

---

EDITORIAL

**MALE RULE MANLY MEN HAVE BEEN RUNNING THE WORLD FOREVER. BUT THE GREAT RECESSION IS CHANGING ALL THAT, WRITES REIHAN SALAM**

1,753 words  
28 June 2009  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
PPGZ  
TWO STAR  
B-1

English

© 2009 Post Gazette Publishing Company. Provided by ProQuest Information and Learning. All rights reserved.

The era of male dominance is coming to an end.

Seriously.

For years, the world has been witnessing a quiet but monumental shift of power from men to women. Today, the Great Recession has turned what was an evolutionary shift into a revolutionary one. The consequence will be not only a mortal blow to the macho men's club called finance capitalism that got the world into the current economic catastrophe, it will be a collective crisis for millions and millions of working men around the globe.

The death throes of macho are easy to find if you know where to look. Consider, to start, the almost unbelievably disproportionate impact that the current crisis is having on men -- so much so that the recession is now known to some economists as the "he-cession."

More than 80 percent of job losses in the United States since November have fallen on men. And the numbers are broadly similar in Europe, adding up to about 7 million more out-of-work men than before the recession just in the United States and Europe as economic sectors traditionally dominated by men (construction and heavy manufacturing) decline further and faster than those traditionally dominated by women (public-sector employment, health care and education). All told, by the end of 2009, the global recession is expected to put as many as 28 million men out of work worldwide.

Things will only get worse for men as the recession adds to the pain globalization was already causing. Between 28 million and 42 million more jobs in the United States are at risk for outsourcing, Princeton economist Alan Blinder estimates. Worse still, men are falling even further behind in acquiring the educational credentials necessary for success in the knowledge-based economies that will rule the post-recession world. Soon, there will be three female college graduates for every two males in the United States, and a similarly uneven outlook in the rest of the developed world.

As men get hit harder in the he-cession, they're less well-equipped to deal with the profound and long-term psychic costs of job loss. According to the American Journal of Public Health, "the financial strain of unemployment" has significantly more consequences on the mental health of men than on that of women. In other words, be prepared for a lot of unhappy guys out there -- with all the negative consequences that implies.

As the crisis unfolds, it will increasingly play out in the realm of power politics.

When Iceland's economy imploded, the country's voters did what no country has done before: Not only did they throw out the all-male elite who oversaw the making of the crisis, they named the world's first openly lesbian leader as their prime minister. It was, said Halla Tomasdottir, the female head of one of Iceland's few remaining solvent banks, a perfectly reasonable response to the "penis competition" of male-dominated investment banking.

"Ninety-nine percent went to the same school, they drive the same cars, they wear the same suits and they have the same attitudes. They got us into this situation -- and they had a lot of fun doing it," Ms. Tomasdottir complained to Der Spiegel.

Soon after, tiny, debt-ridden Lithuania took a similar course, electing its first woman president: an experienced economist with a black belt in karate named Dalia Grybauskaite. On the day she won, Vilnius's

leading newspaper bannered this headline: "Lithuania has decided: The country is to be saved by a woman."

Although not all countries will respond by throwing the male bums out, the backlash is real -- and it is global. The great shift of power from males to females is likely to be dramatically accelerated by the economic crisis, as more people realize that the aggressive, risk-seeking behavior that has enabled men to entrench their power -- the cult of macho -- has now proven destructive and unsustainable in a globalized world.

Indeed, it's now fair to say that the most enduring legacy of the Great Recession will not be the death of Wall Street. It will not be the death of finance. It will not be the death of capitalism. What will not survive is macho.

Men have two choices

How will this shift to the post-macho world unfold? That depends on the choices men make, and they have only two.

The first is adaptation: men embracing women as equal partners and assimilating to the new cultural sensibilities, institutions and egalitarian arrangements that entails.

That's not to say that all Western men will turn into metrosexuals while football ratings and beer sales plummet. But amid the death of macho, a new model of manhood may be emerging, especially among some educated men living in the affluent West.

Economist **Betsey Stevenson** has described the decline of an older kind of marriage, in which men specialized in market labor while women cared for children, in favor of "consumption" marriage, "where both people are equally contributing to production in the marketplace, but they are matching more on shared desires on how to consume and how to live their lives." These marriages tend to last longer, and they tend to involve a more even split when it comes to household duties.

Not coincidentally, the greater adaptability of educated men in family life extends to economic life, too. Economist Eric D. Gould found in 2004 that marriage tends to make men (particularly lower-wage earners) more serious about their careers -- likelier to study more, work more and desire white-collar rather than blue-collar jobs.

This adaptation of men may be the optimistic scenario, but it's not entirely far-fetched.

Then, there's the other choice: resistance. Men may decide to fight the death of macho, sacrificing their own prospects in an effort to disrupt and delay a powerful historical trend.

There are plenty of precedents for this. Indeed, men who have no constructive ways of venting their anger may become a source of nasty extremism; think of the KGB nostalgists in Russia or the jihadi recruits in search of lost honor, to name just a couple.

And there are still plenty of men in the West who want to "stand athwart history, yelling STOP." These guys notwithstanding, however, Western developed countries are not for the most part trying to preserve the old gender imbalances of the macho order this time around.

Instead, the choice between adaptation and resistance may play out along a geopolitical divide: While North American and Western European men broadly -- if not always happily -- adapt to the new egalitarian order, their counterparts in the emerging giants of East and South Asia, not to mention in Russia, all places where women often still face brutal domestic oppression, may be headed for even more exaggerated gender inequality. In those societies, state power will be used not to advance the interests of women, but to keep macho on life support.

Look at Russia, where just such an effort has been unfolding for the past decade. Although there are 10.4 million more Russian women than men, this hasn't translated into political or economic power. After the Soviet collapse, the ideal of women's equality was abandoned almost entirely, and many Russians revived the cult of the full-time homemaker.

But Russian men, floored by the dislocations of the Soviet collapse and a decade of economic crisis, simply couldn't adapt. "It was common for men to fall into depression and spend their days drinking and lying on the couch smoking," Moscow writer Masha Lipman observes.

Between their tremendously high rates of mortality, incarceration and alcoholism, and their low rates of education, only a handful of Russian men were remotely able (or willing) to serve as sole breadwinners.

This left Russia's resilient women to do the work, while being forced to accept skyrocketing levels of sexual

exploitation at work and massive hypocrisy at home. A higher percentage of working-age women are employed in Russia than nearly any other country, Elena Mezentseva of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies has found, but as of 2000, they were making only half the wages that Russian men earned for the same work.

All the while, Russian leader Vladimir Putin has aided and abetted these men, turning their nostalgia for the lost macho of Soviet times into an entire ideology.

The tide of history

It might be tempting to think that the death of macho is just a cyclical correction and that the alpha males of the financial world will all be back to work soon. Tempting, but wrong. The recession is creating points of agreement among people not typically thought of as kindred spirits, from behavioral economists to feminist historians.

Still, while men may be mostly to blame for the current economic mess and the most affected by it, the recession is hurting women, too.

Women had a higher global unemployment rate before the current recession, and they still do. This leads many to agree with a U.N. report from earlier this year: "The economic and financial crisis puts a disproportionate burden on women, who are often concentrated in vulnerable employment, tend to have lower unemployment and social security benefits and have unequal access to and control over economic and financial resources."

This is a valid concern, and not incompatible with the fact that billions of men worldwide, not just a few discredited bankers, will increasingly lose out in the new world taking shape from the current economic wreckage.

As women start to gain more of the social, economic and political power they have long been denied, it will be nothing less than a full-scale revolution the likes of which human civilization has never experienced.

This is not to say that women and men will fight each other across armed barricades. The conflict will take a subtler form, and the main battlefield will be hearts and minds. But make no mistake: The axis of global conflict in this century will not be warring ideologies, or competing geopolitics, or clashing civilizations. It won't be race or ethnicity. It will be gender.

Reihan Salam is a fellow at the New America Foundation. Reproduced with permission from Foreign Policy # 173 (July/August 2009) [www.foreignpolicy.com](http://www.foreignpolicy.com). Copyright 2009 Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive LLC.

PHOTO 1; Caption: PHOTO: Anita Dufalla/Post-Gazette

Document PPGZ000020090628e56s0003m