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The Gender Pay Gap; Continually Hurting Women

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Writing Process

This particular project was our third and final piece to be written for my English 200H class in which the subject deals with "Gender in America." This assignment called for us to research deeply into our chosen topic dealing with gender issues as well as produce original research through a survey or interview. To begin this assignment I began researching scholarly articles relating to my topic, "Gender Pay Gap." After gathering scholarly research, I then produced a survey with responses from my fellow classmates in order to incorporate their perspective into my writing. Once the first draft was completed, two of my fellow classmates reviewed it and gave me excellent feedback to improve my paper. After fixing my first draft my second draft was once again reviewed by two of my fellow classmates as well as my professor, Dr. Vorachek. Being able to have my paper revised multiple times gave me the confidence and ability to produce my best possible work.

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Discrimination is the distribution of unequal benefits to people of different social statuses despite having the same credentials and merit (Leutwiler, Jennifer, and Brian H. Kleiner 102). The act of pay discrimination occurs when an employer allows their own predispositions about an employee's abilities to have an effect on how they are compensated and promoted within the company. Throughout the workforce pay discrimination comes about in many different forms, but the one particular form that is most relevant today is the pay discrimination seen between women and men in the work world. In 2012, full-time female workers made 77 cents for every dollar earned by their male co-workers, which leaves a wage gap of 23 percent. This statistic means that according to the current pace of women's pay increasing, it would not be until 2058 when women would finally reach pay equality with men (Giapponi and McEvoy 143). This startling statistic is hard to grasp, but it is evident that even in our world today women are being discriminated when it comes to pay, though they are just as productive as men. There are many different arguments about why there is such an evident pay gap, but after researching this issue in great depth it is inarguable that this pay discrimination boils down to one particular source, gender. Multiple factors within the workforce contribute to the gender issue being faced by women including such things as job promotion and the level of authority women are allowed to possess within a businesses' infrastructure, but

regardless of what factors help add to this issue, there must be something done to alleviate the problem. Though some may say women being paid less has nothing to do with gender but rather the fields they choose to work in, the fact remains women are still facing pay discrimination in every field of work, and if this is not fixed the pay gap may never completely disappear.

In order to grasp the full understanding of the gender pay gap it is important to learn the historical background of this particular issue. Women began entering the workforce in mass quantities during World War II when men were being sent overseas to fight. They were placed in low paying positions such as weaponry manufacturing plants and other factory jobs as well as care-giving jobs such as nursing (Blau and Khan 7). Though at the time this was a very progressive period for women in our culture since they were finally being integrated into the economy, this facet might have been a double-edged sword. Even though women were finally receiving jobs outside of the home they were also low paying, low status jobs that did not allow any room for promotion. This means that once the war was over and men began to reenter the workforce, they would now be taking higher status positions that would leave room for promotion, while women would now be stuck in low status positions with little room for advancement. Some may argue that this factor may not be relevant to the issue of pay discrimination at all and that women were not stuck in these positions after World War II, but once the 1960s came around this fact becomes inarguable (Blau and Khan 13).

The discrimination of women in the workforce remained steady after World War II, and it was not until the early 1960s that newspapers finally stopped publishing separate job listings for men and women (Blau and Khan 13). Around this time jobs were

being heavily categorized by sex, where the most prominent and highest paying jobs would be listed as, "Help Wanted-Male." Separate job opportunities meant unequal opportunities and between the 1950s and 1960s women with full time jobs earned on average 50 cents for every dollar their male counterparts would earn in the same job (Giapponi and McEvoy 140). This is a point in history where the pay discrimination based on sex became so bad legislation finally had to be created and passed. Due to obvious pay discrimination based on gender differences within the workforce, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act of 1963. This was the first law to require that woman's pay had to be equal to a man's when they had the same level of job. The main purpose of this law was to completely eliminate the discrimination and damaging effect low wages were having on women's living standards. The Equal Pay Act stated that an employer cannot discriminate between employees in any organization on the foundation of sex by distributing wages at a reduced rate than what they pay to employees of the opposite sex for equal work under the same working conditions (Lips, Hilary, and Lawson 679). The reason for bringing the Equal Pay Act of 1963 into the discussion is to reinforce the fact that blatant pay discrimination based solely on gender has been around for years. It is also important to see the point that although this issue was addressed over fifty years ago, even women today are facing the same issues. Although legislation has been passed throughout history to try to alleviate the very obvious issue of gender pay discrimination, the question that should arise is why has the progress for women's pay equality moved at such a slow pace if it has already been addressed in the past?

Now that there is an understanding of how the issue of pay discrimination arose throughout history, it is important to understand the current factors that reinforce the fact

that pay discrimination between men and women is still flourishing. One of the most prominently known factors contributing to the pay disparity faced by women today has to do with the level of authority women can obtain within the organization where they are employed. Mohamad Alkadry and Leslie Tower, professors of public administration at Florida International University and the University of West Virginia, conducted research on the public work sector to see the effect gender has on pay. Their main focus throughout their research was to find how gender affects the amount of authority that is given to an employee, which in turn affects the variance in pay between men and women. After gathering research of over 26,047 executives in 2,598 different companies, the results were conclusive that women were undoubtedly the minorities in high-level positions within companies. The evidence collected showed that throughout all of these companies female executives only appeared five percent of the time, and the amount of female CEOs was even smaller, as they appeared less than two percent (Alkadry and Tower 743). This evidence can reiterate the fact that women are not given the same opportunities to achieve higher levels of authority within their respective companies when compared to their male counterparts. Since men are the majority when it comes to high paying executive jobs, it only reinforces the issue of the gender pay gap. Women are the minority in high power, high paying positions while men continue to flourish in this particular aspect, and the correlation between low authority and low pay for women becomes apparent once again.

After compiling their research they found that women tended to work for much smaller firms than compared to their male counterparts, which performed at the same level of efficiency, but brought in much smaller profits due to size differentials. This

factor led to the finding that, in this particular sample of executives taken, the female executives on average earned 25 percent less than their male counterparts (Wanzeried 200). Taking these facts into consideration it is evident to see that the level of authority held within a corporation, where women appear to be the minority, directly affects pay. The drivers of salary in the work world include variables such as size of the organization and authority levels held by a particular employee, and, as we see through these authors' research, these are both factors where women appear as the minorities (Alkadry and Tower 741). It is apparent that even when women achieve high executive positions within their companies they are still earning less. The factor that can influence this fact has to do with the size of their firm. If women are only allowed to reach executive positions in smaller firms than their male counterparts it will lead to lower pay since smaller firms will have lesser assets than the larger firms. This is where the 25 percent pay disparity faced by women in executive positions appears. If women are still the minorities in authoritative positions within large corporations and are forced into working for smaller firms, then the pay disproportion will continue.

Though women face pay discrimination across the board, in order to grasp the full extent of the situation it is important to look at the type of women that face the worst discrimination, and these women are mothers. Recent studies show that women who have children earn about seven percent less than women who are childless (Holland and Courteille 48). This means that not only are they far behind in compensation when compared to their male counterparts, but mothers are also behind their peers who have chosen not to have children (Holland and Courteille 48). In particular, what women who want to become mothers in our society today face can be explained by the "preference

theory.” The preference theory is a new theory for explaining and predicting how women’s choices between the work world and family are direct factors relating to the gender pay gap. This theory argues that in today’s modern societies women’s preferences have become a central determinant for lifestyle choices with the choice between children and family life or employment and competition within the workforce (Zeigler 205).

The argument the preference theory brings up is that in our society today women are forced into choosing between three lifestyle choices: work-based, family-based, or a mixture of the two (Zeigler 205). This forces women to either invest fully in a family or their career or try and balance both. Women who try to balance the two lifestyles cannot fully invest in their careers and are in turn forced into choosing jobs that are flexible enough to leave time for the children and family. This factor forces women to enter into fields of work that pay less, such as school teaching or part time jobs that can allow them to maintain a balance in their life. Since these women cannot invest fully in their careers and have to choose work that does not pay as well as men’s jobs, it is clear to see how mothers in our society today face another barrier that directly relates to the lack of pay. The preference theory poses a very good argument about how our society today forces women who want to have a family into distinct lifestyle choices that do not let them fully invest in their career. Since mothers have to make these particular lifestyle choices they are in turn forced to take lower paying jobs, which once again adds to the pay gap between them and their male counterparts.

It is important to look at pay discrimination from another perspective before making any assumptions on the issue. Some may argue that the preference theory has no validity and that women are not forced into these distinct lifestyle choices. People may

argue that society does not force women to take lower paying jobs such as school teaching in order to allow themselves to have a balance between work and family. They may state that the reason we do see a pay gap has nothing to do with pay discrimination, it is just the types of jobs women are drawn to. Though this does pose a very good counterargument, there can be no dispute that pay discrimination due to gender does in fact exist. Regardless of what jobs women chose to work in they earn less than their male counterparts even when producing the same amount of work. Data from a survey conducted by the National Association of Female Executives backs up this fact. For example, male accountants with over 20 years of experience earned on average \$119,636 a year while women of the same level of experience earned \$80,375, which is a 30 percent pay disparity. Another example to back up the point that pay discrimination is directly caused by gender has to do with the average pay received by medical surgeons. On average male surgeons earned \$489,000 while women earned \$337,000, which is another 30 percent pay disparity (Graham 512).

It is obvious with these particular examples where the counterargument brought up falls through. Even if one was to disagree with the existence of the preference theory and claim that the pay disparity we see today only has to do with the jobs women are drawn to, it is evident to see that is not the case. Women who are at the same level of experience as their male coworkers are still earning less. With the data shown it cannot be disputed that women's gender causes pay discrimination, not the particular fields they chose to work in. The pay disparity towards women has nothing to do with the fields that they chose to work in; it boils down to the fact that they are women.

In order to gain an even greater insight into this particular issue from another angle I decided to conduct a survey to seek the perspective of students ranging from 18 to 19 years old who will be graduating and entering the workforce in a couple of years. There were 52 respondents to this survey with 27 of them being women and 25 men. To reinforce the fact that the pay discrepancy women face has nothing to do with the particular fields that they choose to work in, I asked the respondents to describe the fields they plan working in upon graduating. Out of the 52 respondents only three of them were planning on working in the fields outside of business and engineering and these three were undecided. These results help reinforce that the pay gap cannot be attributed to the fields that women work in because they are choosing to follow careers in the same fields as men. I also wanted to see the opinions my peers had on the existence of a gender pay gap and to see if they believe this issue is close to being resolved. Their responses once again were not surprising: everyone who took the survey said that they believed there is a pay gap because of gender in the current work world, and all but five respondents said they do not believe this issue is close to being resolved. What can be drawn from the results gathered is that students my age believe there is pay discrimination in the work world due to do gender bias, and they do not believe this issue is close to being solved. These outcomes make it apparent that the issue of pay discrimination is a relevant problem within the workforce today, and current undergraduate students realize this is a problem they may face once beginning their careers because the issue is far from being resolved.

Though it is disheartening to know that women are still facing this particular issue today there are things being done to progressively diminish the problem at hand.

Legislation such as the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act has been passed through Congress in order to help women in the work world. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act came about after the Supreme Court turned down a recent employee of the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, Lilly Ledbetter, when she tried to sue the company for pay discrimination. When Ledbetter tried to sue Goodyear for the obvious discrimination she faced while working there she was turned down because it was said that she waited too long to propose her case which caused her to lose the trial (Lyons 365-368). Though it was a heartbreaking loss for Ledbetter, her influence on the issue of pay discrimination did not end. After the ruling, she proposed a petition to Congress for them to pass Legislation that would allow women to have extended time to propose a case if they were to sue a company for pay discrimination. In 2009, two years after her failed case against Goodyear, Congress passed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, and women were now given a time extension that would allow a fair period of time to construct a case against the company they are attempting to sue (Lyons 372).

Another piece of legislation that has made a positive impact at diminishing the issue of pay discrimination is the Fair Pay Act of 2005. The Fair Pay Act was a revision of the Equal Pay Act where instead of requiring equal pay for equal work it would now demand equal pay for jobs that are the same in skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. Employers would also now be required to disclose all of their payment information to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to ensure that there were no hidden pay disparities within their particular organizations (Giapponi and McEvoy 141). It is important to see that although progress is moving slowly to ensure that women do not face pay discrimination there are still being steps made in the right direction.

Legislations such as the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and the Fair Pay Act of 2005 have helped a large amount of women who have faced pay discrepancies on the behalf of their employers and have set up barriers so women in the future do not have to suffer for the same thing. Though legislation being passed such as these two labor acts are small steps towards resolving the issue faced by women, there must be more done to have a greater impact on the issue. Advancement in resolving this issue is not a bad thing, but the fact is that in order to completely alleviate the issue of pay discrimination, progress has to be achieved at a much larger scale in order to have a lasting impact.

With all of the data and findings present it is very hard to argue against the fact that there is a pay disparity in today's work world that is directly related to gender. Regardless of what fields women chose to work in it is evident that they are being paid less than men even when working in the same conditions and having the same levels of work experience. Throughout history women have faced pay disparities due to such factors as job segregation for the mere fact that they are women and have not been able to completely escape the bias that haunts them. Although things such as legislation are being passed to help these women, the issue still remains evident. Women are persecuted in the workforce, and it is upsetting to know that this issue is far from being over. If more progress is not made in terms of resolving this issue then the livelihoods of women in the future could be in jeopardy. It is inarguable that women face pay discrimination due to their gender, and there needs to be more awareness of this issue in order to help alleviate the problem.

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