



IS THE GENDER PAY GAP REALLY ABOUT WOMEN'S LIFE CHOICES?

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Our November luncheon meeting with our guest speaker Lecia Langston provided important information about the gender pay gap from a publication of the Utah Department of Workforce Services called *Hard at Work: Women in the Utah Labor Force (job.utah.gov)*. Another document crucial to the discussion is AAUW's *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap, 2014 Ed. (AAUW.org)*. This report succinctly addresses the issues by going beyond the widely reported 78% statistic: it explains the pay gap in the United States; how it affects women of all ages, races, and education levels; and what you can do to close it.

Because of time limitations, not all questions could be presented at the luncheon. Are women paid less because they choose lower-paying jobs? Is it that more women work part time than men do? Is it because



" Sorry, but hiring only men allows me to avoid gender politics. "

women tend to be the primary caregivers for their children? Is it because of discrimination? Is it because of cultural issues? Is it because women are less well-educated? Is the pay gap really only about women's life choices?

The following are some highlights from both reports about reasons for the gap between male and female workers. Critics charge that pay differences between men and women are simply a matter of personal choices. AAUW addressed this argument in the 2012 report, *Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College Graduation*. The analysis found that just one year after college graduation, women were paid just 82 percent of what their male counterparts were paid. An earlier report, *Behind the Pay Gap* (AAUW, 2007), found that 10 years after graduation, the pay gap widened, and women were paid only 69 percent of what men were paid. In part, these pay gaps do reflect men's and women's choices, especially the choice of college major and the type of job

pursued after graduation. Yet not all of the gap can be "explained away."



"Yes, I agree that equal pay for equal work is an idea that we should DEFINITELY think about."

After accounting for college major, occupation, economic sector, hours worked, months unemployed since graduation, GPA, type of undergraduate institution, institution

selectivity, age, geographical region, and marital status, *Graduating to a Pay Gap* found that a 7 % difference in the earnings of male and female college graduates one year after graduation was still unexplained. Similarly, *Behind the Pay Gap* found a 12 % unexplained difference in earnings among full-time workers 10 years after college graduation. Other researchers have also found that the gender pay gap is not fully accounted for by women's and men's choices.

According to the Utah reports, while occupational choice is the largest factor in the wage gap, other demographic factors -- less education, less occupational tenure, etc., also contribute to the difference in men's and women's earnings. No study has explained away the wage gap using the differing demographic characteristics of men and women, suggesting that institutional discrimination and other factors do exist.

THOSE "OTHER" FACTORS

- The Utah Report: For years, feminists have talked about the "pink collar ghetto," referring to the segregation or "crowding" of women – through tradition, culture, discrimination, or personal choice –into certain occupations. Women certainly have begun to break out of those traditional jobs into employment that in the past typically was held by men. But the change is slow. Lower paid occupational groups most dominated by females are healthcare-support occupations, personal care and service, administrative support. Compared to the U.S., Utah females make up a smaller percent of workers in computer/mathematical jobs, healthcare practitioners, business/financial operation, life/physical/social scientists, and architecture/engineering occupations. Utah women have been slower to enter male-dominated occupations than their US counterparts.
- Women may consciously trade higher wages, chances for greater advancement, and job status for the flexibility and reduced demands they believe female occupations usually offer. Unfortunately, many nontraditional jobs actually offer more flexibility plus the advantage of a

higher wage.

- Despite evidence to the contrary, many women underestimate substantially the chances that they will work. In Utah most married women and mothers work outside the home. Yet, many young women fail to make a good occupational choice early in life based on that reality. They believe (Prince Charming Syndrome or the Cinderella Complex) that someone will take care of them financially.
- Women may select predominately female occupations because they think they are the only positions open to them. Socialization may lead women to believe that they qualify only for certain jobs. This segregation of occupations is a major factor behind the pay gap.
- Women may be afraid to choose a job outside the norm. Fears of sexual harassment, of trying something different, of having to work mostly with men or of failing in a “man’s world” often keep women out of male-dominated occupations. They choose a more comfortable path.
- Women may be denied access to certain jobs because of sexual discrimination. Employers might prefer men for some jobs. These employers may believe women are not as committed to the job as men. They may believe that women shouldn’t be working at all. Male employers may prefer to hire men because they feel more comfortable with them.
- Women do not seem to advance as quickly as men, e.g. the “mommy track” where women are sidelined from promotions because of a perceived difference by employers; the “glass ceiling,” where employers, for various

reasons, seem reluctant to advance women to the top echelons of corporate power.

- Increasing the number of women in traditionally male fields is likely to improve wages for women, but it is unlikely to fully eliminate the pay gap. Women in “male” jobs such as computer programming still face a pay gap compared with their male counterparts even though they may be paid higher salaries than women in traditionally female fields. It will take more than individual women pursuing careers in “male” fields to ensure fair pay for all.
- At every level of academic achievement, women’s median earnings are less than men’s earnings, and in some cases, the gender pay gap is larger at higher levels of education.
- Becoming a parent is an example of a choice that often has different outcomes for men and women. Many stay-at-home and part-time working mothers will eventually decide to return to the full-time workforce, and when they do they may encounter a “motherhood penalty” that extends beyond the actual time out of the workforce. Employers are less likely to hire mothers compared with childless women, and when they do make an offer to a mother, they offer a lower salary than they do other women. Fathers, in contrast, do not suffer a penalty compared with other men. Clearly, parenthood often affects men and women very differently in terms of labor force participation and how they are viewed by employers, and that difference may be reflected in a worker’s salary.

- Implicit assumptions about roles for girls and boys still exist among educators despite their egalitarian views of student leadership. Every time an educator takes the opportunity to expose girls and boys to more women role models, they challenge gender-based assumptions and help repair any unintended promotion of traditional gender roles. A teacher's support plays a strong role in how students view themselves. Encouraging a student to try out a nontraditional role can help her challenge stereotypes about roles for girls and boys.

WHAT IS AAUW DOING?

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) has been on the front lines of the fight for pay equity since 1913. AAUW members were in the Oval Office when President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act of 1963 into law, and more than 50 years later, we continue to lead the push for policies and legislation to encourage and enforce fair pay in the workplace. Pay equity is a priority for AAUW, and it will continue to be until women everywhere earn a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. In January 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act into law, thanks to the hard work and leadership of AAUW, our members, and our coalition partners. Since then, AAUW has worked for the passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would give women additional and much-needed equal pay protections. The legislation failed in procedural votes in the House and Senate in the 113th Congress. But the Senate did vote to fully debate the bill for the first time ever in September 2014. We haven't gotten our up-or down vote yet, but we are moving ever closer.

Equal pay is not simply a women's issue—it's a family issue. Families increasingly rely on women's wages to make ends meet. The gender pay gap can contribute to poor living conditions, poor nutrition, and fewer opportunities for the children. AAUW continues to advocate for strong pay equity legislation, regulation, and enforcement to protect employees and assist employers. AAUW also educates the public about this persistent problem and its effect on working families. These efforts are critical elements as we work to close the gender pay gap.

HOW CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The gender pay gap is unlikely to go away on its own, but there are many things that we can do in our workplaces and in our communities to make a difference.

Beyond our personal lives, we can take steps to influence employers and governments. There are more ways to make your voice heard than ever before—letters to your legislators and local papers, blogs, and Tweets, use of AAUW resources and its network of activists are just a few examples.

- Visit AAUW's pay equity resource page on the AAUW website at www.aauw.org/issues/economic-justice for current information on the status of legislation, federal policies, and action that you can take to narrow the pay gap.
- Join AAUW's Action Network to keep up with equal pay advocacy and receive notices to tell your legislators what you think: www.aauw.org/actionnetwork.
- Visit the LAF online resource library to learn more about pay equity and what you can do if you believe you're being paid unfairly: www.aauw.org/what-we-

[do/legal-resources.](#)

- Learn about your rights at work at www.aauw.org/what-we-do/legal-resources/know-your-rights-at-work.
- Get ideas for programming and advocacy at www.fightforfairpay.org.
- Visit AAUW's \$tart \$mart salary negotiation page at [www.aauw.org/what-we-do/campus-programs /start-smart-salary-negotiation-workshop](http://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/campus-programs/start-smart-salary-negotiation-workshop) to attend a salary negotiation workshop.
- Read more about the pay gap at www.aauw.org/what-we-do/research.
- Join AAUW and help ensure pay equity for all: www.aauw.org/join.
- Support eSmart, Teck Trek and Tech Savvy programs to expose girls to women in STEM professions.
- Encourage students to take on nontraditional leadership roles including science and math classes & clubs, athletics and politics.
- Let companies know that paying workers fairly is necessary for legal and ethical reasons and that fair pay can be good for the bottom line, increasing worker morale, reducing absenteeism and improving work performance.