

Steven pinker's gender - the gender gap differences versus discrimination essay e...

[Law](#), [Evidence](#)



When Steven Pinker (235) stated near the end of his essay, “ Gender”, that, “ none of this means that sex discrimination has vanished, or that it is justified when it occurs. The point is only that gender gaps by themselves say nothing about discrimination unless the slates of men and women are blank, which they are not”, he apparently choose to tread lightly on the fabric of the carpet of political correctness. In the preceding eleven pages of his essay, Pinker posited that the perceived gender gap, manifested by differences in earnings between men and women performing essentially the same work and by the “ glass ceiling” (an artificial upper limit in the management hierarchy above which women cannot climb merely by virtue of being women), may not be due to discrimination (in terms of artificial barriers, cultural expectations and child rearing practices), but rather due to the fact that men and women are different (in terms of biological brain functioning, innate talents and inclinations). He implied that it made no scientific sense to claim, for example, that there was a lower percentage of women than men in the fields of mathematics and engineering due to discouragement of such endeavors when there was evidence that women were better at (and preferred) verbal, people-oriented professions as opposed to the male preference for thing-oriented, theoretical occupations. However, he appeared to realize that in the climate of the day, such a stance would be unpopular.

Having taken this bold stance, Pinker attempted to diminish the sting of this position by abnegating it by the apologetic tone of the quoted passage and the use of words such as “ none of this means” that there is no sex discrimination, or that it is ever justified. He chose to lead with this caveat

and relegated his real proposition, that the existence of a gender gap per se did not establish that there was a discriminatory reason for the gap, to the second sentence. His choice of the phrase “ clean slate” seemed to be an avoidance of stating more plainly that men and women may well have different aptitudes and tastes. Immediately following the quoted passage, Pinker stated that, “ The only way to establish discrimination is to compare their jobs or wages when choices and qualifications have been equalized”. While he gave an example of a study in which childless women aged 27 to 33 years earned 98 cents to every dollar earned by a man as if this were evidence of such equalization, the reader is told nothing concerning whether in fact the men and women in this study had the same range of choices, the same qualifications or even the same job titles.

Pinker’s choice of the word “ only” in the conciliatory phrase “ The point is only that” again leaves the impression that Pinker is trying to make his position more palatable. He could have, for example, stated that, “ The point is really that the gender gap, without direct evidence of discriminatory motives, intent or actions, is not discrimination at all”. This would have left the impression that those who wanted strict “ fifty-fifty” equality, parity for parity’s sake, bore the burden of proving discrimination as opposed to real gender-based differences in aptitudes and preferences. He also could have stated that, “ Different does not mean better or worse – just different”. It does not seem that Pinker wished to go this far.

Overall, Pinker’s use of qualifying words, sentence structure and word choice left me with the impression that while he wished to posit that the gender gap may be based upon naturally occurring differences between men and

women, he could not go so far as to completely alienate the “ difference equals discrimination” camp. In the end, I felt that the impact of an otherwise compelling essay was diminished by an attempt at appeasement.

Works Cited

Pinker, Steven. COMPLETE THE CITATION