

# **How Much Does My Baby Cost? An Analysis of Gender Differences in Income, Career Interruption, and Child Bearing**

David Dozier, Bey-Ling Sha, Masako Okura

*As in many other professions, public relations has shown persistent patterns of income disparity between men and women practitioners. Previous public relations scholarship has analyzed the factors that contribute to income disparities. Factors previously identified as mediators of the relationship between income and gender include professional experience, participation in strategic decision-making, and manager role enactment. Nevertheless, gender differences in income persist even after controlling for the influence of these mediators. One possible explanation for on-going gender differences in income is that women are more likely than men to take "time out" from their careers to have children. Arguably, such mid-career interruption may result in less accumulation of human capital, depressed upward mobility, and differential suppression of salaries for women. To investigate this possibility, an online survey was conducted in 2004 of public relations practitioners who were members of PRSA. A systematic sample was drawn from the membership list of PRSA; 505 practitioners responded, for a 24% response rate. In the sample, men reported average annual salaries of \$93,494 (median=\$73,250); on average, women earned \$66,467 (median=\$60,000). If women's salaries were not depressed by career interruptions to have babies, their salaries would increase, on average, from \$66,467 to \$66,615. The \$148 (0.2%) increase in annual income is not statistically or practically significant. Thus, career interruption to have a baby does not account for salary differences between men and women practitioners.*

## **Introduction**

Since the government began tracking household incomes in 1960, women have always made less than men. Census data show that, in 2004, the median for men's earnings was \$40,798, compared to \$31,223 for women; in other words, women earned only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Lee, 2005). This national pattern of gender disparity in income is reflected in our field by data on public relations practitioners collected over the last quarter century (Aldoory &

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David Dozier, Ph.D., is Professor of Public Relations at San Diego State University,  
ddozier@mail.sdsu.edu.

Bey-Ling Sha, Ph.D., APR is Professor of Public Relations at San Diego State University,  
bsha@mail.sdsu.edu.

Masako Okura, M.A. is Executive of Gavin Anderson & Company, Japan.

Toth, 2002; Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1988; Dozier & Broom, 1995; Sha, Dozier, Toth, & Aldoory, 2007; Serini, Toth, Wright & Emig, 1997; Toth & Aldoory, 2001; Toth & Cline, 1991; Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998; Wright, Grunig, Springston, & Toth, 1991).

The present study focuses on this well-documented gap in income between men and women practitioners of public relations. Specifically, this study focuses on the role of *mid-career interruptions*, the intentional temporary exit from professional pursuits to do some other activity. Relevant, perhaps, to the income differences between men and women practitioners are mid-career interruptions to bear children. Whereas men may make brief career interruptions upon the birth of a child in the nuclear family, we posit that women make such career interruptions more frequently than men and that these interruptions are posited to be of longer duration.

After all, latest available data from the U.S. Census Bureau on people out of the labor force for more than four months show that women make up about 72% of nonworkers between the ages of 25 and 44, with taking care of children or others cited most frequently as the reason for leaving the workforce. Furthermore, "taking care of children or others" was the most-cited reason among all women in the study for their being nonworkers (Weismantle, 2001).

Career interruptions of a year or more are posited to exert a depressing effect on salaries. In a field like public relations, technological changes affect the practice. Cell phones, the Internet, and e-mail have accelerated the pace of public relations, just as new technologies have transformed the media institutions that serve as conduits of communication between organizations and publics. Further, the public relations profession is a "people" business, where contacts and relationships within the organization, with clients, with the media, and with other publics are critical to effective practice. Practitioners "out of the loop" for an extended period of time may find fewer opportunities for advancement and salary increases when they return to the practice.

This study posits and tests seven hypotheses that move sequentially from what is already known about gender and salaries in public relations to hypotheses that test new relationships.

### *Gender, Salaries, and Professional Experience*

That men practitioners are paid more than women practitioners is long-standing and well documented. In a secondary analysis of data from a 1979 survey of PRSA members, Broom (1982) found that men earned salaries of \$38,840 on average; women in the same sample earned \$22,620 on average. Men's income was 72% greater than women's income. In a 1991 follow-up survey of the same panel of now-mature PRSA members, Dozier and Broom (1995) found that men earned average annual salaries of \$71,450; women earned average salaries of \$53,010. Men's income was 35% greater than women's income. In a survey reported in 1995 (*Salary Survey of Public Relations Professionals*, 1995), PRSA's research firm found that men earned average annual salaries of \$59,460; women earned average annual salaries of \$41,110.

Men's income was 45% greater than women's income. In a survey of practitioners by *PR Reporter* ("30th survey," 1998), men earned annual median salaries of \$72,000; women earned annual median salaries of \$56,000. Men's income was 29% greater than women's income.

In a survey for *PR Week*, Leyland (2000) reported that men earned average annual salaries of \$81,920; women earned average annual salaries of \$59,026. Men's income was 39% greater than women's income. In a 2000 survey of PRSA members, Aldoory and Toth (2002) found that average annual income for male practitioners was \$73,700; women earned \$56,000 on average. Men's income was 32% greater than women's income. The most recent salary survey, conducted in 2006, indicated that men's average annual income in public relations was \$98,189; among women practitioners, average income was \$67,853 (Sha, Dozier, Toth, & Aldoory, 2007).

Many other studies tell the same tale: Women make less than men in public relations (Dozier, 1988; Serini, Toth, Wright & Emig, 1997; Toth & Aldoory, 2001; Toth & Cline, 1991; Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998; Wright, Grunig, Springston, & Toth, 1991). Furthermore, the future may not be getting brighter, in terms of eliminating gender disparities in income. Surveys of public relations students show that, even before they enter the field, men and women project unequal salary expectations, with male students consistently holding higher ones (DeRosa & Wilcox, 1989; Farmer & Waugh, 1999; Sha & Toth, 2004, 2005). The persistence of inequitable incomes in public relations should not be written off as merely reflective of national income trends; rather, this disturbing phenomenon deserves and requires serious consideration.

As noted by Aldoory and Toth (2002), research on income and gender is mostly "atheoretical" (p. 105), although we all have "working theories" to explain income disparities. One theoretical argument is that women earn lower incomes than men because they have fewer years of professional experience. Dozier and Broom (1995) reported the results of a national survey of public relations practitioners, systematically sampled from the current membership of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). In that study, they tested a path model that indicated a negative relationship between being a woman practitioner and professional experience and a positive relationship between professional experience and income. Other components of the model included length of employment with current employer, education, number of employees in the public relations department, manager role enactment, and participation in management decision making. These other components were treated as intervening variables that mediated the relationship between gender and income.

Once all the intervening variables were controlled, no significant relationship between gender and income remained. However, in the sample, men earned average adjusted income that was 13% greater than the average adjusted income for women, once professional experience was controlled. Dozier and Broom concluded that the lack of opportunity to enact the manager role and to participate in management decision making may provide some explanation as to why income differences exist

between women and men practitioners. However, as noted by Dozier and Broom, the loss of statistical significance also could be related to small sample size (N=207).

In contrast, Aldoory and Toth (2002) found in a more recent survey that income differences between men and women remained, after controlling for professional experience. That survey also sampled from the membership of PRSA, but the final sample (N=864) was larger than the one obtained by Dozier and Broom. Therefore, the Aldoory and Toth study had greater statistical power and was, therefore, less likely than the Dozier and Broom study to yield Type 2 error (falsely concluding no income differences exist in the population because of insignificant statistical differences in the sample). On average, women in the Aldoory and Toth (2002) survey earned \$56,059 a year, whereas male respondents earned an average \$73,706 a year. The researchers used regression analysis to test if the relationship between income and gender remained significant, after the influence of professional experience was removed. Indeed, the relationship between income and gender was significant at a 95% level of confidence, once professional experience was controlled.

Based on the later findings from the Dozier and Broom (1995) and the Aldoory and Toth (2002) surveys, the first four hypotheses are posed:

- H<sub>1</sub>: Women practitioners earn lower salaries than do men practitioners.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Women practitioners have fewer years of professional experience than do men practitioners.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Income is positively correlated with years of professional experience.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Women practitioners earn lower salaries than do men practitioners, after controlling for the influence of professional experience.

#### *Mid-Career Interruptions, Babies, and Income*

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, mid-career interruptions are posited to exert a negative impact on career advancement and income. Previous research in other fields, such as economics and sociology, consistently show a "family gap," i.e., that motherhood substantially affects women's career paths and salaries, with mothers making less than childless women (Beblo, Bender, & Wolf, 2004; Browning, 1992; Budig & England, 2001; Cramer, 1980; Dankmeyer, 1996; Joshi, Pierella, & Waldfogel, 1998; Waldfogel, 1998). In concrete terms, Miller (2005) found that women who chose to wait to have children gained in career earnings by 10% *per year of delay* and that these gains were greatest for women in professional and managerial occupations, as well as for women with college degrees.

Other research suggests that, although women make more numerous career interruptions compared to men, the wage penalty for that break is less costly for women than for men to who take breaks (Schneer & Reitman, 1990; Spivey, 2005).

Clearly, the question of mid-career interruptions is one that affects all members of the labor force, and not just women; this may become a particularly important issue for future workers, as male members of Generation Y have shown increased willingness to take non-traditional career paths.

Currently, however, the career risks to women of taking time off from work to start a family are measurable and subject to statistical modeling. The phenomenon is global. In Japan, estimates suggest that women have an 18% chance of finding full-time work after a career interruption, and this figure drops to 12-13% for non-university-educated women (Ueda, 2004). A similar pattern is found among French women who exit the labor force to bear children (Grimm & Bonneuil, 2001).

Analysis of British data showed that women who leave the workforce for even one family-related "break tend to have a significantly lower prestige level across their whole work-life career. This effect becomes even larger for women without studies and for those who have stayed more time unemployed or inactive" (Malo & Muñoz-Bullón, 2004; p. 15). In the United States, from 1998 to 2002, the labor force participation rates of women with infants dropped from 59% to the 1994 level of 55%; it was the first-ever drop in labor participation rates of mothers with infants since the Census Bureau began calculating this measure in 1976 (Downs, 2003).

In public relations, our research has been admittedly less complex, in terms of the statistical measures used to investigate career interruptions and their impact on practitioners in our field. For example, the Aldoory and Toth study (2002) measured job interruption as a binary variable, i.e., whether respondents had ever interrupted their careers at some point. Respondents who selected "yes" could then check off as many reasons as applied from a list of reasons, with space provided to offer "other" options.

For the present study, we posited that women are more likely than men to make mid-career interruptions to have a baby and to take mid-career interruptions of longer duration. This, in turn, was posited to depress earnings. Two studies provide support for these hypotheses. In a 1997 interview survey of 4,883 women of working age in Queensland, Australia, Arun, Arun, and Borooah (2004) found that 3,273 of the respondents had been in the labor force for five years or more. Their statistical analysis was limited to this latter subsample. They discovered that the negative impact or "penalty" on income for these women was most pronounced when a mid-career interruption was of long duration and that the reason for the interruption was to have children. In their economic analysis of the data, Arun, Arun, and Borooah found that women suffered a 17% "penalty" on their income when they took long interruptions to have a baby. Arun, Arun, and Borooah posited that this economic penalty occurred because a mid-career break will "interrupt their accumulation of human capital" and, as a consequence, such women "pay a penalty in terms of lower earnings" (p. 80). They also posited that women with babies or small children at home who returned to the labor force faced discrimination from employers and were unable to secure their old jobs. The authors noted that "Women have to accept low quality employment because of their caring and household responsibilities" (Arun, Arun, & Borooah, p. 81). Findings

of Arun, Arun, and Borooah are consistent with the research of Crompton (1977) on women and employment in Britain.

Therefore, based on prior research and logic, the following three hypotheses were posited and tested:

- H<sub>5</sub>: Women practitioners are more likely than men practitioners to take family leave on the occasion of the birth of a baby in the nuclear family.
- H<sub>6</sub>: Women practitioners have longer mid-career breaks from work than have men practitioners.
- H<sub>7</sub>: Women practitioners earn salaries equivalent to men practitioners, after controlling for professional experience and taking time out in mid-career to have a baby.

## **Method**

An online survey was conducted using a systematic sample of public relations practitioners in the United States. The questionnaire used in this study was pre-tested online with 20 respondents from a southwest chapter of PRSA. Based on feedback from the pilot test respondents, a revised questionnaire was designed.

### *Survey and Instrument Design*

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design, which allowed for a comparison and description of the relations among the variables. A web survey, which is one form of electronic surveys, was utilized to collect data in the present study. Data were collected from July 7, 2004 to September 4, 2004.

The researchers expected an online survey to be the most effective method for collecting data from the target population for three reasons. First, an increasing number of public relations practitioners use online technology such as e-mail and the Internet for their daily work (Johnson, 1997; Lordan, 2001; Sallot, Porter, & Acosta-Alzuru, 2004; Springton, 2001). Second, the penetration of online technology in the field of public relations supports the idea that practitioners can be contacted easily by e-mail; thus, an online survey provides a viable method for data collection. Third, electronic surveys have had advantages over traditional mail surveys in terms of speed and cost required for data collection (Sheehan, 2001; Sheehan & Hoy, 1999).

Similar to the Aldoory and Toth (2002) study, we asked respondents "Since the beginning of your public relations career, have you ever taken time off from full-time public relations work (one year or more)". That is, a mid-career interruption was operationalized as leaving public relations work for a year or more. If the respondent answered yes, he or she was asked several contingency questions, including the

length of time that they did not work in public relations and a series of binary questions regarding their reasons for the mid-career interruption.

### *Sample Selection*

The sample was drawn from the 2004 membership directory for the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Initial systematic sampling yielded 2,717 potential respondents. In order to meet the requirements of this study, several restrictions were placed on sample selection and disqualified initial sample elements were not included in the sample solicited by e-mail. PRSA members whose e-mail addresses were not listed in the membership directory were disqualified ( $N = 107$  or 3.9% of the initial systematic sample) because they could not be reached by e-mail. Since this study focused on practicing professionals employed by organizations (including corporations, nonprofits, educational institutions, government, and associations), members identified as educators ( $N = 64$  or 2.8%) or freelance consultants ( $N = 11$  or 0.4%) were excluded from the sample. In addition, those who had no organizational affiliation were disqualified ( $N = 120$  or 4.4%) because it was not clear that they were currently employed by organizations as public relations practitioners. Furthermore, practitioners with international mailing addresses were disqualified ( $N = 10$  or 0.4%) since their frequency in the sample was too small to permit meaningful statistical inferences to the population of international practitioners. In total, 2405 members were selected from the sample frame, after removing disqualified respondents. That is, 88.5% of the initial systematic sample of 2,717 was qualified to participate in the study (see Table 1).

Table 1

#### *Breakdown of Initial Systematic Sample and Disqualified Respondents*

Disqualifiers	Number	Percentage
Initial systematic sample	2717	100.0%
International addresses	10	0.4%
Freelancers	11	0.4%
Educators	64	2.4%
No email address listed	107	3.9%
No organizational affiliation	120	4.4%
Final sample solicited	2405	88.5%

Overall, the survey yielded 505 usable responses for a 24.0% response rate. A total of 2,405 e-mail invitations were sent; 301 (12.5%) email addresses were undeliverable, and 147 (6.1%) individuals who received the invitation declined to participate. In total, 598 responses were received from the respondents; however, 93 of these were incomplete. Therefore, the final valid sample size resulted in 505. Table 2 summarizes the outcomes of this survey, including completion, response, refusal, and non-contact rates. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The 95% decision rule ( $\alpha=.05$ ) was used to test all hypotheses. Because the hypotheses specify the direction of the relationships between variables, a one-tailed test was used.

Table 2  
*Summary of Survey Outcomes*

Item	Number / %
Undeliverable emails	301
Declines	147
No response	1359
Incomplete questionnaires	93
Complete questionnaires	505
Completion rate	21.0%
Response rate	24.0%
Refusal rate	11.4%
Non-contact rate	64.6%

At a theoretical level, gender salary discrimination was treated as the residual variance in income between men and women practitioners that could not be accounted for by the mediating variables of professional experience and mid-career interruption to have a baby. If gender differences in income disappear after controlling for the covariates, when we have discovered a mechanism where gendered roles in the home and gendered roles in the labor force interact to depress the salaries of women practitioners who interrupt their careers temporarily to have children. In other words,

the present study cannot disprove the existence of gender income discrimination. This study may shed light on how such discrimination works.

## **Findings**

Hypothesis 1 states that men earn lower salaries than women. This hypothesis was confirmed. On average, women in the sample earned \$66,467 a year. Men in the sample earned \$93,494. Men's income was 41% greater than women's income. The relationship between income and gender generalizes to the population of all PRSA members at a 95% level of confidence,  $F(1, 289) = 14.50, p < .01$ . The effect size is substantial, with gender accounting for approximately 5% of the variance in income,  $\eta^2 = .219, \eta^2\text{-squared} = .048$ .

Hypothesis 2 states that women have fewer years of professional experience than men. This hypothesis was confirmed. Among men, average professional experience was 14.9 years. Among women, average professional experience was 13.3 years. The difference is statistically significant, according to the 95% decision rule,  $F(1, 440) = 3.17, p = .04$ . However, the effect size is small, with gender accounting for less than 1% of the variance in professional experience.

Hypothesis 3 states that professional experience (in years) is positively correlated with income. This hypothesis was confirmed. The Pearson correlation coefficient between income and gender was statistically significant,  $r(294) = .35, p < .01$ . The effect size was substantial, with professional experience accounting for over 12% of the variance in income.

Hypothesis 4 states that women practitioners make significantly less income than men, even after controlling for the influence of professional experience. This hypothesis was confirmed. Women earn lower salaries than men, after controlling for the influence of professional experience. The relationship can be seen best by comparing the unadjusted income of men and women practitioners (before controlling for professional experience) and adjusted income (after controlling for professional experience). Note that the unadjusted means differ slightly from those reported for hypothesis 1, because the introduction of professional experience as a covariate reduced the sample size somewhat, due to missing cases. Among women practitioners in the sample, annual income increases slightly from \$66,600 to \$66,910, once the influence of professional experience was controlled. Among men practitioners in the sample, income decreased slightly from \$93,494 to \$92,804, once the influence of professional experience is controlled. In other words, men's average adjusted income was 39% greater than women's average adjusted income. The \$25,894 difference in adjusted annual income between men and women remains statistically significant,  $F(1, 287) = 15.16, p < .01$ . The relationship generalizes to the population of all PRSA members at a 95% level of confidence.

Hypothesis 5 states that women are more likely than men to take family leave to have a baby. A significant relationship between gender and taking leave from work to have a baby may seem obvious. Given the current science in organ transplants and the

like, men are biologically incapable of actually giving birth. However, some men do take time off from their careers for family leave when a baby is born. Approximately 8% of women practitioners in the sample indicated that they had taken time off from their careers in public relations to have a baby. Among men, less than 1% indicated taking family leave upon the occasion of a birth in the family. The relationship is statistically significant and generalizes to the population of all PRSA members at a 95% level of confidence,  $\chi^2(1, N = 443) = 8.41, p < .01$ .

As a corollary to hypothesis 5, hypothesis 6 states that women practitioners have longer mid-career breaks from work than do men practitioners. This hypothesis was disconfirmed. Among all women in the sample, mid-career interruptions (time off from work) averaged 0.88 years. Among all men in the sample, mid-career interruptions averaged 1.14 years. The difference is not statistically significant,  $F(1, 432) = 0.91, p = .34$ . Further, the direction of the relationship in the sample was counter to the hypothesis. Men in the sample took off more time from work than did women (for whatever reasons), but the difference was not significant.

Hypothesis 7 states that women practitioners earn salaries equivalent to men practitioners, after controlling for professional experience and taking time out in mid-career to have a baby. As with hypothesis 4, this hypothesis was tested by removing the influence of professional experience and having a baby (a binary variable) from the relationship between gender and income. That is, adjusted incomes were tested between men and women, after removing the variance accounted for by years of professional experience and having a baby. For women practitioners in the sample, average adjusted incomes increased from \$66,600 to \$67,271, a \$672 increase in average annual income. For men practitioners in the sample, average adjusted annual incomes decreased from \$93,494 to \$92,001, a \$1,493 decrease in average annual income. However, the \$24,729 difference in adjusted income between men and women remains statistically significant,  $F(1, 286) = 13.56, p < .01$ .

Further, when the impact of having a baby is introduced as a single covariate, the impact on a woman's income is trivial. The adjusted income for women increased from \$66,467 to \$66,615, after the influence of having a baby in mid-career is controlled. For women public relations practitioners as a whole, the average "cost" or "penalty" of having a baby in mid-career is \$148 annually.

## **Discussion and Limitations**

The present study provides compelling evidence that aggregate income differences between men and women practitioners in public relations cannot be accounted for by women taking mid-career interruptions to bear and rear children. Although women practitioners were significantly more likely than men to take a mid-career break to have children, men also take mid-career breaks for other reasons, mostly to pursue education, both in our study and according to government data (e.g., Weismantle, 2001).

Furthermore, we caution that our finding regarding the \$148 cost to women of interrupting their careers for childbirth should be interpreted against the context of reality. Although the penalty for the interruption itself is relatively minimal, this amount cannot account for the wide variety of other factors affecting women's economic well-being over the course of their careers. For example, women in public relations may find, after paying the \$148 annual penalty to interrupt their careers for childbirth, that they have difficulty getting back into the field, that they return to lower status positions or organizations, that their opportunities for career advancement are limited due to increased family responsibilities, that the frequency and percentage of their salary increases decline due to misperceptions about their dedication to their jobs, that the financial costs of childcare outweigh the monetary gain of re-employment, or that the emotional costs of work-family balance are unjustified by their levels of job satisfaction. All of these risks add up financially, and they may cost women (and men) in other ways as well.

Indeed, this study did not address the impact of women leaving the public relations profession altogether when they have children. In survey after survey, women practitioners tend to be younger and to have fewer years of professional experience than men. Some of this can be accounted for by the shift of the practice from male majority to female majority. But some of the differences in aggregate professional experience of men and women practitioners might be accounted for by the phenomenon of women leaving public relations to bear and raise children, and then never returning to our fast-paced, high-stress, demanding field. After all, scholars have studied gender issues in public relations for nearly three decades; shouldn't women have caught up to the men by now in terms of years of professional experience? Where is the critical mass of senior-level women in public relations? Are they just too busy to respond to academic surveys? Clearly, the present study raises yet more questions to be investigated in future research.

## **Conclusions and Directions for Research**

This study confirmed previous research showing that (1) men make more money than women in public relations, (2) that this income difference remains after professional experience is controlled, and (3) that this income difference is also present after controlling for the influence of having a baby. Further, we found that, contrary to our expectations, (4) men in the sample took longer breaks from the practice than did women, although the difference was not statistically significant.

The logic of the elaboration model dictates that we continue to seek those missing variables that can account for the income differences between men and women practitioners. Similarly, we are obligated to build a theoretical understanding as to the mechanisms that shape and influence income differences. As indicated over a decade ago (Dozier & Broom, 1995), and confirmed in this study, women have fewer years of professional experience than men and professional experience is positively correlated with income. The present study shows that large income differences remain after differences in professional experience are controlled statistically. Indeed, the

present study shows that the difference in professional experience between men and women practitioners is narrowing. This study provides evidence that a small number of women (7% in the present study) take mid-career breaks (year or more) to bear children. However, these time-outs from the practice do not account for the substantial differences in income between women and men.

For more than 25 years, the first author of this study has explored patterns of gender discrimination in public relations using quantitative methods. As noted in the methods section, gender discrimination is the variance in income between men and women that cannot be accounted for by other factors. In this study, men earned average annual salaries 41% greater than salaries earned by women. Gender discrimination is not the kind of information that can be measured directly (e.g., "When hiring and promoting public relations practitioners under your supervision, do you agree or disagree that men should be paid 41% more than women?"). Only carefully constructed laboratory experiments can ferret out mechanisms of gender discrimination using masking techniques to elicit revealing responses from subjects.

For example, one technique is to provide identical resumes for evaluation by someone in a decision-making role. Under one test condition, the name on the resume is female. Under another test condition, the name on the resume is male. Dependent variable may include (1) the decision to interview or not interview the candidate and (2) make starting salary recommendations based on the resume. Under these laboratory conditions, where indeed everything else in the resume is equal except gender, one can isolate the causal relationship between perceived gender of a job applicant and income.

In the messy world of survey research, variables interact in complex ways. To date, no satisfactory rival theory has been posited to explain the differences in income between men and women practitioners. Gender discrimination remains the most compelling explanation. As each rival theory is unable to account for the disparity in incomes, the theory of gender discrimination becomes more plausible.

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