



Munk Debate on the End of Men Post-Debate Commentary

By Ann Friedman

In the introduction to this debate, the moderator describes the decline of men, in part, as the presence of women in “once all-male bastions such as politics and business.” Men, Hanna Rosin adds in her opening salvo, were once defined by their entitlement to power, their destiny for leadership, their arrogance. For centuries men have presumed a certain amount of dominance in the private sphere. But outside the home, those descriptions only applied to educated, upper-class men.

Indeed, this debate is more about class than gender. Over and over, the all-female panelists make clear that we’re not seeing the end of male power. The men who are becoming obsolete “aren’t the kind of men I wish were becoming obsolete,” as Caitlin Moran put it. As I watched the panelists agree again and again that we’re primarily talking about the decline of the average-joe manual-laborer type and not “asshats in private jets,” I kept wondering about the men in the latter category who are still destined for leadership and entitled to power: The professional-class men who make up 82 percent of the United States Congress, hold 80 percent of global political power, and comprise more than 95 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs. These are the people who, despite what Beyonce says, run the world, and they are *not* at risk of obsolescence.

Given their considerable political, financial, and social power, these upper-class, mostly white men, never had to worry as much as lower-class men about conforming to macho stereotype. Which is why the panelists lost me when the discussion veered away from breadwinning and economics and into the realm of personal grooming. Sure, these days New York congressmen might be into “manscaping,” as Rosin illustrated with a photo of Anthony Weiner’s upper torso, but my guess is that precious few refrigerator repairmen and construction workers—the men whose social power we all agree has been eroded—are shelling

out for a chest-waxing. The Weiners of the world aren't facing extinction, no matter how smooth their pecs may be. Moreso than ever before, their claim to power is secure.

There was once a presumption that if you were white and male, being born poor was not an impediment to relative success and happiness. But even in eras of greater class mobility, women and people of color had a hard time improving their lot in life. And the end of men has not brought with it attendant benefits for women, Moran and Camille Paglia pointed out. In fact, when non-college-educated men cannot get an economic toehold, women struggle, too. We could just as well title this debate *The End of Women*, because any working mother will tell you that being primarily responsible for all family duties—from breadwinning to housekeeping—feels completely impossible. Rosin carefully noted that “young, single women” have a higher median income than men—that is, before they start having children and their earning power slips away. The opposite is true for men, whose salaries don't take a hit with the birth of each child.

It's true that women have managed to weather recent economic storms better than their male counterparts. “All those centuries when you guys were asleep at the wheel,” Maureen Dowd said, “we were tinkering under the hood.” But it turns out that, even after all that tinkering, the car is on autopilot thanks to deeply entrenched inequality. And even though they're snoozing, white men who were born rich are still behind the wheel.

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