



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on April 23, 2014

Wage Discrimination

“President Obama Vows Zero Tolerance on Gender Wage Gap,” read one headline. Another read, “Women Still Earned 77 Cents On Men’s Dollar In 2012.” It’s presumed that big, greedy corporations are responsible for what is seen as wage injustice. Before discussing the “unjust” wage differences between men and women, let’s acknowledge an even greater injustice — which no one seems to care about — age injustice.



[According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), workers ages 16 to 24 earn only 54 cents on every dollar earned by workers 25 or older. This wage gap is 43 percent greater than the male/female gap. Our president, progressives, do-gooders, academics and union leaders show little interest in big, greedy corporations ripping off the nation’s youth. You might say, “Whoa, Williams! There’s a reason younger people earn less than older people. They don’t have the skills or experience.” My response would be — if I shared the vision of the president, media elite and do-gooders: Just as there can be no justification for big, greedy corporations paying women less than they pay men, there’s no justification for them to exploit the nation’s youth.

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The 77 percent median income statistic, used in discussions about male/female differences in earnings, tells us nothing about differences that might explain the differences in income, and it leads to stupid discussions. Let’s use some common sense and look at some differences between men and women that may have a bearing on earnings.

Kay S. Hymowitz’s article “Why the Gender Gap Won’t Go Away. Ever,” in *City Journal* (summer 2011), shows that female doctors earn only 64 percent of what male doctors earn. But it turns out that only 16 percent of surgeons are women, whereas 50 percent of pediatricians are women. Even though surgeons have put in many more years of education and training than pediatricians and earn higher pay, should Obama and Congress equalize their salaries? Alternatively, they might force female pediatricians to become surgeons.

There are inequalities everywhere. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Asian men and women have median earnings higher than white men and women. Female cafeteria attendants earn more than their male counterparts. Females who are younger than 30 and have never been married earn salaries 8 percent higher than males of the same description. Among women who graduated from college during 1992-93, by 2003 more than one-fifth were no longer in the workforce, and another 17 percent were working part time. That’s to be compared with only 2 percent of men in either category. Hymowitz cites several studies showing significant career choice and lifestyle differences between men and women that result in differences in income.

According to 2010 BLS data, the following jobs contain 1 percent or less female workers: boilermakers, brick masonry, stonemasonry, septic tank servicing, sewer pipe cleaners and trash collectors. By contrast, women are 97 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers, 80 percent of social workers,



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82 percent of librarians and 92 percent of dietitians and nutritionists and registered nurses.

For people having limited thinking skills, differences in earnings cannot be explained away. For them, Congress has permitted — and even fostered — a misallocation of people by race, sex and ethnicity. They'll argue that courts have consistently concluded that "gross" disparities are probative of a pattern and practice of discrimination. So what to do? Maybe President Obama and Congress should require women, who are overrepresented in preschool and kindergarten teaching, to become boilermakers, garbage collectors and brick masons and mandate that male boilermakers, trash collectors and brick masons become preschool and kindergarten teachers until both of their percentages are equal to their percentages in the population. You say, "Williams, to do that would be totalitarianism!" I say that if Americans accept that Congress can force us to buy health insurance, how much more totalitarian would it be for Congress to force people to take jobs they don't want?

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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