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WOMEN'S LIBERATION - EQUALITY MEANS CHOOSING THE JOB YOU REALLY WANT

BYLINE: Kyle Smith

Now that 140 women are graduating from college for every 100 men, it's become laughable to argue that girls are getting short shrift in school. Ladies are getting long shrift at work too: women execs get promoted after an average of 2.6 years in one job, men after 3.5 years in comparable posts. But the wage gap shrugs off this information. Even boys who are classified as learning disabled and drop out of school grow up to be higher earners, on average, than women with no mental disabilities. Billionaire dropouts like Steve Jobs and Bill Gates aren't quite as exceptional as you thought.

The numbers come from an illuminating new book called "The Sexual Paradox" by psychologist Susan Pinker, who started by studying a group of boys with various learning disorders and tracking them as they grew into adults - many of them highly successful ones. They took on competitive, higher-paying jobs requiring long hours as Pinker began noticing that the girls who had outscored them in classrooms turned out to be much more likely to drop out of the work force, downshift to less demanding jobs or avoid highincome, high-stress work in the first place.

Pinker began her intellectual journey as a classic '70s style feminist exhilarated by the teachings of Simone de Beauvoir ("One is not born, but rather becomes a woman") and Germaine Greer (from whose book "The Female Eunuch" Pinker drew the idea that "Only when women dumped their female personae and took on men's roles would they truly be equal.") Theory turned out to be a weak defense against fact, though, and today Pinker says, "Thirtyodd years after my first summer job, I wondered whether biology is, well, if not destiny exactly, then a profound and meaningful departure point for a discussion about sex differences."

This idea may strike you as reasonable or even self-evident, but it's been just two years since Lawrence Summers, the president of Harvard, was vilified and pushed out of office for saying so. (Harvard was forced to promise to spend \$50 million to hire and promote faculty who are women or even minorities, whom Summers didn't mention in the first place.)

Mother Nature is a feminist. Preemie babies are almost twice as likely to survive if they're girls, possibly because girls have a spare X chromosome while boys instead have a Y that's more useless than one of those CBS sitcoms about useless guys. On the other end of life, nursing homes skew more female than "The View."

Women evolved to be healthier, perhaps, because their genes hit a dead end unless they

can carry, nurture and raise a child, whereas a man's genes thrive based not on his lifelong health profile but on the number of mates he manages to beguile. (Why women persist in being more attracted to gangsta rappers, Wall Street pirates and race car drivers than, say, quietly dependable writers who reserve their swashbuckling for the keyboard is an evolutionary error that must await another column.) A man's life is reducible to this: "Stud, Dud, Thud," in the words of biological anthropologist Richard Bribiescas. The years roll by and still: no ribbon for prostate cancer.

Much of Pinker's book is confirmation of what we've all noticed in the past few years, what she calls her "front porch" observation of seeing educated (and happy) women home most of the day. Women who were once locked out of the best jobs now turn away from them (they also continue to avoid the worst, dirtiest and most dangerous jobs). The percentage of female participation in the workplace rose steadily for decades but has now begun to subside.

"The Sexual Paradox" is an amusing mix of anecdotes and science; Pinker cites several studies that upend, for instance, the "society makes us who we are" myth. Male aggression peaks in the preschool years, then gradually is reduced by societal norms. Moreover, a study of the kibbutz movement found that, after four generations of strenuous social engineering intended to de-gender the sexes, 70 to 80 percent of the women had gravitated to people-oriented jobs. The longer people lived on the kibbutz, the more polarized the sexual division of labor. Almost all social scientists agree, says Pinker, that males are, on average, more aggressive than females.

Pinker no longer finds anything particularly worrisome about the facts. She derides what she calls the "vanilla gender assumption" - one sternly defended by today's angry Salon.com-brand feminist - that females should emulate male behavior until every field is 50-50 and every income disparity eliminated. What if the average female's desire to care for others, to choose a job in which human interaction comes before income or power, to feel that there's more to life than work, were simply seen as the unexceptionable norm? Reading Pinker's book, you start to think that the freaks are those who work 80 hours a week in jobs they hate in order to brag that they beat the next guy - just in time to drop dead of a heart attack.