

Inconvenient Truths for White Men

by **Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Friday, March 08, 2013**

<http://politicsrespun.org/2013/03/inconvenient-truths-for-white-men/>

Men, especially white men, sleep too easily at night while women earn 70 per cent of what we do. Secretly, I think we'd prefer to not have to talk about this much. Sure, March 8 and December 6 are days we set aside for reflecting on this, but, most likely, we don't want to be bothered with it every other day of the year. Plus, the NHL is back.

One conversation I have never had, goes like this. I'm in the lunchroom at work with a group of men discussing workplace realities. The topics drifts around to how women in Canada make less than men, on average. We then happily discuss how unionized workers suffer less gender-based wage discrimination than non-unionized workers. We comment on how women take time out of the workforce to bear and raise children. Then we conclude that pay equity programs can help bridge the gap, recognizing structural discrimination. Finally, we end up talking about how, as men, we need to find ways of being willing to take less money in raises to allow women to make more, until they are on par with men.

While most of that conversation seems realistic, the ending has never happened. I have never had a conversation with men about what kind of sacrifices we need to make, individually and collectively, so that women can reach wage parity with us. Why is that?

Here are a few generalized assertions that I believe will help explain our acceptance of continuing widespread pay discrimination. Brace yourselves, fellow white men.

First, I believe many people still think women actually don't deserve to make as much money as men. Maybe we rationalize this by saying that men have traditionally been the main wage earners, as women used to not work so much outside the home. This is a compelling explanation, but it's still sexist. And I think it's still widespread today, even when so many women are now in the paid workforce.

Second, men still may have a sense of entitlement, which leads us to resent women taking "our" jobs. We can rationalize this by saying that, for thousands of years, women were domestic and men worked outside the home. But I think men still act from this entitlement.

Third, people think it is not fair for a woman to continue to earn full pay and accrue seniority while on parental leave. Strictly speaking, in a meritocracy, people ought to get compensated for what they actually do.

On the surface, there may appear to be some common sense to this sense of "natural justice." It is, however, absurd and chauvinistic. No one questions the accommodations we make to allow people to stay home with full pay and seniority accrual for a variety of other things: having a sinus cold; recovering from cancer; celebrating Canada Day; and, in more progressive workplaces, caring for sick children or elders. We champion these benefits, but many of us still balk at loudly fighting for full pay and seniority for women on parental leave.

Fourth, capitalists don't like women and they especially don't want to work for one. Every January, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reminds us of the grotesque income inequality in Canada between CEOs and average workers. And the CCPA's 2013 report revealed that only one of Canada's top 100 CEOs was a woman. Many think the brutally competitive world of capitalism is a testosterone arena where women don't belong: one that would undermine the femininity men enjoy in our minds when we think of women taking part.

Fifth, whatever gender entitlement men feel, is compounded when we look at racial entitlement: the idea, common among white men like me, that our white European settler ancestors created this "Canada" despite the people who were already here. The predictable defensive backlash against the Idle No More movement reflects this lingering sense of white entitlement.

And this has been a two-directional racial entitlement. White Europeans settled "Canada" and marginalized the people who were here because those people were inconvenient to the settler agenda. Going forward, white "Canada" has been brutally racist towards other new people who have arrived in this land we currently rule.

Canada may no longer charge the Chinese a head tax and we no longer turn back Komagata Marus. Now, instead, we detain and deport migrants on ships that approach the West Coast. And, in B.C., in a disturbing echo of the exploitation of Chinese labourers brought to Canada in the late 1800s to build our transcontinental railroad, we are importing Chinese coal miners under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to operate new mines.

It is uncomfortable to speak of such blatant systemic and cultural racism and sexism. I think most white men still have a blind spot when it comes to these subjects, or are simply too complacent when it comes to economic discrimination based on gender and race.

We need to drop this blind spot, or complacency, now.