

Women Should Stop Playing Victim on Gender Wage Gap

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Do men earn more money than women in comparable jobs with comparable responsibility? Most people seem to think so. During one of the presidential debates, John Kerry complained that full-time working men made a dollar for every 76 cents paid to women for the same work. President Bush didn't challenge the statement, and reporters let it go by as well. "The average woman is cheated out of about \$250,000 in wages over a lifetime," said an article in *Ms. Magazine*. The AFL-CIO estimates that working families lose \$200 billion of income annually to the male-female wage gap.

Oh, really? The Census Bureau did find that women earned 76 cents for every dollar paid to a male (now up to 80 cents on the dollar), but that was a raw number, not adjusted for comparable jobs and responsibility. A new book, *Why Men Earn More* by Warren Farrell, goes further, examining a broad array of wage statistics. His conclusion: When reasonable adjustments are made, women earn just as much as men, and sometimes more.

Some of Farrell's findings: Women are 15 times as likely as men to become top executives in major corporations before the age of 40. Never-married, college-educated males who work full time make only 85 percent of what comparable women earn. Female pay exceeds male pay in more than 80 different fields, 39 of them large fields that offer good jobs, like financial analyst, engineering manager, sales engineer, statistician, surveying and mapping technicians, agricultural and food scientists, and aerospace engineers. A female investment banker's starting salary is 116 percent of a male's. Part-time female workers make \$1.10 for every \$1 earned by part-time males.

Surprisingly, Farrell argues that comparable males and females have been earning similar salaries for decades, though the press has yet to notice. As long ago as the early 1980s, he writes, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that companies paid men and women equal money when their titles and responsibilities were the same. In 1969, data from the American Council on Education showed that female professors who had never been married and had never published earned 145 percent of their male counterparts. Even during the 1950s, Farrell says, the gender pay gap for all never-married workers was less than 2 percent while never-married white women between 45 and 54 earned 106 percent of what their white male counterparts made.

Citing Internal Revenue statistics, Farrell notes that women who own their own businesses net only 49 percent of what male counterparts make. Since it can't be that male bosses are holding them back here, women seem to be seeking certain lifestyle trade-offs—forgoing the highest possible income for more free time and flexible hours. They also seem to be avoiding some high-paying jobs. Female engineering managers make on average \$83,000, but only 10 percent of the managers are female, indicating that many women are bypassing careers that could pay them more.

Farrell argues that many men outearn women by a willingness to take risky and dangerous jobs as well as work that exposes them to stress and bad weather or that requires a transfer to an undesirable location in another city or country. Women are more likely than men to pick glamorous jobs that tend to pay less. A London School of Economics study tracking 10,000 post-1993 United Kingdom graduates from 30 universities found that males were earning 12 percent more than women. The men tended to stress salary and were more likely to take up engineering, math, and computing. The women were more apt to seek socially oriented jobs and as undergraduates had favored majors in education and the arts.

Much of Farrell's book is written in the style of a self-help book. It lists 25 ways women can improve their earnings, 10 of them advising the careful selection of high-paying fields and subfields. In nursing, an anesthesiology nurse can make more than the average doctor. An Army therapist is better paid than many other therapists. In the field of languages, Farrell advises, skip French and learn Arabic or Farsi. You will earn more.

Farrell was a board member of the National Organization for Women in the early 1970s but broke with the movement over its antimale excesses. He believes that the academic world and the news media have been incurious custodians of the myth that male oppression prevents women from achieving equal pay. It's a sturdy myth, and data that contradict it are typically buried or never updated. Given the current campus climate, no broad and honest academic study of women's pay is possible today. Farrell bluntly advises women to put the victimization rhetoric on hold and just do what it takes to get the high-paying jobs. Good idea.