

Apparently, Men Are Finished

The fairer sex won big at Tuesday's Slate/Intelligence Squared U.S. debate.

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In the middle of Tuesday night's *Slate/Intelligence Squared U.S.* debate, ABC News chief legal analyst Dan Abrams presented this damning piece of evidence: "Between 1995 and 2008, 82 percent of lightning strikes were on men," Even God, Abrams told the packed house at NYU's Skirball Center, has decided that men are finished.



Abrams teamed with journalist Hanna Rosin of *Slate* and the *Atlantic* to argue for the proposition, "Men Are Finished." They squared off against American Enterprise Institute scholar Christina Hoff Sommers and *Men's Health* Editor in Chief Dave Zinczenko, who opposed the motion. ABC News *Nightline* Correspondent John Donvan moderated.

The debate—lively, a little bit mean, and extremely funny—ended with a big victory for Rosin and Abrams. Before the debate started, 20 percent of the audience voted for the motion, 54 against, and 26 were undecided. By the end of the debate—in a result that Intelligence Squared deemed the biggest swing in its history—the numbers had more than reversed, with 66 percent voting for the motion, 29 against it, and 5 percent undecided.

"Men are finished," is a bold claim—"preposterous," as Zinczenko scoffed repeatedly. Rosin and Abrams helped their cause early by defining victory down: They argued that "men are finished" did not mean complete and utter humiliation of the sex, but rather an end to male dominance. Rosin, the author of last summer's *Atlantic* cover story "The End of Men," used her opening statement to argue that men are through dominating because they've failed to adapt to a postmodern economy that places a higher premium on traditionally feminine attributes (consensus-building, social intuition, empathy, and communication skills). Men have narrow, inflexible ideas of what it means to be a man, and thus have pigeonholed themselves into dying industries. Women, on the other hand, are more flexible and malleable than ever before. There's "some special formula required for succeeding" today that women seem to have in greater abundance," Rosin said, while reeling off favorable statistics. In 2010, women became the majority of the workforce for the first time in American history. They now hold 54 percent of managerial jobs, and are set to dominate 13 of the 15 industries projected to grow the most in the next decade. They're more likely than men to receive a college degree. Meanwhile, one-fifth of men are out of work. And images of the "omega" male (imagine the slothlike, video-game entranced, drugged-up, potbellied guys you see in Judd Apatow movies) dominate movies and television shows. "We'd like you to think of this as the writing on the wall, the sign that points to

an inevitable future," she asserted. "The world where men dominate the public sphere, and where male traits lead to public success is the world we're saying goodbye to."

Sommers, author of *The War Against Boys*, countered that the short-term trends we're seeing are signs of equalization, not dominance: Women are joining men, or even catching up to them, as partners in running the world. They are *not* surpassing them. She and Zinczenko both cited Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs, and Bill Gates as proof that we need men to drive innovation in fields like technology and science. And our civilization depends on the brawn and bravery of the men—"and some women"—who fight and die to protect us. "Toughness and assertiveness are obsolete—that's absurd!" she declared, referring to the idea that male traits aren't as crucial to the postindustrial economy.

Abrams, who is also the author of *Man Down: Proof Beyond a Reasonable Doubt that Women are Better Cops, Drivers, Gamblers, Spies, World Leaders, Beer Tasters, Hedge Fund Managers and Just About Everything Else*, highlighted a new study showing that female politicians are more far effective than men. So why aren't more women voted into office? He pointed to the paradoxical results of a survey that asked participants to rate whether they associated the eight most important political traits (intelligence, compassion, creativity, etc) with women or men. They associated seven of those positive traits with women. Yet only six percent said that women made better political leaders. It's a strange incongruity, Abrams admits, but it's one that will ultimately dissipate as the public becomes more aware of women's superior skills. "There is only so long men will be able to thrive, much less survive on the fumes of past sexism and assumptions."

Zinczenko, who maintains a well-known bromance with Abrams, began his argument not with statistics or studies, but with a sex joke. "Men can't possibly be finished because as all of you know, when men are finished, they roll over immediately and go to sleep. That's not happening. ... They continue to do what they have always done..."

"Sleep!" yelled out a member of the audience.

Zinczenko, unfazed, continued. "All of the statistics my opponents are citing tonight are indicative of a trend," he said. "Women are beginning to catch up to men, but the pace of that progress is inexorably slow." Then, he cited a few statistics of his own: Women perform two-thirds of the world's work, but only earn a fraction of the world's income. Men rule 92 percent of its sovereign nations. "I didn't get through all of *Freakonomics*, admittedly, but these do not seem like winning statistics for that side," he joked.

So why do women seem to be forging ahead, even if it is only a temporary trend? "Women are willing to move together as a unit, and men are rugged individualists," he explains. "They want to move together, but none is willing to stop and ask for directions. We need to move beyond our opponents' assertion that there is something wrong with that."

Later, Zinczenko took shots at his friend for the data he was citing. "Don't trust Dan and his statistics," he giped. "He's a columnist for *Men's Health*, and he has the hardest time getting his pieces through our fact-checking department."

Perhaps the most telling moment in the debate came during a rather rowdy question-and-answer session. The bombastic crowd was driving moderator Donovan "nuts" with two-part questions and long premises. He seemed exasperated. Then Diane Salvatore, the editor of *Prevention* magazine, stepped in.

"Is it true that men with power and money tend to self-destruct more than women do?" Salvatore asked. "And I think here of Oprah versus Charlie Sheen."

"That was a focused question," said Donovan happily. "That's the model."

"By a woman," Rosin quipped.

Rosin then said she was grateful to Salvatore for mentioning Charlie Sheen. "I feel like if you say 'Charlie Sheen' enough times, everyone will vote for us."