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Don't Write Off Men Just Yet

By **NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF**

The yang of America's labor force is this: [over a 40-year career](#), a man earns \$431,000 more than a woman on average, according to the Center for American Progress.

The yin of America's labor force is this: in this decade, for the first time in American history, men no longer inevitably dominate the labor force. Women were actually [the majority of payroll employees](#) for the five months that ended in March, according to one measure from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's mostly because about three-quarters of Americans who lost their jobs in the Great Recession were men.

Now men again fill a slight majority of payroll jobs because they are more likely to work in summer jobs such as construction. America may now teeter back and forth, with men predominant in the summers and women in the winters.

With women making far-reaching gains, there's a larger question. Are women simply better-suited than men to today's jobs? The Atlantic raised this issue provocatively in this month's issue with [a cover story by Hanna Rosin](#) bluntly entitled, "The End of Men."

"What if the modern, postindustrial economy is simply more congenial to women than to men?" Ms. Rosin asked. She adds: "The postindustrial economy is indifferent to men's size and strength. The attributes that are most valuable today — social intelligence, open communication, the ability to sit still and focus — are, at a minimum, not predominately male. In fact, the opposite may be true."

It's a fair question, and others also have been wondering aloud if a new age of femininity is dawning. After all, Ms. Rosin notes that Americans who use high-tech biology to try to pick a baby's sex seek a girl more often than a boy. And women now make up 51 percent of professional and managerial positions in America, up from 26 percent in 1980.

It's also true that while men still dominate the American power elite, they also dominate the bottom rungs of the ladder. By some counts, America's prisoners are 90 percent male, and most estimates are that homeless people are disproportionately male.

If school performance predicts career success, then women may do even better a few decades from now, for girls clearly excel in school as never before. The National Honor Society, for top high school students, says that 64 percent of its members are girls. The Center on Education Policy cites data showing that boys lag girls in reading in every American state.

Yet count me a skeptic. My hunch is that we're moving into greater gender balance, not a fundamentally new imbalance in the other direction. Don't hold your breath for "the end of men."

One reason is that women's gains still have a catch-up quality to them. Catch-up is easier than forging ahead.

Moreover, the differences in educational performance are real but modest. In math, boys and girls are about equal. In verbal skills, 79 percent of elementary schoolgirls can read at a level deemed proficient, compared with 72 percent of boys, according to the Center on Education Policy.

At the very top, boys more than hold their own: 62 percent of kids who earn perfect 2,400 scores on the S.A.T. are boys.

Some education experts, like Richard Whitmire, author of "Why Boys Fail," argue that the success of girls has to do in part with how schools teach children. Tweaking curriculums by exposing kids to more books full of explosions might lead boys to do better in reading — and if boys continue to lag, there'll be more of a push for boy-friendly initiatives.

I think we exaggerate the degree to which the sexes are mired in conflict. As Henry Kissinger once said, "Nobody will ever win the battle of the sexes. There's too much fraternizing with the enemy." We men want our wives and daughters to encounter opportunity in the workplace, not sexual harassment; women want their husbands and sons to be in the executive suite, not jail. Nearly all of us root for fairness, not for our own sex.

The truth is that we men have typically benefited as women have gained greater equality. Those men who have lost their jobs in the recession are now more likely to have a wife who still has a job and can keep up the mortgage payments. And women have been particularly prominent in the social sector, devising new programs for the mostly male ranks of the jobless or homeless.

So forget about gender war and zero-sum games. Odds are that we men will find a way to hold our own, with the help of women. And we'll benefit as smart and talented women belatedly have the opportunity to deploy their skills on behalf of all of humanity — including those of us

with Y chromosomes.

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