are a year older, chronologically speaking, what that means is that developmentally they're a bit closer to the girls, because at around the age of 15-16, girls are between a year and two years ahead in the development of various important skills, including things like staying on task, planfulness – these are called non-cognitive skills in the literature. It's not really that girls aren't smarter than boys. It's not really that intellectual ability, but they have got their act together, and they're much more able to defer gratification, manage their risk…All the things that the school system rewards, turning in your homework on time, studying for your exams, getting some sleep, etc, girls are just better at that because girls are just more mature., they're more grown up.

You look at a classroom full of 15-year-old girls and boys – they don't seem like a different sex, they seem like a different species. So let's just stagger the entry. The question then is what would you do for that extra year that the boys are at home and you worry about childcare and so on for the parents, so I do think that enriched early years education, or more childcare, would also be good, so that year isn't a wasted year, it's a year of extra development. That will be the extra year, if you like.

As far as the formal education system is concerned, boys and girls should be in for the same period of time. It's just that boys should just be staggered back a year, so for everything else they'd be a year older, and I have some reason to be confident that that would reduce some of the gender gaps we're seeing.

Andrew: And I was very much taken – you've talked about it already – but on becoming a better dad, I thought the idea of being able to take that leave not in the first five years or the first five months, but when they might be teenagers, for example, would help with that.

Richard: I think there's a real problem with the obsession with early years. James Heckman, a Nobel Prize winner, did a lot of the work on how pre-K or early years programmes are really effective. I was at a meeting with him, and he said once, 'You know, I'm really worried everyone's just obsessed with the early years, and they're forgetting about adolescence.' And I said, 'Whose fault is that?' I mean, literally, you are the guy that put early years education on the map. I do think that we've underestimated the importance of adolescence, but in particular, then, how does that play into mothers and fathers? It looks like fathers are actually particularly important during adolescence, and that's because adolescence is a period where children are starting to push against boundaries, they're learning to be independent, and so on. It turns out that dads are pretty good – on average, distributions overlap – at that. Whereas in the very early years, there seems to be something of a genuine preference for a division of labour the other ways, for mums to stay at home a little bit more.

I think the problem is that if you assume, OK, so mums are wanting to stay at home a little bit more in the first couple of years, that doesn't mean they want to be the main parent for the next 20 years. What it means is that they think, yeah, I want to do this early bit, right? But just because you're better at breastfeeding at five months, doesn't mean you're better at making dentist appointments at 15 years. I think that's the problem, that you get locked into these parental roles, and I think we need to disrupt that and give fathers and mothers equal opportunities to take that time off. If it's independent, they will take it, particularly if you replace their wages, which I would like to see us do much more of, then men will take it. But they shouldn't feel they have to take it straight away. Right now, there's this bit of a thing of, 'I took maternity leave straight away, I was at home with a baby for two weeks.' I've had three kids, and it is good to be at home for a while because there's a lot to do. But in terms of the impact on the kid and your relationship with the kid, I think it was better when I was at home with my 16-year-old than with my 16-day-old, honestly. More importantly, we should let parents choose that and not fetishise the early years.

Andrew: Final question to you on the HEAL idea. This isn't just meeting a need – this is a huge opportunity, isn't it? The amount of work that will be created, particularly in health and social care, for example, will demand skilled labour, compassionate labour.

Richard: Yes. These jobs in health, education services, and so on, again in the US – I know the numbers here best – for every STEM job we're going to create between now and 2030, we're going to create three HEAL jobs. So there's three times as many jobs coming in those sectors. And you're quite right that some of the jobs in that sector are pretty skilled like teaching, nursing, nurse practitioner certainly, are quite skilled. Some of the others are less skilled, right? Some of the care work jobs, healthcare, are less skilled, but that's true of male jobs now?

There are different skill levels required. It's not really the skill level I think that's the issue here. It's more that these roles are seen as so gendered. We have to reduce that.

Claudia Goldin, a Harvard economist, has this lovely phrase of the auras of gender that surround occupations. This is a lovely phrase, because aura is exactly right, right? When was the last time you heard someone say female lawyer or even female doctor? But you hear male nurse, you hear male teacher, and it is because they are so exceptional in those sectors. So reducing those auras of gender are really important, because, as you say, that's where a lot of jobs are coming from. If we keep saying to men, either implicitly or explicitly, 'Don't worry, we're going to bring back those jobs of the past,' then we're selling them a bill of goods, because there is no economic magic wand in the world that can do that. In the meantime, these other sectors are going to keep growing and needing more workers.

Andrew: One of the reasons that motivated you to write this book was that social policies were not working for boys and men. Do you have much confidence that this will shift now? You talked in one of the sections of the book about a US bipartisan commission on Black boys and men that is taking place I think right now

Richard: It's just started. And that's a great development, that there is a specific focus on Black boys and men, and I hope that will produce some policies which are specifically aimed at that group. But I think more generally, the issue is that lots of the policies that have been attempted and evaluated to try and move the needle on education, for example, do seem to be much more effective for women or girls than they are for boys and men. One of the ones that really jumped off my desk was an evaluation of a free college programme, so it made college completely free. This was in Kalamazoo, Michigan, a very, very generous college scholarship scheme, very well evaluated. It increased the proportion of women graduating college by some 50 per cent, just a huge jump. It didn't move the needle at all for men. So making college completely free didn't increase college completion among men. That's an extraordinary negative finding. I kept looking and kept looking, and I kept finding lots of independent mentoring schemes here or school choice schemes there… You're getting more response from women and girls than from men.

I think that means, first of all, we need to just break the data more, and just think why? What's going on there? What is it that's making these offers or these interventions more positive for women and girls than for boys and men? I think it's speaking to some of these broader cultural questions about motivation, sense of direction, purpose. I think, young women now do have quite a strong sense of purpose and direction, and they kind of know where they're going. That's much less true of boys and men.

I'll give you a trivial example – one of the things I was really struck by is you take something like Voluntary Service Overseas, and the equivalent in the US, which is the Peace Corps, and there's a domestic equivalent in America – in all of those, there are twice as many women doing that as men. In fact, in the case of VSO in the UK, 70 per cent are women. Why? No one has a good answer to the question why, but for me, it's something about the sense of ambition and purpose and motivation and drive and oomph or whatever you want to call it that I do think is animating a lot more young women than young men now.

I think a lot of young men are a little bit lost, a little bit less locked on, and that's why these interventions don't seem to work as well for them. So let's find some that do. Some that do, for example, things like vocational education, apprenticeships and more vocational education, they actually work much better for boys and men than they do for women and girls, which is a reason to invest in them. Not a reason to not invest in them because of that gender gap, but because there is a gender gap, because in the rest of the education system, there's a big gender gap the other way around.

Andrew: Well, Richard talks about getting beyond the heat and noise is essential, as well as overcoming left and right failures. There are lots of ideas in Richard's book, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do About It*, which is out now from Swift Press. Thank you for joining us, Richard.

Richard: Thank you for the questions. Andrew. I loved the conversation.

This interview has been lightly edited for length and clarity. The full version of the interview is in the recording.