



Barack Obama's Paycheck Unfairness Act

While pushing the legislation in a radio address this past Saturday, Obama [said](#), "Today, women still earn on average only about 75 cents for every dollar a man earns. That's a huge discrepancy." It certainly is, and the implication is that it's a function of discrimination. But is this true?



Obama's appeal much reminds me of an incident that occurred during the discussion segment of a college class many years ago. The subject of traffic fatalities arose, and making the case that they were astoundingly high, a female student emphatically stated (I'm paraphrasing), "Isn't it amazing that more Americans die on the roads every year than died in the whole Vietnam War?!" I immediately chimed in and said no, it wasn't. I then explained that far more people drive in the United States every year than fought in Vietnam. What followed were a couple of seconds of silence, a real "Aha!" moment.

Even harder to combat than the statistic in that class, however, is the rhetorical effectiveness of the "75 cents on a dollar" sound bite. Yet this fact is meaningless unless we examine the statistics behind the statistic.

While men do earn more, they also work more. The U.S. Census Bureau tells us that while full-time men average 2,213 working hours a year, "full-time" women average only 1,796. This means that men work 23 percent more than the fairer sex. Of course, since men earn 33 percent more, are they still overcompensated?

Not at all, says columnist Carrie Lukas. In her piece "A Bargain at 77 Cents to a Dollar" she delves into some other causes of the wage gap, [writing](#):

I'm the cause of the wage gap — I and hundreds of thousands of women like me. I have a good education and have worked full time for 10 years. Yet throughout my career, I've made things other than money a priority. I chose to work in the nonprofit world because I find it fulfilling. I sought out a specialty and employer that seemed best suited to balancing my work and family life. When I had my daughter, I took time off and then opted to stay home full time and telecommute....

Surveys have shown for years that women tend to place a higher priority on flexibility and personal fulfillment than do men, who focus more on pay. Women tend to avoid jobs that require travel or relocation, and they take more time off and spend fewer hours in the office than men do. Men disproportionately take on the dirtiest, most dangerous and depressing jobs.



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Because women have these very different priorities, they are also more likely than men to decline promotions, which invariably means trading higher pay for benefits that don't figure in government statistics. In addition, women typically choose lower-paying fields than men; for example, they are more likely to specialize in soft sciences such as psychology than hard ones such as physics. (Barack Obama is well aware of this, by the way. So aware, in fact, that his administration now [wants to apply](#) Title IX "proportionality" mandates to the sciences, which would likely have the effect of forcing colleges to reduce the number of men in hard-science courses. Also note that no one ever recommends applying Title IX to the humanities, education, social sciences, and life sciences, where women get the majority of bachelor's degrees.)

So, ironically, Obama was correct in saying that a man "earns" a dollar for a woman's 75 cents (a more skilled demagogue would have said "is paid"), as "earn" denotes compensation based on merit. Yet there is discrimination in play here. It's the kind that rewards people more handsomely if they work longer hours; specialize in harder-to-master, more lucrative disciplines; accept positions involving more responsibility and pressure; and take more dangerous jobs. Of course, if you're a communist, you'll find even this kind of discrimination intolerable.

If you're sane, however, you'll realize that Paycheck Unfairness Act social engineering doesn't just hurt us unfashionable Y-chromosome types. Remember, men don't work more hours for fun, nor is the phenomenon explained completely by characteristic male ambition. There's also another factor: Among couples, men are still far more likely to shoulder the burden of being sole breadwinners.

This brings us back to this piece's opening sentence. Since no business has a money tree, overspending in one area requires cuts in another. Thus, if women are overcompensated due to an affirmative-action mentality and government coercion, it follows that men will generally be undercompensated to balance the books. This is much like Title IX's effect on athletics: To achieve "proportionality," schools not only added women's sports — they cut men's.

And this pressure to overcompensate women is already apparent. As writer Carey Roberts [pointed out](#) in 2008:

Female physicists are getting \$6,500 more [than men]. Co-eds who majored in petroleum engineering are being offered \$4,400 more. And women computer programmers are being enticed with \$7,200 extra pay. In fact for dozens of majors and occupations, women coming out of college are getting better offers than men....

Why these disparities? Because in traditionally male-dominated professions, employers are willing to ante up more greenbacks to attract females in order to forestall a costly discrimination lawsuit.

And the effect of this may now be obvious. Even if you accept the proposition that giving people undeserved benefits helps them (which I don't, as it does nothing to encourage moral and spiritual development), there are unseen female victims here: the ones whose husbands and fathers now, in the name of social engineering, may be undercompensated. Thus, you could say that the PFA would benefit career-driven women at the expense of other women, stay-at-home moms and their daughters. Along with high taxation, it would drive more women from the home and strike yet another blow against the nuclear family.

Having said this, I won't hold my breath waiting for the aforementioned to translate into an "Aha!" moment. Because, you see, two conditions must be met before this can happen. First, people must be intellectually honest enough to acknowledge the truth even when it contradicts a cherished agenda.



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Then, they also must not be devious. But if, like feminist Simone de Beauvoir, you want to destroy the nuclear family and [believe](#) that women shouldn't even have the right to stay at home, facts simply won't matter. All you'll then care about is "75 cents on the dollar." Rinse, wash and repeat.



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