

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

A Man's World?

Eric · Monday, March 5th, 2018

The End of Men and the Rise of Women is the name of a disturbingly good book by Hanna Rosin. It was sitting lazily around my house. Inviting me to pick it up. My wife had checked it out from the library. She does that a lot. Reads. Listens to books. Mostly women's empowerment books, self help books, entrepreneurial business books, books on the economy. She says she doesn't want to end up like me when she's 70.

This book, *The End of Men and the Rise of Women*, was published on September 11, 2012, clearly not a good day for men anywhere... nor for women. But the book's premise is that modern contemporary man and his entire gender is in great decline. Why? Well... men used to succeed by using their superior brawn... in the workplace: factories, fields, forests... forever. Until now. We don't need hunters and gatherers any more. Nor stevedores, or blacksmiths, or frontier-taming pioneers. Not in the cities. Not in most of our communities.



Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier

It turns out that what we need now in the 21st century workplace is more cooperation, empathy, education, communication, and teamwork. All things that women are pretty clearly better at than us men. All things that shine and prosper in inter-personal relationships, like marriage, sales, child-rearing, sex, work, and just about every other two way, human endeavor.

So... men in the 21st century are working less. Staying at home more. Dropping out of school more. Providing less financially for their families. Although they still might be at the top of the many corporate ladders, it's women who are filling more links in the chain of command. Some women are even choosing to jettison their husbands: who needs another mouth to feed when the the dudes aren't pulling their weight?

So... "a man's world"? John Wayne, Clark Gable, Winston Churchill, Robert Redford, Donald Trump?

Maybe not so much any more. Maybe George Clooney or Barack Obama.

But what about the rest of us poor schmoes?

It's scary!



GI Joe Trules

I grew up in the 50s. GI Joe, my Dad's real name, Joe, came home from the 2nd World War, got married, had 2 kids, bought a house in the suburbs, then a better one, sent his kids to college, moved to Manhattan, then to Walnut Creek, California. He didn't divorce, he didn't hit his kids, he didn't talk or teach me about sex, but he seemed happy. With my Mom. With us kids. With providing for us. He'd survived the sinking Depression, not his own but the country's and my Russian immigrant grandparents'. He didn't think about himself; he thought about his family. And he cared for them.

And like the Dali Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu say, if you want to be unhappy, keep thinking about yourself. But if you want to be happy, and better yet, build up mental immunity – to anxiety and depression, then think about others. Give instead of take. Be humble. Have gratitude. Be generous, kind. See the bigger picture... and you'll have a life filled with joy.



Dalai Lama

My father had nightmares, but he wasn't self-analytic, and during most days, he was a kind, generous, and a pretty "happy" man.

Me? Not so much. I was spoiled. Over-loved. Entitled. Given everything. I was told I was smart, could become anything I wanted, and when I was in 8th grade, I decided to become President of the United States. I picked my Cabinet from my 8th grade classmates. Dick Charney, Vice President. Warren Wieboldt, Secretary of State. I had it all worked out.

But guess what? It didn't turn out that way. The way they said. I didn't become President. I became a modern dancer. And a clown. Not sure how manly that was. I didn't date girls or get laid until I graduated college. And then I made up for lost time. And low self esteem. I took the road less traveled. Was uncomfortable in my own skin. Me. Me. Me. We were the "me generation", right? I gave up materialism, conformity, became the black sheep of the family, just like my criminal uncle, who spent most of his life behind bars. My role models were Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Muhammad Ali. Iconoclasts. Real men? I don't really know.



Muhammad Ali, "The Greatest"

But my Mom. 26 years older than me. And my wife. 31 years younger than me. They both seemed, and seem, to have it together. In different ways. My Mom, the housewife, went back to school, got a job in social services for Nassau County, was a feminist long before Betty Friedan. My wife, from 3rd world Indonesia, knows how to work hard, set goals, help her family. Me? I blow in the emotional wind. My life became... whatever *came* my way. Gino "Cumeezi"... that was my name as a clown. Not that anything ever came easy... in fact it never did. I always fretted and worried, copied my Dad's nightmares. I still fret and worry. Give me the clear blue day of retirement and I still worry about when the sky will fall.

Is that what it means “to be a man”? To fret and worry? I don’t think so. Does “being a man” mean... being strong? Physically? No... I don’t go the gym. Emotionally? I doubt it. Most women I know are much stronger than the men I know. Emotionally. They bend easier. Recover better. Their egos are not so brittle and defensive.

And... do I *feel* like a man? Like the TV cowboys I used to admire so much as a kid? Roy Rogers, Brett Maverick, Palladin, Have Gun Will Travel, Clint Eastwood, the Man with No Name?



Richard Boone as “Paladin”

I used to want to be, and think I even was... “invincible”. Like those guys. That was my strength. My invulnerability. But like most things I used to believe... I now think I was wrong. I even believe the opposite. A person’s, a man’s, greatest strength, as an artist, as a father, as a human being, is his vulnerability. And maybe his courage, his risk-taking, his freedom, and his generosity.

It’s a complicated issue... “a man’s world”? “A woman’s world? A #Me Too world? Everything is topsy turvy. Upside down. Who’s right? Who’s wrong? Who’s weak? Who’s strong?

The Winter Olympics just ended in PyeongChang, and American women clearly out-performed American men. Won more medals. Individual and team. Women’s hockey. Chloe Kim. What am I supposed to tell my 10 year old Indonesian son? He says all the time, “I’m a man”. He weighs 60 pounds and is just over 4 feet tall. Sometimes he says he wants to become President of the United States. He’s not even a U.S. citizen yet.

I think... I won’t give him the answer. I don’t have one. I think... I’ll just let him.... find.... his own way.....to becoming a... man.



This piece was first read at “Poetry in Motion“, produced by [Eve Brandstein](#) at Beyond Baroque on March 3, 2018.

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