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INTERSECTIONS  
Americans stuck on the sidelines  
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(MUSIC)

PITA: Welcome to Intersections. The podcast where two policy experts explore and explain the important policy issues facing us today. We are part of the Brookings Podcast Network and I am your host Adrianna Pita.

Ten years after the Financial Crisis and Great Recession, the US economy has, by most standards, recovered. Unemployment is under four percent, corporate profits are up and the stock market is humming along. But how much the recovered economy touched the American workers. The unemployment rate only measures those who are still looking for work. It doesn't count the underemployed or those who, for lack of hope or options, have just given up. And as we have seen in recent years, there are dangerous and troubling social and political consequences, when enough people feel disconnected from the economy and society around them.

With us today are the authors of two new books, which look at two different groups of these Americans on the outs. Isabel Sawhill, is a Senior Fellow here at Brookings and author of, *The Forgotten Americans: An Economic Agenda for a Divided Nation*. And Andrew Yarrow, a Senior Fellow with the Progressive Policy Institute and author of, *Man Out: Men on the Sidelines of American Life*. Bel and Andy, thank you so much for being here today.

YARROW: Thank you.

SAWHILL: Thank you. Great to be here.

PITA: Now both of you emphasize, as you frame who you are writing about, you say that neither of these groups of people that you are looking at are the worst off. They are not the most marginalized in our society. But they are populations that you feel have been either underserved or unidentified as a group who needs policy attention. And you also both link these issues to the 2016 election and the generally dismal state of US politics.

Andy, if I can ask you to start, *Man Out*, looks at this large and expanding sub-cultures of men who have been put on the sidelines or chosen to disengage from the, what you call the traditional responsibilities of American manhood. And it's this really broad swathe of people that crosses all these regional, age, racial and income lines. Can you give us a quick overview of who these men are and why you use the word sidelined? You are very particular about that.

YARROW: Yes. Thank you, Adriana. Unlike many people who focused really on the white

working class or the Trump-ian white working class, I go beyond this to look at three other populations, millennial men, formerly incarcerated men and men higher up the socio-economic ladder, who maybe over 50, 55. And in terms of sidelined, I use the word to avoid saying pushed out or dropped out. I mean, there are political connotations to each. To put very crudely, pushed out tends to be a way that people on the left might look at this issue through bad economy, for example, bad policies have made these men fail in a variety of ways. Dropped out, many conservatives would use as a term to say because of bad morals or laziness, they have stopped working, stopped being good fathers or husbands. So, that's kind of my --

PITA: Okay. And how do you go about identifying these groups and getting this perspective on all these different people?

YARROW: Well, it's interesting. When I initially started the book, I had talked to some divorced women, upper-middle class divorced women, who complained about their then ex-husbands, who had basically stopped working at a point, maybe in their 40s and never went back to work and hung out in the basement, maybe drank, maybe were on the internet way too much, maybe more -- slightly more nefarious things. But as I went along, I saw these men as, not just culprits, but in many ways victims. And in all cases see these men as a little bit of both on a continuum, certainly different degrees.

And in looking at this, as I say, I was struck by the large numbers of upper-middle class men, some others have been struck about the failures of millennials and many people tie that to the Great Recession. But that millennial men are doing worse than millennial women by a number of measures. They are more likely to live at home. They also have lower labor force participation rates than older men. And the formerly incarcerated is a whole other population which overlaps with some of these.

But a main point that I make in the book, is that many of these issues have tended to be silo-ed, tended to be seen as labor force issues, family and fatherhood issues, public health issues, mass incarceration issues, political issues. And while all of these issues for all of these men don't come together for all of them, a lot of them do interact with each other. And I think that's something that's been missing.

PITA: Well, you had had a really good quote from Sylvia Allegretto, an Economist from the

University of California, that said that, that while there are a lot of different stories that one can tell, and that's a lot of what you do in your book is telling some of these stories, with the differences between rural, formerly industrialized and urban areas, it all comes back to an economy that isn't working for a lot of people. And, I think, that's good a way to bring you in here, Bel. You are looking specifically at the working class. It's this group of working age adults without four-year college degrees, who make family incomes below 70,000 Dollars, is that right?

SAWHILL: That's absolutely right. And they are mainly working class but it also includes the poor and it also includes the lower-middle class. And, I think, somebody can be making 70,000 Dollars a year and not have a college degree and they aren't all working class. So, it's quite a wide group.

SAWHILL: All right. The hardships faced in the working class are often depicted sometimes by policy makers or sometimes by people in the media, it's through the lens about the loss of manufacturing jobs, specifically due to trade and automation issues, or through the lens of the Great Recession. And a lot of the times, in talking about these struggles, the notion is that, well, once we can get the economy growing fast enough again, then everybody will be doing better. However, in your analysis there are both more factors at play than just those two aspects. And you also spend a good deal of time explaining how economic growth alone isn't the answer. Can you give us an overview about why the working class are in such struggles at this time?

SAWHILL: Well, I think an awfully good way to think about your question, is to simply look at how this group is doing right now. And we have, as you have said at the beginning, very low unemployment, a very strong economy, employers looking for workers and not being able to find them. So, what's going on here? And I think, what's going on, in addition to trade and technology and the other things you mentioned, is that people don't have the skills that employers want. So, a big theme in my book is the need to reskill the workforce, especially this workforce that does not have a college degree.

And, I think, we have gotten into a mental mode in this country, in which we think everyone needs to go to college. And, in fact, there are policy proposals out there that would make that fiscally feasible for everyone. But, I think, that's not necessarily the right solution, at least not for everyone. I think we need a lot more career and technical education, a lot

more practical skills that people learn in high school. And so, I think that has to be part of the solution.

PITA: A lot of your recommendations, as we have talked about -- you are talking about the working class at large. So, its men, its women, its, you know, different racial backgrounds. You do spend a chapter talking specifically about the white working class. And again, you emphasize that for all their very real struggles and grievances, they are not the worst off in society. But so, why is it important that this group of people be a policy priority?

SAWHILL: Well, I think the first and simplest reason why they need to be a policy priority is because they haven't been in the past. They have been forgotten. They have been neglected. They have been left out. And perhaps that's an area where Andy and I could agree. I think they also voted overwhelmingly for President Trump. I mean, the margin over Hillary Clinton was almost 40 percentage points. That is huge. So, I can't emphasize that too much.

The other thing that goes along with that, is that they are a very large group. They are the largest single part of the electorate. So, if they are voting for people like Trump, imagine what's going to happen, given his policies, to minorities, to women, to immigrants, to LGBT people. And so, I think, we can't ignore them, even if we wanted to. Hillary Clinton called them the deplorables. They aren't all deplorable. They are a very diverse group and many of them are not racists and not anti-immigrant and so forth and so on.

They are also not all men in hard hats. I think, we also have this image in our minds of the manufacturing worker and the coal worker and those jobs have disappeared. An awful lot of them are in retail, in the service sector, in low level healthcare jobs and call centers. And I have gone out and talked to a lot of them. And they are not nearly as homogeneous as people like us, people who write books and look at data would like to think.

PITA: Right. Before we delve down to some of the specifics, just one more question about context. You both point out that these trends that the US is facing, they are not unique to us. Europe and several of the other advanced economies are also facing some similar issues, although in a lot of cases they are not quite as severe. Can I ask you both to add your piece of the international context to these trends, both for the working class and for men?

SAWHILL: Well, the parallels are rather strong between the US and Brexit and some of the

other populist trends that we are seeing in Europe. On the other hand, I am a little reluctant to lob everything under the populist rubric. I think that would be a mistake. I think there is much about America that is distinctive, and I think our President is an incredibly unique human being, for better or for worse. And everybody is now worrying about the mid-terms and I think that one of the things I have learned from my research and my conversations with this group of forgotten Americans, is that if the Democratic Party believes they are going to win in the long run by moving way to the left, they are wrong.

This group, again and I hate to generalize, but they have relatively conservative attitudes. And they do face, not just economic problems, but status anxieties, cultural issues that they care about. They want to hear their elected representatives talk about mainstream values and they also want to hear them do something pragmatic that will improve their lives. And right now, they are not really getting either.

YARROW: First off, I think you are very right, Bel, in terms of this group of people. And, for me, looking at men who have just been ignored by the Democratic Party. And as you mentioned with Hillary's comments about deplorables, there is a lot of, kind of, sotto voce disdain out there, I think, when Democrats, liberals, kind of, urban elites, towards these working class men and women.

SAWHILL: Yeah. Well said.

YARROW: Thanks. So, beyond that in terms of international comparisons, I think the country that comes closest for me, to what's happening in the US, is the UK, as Bel suggested too. That some of the similar labor force trends are going on. Some of the similar cultural trends, issues around masculinity, which is also a piece that weighs into my book. But it's hard to make broad brush comparisons. I mean, for example, Italy, there has been a long tradition of young men staying at home, the sort of, [inaudible], the adult boys. But, you know, while Italy's economy and society are hardly a model for anyone, much of that has been to actually save money to figure out how to get launched.

YARROW: One difference in terms of policies, by the way, is that in Europe they still have strong unions. And they still have apprenticeship programs, very robust apprenticeship programs. And a whole lot of other institutional mechanisms for integrating this group into their economy

and their society. And we have not got those kinds of institutions. We have a tiny apprenticeship program. We do not have unions. Unions are now about six percent of the private sector workforce. And we have been passing laws and making court decisions that are weakening unions further.

And the result is that we have given these very large tax cuts to corporations in America on the hope, and I want to underscore the hope, that some of that will trickle down to America's workers. And so far the evidence is that it's not. Wages have been stuck at relatively low levels. Not increasing faster than inflation. And businesses are using their windfall from these tax cuts, their increased profits to buy back stock, to increase dividends. In other words, to help shareholders. And so, American workers do not have the protections that they do in Europe and even in the UK, to a lesser extent.

YARROW: And I think something that you say applies particularly to men in America, in terms of wages. I mean, you have seen less skilled, less educated men's wages actually decline, in real terms after inflation, for about four and a half decades. Women's wages from a lower baseline have edged up. So, there has at least been some progress. But to see falling wages, falling expectations, is not a good thing.

SAWHILL: That's a really good point that Andy is making about the differences between male wages and female wages. In fact, I want to add to it by saying that what's really been the backbone of the American middle and working classes, in recent decades, has been the increased labor force participation of women. Think about it. If we hadn't had that increased labor force participation and the rising wages that have gone with it for women, we would have had falling middle class and working class incomes.

All that the women's participation was able to do was to keep that more or less level or maybe inching up a bit. And now, we are in a situation, where the labor force participation rates of women, have leveled off. They haven't been increasing since about 2000. So, there isn't that impetus to working and middle class incomes that there used to be. And if wages don't rise, people are really stuck and are going to fall further behind.

PITA: Sure. Can you talk a little bit about some of the causes why women's labor force participation has now leveled off?

SAWHILL: Oh, I am so glad you are asking me that question. And here is why. On Friday of this week, September 7th, we are doing a big event with the American Enterprise Institute to release a new report on paid family leave and what America should be doing about it. And this has been a distinguished group that's worked on this issue for two years now. And we will be releasing our final report on Friday with our recommendations.

The reason I mention that is because there is very strong evidence now that one reason that women's labor force participation in the US hasn't been increasing, and it's now much lower than it is in other advanced countries, is because we don't provide the paid leave, the child care and the other policies that enable people to combine work and family. And so, that is a big issue in this country.

PITA: We will be sure to put a link to that report in the show notes for this, so our listeners can go and find your recommendations there as well. One thing that you had mentioned Andy about women's wages have been coming up a little bit, that is of course -- while it's good for the working class family who is depending on those women's wages, for men they are looking at that and to them it makes theirs look even more like it's going down.

And that was the thing that struck me about both for the working class and for men, a lot of the issues that you both wrote about, it's not just about the individual specific issue. So, it's not just about, well, in this industry wages aren't going up or in this region of the country there aren't as many jobs available. But it was about how people feel about their life situation, about their employment, their jobs, relative to other people. Can you talk a little bit about that aspect?

YARROW: Yeah, I am glad you ask that too, Adrianna. I think a big issue for a lot of men is that you see growing anger and misogyny out there, resentment of women, that women appear to be doing better in education, in the workforce. Whether that's entirely real or not, there is this resentment. I touch on all the, really dark, communications that many men, misogynistic men, put out there these days. And, I think, it also impacts another big area, health. While women's life expectancy continues to inch up, white women's less than people of color, men's life expectancy has been falling in the last two years.

And you see also it's about their health problems. Like men being twice as likely to die

from overdoses, men being much less likely to get preventive healthcare than women, particularly unmarried men. And so, I think a lot of these things, kind of, ripple together to form a swathe of men, either resenting women and being angry toward women and toward the system at large, who are just really not taking care of themselves. Kind of, falling through the cracks.

PITA: How does the need to address people's perceptions of their issues affect how policy makers should respond? Should addressing those perceptions be part of the specifics of policies that are laid out or is that more about the messaging of how you explain why certain policies should be done?

MR. YARROW: Yeah. I think that's an excellent question too. Yes, I mean, the economic issues are very important but the cultural issues are also important. And that's something that, I think, the Democrats have been particularly bad, that many Democrats at understanding. Certainly an awful lot of Republicans don't understand either. But why are men feeling this crisis of masculinity, of what their identity is? Why are men resenting women? Why is men's health deteriorating so much more badly than women? And so, consequently, I think, there are a lot of other areas that policy makers should be thinking off. And more, really kind of in the cultural realm, or the intersections between culture and economics.

PITA: Bel, did you want to weigh in on this point?

SAWHILL: Yes. I think that there is a issue of how people feel compared to others that they are likely to compare themselves to. And, I think, that comes out time and time again in all of the research that Andy and others have done. So, we do need to pay attention to that. I would remind us though that the women in, what I call the forgotten American group, their attitudes are not that different from the men's. Let's not forget that a majority of white working class women voted for President Trump, despite Hollywood Access tapes and all the rest. So, they knew what they were getting.

But the attitudinal data, which I review in my book, shows that they as well as the men in their lives, believe that women's first place is in the home. And so, they have endorsed traditional gender roles in a way that the urban elites, that Andy mentioned earlier, have not. So, we are dividing as a society between those who are well educated and part of the elite, if you will, who

understand that women have much more diverse and much more equal roles nowadays, than they used to and should have. And that attitude is less prevalent in the group that I talk about in my book.

PITA: So, another common theme that you both touched on is that there is a mix of institutional forces where economic issues, political decisions and then also personal choices, how people respond to the political circumstance or the economic circumstance that they find themselves in. Andrew, you had a really good quote from Daniel Patrick Moynihan, that came up twice. The central conservative truth is that it's culture not politics that defines success of a society and the central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it for itself. Can you ask you to unpack that a little bit?

YARROW: Sure. I mean, first off, that's a very popular among as many popular quotes out there. Hardly something I dug up. But basically, what he meant and what I feel is very true is that culture shapes, maps out the beliefs, the behaviors, the norms of how people in a society act. And that those are the really overarching factors in, sort of, shaping what kind of society we have. Whether it's in politics, relationships between men and women, in the workplace, employer-worker relationships. And the other half, I think, is pretty straight forward, Moynihan being the great figure that he was, recognizing that the only way you change things that are, maybe, dysfunctional in a culture or harmful in a culture, is through political action and policy change.

PITA: And Bel, on your part, you had a good quote yourself, that if there is a set of concerns that transcends party, it's the fact that too many Americans feel that they have been left behind by an economy undergoing rapid change. And a lack of well-paid jobs is the heart of that problem. So, as you were thinking about solutions, how do you deal with that tension between the multitude of causes and these cultural differences that we are talking about, to drill down to practical solutions?

SAWHILL: Well, that's really a question about my entire book. But -- let me see if I can summarize and adequately here. I mean, I do think that on the right these days, the focus has been on increasing economic growth through, so called, supply side policies, tax cuts, deregulation. And that hasn't worked. I mean, I think the evidence is really in on the fact that that hasn't worked. And I tried to go through that evidence in my book and say, growth is not the

solution or certainly not the only solution.

And I even quote our colleague, Ben Bernanke, who gave a wonderful speech on why growth is not enough these days and why we really need to focus much more directly on jobs and wages. On the left you see a lot of people arguing, for understandable reasons, that we should be redistributing income from the rich to those lower down in the income spectrum. And I again understand that desire and I personally support it myself. But I would also suggest, and I have evidence in my book about this, that's not going to fly politically in the US, to simply redistribute income. People don't want to pay much higher taxes. They believe in meritocracy. They believe that if you have a high income it's because you earned it and so, for all kinds of reasons, I don't think redistribution is the only solution either.

So, then what is the solution? The solution is really jobs and wages. And what do we need there? We need to reskill the workforce, as I argued earlier. But we also need to boost wages at the bottom. And if we can't count on a big corporate tax cut to automatically produce higher wages at the bottom, maybe we need some revisions or amendments to the 2017 tax law that would nudge corporations in a new direction. A direction which is not totally new in our history, but it's been lost in recent decades and that is, what I call, a stakeholder as opposed to a shareholder form of capitalism, in which business pays attention, not just to their shareholders but also to the community, to their customers and above all to their workers.

And I cite any number of companies that are doing this right in the US right now. And I also cite a lot of evidence that shows it's not inconsistent with building shareholder value for the longer term. So, I am in favor of really moving the private sector in some new directions. And I also think in that in the meantime, in the short term, we need to boost wages with a worker tax credit.

A worker tax credit would, basically, reduce taxes or offset payroll taxes for those in the bottom, let's say, one-third of the distribution. We have tried that with the earned income tax credit but it's mostly focused on the poor right now and on families with children. I want to move it up the income scale and I want to focus it on a broader group, then just poor families with children. Sorry, that was a long answer.

PITA: No. That was really good because I would say you anticipated my next question is going to be, so many of your solutions -- there are things that may take time. Like, reskilling

workers, changing the way we think about education and apprenticeships. These are all really great ideas but it will take a while to roll out for people to see the benefits of those. So, I was going to ask you direct to say which one of you --

SAWHILL: Well, yeah. So, let me just emphasize that we badly need to fix our K through 12 education system, as well as the post-secondary education system and creating more opportunities for people to gain skills. But, as you say, that's going to take a while and so, that's why in the short run, I really want to work on what businesses are doing right now and what government can do through a worker credit.

On the cultural front, my major proposal is for universal national service, combined with something new. This is new in my book, that I call an American Exchange Program. The American Exchange Program would encourage families all across America to open their homes, on a voluntary basis, to a young person from another community, who is doing their year of service, and they would then get to know each other and it would have, I think, a very positive impact on some of our cultural divides. And when I tested this idea with my focus groups in three cities around the country, this was their favorite idea. They all loved this idea. And they picked up on it very very quickly.

Now, the universal service itself, I think, has value and we, I think, need to tie financial aid to go to college or get other post-secondary training to, you are providing to service to America first. I think we have lost the idea of service. I think John F. Kennedy said, and it's been quoted many many times because it doesn't get said enough, ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country. And I think there is a yearning for patriotism and for service and for encouraging the younger millennials, including those millennial men that Andy talks about, to get involved and engaged in civic constructive behavior.

YARROW: Yeah. I would agree with everything you say, Bel. And I think the American Exchange Program sounds very exciting. In terms of getting people more civically involved, I think that it's absolutely right but the very tough thing -- I mean, I talked with a lot of Army Recruiters in the course of working for this book, Peace Corps, AmeriCorps people and they find, not surprisingly, that it's very hard to get good men in the Army. One Colonel told me, he has the one and three problem, that this big chunk of people, who even try to volunteer for the Army, don't

have the education or skills, as far as service programs, domestic service, like AmeriCorps or foreign, like the Peace Corps. While they closely guard their data, it's between two-thirds and a little over 70 percent of those who volunteer are women.

And you see this in other areas as well, which is troubling with men. The climbing patriotism, particularly among young men, rises in atheism, other forms of civic or community involvement. I mean, men are much less likely to go to churches, synagogues, mosques, than women are. And organizations for men have, kind of, withered. I talk about civic organizations, like the Rotary, like the Elks, et cetera, that were once vital supports for men and did good in the society as well, that have just withered to almost nothingness. And, in fact, many people in these organizations, including men say, the only reason they have survived is because they were forced by courts to admit women in the late 80s.

SAWHILL: Could I ask Andy a question?

PITA: Please.

SAWHILL: Everything you say is true, I think, but I am wondering, if in your book, you addressed what it is that these young men in particular, are doing, now that they are not doing all the things that you have so carefully said they are documented that they are not doing. What are they doing?

YARROW: Well, that's an excellent question. And, you know, there is data in the American Time Use Survey. But the big piece that I look at is online gaming, just online addiction. There is, believe it or not, the support group, a 12-step program Online Gamers Anonymous out there. But you have got estimates of approximately 15 million hardcore gamers. There have been surveys out there that young men who don't work actually prefer life as a gamer to working, on average. And -- yeah, I think --

SAWHILL: Do you know what they are living off of? You know, I mean, gaming doesn't exactly bring in an income.

YARROW: Yeah.

SAWHILL: They are living in their parent's basements or whatever?

YARROW: Yeah. Yeah. No, that is a huge huge part of it. About 40 percent, a little over 40 percent of men between 18 and 34, live with parents and other relatives. The numbers for

women in those age groups are anywhere from 8 to 10 percentage points lower. So, yeah, there is a lot of parental support. Obviously, that doesn't work for people who are quite poor and don't have both parents around and good incomes. But then it gets to issues which are the ones that conservatives harp on about relying on government programs, particularly disability insurance. Although the actual numbers in terms of the increase in men on disability insurance -- although you like to tout from one to three percent of the workforce, it's actually pretty tiny, a pretty tiny reason for men staying at home, young men and others.

PITA: Right. Yeah, I was struck by the difference between young men and women. Because a lot of times when we think about disenfranchisement we are, as you said earlier, thinking about the former industrial workers, who now are 50 years old and out of work. And while it's understandable that a lot of millennials had problems getting work right out of college because, again, the recession, it is such a difference between the young men and young women. What are some of the other dynamics there? The young women struggled but they eventually went and found work. But these young men, more of them are staying home.

YARROW: Sure. It's pretty well known that women have become the vast majority of college graduates, about 58 percent of those in college are women these days. Girls do better in K through 12. There is some evidence of maybe teacher bias on that. But there is also evidence that things that might help boys engage with school better have been dropped that we need. Physical education, for example, and you know, I think --

SAWHILL: My -- not to interrupt you but my participants and my focus groups they kept talking about shop. They said, why don't we bring back shop in school.

YARROW: Right. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, there need to be things that, whether stereotypically or not, appeal to boys in schools. And, I mean, the last point is at least in large metropolitan areas, the New Yorks and Washingtons, for adults under 30, women are actually making more money on average than young men. I mean, this is not to say that on average across the society women remain behind men in income and discrimination, all sort of things. But, you know, among the young, women are actually doing better in a lot of ways than men.

SAWHILL: You know, Richard Reeves and I wrote a piece for the New York Times that they headlined, Men's Lib and our big theme there, and I am wondering what Andy thinks about this

theme, having done so much research himself now, was that, you know, men are simply not adjusting very well to the new world. This is a terrible generalization but that women are more flexible. And women have figured out how to deal with the new economy and the new society, they have gotten more education, they have been more willing to move. They have just been a little more entrepreneurial almost.

And men are having a hard time adjusting to changes in the economy and changes in gender roles and various other things that now make their lives more of a struggle. And so, you know, the big question for me -- I know there is no easy answer, Andy, but it's this men's problem or is this society's problem? You know, should we be expecting more off men. I had been in groups, at small seminars, where there have been conservative men who have said, oh, well we are not doing enough for men and they need to be married and they need women to shore them up, and so forth. And I am saying, hey, younger women don't want to be responsible for men who can't make a living and can't be reliable and responsible. So, I just toss it out to you.

YARROW: Yeah. No, that's a big question. And as you say, no easy answers. But I think it's very true in the labor force, men are less likely to be adaptive. It's a lot of anecdotal data but, you know, the skills of the modern economy are much more suited to women. Traditionally communications, interpersonal skills, et cetera, that men remain not so good at.

SAWHILL: We call those HEAL jobs as supposed to STEM jobs. HEAL stands as the acronym for Health, Education, Administration and Literacy. Those were the skills that are now needed, as much as or more than STEM skills, and those are the skills that women tend to have more than men.

YARROW: Well, that's exactly right too, that men are less likely to take low wage available jobs or less likely to take in the HEAL framework, things that are perceived as women's work, you know, childcare, healthcare aids, even K through 12 teachers. And to do so, I think, especially looking at K through 12 or Pre-K teachers, would benefit not only men but benefit children as well. I think, on the identity issues, in some ways women, or at least better educated women, but trickling down pretty far, have kind of integrated a lot of the ideas of feminism, of kind of needs for beliefs in the equality with men on a lot of levels. I mean, not just political or economic.

Whereas for men, I mean, I heard, sadly over and over, feminism has done a lot for women

but not so much for men or it's left men confused. And even self-described progressives or liberals would say, yes I believe in feminism but then there are those radical feminists they don't like. And the confusion around masculine identity is a big issue. Are you, kind of, the he-man of old or are you the, kind of, new sensitive, caring man. And, I think, it's very hard for a lot of men.

And, I think, there has also been somewhat divisive rhetoric around this. You have people, like I said, won't mention names, who call for men to be more manly and to go back to, what many people call, toxic masculinity. On the other hand, you have many progressive men's groups who are espousing the right things. But I feel like espousing the right things doesn't really get us very far.

PITA: So, then how do you overcome -- to Bel's question, how does the rest of the society help men get over it? To put it a bit bluntly.

YARROW: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SAWHILL: Get over it, right.

PITA: Like yeah, okay, well look the jobs are in healthcare.

YARROW: Yeah.

PITA: If you want a job, you got to start going that way. How do we deal with that?

YARROW: Well, again it gets to cultural messages that these things are valuable work for society, valuable work that men and women can be doing. The fact that these HEAL occupations are women's occupations, also means they are lower wage occupations, which gets back to the wage issue.

PITA: Yeah.

YARROW: You know, if we can pay higher wages maybe more men would be drawn to them.

PITA: Although that is part of a typical pattern, Bel, you would know this better than I would, isn't it usually -- and I think they have seen it like in computer programming and all those sorts of fields, once enough men start entering that field, then the wages will start rising. Is that cause and effect or is that a chicken and egg question?

SAWHILL: No, I think, there is actually some evidence that female dominated occupations, even after you adjust for everything else that might be going on, they pay less.

PITA: Right.

SAWHILL: So, you are right. As men enter an occupation, the wages should, other things being equal, rise for that reason alone. And we would like to think we are a gender blind society, but we are not there yet.

PITA: Right.

SAWHILL: Not completely there. Although we are a lot better off than we were when I was a millennial.

PITA: Yeah. All right. We are getting a little long on time. So, I think, I want to end with a how question. And it's related to what we have already been talking about. How do you deal with people's attitudes about things? Andy, for your part, you had had a really great killer, pun not intended quote, that if the two unchanging things in life are death and taxes, Americans have chosen death. How do we deal with that question? And Bel, for you --

SAWHILL: I like to do the death and taxes one too.

PITA: -- yeah.

YARROW: Okay.

PITA: I will come back to what I was going to ask you.

YARROW: Well, it gets back to tax policy, our social priorities. You know, Americans used to live longer than people from any other large developed country in the world. Now we have fallen behind many many developed countries. We are way down the OECD rankings. And as I mentioned before, men's health has been deteriorating in a lot of ways and mental health as well. Suicides are three and a half times more common among men. Obama's former Surgeon General pointed out that loneliness is the biggest public health crisis in America. Men are more likely to be lonely. Again, decline of civic groups, women more able to cope later in life, you know, if they are alone.

But getting back to the death and taxes, having strayed a little bit. If we want men to be healthier, if we want Americans to be healthier, despite the enormous amounts we spend and waste on healthcare in America, you know, we need to address some of these men's health problems. And women's as well. There is no office of Men's Health in the CDC or NIH. And not to make this a men versus women issue, there have become a lot of offices of women's health out in

the government.

And that's great, but we seem to prefer and brought into the promises from Ronald Reagan on down or the Jarvis Proposition 13 on down, that low taxes are better. And the lowering of taxes, really as Bel said earlier, overwhelmingly benefit the well-to-do.

PITA: Bel, on top of the death versus taxes dichotomy, I wanted to ask you, was -- given the high levels of public distrust in all sorts of political institutions, how do we enact? Your book is full of great recommendations. How do we make them happen, if people don't trust what the government is trying to do for them?

SAWHILL: Well, let me start with death and taxes because it is a big theme in my book. And, I think, that what people have not recognized is that this generation, that is moving into retirement and towards death right now, basically, the baby boom generation and those that are little older even, they are the wealthiest generation we have ever had in America. One estimate is that they are going to be passing on to their children 30 trillion dollars. 30 trillion, with a t.

And what are we doing in the meantime? We are trying to eliminate the estate tax. Most of their children, by the way, are very wealthy as well. They have had all kinds of advantages, even if they aren't quite as wealthy as their parents; they have had good educations, good upbringings, all kinds of social networks that have helped them. So, we should be taking some of that money back for the kind of purposes that we could all sit here and say are needed.

And what we have had instead is conservatives calling the estate tax a death tax. Well, it's not a death tax. Dead people, by definition, do not pay taxes. Think about it. Furthermore, conservatives tend to worry about the fact that if you tax people too much, it will dis-incentivize them from working. Well, all of the evidence, the best of it written by conservative economists themselves, show that if you lower inheritance taxes, what you do is you discourage work, because now have money that they don't have to work for. It's welfare for the wealthy. Inheritances are welfare for the wealthy.

So, I feel very strongly that one good source of new revenue for our society, which would also honor our belief in meritocracy, our belief that we are not a class-based society, our belief that we don't want to be a plutocratic and a class-based system, would be to begin to tax some of that money that is flowing to the next generation that doesn't need it at all. So, that's my riff on

welfare for the wealthy and death and taxes.

PITA: All right.

SAWHILL: Distrust in government is very high. No question about it. I struggled with this in my book and I am not sure I have the answer. In fact, I am worried right now about, what I call, the catch-22. The catch-22 is that we keep electing people who promise to do one thing or another, either on the far right or on the far left, aren't able to deliver because either the promises are not based on good sound policy analysis, or because they can't be enacted. Both are a problem.

And then you get more distrust in government because people think they elected someone who could change things -- they elected Trump, I think, largely because they thought they were frustrated that nothing was happening in Washington. That their problems weren't being addressed. Now, I think, they are going to be disappointed that he didn't do much for them. And they are going to be even more distrustful. So, we have to stop that cycle of people overpromising and not being able to deliver.

So, I don't know what to do about that, except to try to go back to sensible moderate policies that embed mainstream American values. And the three values that I emphasize in my book are, education, everybody is in favor of education; work, everybody wants a job and wants to work, wants to be self-supporting, wants to be self-reliant, that's the American way; and finally, stable strong families, which I wrote about in my last book *Generation Unbound*. And, I think, we have a shot at improving education, improving work and wages and strengthening families, but we are not doing it.

PITA: All right. Isabel and Andrew, thank you so much for being here today and explaining some of these issues. Again, for our listeners, your two books that are out as of September are, *The Forgotten Americans: An Economic Agenda for a Divided Nation* and, *Man Out: Men on the Sidelines of American Life*. As always, we will, of course, have links to these, as well as, other research in our show notes. And Bel, you also have -- there is going to be a really interesting product coming from you, your focus groups, the stories of these forgotten Americans. So, I encourage our listeners to look forward to that. Thank you very much for being here today.

SAWHILL: Thank you, Adriana.

YARROW: Thank you very much.