

Barbara Kay: Manliness still matters

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Soldiers of the 1st Platoon A Company of the Royal Canadian Army advance on the objective with an observer from the United States Marine Corps during live fire training in Hawaii on July 22.

Years ago, researching for a column on women in the military, I interviewed a top military historian who approved of women serving in every military role but combat operations.

He supported his view with — to me — a new, startling observation: “When women take up traditionally male work, the moment they hit precisely 15% of the field, the job loses status in men’s eyes.” He didn’t want that happening to combat troops.

He needn’t worry. Women are swarming into former male fiefdoms, but there are certain exceptions: jobs that entail high physical risk, depend on brute strength, require constant engagement with filth or involve unpleasant conditions; to those you can add physics and computer science in spite of massive girl-directed recruitment drives.

But in occupations like law, medicine, accountancy, pharmaceuticals, business, teaching, social services, publishing and journalism, amongst others that were once male-dominated, women rule or soon will. They long ago surpassed the 15% mark in all these fields and the 50% mark in several. Fewer men are entering those fields, while the “mancession” dries up construction and manufacturing jobs. Consequently more men are economically dependent on women than ever before.

In her new book, *The End of Men*, Hanna Rosin analyzes the shifting social landscape accompanying these changes. She greatly admires women’s “plastic” nature — the inherent communication and interpersonal social skills she sees as the root of their success — and she claims men will find their feet once they “adapt” to the new order by redefining manhood in mimicry of women’s flexible and empathic nature.

Behind Rosin’s confident beliefs and formidable array of statistics, data and interviews, I see an interpretive bias that is downright troubling: take, for example, Rosin’s suggestion that romance and emotional intimacy are old-fashioned obstacles to women’s ambitions, and that “to put it crudely, feminist progress right now largely depends on the existence of the hookup culture.”

It is hypocritical to endorse for women the exploitative sex that feminists used to condemn in men. Apart from that, I find it rings false historically. In my pre-feminist generation, women married very young. But that didn’t stop those with ambition from realizing their goals. On the contrary, they were undistracted by promiscuity’s sexual day trading, and being married wonderfully focused their minds.

Indeed, I can name two female Canadian Supreme Court justices who married and had children young, and who publicly credit their husbands’ practical encouragement for their rise to the top. My own sister married her high school sweetheart a month after she turned 19, and — with his unconditional support — rose to career heights few Canadian women can match.

So it is absurd to suggest that a highly selective, dignified approach to relationships is an impediment to career success. Serial hook-ups do not accord well with even “plastic” women’s inherent desire for a mutually trusting, emotional connection in their sexual relations.

(Any young woman inclined to trust Rosin’s prescription should read psychiatrist Miriam Grossman’s book, *Unprotected*, a scathing, well-documented indictment of radical social theories like Rosin’s that have infiltrated campus health and counselling centres. This, at a tragic human cost in women’s feelings of self-worth and their ability to form meaningful intimate partnerships. Sexual equality is not sexual sameness.)

Women collectively know men need them and know they make a contribution to society simply by having children. Men have in the past contributed to society and won women’s admiration through the “three P’s”: paternity, provider, protector. But the economic situation that has brought women to triumphant bloom has occurred in the shadow of a movement that has relentlessly campaigned to convince women that men are no longer needed for any of these roles. Men were already in trouble on the other two fronts when their “provider” role lost traction.

Patriarchal cultures are bad for women, but matriarchal cultures are bad for men. And manliness is not so fungible a concept to men themselves as it is to Rosin.

Feminists did not look to men to redefine their concept of womanhood in the 1960s. In fact, they deliberately, and wrongly, cast men as the collective villain to their collective victim. Now that men are in difficulty, it is not up to Ms. Rosin to prescribe solutions on their behalf.

Men themselves must reset their cultural compasses in ways that suit their inherent nature while recognizing the realities of a forever- changed social environment. Women should encourage them, not ignore them. A critical mass of disaffected men who feel they have no contribution to make to society is not a happy scenario for anyone.

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