

The end of male supremacy?

April 7 2015, by Megan Mcrainey



Women and men have biological differences that give each certain advantages, but women's biological advantages are becoming more and more relevant in modern societies and helping shift the balance of power between the two sexes, according to a new book from Melvin Konner, professor of anthropology and neuroscience and behavioral biology at Emory University.

While some feminists have argued that [men and women](#) are the same and women can do anything men can do, Konner's book ("Women After All: Sex, Evolution and the End of Male Supremacy") asserts that women biologically think and act differently in some ways and that's actually an advantage for women.

"That's a very important idea in my book. The idea that men and women are the same is a myth that actually holds women back," says Konner, who combined his fascination with human behavior with his extensive research in [biological anthropology](#) and neuroscience to write the book.

Men's physical strength and martial prowess (related to war and aggression) were significant biological advantages over women in the past but have become less important in modern societies, Konner says.

"A woman doesn't need to pass a U.S. Marine fitness test to pilot a drone from an office in Colorado. We have women piloting F16s and Apache helicopters who are delivering more force than any Roman warrior could possibly have dreamed," Konner says.

Meanwhile, other male traits contribute to oppression and violence in male-dominated societies. Men of all cultures have a biological propensity toward physical violence and driven sexuality, divorced from affection and disconnected from consequences, Konner says. Not all men have those tendencies but very few women do, he adds.

"I know the cultures of the world quite well and those two male tendencies don't differ much from culture to culture," Konner says. "Everywhere you look in the world those traits exist."

Testosterone in boys and men affects the hypothalamus and amygdala, priming them for increased aggression and sexual impulsivity. Women, by contrast, are much less likely to be violent or distracted by sexual

impulses, says Konner. Women also are more willing to compromise, more collaborative and generally better at managing without making those being managed feel defensive.

For instance, women in the Senate were instrumental in reaching across the aisle to avoid a government shutdown and break the budget deadlock in fall 2013, says Konner. It started with three Republican women who reached out to two women Democrats; they charted and proposed a compromise. Then an official committee—made up of half women and half men, though only 20 percent of Senators are women—formalized the deal.

Senator John McCain joked at the time, "The women are taking over."

Still, Konner admits that women have far to go before reaching true societal equality or even dominance. Women still make up only a fraction of elected leaders and top CEOs, but their ranks in leadership positions have grown significantly over the past few decades, Konner says.

"It's like a line going straight upward. Some women tell me I'm being too optimistic, but I'm optimistic precisely because [women](#) are not complacent and are demanding that more glass ceilings be broken. I think it's happening, and I think it's going to be a good thing," Konner says.

Provided by Emory University

Citation: The end of male supremacy? (2015, April 7) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-male-supremacy.html>

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