

The Salary Myth Concerning Women

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This is a highly charged issue and my purpose here is to bring some sanity to it by illustrating a thought process that can assist the reader in finding their own conclusions rather than blindly accepting what they hear. The title clearly identifies my belief. Discrimination does in fact exist but it goes far beyond gender. People suffer less than proper treatment for being the wrong race, religion, not having attended to the “right” school, not being a member of the “correct” political party, and a long list of other attributes. I have personally seen such and it is always wrong. I am as against discrimination as I am against manipulative truths (a.k.a. lies). That is what this article is about.

It is often said that women only make seventy percent of a man’s salary. What does that figure mean? How is it arrived at? The derivation of the figure is as follows.

The average of all salaries from minimum wage up to top executive made by men is computed and compared with the corresponding average for women. The average for women is roughly seventy percent that for men. Thus, women are victims of pay discrimination.

Note that the comparison is always based on some kind of average rather than direct salary comparison as many are led to believe. Discrimination is a vile concept that rightfully makes anyone mad. Maybe it exists but I am not aware of any example of a significant difference in salary for the same job with the same experience at the same place. But, if the job description is stretched (an engineering aide grouped with engineers) and experience is discounted (entry level is grouped with long experience) and the locations are cleverly chosen (a low cost area grouped with a high cost area) then it is possible to falsely show discrimination. The premise restated with the little weasel words included is, women (on average) make seventy percent of the salary of men (on average). It is never said but is intended that the reader will assume that both are doing the same job at the same place. This statement can be manipulated to be true but not for the alleged reasons of discrimination. So if a man is being paid \$40,000 then the women is presumed (but never stated) to only make \$28,000. This is an example of the presentation method of deception – steer the audience into a specific wrong assumption that the presenter never actually said – thus the presenter is never guilty of lying.

Comparing the salary of a man working for a large company of 100,000 employees with the salary of a woman doing similar work at a company of only 20 employees is bogus. Ignoring critical details of the job requirements at different companies is also bogus. The sales manager at one company may have to be multi-lingual and travel six months out of the year whereas the sales manager of another company may only need basic skills. Should they be paid the same even regardless of gender? Crafty omission of details is a common method of deception.

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Crafty selectivity of facts is a related method of deception. It is a fact that there are men who do make more than women doing essentially the same job. It is also a fact that there are men who make more than other men also doing the same job. It is also a fact that there are women who make more than other women doing the same job. It is also a fact that there are women who make more than men doing the same job. If one focuses on the first fact while ignoring the next three then the picture of discrimination shines bright. Including all the facts makes a more complicated albeit truer picture and the case for discrimination dims. What are the four facts telling us? Some people (men or women) have some combination of better skill sets, work ethic, etc. than other people (men or women). People are paid according to their value to the company regardless of gender – really. Thus, there is going to be a pay spread in similar jobs even if all are the same gender. It is true that companies will try to pay each person as little as possible to retain them. This has nothing to do with gender. It is pure business and that is fine. Some people (women in particular but even a number of men) are not very good at negotiation and end up with a lower salary than someone else (could be a woman with high skills). The ability to negotiate is a skill that makes one worth more so the previous statement is not surprising. Rather than wasting one's time fighting perceived discrimination it would be more effective to learn how to negotiate and pick up other good skills too in order to be worth more and thus paid more. What a concept!

Because women are relative newcomers (consider prior rank discrimination but also changing interests – that is the real issue) to the higher end job market it is obvious that there are fewer of them in those positions. Thus, even if all women in their present positions were precisely paid the identical salary for identical work as their male counterparts, the average salary for women would be skewed downwards. Rather than discrimination, the method only shows how to use statistics to paint a distorted picture.

The completely wrong allusion is that for any given job, women are only paid seventy percent that of what a man makes doing the same job. Many are tricked into accepting that absolutely bogus conclusion. I do not claim that there is zero discrimination. However, the reported level is highly misleading. This type of lie is typical for practically all advocates of whatever cause. I routinely look for and find it in any issue. I am very sensitive to lying. If the only way to support one's cause is to lie then one does not have a cause. If salary discrimination is real then no gimmicks need to be used to illustrate it. The direct numbers would speak for themselves. But instead of direct numbers I have seen such approaches as comparing the salaries of men and women by crafty groupings regardless of the actual jobs performed. That tells me nothing for in any group there are men that make more than other men, etc. as previously discussed.

Evidence against the myth

At this point I am sure there are many feminists who are calling for my demise as a male chauvinist pig as this has become an intensely (by crafty design) emotional issue. However, there is a simple question that can be asked that casts considerable doubt concerning the validity of this myth. *Where are all the unemployed men?* Companies

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are cutting costs to the bone and if a woman can be hired for seventy percent of a man's salary then it is good-bye man, hello woman, good-ole-boy clubs notwithstanding. Women would be dominate in the workforce with men only hired when no women were available. Clearly, that has not happened. So the premise must be flawed.

The only correct method is to compare same job, same qualifications, same experience level, same work ethic, and same everything else. That turns out to be practically impossible to do since there are so many variables. Thus, it is necessary to perform some kind of grouping to smooth the variables. But craftily bogus groupings can again lead to skewed comparisons. In short, if a test is rigged to show a particular result then it should be no surprise that that result is obtained. Even an apparently honest random sample can be skewed by running a sub-sampling process countless times and selecting the particular random result that fits the desired conclusion. That is an established method of lying with statistics.

A factual, albeit crafty, description can mislead most readers. I have often said, "You have to know how to deceive people in order that you are not deceived." I have studied the methods of deception so I am very alert to those who would deceive me. I wish more people would engage in that study. That would make life much more difficult for charlatans and perhaps we could have a more just world.

The question at this point becomes how to either show that there is no discrimination or the true extent of what discrimination exists. Proving that there is no discrimination is impossible as it is highly unlikely for two things in the world to exactly match. There will be differences one way or the other and those differences will likely alternate over time. The question continues with how to show the extent of the differences. Random small differences would indicate no discrimination while a definite pattern of one-sided differences would suggest discrimination to some extent.

I thought about looking up a variety of jobs and salaries in the United States but I would have to highly condense that list to be practical for this article. Such a data set would be non-believable because I could never show that the set was not consciously or subconsciously biased. Such a data set would also be a snapshot of a particular time period and I prefer that this article be as timeless as possible. So my approach is to discuss jobs in a few salary ranges from lowest to highest and explore the sameness or difference that might exist between the genders. I encourage the reader to think for themselves about each example. One factor that makes comparisons difficult is that men and women actually are different and tend to specialize in different jobs. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, there is a lot right with that as the world needs a wide variety of capabilities. A mono-culture cannot work. Valid comparisons can only be made where jobs truly overlap.

Minimum wage jobs are just that – everybody makes identically the same – discrimination is not an issue. For unskilled jobs that pay above the minimum but are still low it would be hard to find meaningful gender differences in the low pay. This is an arena where employers need bodies that can get something done. There is little reason to

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care one way or the other about gender. A job is only worth but so much and with little opportunity for advancement. Men would tend to be found more in the strong-back outside type of jobs and women would tend to be found more in the inside type of jobs requiring some degree of patience. Opposite genders are often discouraged from certain employment for a variety of reasons both practical and perhaps biased. In this category, some men will have a higher salary than women and some women will have a higher salary than men. But by and large the salaries are similar – low. In genderless jobs such as fast food, etc. men and women make the same low salary.

There are jobs where the pay is fixed regardless of a person's gender, qualifications, or whatever. A classic example is elected office. A closely related example is a staff position at some level of government. While pay naturally varies with qualifications, there is not a wide spread. Total government employment is a significant portion of the workforce. Positions pay the same regardless of gender although there may be gender bias in rank thus resulting in a natural average pay difference.

Manufacturing jobs generally require specialized skills taught at the factory although based on skills brought in by the employee from schooling or past experience. These are so widespread and varied that it is hard to make simple comparisons. Men will generally be found in jobs that require brute and women will generally be found in jobs that require patience. I hear of allegations of discrimination in these types of jobs more than anywhere else. This is also the area where it is hard to track down the truth so I am not sure what to think. However, if women are paid significantly less than men in these jobs, then the key question from before needs to be asked, "Where are all the unemployed men?"

Bureaucratic jobs are very prevalent, especially in the government. These jobs have fixed pay ranges and classifications so anybody in the same classification is paid that particular salary. The only possible discrimination would be if otherwise qualified women were not allowed to advance and that probably does exist to some extent as good-ole-boy clubs are not yet extinct.

One example I have heard of concerns bank tellers. It would be reported that an inexperienced man would be working as a bank teller and be paid significantly more than experienced women tellers. End of story. Ergo, discrimination. However, when the complete story is heard then it is discovered that the man is actually a manager either filling in for a teller or someone on a management track that as part of training has to perform teller duties for a certain period of time. Of course he is paid more. Women in that same situation are also paid more. Why is the comparison only concerning men? There is an old saying that a partial truth is a full lie.

There is a wide variety of skilled labor jobs ranging from specialized labor to pure mental with huge variations in pay no matter how you select the groups. Thus, discrimination can always be inferred. Inference for many people is as good as guilty. That is wrong. These are high value added jobs. Having the best people and paying them competitive salaries enhances company profits. Discrimination may exist but companies practice

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discrimination at their peril. The best people, men or women, will migrate towards the better companies. It is not unusual to find people of all types in these fields thus making it hard to believe that significant discrimination takes place.

The widest pay variability is at the high executive level. The pay scale varies hugely even among the same gender. This is another level at which gender pay bias is often alleged. But even in this arena performance is a strong driver as companies really only care about profit (as they should) and there are women who make more (even significantly more) than men. Regardless of gender, high performance with low pay leads to recruitment by other companies for higher pay as they want the performance. Pay tends to work itself out over time.

My profession is engineering. Over the thirty years I have been employed I have worked with many people of various gender, race, ethnicity, etc. I do not know what the pay of any of them is compared to mine except through various salary surveys and articles published in engineering journals. I do know that my pay is less than some women and more than some men and no doubt the converse is true. Am I a beneficiary or victim of discrimination? I do not know. I do not have time to figure it out as I am very busy. I have made a number of life choices that ultimately has had a negative effect on my salary – working for small companies, not going into management, working in a geographically weak area for my profession, etc. That a women doing similar work without the factors that affect me earns more does not bother me. I have the option to change but I choose not to. The situation I have described applies in various ways to a lot of people both men and women. It can be packaged as discrimination but it is not.

The Real Discrimination

In the past women were not generally hired or promoted into high paying jobs. Thus, even if women are paid precisely that of a man for identical jobs the average for women as a whole will be less than that of men as a whole just as the original premise states. The real discrimination is that of rank rather than that of pay. The difference in pay is only the symptom. To argue the pay angle is a waste of time. It is the wrong argument. In recent years more women have been hired and promoted into higher paying jobs and given sufficient time there will be a convergence of average salary comparisons. But, I doubt that there will ever be equality in that metric as women in general have different life styles than men and are not as aggressively career oriented. There is nothing wrong with that. Everybody, men or women, should live their lives as they want to. There is no requirement that they live as some average. What is wrong is for charlatans to pawn this fact as de-facto discrimination when it is not. My advice has always been to be aware of advocates – they frequently use selected facts to paint a false picture. Understand the whole story for yourself. Think!

Are women doing the same work as men really paid less? I have no doubt that in specific cases that would be true. But specific cases do not add up to a broad general concept. Keep in mind that it is also true that some men are paid less than other men doing the

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identical work, and that some women are paid less than other women doing the identical work, and there are even men who are paid less than women doing identical work. It all depends on how the “study” is performed.

Conclusions

We live in an age where some groups of people are given special consideration known as privileged minority status over others. Thus, it is not surprising that a number of people try to find some “angle” so that they too can be classified as a privileged minority. There is a tendency for the various group members to be gullible to any story concerning them being possible victims. This whole concept of special consideration (in the name of treating all equally) has been a huge cost to society and a huge profit for lawyers who frequently hock creative new concepts of discrimination. People should wake up and look at reality rather than blindly accept the pseudo realities from charlatans.

Discrimination, both real, imaginary, and the many government imposed forms needs to end. Interestingly, the one minority group excluded from privileged status is the normal white male.

If you hear of a case that appears to be bona-fide pay discrimination then examine the details. Could it be that the man happens to have specific skills or other attributes that truly command a higher salary? But also ask why some men make more than other men? Perhaps the answer is the same. Also ask why all women in similar positions are not paid the same and do not advance at the same rate. Again, one answer may fit all. Don’t just blindly accept the short story you hear on the news media. Check it out. Think about it. Is it even plausible? What are the ramifications if it is really true? If the ramifications do not exist then perhaps the story is incomplete. Perhaps your thoughts would be different if you were aware of the complete truth. If you are quick to anger concerning short stories then you are easily manipulated – another success story for the charlatans.

The truth often hurts. My purpose here is not to hurt people but rather to make them think. I believe in the truth because lies hurt much more. Some readers may feel that some of what I have said is hugely wrong. My answer is to stop thinking emotionally and start thinking practically. Yes, the world is not a perfect place. Individuals have more power over their positions than many realize. Some women (I personally know examples over my many years) spent their time acquiring the skills they observed that enables upward movement on the economic ladder. They may experience unfairness but they did not have time to complain. In the end they had results and thus did not need excuses. But others (men or women) looked for a special privilege in hopes that it would take them up the economic ladder. In the end they had excuses rather than results. The choice is yours. Which path are you going to take? Men also experience various forms of unfairness along the road of life (I know this from personal experience). Some become strong and succeed while others quit. The difference is that male quitters are not yet classified as a privileged minority. But I am sure it is coming. All it takes is the right “angle.”