
The Issue of the Gender Wage Gap in the Patriarchal Society

It is a widely publicized statistic that spreads national outrage: that women make 77 cents to every dollar a man makes. You see it in feminist articles, hear it in the state of the union address, and probably hear it in any political discussion concerning gender and public policy. What the public doesn't know and what doesn't get publicized however, is that numerous studies, dating back to 1996 and recent studies, even a study done last year by the American Association for University Women, shows this figure to be misleading and that the claim that women make 77 cents for every dollar a man makes for the exact same work is completely false. In this paper, I will bust the myth surrounding this figure, prove that the gap is much smaller than the widely publicized 23 cent difference, shed light on why the gap is the way it is, address why some poor developing nations can seem (with misleading statistics) to be more progressive in gender equality than the United States, and finally address the "problem" of gender roles in society, hopefully showing that even though it may contribute to a gap, gender role socialization may not be the problem progressives tend to think it is. My hope is that by the end of this paper, any self-identifying "feminist" reading it will think twice about bringing up the bogus 77 cent statistic and that truth and reason will prevail.

The reason that the 77-cents-to-a-dollar statistic is so misleading is because it only takes into account the median salary of all men in America versus the median salary of all women in America. It's easy to see this statistic, slap a label of discrimination on it because it fits nicely with our societal narrative of sexism, and call it a day. It's much harder to look further into the research to find the cause. A study by the AAUW attempts to address this by comparing data regarding men's and women's salaries while taking other factors into account. Looking at the numbers this study provides overall and ignoring the authors' arbitrary speculation, one can conclude as Christina Hoff Sommers, a self-identifying feminist, has concluded that "the AAUW has now joined ranks with serious economists who find that when you control for relevant differences between men and women (occupations, college majors, length of time in workplace) the wage gap narrows to the point of vanishing" (Sommers, 2012). The authors of the study themselves actually acknowledge that non-discriminatory factors are in play when discussing the wage gap. They admit that "Education and occupational differences between men and women help explain the pay gap... Both discrimination and cultural gender norms can play a role in the "explained" portion of the pay gap" (Corbett & Hill, 2012). Notice that they do not claim that discrimination and gender norms are responsible for the gap, but merely that they "can play a role in the "explained" portion" of the gap. Their call to action in their conclusion contradicts their data outcome. While it cannot be undeniably proven from their data that discrimination is responsible for the gender wage gap, they still remain adamant that federal law is needed to protect workers from discrimination.

Looking into the data from this study more closely, we find that when comparing men and women in the same major, the data shows 4 majors in which men and women are equal in pay: Healthcare, Biological & Physical Sciences and Math, Education, and Humanities. The study also shows 4 majors in which men make more: Business, Engineering, Computer and Info Sciences, and Social Sciences, and also an "other" category in which men make more (Corbett & Hill, 2012). Now, one may take this data and conclude that in the areas of business,

engineering, computer and info sciences, and social sciences, (and whatever is included in the “other” category) that unfair discriminatory practices are at hand. This would be incorrect. This data does not take into account differing choices in occupation after college. For example, a woman who majors in engineering and decides to become a teacher will make far less than someone who gets a career in engineering.

Data comparing college grads one year after finishing college by occupation gives a better picture. According to the AAUW study, nurses and those in other healthcare occupations, social services professionals, those in business support and administrative assistance, life science professionals, those in math, computer, and physical sciences, and engineers made equal pay regardless of gender. In occupations of K-12 education, business and management, sales, and “other” occupations, men, on average, made more. However, if one does the math, the average gap drops to 8% or 92 cents for every man’s dollar, not 77 cents (Corbett & Hill, 2012). Now, one may take this data and conclude that women, on average, are paid 8% less than men for the same work. This would be incorrect. Economist Diana Furchtgott-Roth of the Manhattan Institute points out what is wrong with taking this data at face value. “The AAUW study classifies jobs as diverse as librarian, lawyer, professional athlete, and “media occupations” under a single rubric—“other white collar... So, the AAUW report compares the pay of male lawyers with that of female librarians; of male athletes with that of female communications assistants” (qtd. In Sommers, 2012). So, this data was cherry-picked with an agenda in mind. Also, this data still does not take hours worked into consideration. Multiple studies show that men work more hours. A study by the Harvard Business Review shows that a mere 9 percent of American mothers work more than 50 hours a week (Williams, 2013).

However, even when assuming the biased AAUW data is accurate and taking into consideration the difference in hours worked between men and women (which the AAUW study does), the wage gap drops to about 5.3% or 94.7 cents per dollar (Corbett & Hill, 2012). Now, one could take this percentage at face value and conclude that women, on average, are paid 5.3% less than men for the same work. This, too, would be incorrect. This data does not take into account that occupations also have various positions and functions, some of which pay more than others. We also have to consider factors which are difficult or impossible to scientifically or mathematically measure, such as ability to negotiate pay which men, on average, do better than women. Here are the words of the authors of the AAUW study exactly: “Another possible explanation for the unexplained portion of the pay gap is a gender difference in willingness and ability to negotiate salary. Negotiating a salary can make a difference in earnings, and men are more likely than women to negotiate their salaries” (Corbett & Hill, 2012). Though, the authors of this study come to a different conclusion, the data clearly shows that discrimination in the workplace is not widespread and systematic, but isolated and sporadic.

A study of the more general working population (not just college graduates) found that “Statistical analysis that includes those variables has produced results that collectively account for between 65.1 and 76.4 percent of a raw gender wage gap of 20.4 percent, and thereby leave an adjusted gender wage gap that is between 4.8 and 7.1 percent, roughly the same numbers as the AAUW study found (“An Analysis of Reasons for the Disparity in Wages Between Men and Women” 2009).

So, one may ask “if the 77-cents-to-a-dollar figure is so misleading, why is it so often quoted in political discussion among authorities in American politics such as President Barack Obama or Secretary of State Hillary Clinton?” It is true that Barack Obama has rallied supporters against

this perceived injustice in his state of the union address and Hillary Clinton, on her campaign website argues “that the deck is stacked for those at the top, making it harder for families to get ahead and stay ahead, especially women” (qtd. In Meyer, 2015). This statistic is shocking and spreads political outrage from the left, making it an effective tool of propaganda to secure votes from that demographic. When we look at Obama’s administration, we see that “Women working in President Barack Obama’s White House make just 84.2 cents for each dollar earned by men, according to an American Enterprise Institute analysis of 2015 salary data...the median salary earned by men was \$78,000, which is \$12,350 higher than the median female salary of \$65,650” (Scher, 2015). Also, when we look at the State Department under the leadership of Hillary Clinton, we find that it “paid men \$16,000 more on average in annual salary than women, according to data from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)” (Meyer, 2015). Why would such vocal advocates of pay equality have inequality in the wages of men and women in their own departments? As studies have proven, there are non-discriminatory factors to consider when looking at the wage gap. However, I do find it irresponsible of those in such positions to misrepresent data for their own political gain.

How easy is it to manipulate statistics to support the commonly cited 77 cent statistic? Consider this study published by the Journal of Economic Surveys that investigated “more than 260 published papers covering 63 countries during the time period 1960s – 1990s” which found that researchers who studied subjects with “better comparability” (same hours, same productivity, etc.) came up with a lower wage gap as a result (Weichselbaumer & Winter-Ebmer, 2005). So, it is obvious that when studies give us a view of the full picture instead of trying to provoke a response of anger and outrage to suit a political agenda, the wage gap “narrows to the point of vanishing” (Sommers, 2012). However, without getting the full picture, we are left to assume and fill in the blanks of modern society with whatever makes sense to us.

Among the factors that contribute to the wage gap, let’s not overlook the importance of freedom of choice in this argument. Differences in choice of college major account for a “sizable portion” of the gender wage gap. Whether this difference is due to a difference in training within those majors or a difference in abilities and tastes between students is unclear, however, what is clear is that non-discriminatory factors, and not sex-based workplace discrimination on the part of employers (Brown & Corcoran, 1996).

Now, one might say that women are brainwashed by a patriarchal society into entering careers which fit their gender roles. However, another study by the National Center for Policy Analysis shows that “Women’s work-life patterns and their occupational preferences are significant factors in determining wages” (Venable, 2002). That is to say, instead of being “brainwashed by patriarchal society” to take lower paying jobs, “women often choose these occupations because of the flexibility they offer” and after adjusting for the factor of men and women in the same occupation, the gap between the sexes in pay is “very narrow” again, as supported by the earlier cited AAUW study (Venable, 2002). The Harvard Business Review statistic previously cited already shows that mothers are likely not to work full-time for the obvious reason of wanting to spend more time with their children. This article also speaks in detail of how hard work and sacrifice have become a part of the American male identity. The author notes that, because of this sense of work ethic and masculinity being linked in male gender identity, it may be difficult to change society in such a way that men work less. “In a culture that conflates manly heroism with long hours, it’s going to take more than a few regressions to convince you it wasn’t really necessary, after all, for your work to devour you” (Williams, Joan; 2013). These differences between the sexes are apparent in nations other than the USA as

well.

All over the developed world women make up the large majority of the part-time workforce, and surveys suggest they want it that way. According to the Netherlands Institute for Social Research, in 2008 only 4% of the 70% of Dutch women who worked part-time wished they had a full-time job. A British Household Panel Survey interviewing 3,800 couples discovered that among British women, the happiest were those working part-time... A 2007 Pew Research survey came up with similar results for American women: Among working mothers with minor children, 60% said they would prefer to work part-time, while only 21% wanted to be in the office full-time (and 19% said they'd like to give up their job altogether). How about working fathers? Only 12% would choose part-time and 70% wanted to be full-time (Hymowitz, 2012).

Another well-intentioned, but misinforming dataset that is often the topic of discussion among debates concerning gender equality is one performed by the World Economic Forum which shows the United States (and other developed nations) lagging behind poorer nations such as Rwanda and Burundi in terms of gender economic equality. This study measures only equality and ignores quality of life of men and women. Men and women in a nation can be equally poor and miserable, but score favorably in this study. A writer for the British political editorial site, SPIKED, notes the irony of some of the nations that scored more favorably than the UK: according to this report, American women who want to enjoy greater gender equality should move to Burundi — a small East African country whose president held a sham election to garner an unconstitutional third term and who is currently threatening to commit genocide against his own people in order to keep power. Burundi also has a continuing history of widespread rape committed by both private citizens and government officials (Williams, Joanna; 2014).

Burundi is clearly not the feminist utopia that this study paints it to be. This study also “ignores that men and women are interconnected, and that their happiness and well-being are interconnected” (Durgin, 2015). Furthermore, in her video blog, “The Factual Feminist,” Christina Hoff Sommers (the author of the previously cited Huffington Post article) refers to a study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* that studied gender norms in 55 different countries in the world. It found that, on average, “women tended to be more nurturing, risk-averse, and emotionally expressive while men tended to be more competitive, risk-taking, and emotionally flat” (“Are gender roles a marker of true equality?” 2015). Interestingly enough, the study found that the gender differences were more pronounced in more prosperous, developed nations like the USA, Canada, and France and less so in poorer nations with less freedom. Even modern feminists would agree that these gender roles could contribute a great deal to the gender pay gap in the countries that reinforce them. However, this may not necessarily be a bad thing. Sommers argues that gender roles are not a sign of oppression upon society but a sign of freedom and prosperity. An article in the *National Review* notes that “when you have a freer society, you may not be able to reach the kind of parity that women have in mind, because women in a free society won’t make the same choices as men” (Durgin, 2015). Maybe gender differences aren’t an enemy to be defeated but something that should be accepted and celebrated.

So what can or should be done about the gender pay gap in America? Different sources have put forward different solutions. The *Wall Street Journal* article on the wage gap discusses two proposals often brought up by modern feminists. First, that fathers should take equal responsibility for child care. While, ideally, I’m in favor and agree that fathers do have a moral obligation to help care for the child, this as a basis for federal law regarding the wage gap is not

pragmatic. Even if a large number of men stepped up and took responsibility,

“Over 40% of American children are now born to unmarried women. A significant number—though not a majority—are living with their child's father at birth. But in the next few years when those couples break up, which is what studies show they tend to do, guess who will be left minding the kids?” (Hymowitz, 2012).

The other plan of action the article brings forth is “generous family-leave and child-care policies” like those of Sweden and Iceland (Hymowitz, 2012). However, the article notes that these nations also have gender wage gaps, because the gender roles, like that of a nurturing mother, still persist in those nations. As the author notes, “mothers still take more time off than fathers after the baby arrives. When they do go back to work, they're on the job for fewer hours” (Hymowitz, 2012). Is this a sign of oppression or freedom of choice? Thinkprogress.org offers another solution noticing the use of gender quotas for political parties in the 1970s, and noting that “the U.S., meanwhile, doesn't mandate gender representation in either politics or the corporate world” (Covert, 2013). This would surely cause controversy and not actually help the problem. I would argue that this would deny these careers to men, whom may or may not be more qualified for the position than the woman who will eventually fill it for just being a woman and this would add more fuel to the fire of those who notice this kind of discrimination in our law and add to the already mounting tension that exists due to such government-mandated quotas in public programs that lead to men's programs being defunded without the bat of an eye and women's programs being valued higher. In addition, how will an official government mandate of female representation in politics or business fix the lack of interest among most women to work in those fields (partly because of non-flexibility of the required schedules for higher positions)? Simultaneously, as a nation, to meet these quotas, we would have to socially pressure or force women to take more interest in such things, thus taking away a woman's freedom of choice, telling a woman she is too under/misinformed to make her own decisions about her own career, all under the guise of “empowering” her. “We don't know if there is a way to design workplaces so that women would work more or men would work less or both. What we do know is that no one, anywhere, has yet figured out how to do it” (Hymowitz, 2012). Personally, I think any true step toward real progress, for women, for men, for humanity, will come from accepting our differences and be more educated on the subject instead of believing all of the media hype, fabricated statistics, and political rhetoric that we are bombarded with every day.