

The Gender Pay Gap – Myth vs. Fact

“The pay gap is closing fast.”

In the United States, according to an estimate [published](#) by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, the wage gap will not close at this rate until 2058, which is another generation away for women of today.

The UN recently [reported](#) that the worldwide wage gap will take 70 years to close at the rate at which it is currently closing.

From 2005-2014, the weekly earnings gender gap [closed](#) by only 1.5 percentage points. From 1995-2004, the gap closed by 4.9 percentage points and 8.1 percentage points from 1985-1994. The rate has slowed down tremendously and very little gains are being made.

“The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act has solved the problems of a wage gap.”

Not necessarily. In 2010, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research [found](#) that 62 percent of women in the private sector felt they were strongly discouraged from discussing wages or feared repercussions from doing so. A much smaller amount of women in the public sector felt as though discussing wages would result in repercussions. This is highly reflective of the wage gap in the private sector, which is far larger than that in the public sector.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 clarified that any inequitable payments are unlawful, even if they result from a decision made in the past. Lilly Ledbetter was paid less than her male counterparts but did not know this for many years due to a common workplace practice that forbids employees from sharing salary information. A lower court decision in Ledbetter’s lawsuit against her employer (Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. plant in Alabama) said that she filed her grievance too late and the U.S. Supreme Court agreed.

“Women aren’t assertive enough to ask for raises.”

In a 2007 study, it was [found](#) that male employers are less likely to hire a woman who negotiates about salary, as the men perceive these women as “demanding.” Many women are aware they will be punished for acting in such a way and some will avoid this, by no fault of the woman but by fault of the culture.

“Women earn less because they take time off for motherhood.”

It is [estimated](#) that for every child a woman has, she suffers a five percent wage penalty. Studies show that in comparison with female managers who are not pregnant, those who are pregnant are perceived to be less committed to the job, less dependable, and more emotional. Studies show part-time work, lower experience, and interrupted work only

contributed to one-third of the motherhood penalty. Discrimination plays a significant role in the limitations for working mothers.

While motherhood is a choice, it is one society has somewhat forced on women – it is not totally socially acceptable for a father to take time off of work to raise his children and it is basically expected of new mothers. In a study done by the American Association of University Women, they [found](#) that within 10 years of graduating, 23 percent of mothers had left the workforce, compared to 1 percent of fathers out of the workforce. Additionally, 17 percent of mothers worked part-time, in comparison to 2 percent of fathers working part-time.

Additionally, Professors Lawrence Kahn and Francine Blau at Cornell University [estimated](#) that one-third of the gap in female participation in the labor force is a result of poor family leave and workplace flexibility. The United States is the only wealthy country that does not have paid maternity leave.

In fact, a study done by the University of Massachusetts in 2010 [found](#) that fathers in the United States earn 11 percent more than non-fathers. Research has [shown](#) that employers are less likely to hire women with children compared to childless women and that if they do choose to hire a mother, employers offer a lower salary than they do to other women. Women with children are punished with the motherhood penalty, whereas fathers actually earn more when they have children.

And the majority of mothers, 67 percent in 2010, [are](#) actually members of the labor force, despite contrary to popular belief. Since 1860, the proportion of working mothers has increased by 800 percent!

“Saying women make 77 cents to every dollar a man makes is an exaggeration.”

By comparing differences in annual earnings between men and women, we find that there is about a 23 cent difference per dollar according to the Census Bureau. Women of color, in fact, suffer from an even larger wage gap. If you look at weekly earnings for women, that figure is a little smaller, around an 18 cent difference.

In 1963, when the Equal Pay Act was passed, women only [made](#) 59 cents on the dollar. That figure rose to 77 cents by 2004 and has increased by less than half a penny every year since.

“Women choose lower-paying careers than men so it’s understandable they make less money.”

Women do tend to choose lower-paying careers and the fact that those careers are paid lower is part of the problem. However, a wage gap exists regardless.

One year after graduation, it was [found](#) that women earned 82 percent of what the men earned, with similar education and experience as their male counterparts. 10 years after

graduation, those women were only earning 69 percent of what the men were earning. After accounting for occupation, hours worked, age, college major, and many other factors, an astonishing seven percent difference between the earnings of women and men was left unaccounted for within a year of graduation and a 12 percent unexplained difference was found within 10 years.

Out of the 20 most common occupations for women and the 20 most common occupations for men, only four occupations are [shared](#) in these lists. A mere 5.4 percent of women work in male-dominated fields.

“Women in ‘male’ jobs such as computer programming still [face](#) a pay gap compared with their male counterparts.” In 2012, female computer programmers earned 84% of what male computer programmers earned. Female financial managers earned an astounding 70% of what male financial managers earned. Female lawyers earned only 80% of what male lawyers earned.