



## **Munk Debate on the End of Men Post-Debate Commentary**

**By Liza Mundy**

This was a stirring, fun debate, and I was surprised at how little true disagreement there was between the two sides. Pretty quickly the conversation coalesced into an elegy for the working man--the endangered construction worker and refrigerator-parts-assembler. Nobody contested the idea that working-class men are in trouble--global trouble--and so the only real point of contention was whether men in CEO suites and political offices and church hierarchies are doomed to follow. I agree with Hanna Rosin that what we are seeing, in terms of women's achievement and economic and academic standing, is a trend that seems likely to continue--not a blip.

But I also was a little surprised by the collective nostalgia for, and romanticization of, a kind of burly, 1950s-era masculinity. At times, Camille Paglia's rhetoric felt a bit like those old Works Progress Administration paintings: homages to the noble, strong, muscular, beatified laborer. Appealing as those portraits are, they are also a little simplified. I admire a lovely skyscraper as much as the next person, but her assertion that men who work construction are contributing a "silent" service might come as a surprise to women who walk by construction sites with any regularity. Silence is not the rule.

And remember that for men, that old, rigid form of mid-20th century masculinity could be an absolute stultifying straightjacket. When I was growing up, it was considered non-masculine for men to cook, even if they wanted to. It was considered extremely masculine for men to work long hours and spend it away from their homes and families. Men who were not successful providers were considered failed men and unsatisfactory husbands. How was this a good thing, for men or for women? What, exactly, are we nostalgic for? The good old days when men died significantly sooner than women? From lung cancer and heart attacks and overwork?

I thought a most important point was made by Naomi Wolf, who persuasively argued that women's empowerment is not only good for women--it is very, very good for men. Scholarship is beginning to emerge which underscores the point that advances for women are, in truth, advances for humankind. It's not a zero-sum game, this contest between the sexes. To the contrary.

A study came out just recently, showing that men are happier in workplaces where women can advance and be promoted--because these are workplaces that are vibrant, open, and fair, for everybody. As women become more educated and contribute more robustly to economies, those economies flourish. We see this in the most recent global gender gap report issued by the World Economic Forum. The top countries for women--those that have done the most to close the gender wage gap and advance women's prospects--are also countries that are prospering. The same is true for families: When women are economically empowered, they tend to use these funds for the health and welfare and education of children. When women prosper, so do households and families, husbands and children, so do nations. In that sense, I don't think the working class man is doomed, nor is masculinity. Men have not become vestiges or ornaments. We are an adaptive species--wonderfully adaptive.

There is advantage to men in the rise of women. I tried to show that in my book, *The Richer Sex*, which looked at women's rising economic and academic power, and the impact it has on relationships. While it's true that some men can be jealous and competitive when women succeed, the smart men are the ones who are investing in and accommodating women's talents and ambitions. I interviewed men who were inspired by their own wives and girlfriends to finish school and better their own prospects. One solution for the working man is to invest in a woman who loves him and believes in him, and in some cases to follow her example. I interviewed one man whose wife had inspired him and persuaded him to return to and finish college, even as she was working on her masters and looking toward a doctorate. "I am putting all my chips on her," he said. It wasn't that he was giving up--just the opposite. He planned to work, but also to enthusiastically support her career goals. Both were from a working-class, immigrant community in Texas. Men aren't ending; rather, a new chapter for both genders is beginning.

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