



Understanding Gender and Wage Gap: A Theoretical Update

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ABSTRACT

The gender wage gap, or the measure of what women are paid relative to men, is a much-discussed topic among policymakers, statisticians, and economists. The average income by women of 82 cents for every \$1 earned by men of all races is a highly cited statistic. But does these stats reflect women from different societies (developed and developing) or women of colour? We address this issue of the gender wage gap and the possible reasons behind the drivers of the wage gap. We start by explaining the concept of gender wage gap in developing countries, focusing on India. Further, we try to understand the gender wage gap through sociological and economic perspectives and differences in negotiation and personality traits in the gender wage gap from a psychological perspective. The authors further highlight the importance of the choice of education, profession, and the womanhood penalty levied on women restricting opportunities in the labour market. Lastly, the author addresses the limitations of linear studies highlighting the wage gap with a call for more multivariate studies. Whether the gender wage gap is wide, narrow, or nonexistent for one reason or another, policies and social responsibilities are suggested.

Keywords: *Gender wage gap, personality, negotiation, womanhood penalty.*

1. Introduction

In an infamous interview in 2018 with Channel 4 broadcaster Cathy Newman, Clinical Psychologist Dr. Jordan Peterson stated that saying the wage gap between men and women exists only due to sex is wrong (Channel 4 News, 2018). He further elaborated that most univariate analysis on the gender wage gap leads to skewed data resulting in faulty interpretations. Claiming women, in aggregate, are paid less than men needs to be broken down into and in association with more measurable factors such as age, interest, occupation, and personality. Regarding personality traits, Dr. Peterson gives an example of agreeableness (McCrae & Costa, 1996, 1999), a trait conceptualization from the Five-Factor Theory of personality, which categorizes people as being soft-hearted, trusting, generous, obedient, lenient, and good-natured. Studies indicate that agreeable people are paid less than those who are less agreeable for the same job, and large-scale population-based studies have shown that, on average, women are more agreeable than men (Feingold, 1994; Costa et al., 2001), which is sometimes the reason why some people are paid less than others. Of course, this is a vast generalization, and there are several cases where women get paid more than men.

In the latter half of the 20th century, women's labour force participation expanded dramatically. Increasing numbers of women are working longer hours and pursuing higher education. Despite this progress, ongoing debates exist regarding the significant wage gap between men and women. So what is the gender wage gap? What pushes it? What are the factors behind the gender wage gap? And how can it be addressed? This paper also addresses the different theories that have studied the gender wage gap from sociological, economic, and psychological perspectives. This paper also discusses the various methodological flaws of gender pay gap studies and how to address them. Finally, we conclude with a discussion on policies that safeguard women's interests in the workplace.

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What is Gender Wage Gap?

The discrepancy between what men and women earn is known as the gender wage gap. This ratio is occasionally expressed as a percentage or in dollars in western nations. It is typically calculated by dividing women's pay by men's wages. This indicates how much a woman earns for every dollar paid to a male. This gender pay ratio is frequently measured for year-round, full-time workers. It compares the annual wages (of hourly wage and salaried workers) of the median ("typical") man to that of the median ("typical") woman; measured in this manner, the current gender pay ratio is 0.796, or expressed as a percentage, it is 79.6%. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). In other words, a woman earns around 80 cents for every dollar a man earns.

Sometimes, the wage gap between men and women is defined by how much fewer women earn than males. To determine the gap from the ratio as previously specified, subtract the ratio from 1. If the gender pay ratio is around 80% (or 80 cents on the dollar), then women are paid 20% less than males (or 20 cents less per dollar). A higher disparity between men's and women's incomes results in a lower ratio and a more comprehensive earnings gap (Gould et al., 2016). The median wage of salary workers is used rather than the average wage and salary workers because a small number of individuals might distort averages by earning much more or less than the rest of the sample. However, median salaries are only determined hourly and include all workers who report working at least one hour per week. This hourly measure represents a modest "correction" in research methods, as it accounts for the fact that men work an average of more hours per year than women and that more women work part-time.

Prevalence of Gender Wage Gap

Using the most recent statistics from the Census Bureau, women of all races earned an average of 82 cents for every dollar earned by males of all races in 2018. This computation is the ratio of the median yearly earnings of women working full-time, year-round, to those of their male counterparts, which results in a gender wage gap of 18 cents. In developed countries, barriers against women's entry into the labour market differ, and women's labour force participation and employment rates converge to those of men (Aldan, 2021). In these countries, public interest focuses on gender gaps in earnings and other work-related dimensions, such as occupational segregation. On the other hand, significant gender gaps in labour force participation and employment rates remain in developing countries, and discussions focus on policies for the assimilation of women into the labour force. India is a developing country in which the labour market is characterized by low female labour force participation and employment rates but a high gender wage gap. According to the most recent (2018) Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), India scored 108th out of 149 nations on the gender gap index. While India performed better on salary equality for equivalent labour, ranking 72nd, it placed 142nd on the sub-index of economic opportunity and participation. This paradox is due to the distinction between uneven pay and the gender pay gap.

In a country like India, the causes of the gender wage gap are somewhat more complex and might be linked to socioeconomic and structural factors. Girls are occasionally excluded from school or forced to leave school early. Even if they are educated, many women are forbidden by their families from working. Women who enter the workforce frequently need extended absences for maternity, child care, and even other family members' medical care. These variables result in women falling far behind men in earnings over time. Therefore, the gender pay gap in India is still relatively large. According to the March 2019 Monster Salary Index (MSI), women in the United States earn 19% less than men (Gender pay gap still high, 2019). The poll indicated that the median gross hourly wage for males in India in 2018 was 242.49, while the median gross hourly wage for women was 196.3, implying that men earned 46.19 more than women. According to the poll, the disparity in compensation between men and women exists in all major businesses. In the IT services industry, males make 26% more than women, whereas men earn 24% more in the manufacturing industry.

The fact that there is considerable variation by race and ethnicity must be addressed when analyzing the wage gap for women. Median earnings cited by US Census Bureau do not represent each woman's experience. Women of colour and Asian women suffer the most disparity in the wage gap. Tongan women made 75 cents for every \$1 earned by white, non-Hispanic males, while Filipino women earned 83 cents and Nepali women earned 50 cents (Harwood, 2019). The larger wage gaps for most women of colour result from the damaging effects of gender bias, racial and ethnic bias, and other prejudices on their earnings.

Theoretical explanations of the gender wage gap

Sociological perspective

From a sociological viewpoint, discrimination results from power imbalances due to the privileged and disfavored societal positions (Reskin & Bielby, 2005). In simple words, it states that societal norms are the root of gender inequality, as norms define modes of behavior that are consistent with a gender division of labour and power. Different theories, such as theories of conflict, segregation (Bergmann, 1974; Bielby & Baron, 1984; Collins et al., 1993; Cohen, 2011), and feminization (Weisberg, 1993; Douglas, 1998), theorize why women do not receive equal pay for equal work.

The conflict theory tradition emphasizes the element of subordination, and approaches emerging from stratification theory emphasize various outcomes that differ in parallel to wages and labour market status (Seguino, 2007). Women from societies encouraging more traditional gender roles are less to benefit from increased job opportunities (Fernandez & Fogli, 2009; Alesina & Giuliano, 2010). Women who live in areas where traditional gender norms are more prevalent have worse economic outcomes, even if they do not share those values themselves (Charles et al., 2018). According to the segregation theory, many cultures impose specific spaces where individuals are not allowed to function at par, which spills to other spheres of society, including the labour market. Feminization theory suggests that access to jobs is unequal between men and women, and workplace participation for women is only acceptable in occupations consistent with their lower status.

Economic perspective

The economic viewpoint of inequality distinguishes between unevenness rooted in underlying productivity differentials and inequity, which cannot be explained away by objective differences in productivity-related characteristics and thus is attributed to tastes (Becker, 1957; Krueger, 1963; Phelps, 1972; Stiglitz, 1973; Ashenfelter & Oaxaca, 1987). The taste-based theory of inequality, started by Becker (1957), argues that if the privileged group in society has a distaste for some other groups, then privileged workers may require to be reimbursed for the distress. Inequality stems from

women's co-workers demanding compensation for sharing the work environment with women or from firms' clients being compensated for the disutility of receiving service from women. Both sociology and economics view inequality as a result of relatively slow-moving institutions (Roland, 2008), resulting in a slow decline in adjusted gender wage gaps. Changes in disparity stem from deviations in an organization (sociological view) or changes in tastes (economic view).

Psychological perspective

(i) Negotiation and pay gap

One prominent account for the gender gap in pay—the difference in average earnings between women and men—is that women and men negotiate differently (Mazei et al., 2015). Also, women initiate negotiations less often than men (Azmat & Petrongolo, 2014) and ask for less than men (Gerhart & Rynes, 1991). This difference is magnified when the evaluators of the negotiation are men (Bowles et al., 2007), which, when paired with the overrepresentation of men in upper-level management (US Department of Labour, Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2018), can partially account for women tending to negotiate for lower salaries than men.

These researches support the existence of gender differences in negotiation which further leads to differences in wage gap in adulthood. But the origin of differences in negotiation has not been explored. A recent study by Arnold and McAuliffe (2021) tried to address this gap by focusing on the origin of gender differences in negotiation. Using a developmental approach to fill this gap by examining negotiation in 4 to 9-year-old children. The focus of this study was to see (a) whether girls in this age range would negotiate differently than boys and (b) whether girls, like women, would ask for less from a male than a female evaluator. 240 children between the ages of 4 and 9 years old negotiated for a bonus with a female or a male evaluator. The results showed that boys asked for the same bonus from a male and a female evaluator. Older girls, in contrast, asked for a smaller bonus from a male than a female evaluator. The findings of the study suggest that a gender gap in negotiation emerges surprisingly early in development, highlighting childhood as a critical period for understanding the origins of the gender gap in negotiation, which can, in turn, shed light on the forces that sustain it in adulthood.

Moreover, full-time workers were more likely to set their pay by negotiation and state that they have successfully obtained a pay increase. Significantly, women under 40 were more likely to initiate the negotiation of a pay increase than women over 40. This suggests that age and gender intersectionality privileged younger women in negotiating wages (WGEA, 2018).

(ii) Personality and wage gap

In recent years the gender wage gap has also been linked to differences in the personality traits between men and women. Several studies have highlighted the impact of personality traits on gender-specific wages and the gender wage gap (Mueller & Plug, 2006; Manning & Swaffield, 2008; Braakmann, 2009; Heineck & Anger, 2010). Mueller and Plug (2006) identify two channels through which personality traits may affect earnings. First, based on the human capital theory, personality traits may be considered part of productive skills valued in the labour market. Second, personality traits may be correlated with work-related preferences; thus, certain personality skills lead to specific occupational choices. Mueller and Plug (2006) also found that 3–4% of the gender wage gap was explained by gender differences in Big-Five personality traits and differences in returns to these traits, with agreeableness being the essential trait in this regard. Heineck and Anger (2010) further reviewed the literature linking personality traits and career success. Based on this review, they expected that an external locus of control and agreeableness should be negatively correlated with wages, openness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and positive reciprocity positively, and extraversion should not be correlated with wages. They also expect that these hypothesized effects may vary by gender. The authors found that non-agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness have a significant positive impact on wages among men. In contrast, among women, conscientiousness and openness have a significant positive impact on wages.

Choice of Education

The human capital theory, the dominant paradigm in the economics of education, hypothesizes that men and women are paid the value of their productive contribution, implying identical wage determination structures and that gender wage differentials are attributable to differences in human capital investment between the sexes. A gender Gap exists in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) career choice. One significant reason for this gap is that women may find math- and science-based fields unwelcoming due to anticipated gender bias (Chen, 2013; Fouad et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2010). This means that even when women have interests aligned with STEM careers, they may still choose not to enter those fields, particularly if they perceive other careers where they are less likely to experience bias and discrimination as equally consistent with their interests and thus equally viable. Given that vocational interests shape perceptions of occupational fit (Holland, 1997) and that women contemplating work in STEM fields anticipate gender bias, cold professional and organizational climates, and lack of inclusion (Chen & Moons, 2015; Fouad et al., 2011; Hill et al., 2010; Ganley et al., 2018), having broad interests may cause women who do possess strong STEM related interests to gravitate away from STEM careers still because they may find other career choices equally aligned with their interests while not posing the same high risk for negative experiences in the form of gender bias and discrimination.

Choices of Profession

A study by the American Association of University Women, a feminist organization, shows that the wage gap shrinks to only 6.6 cents when you factor in different choices men and women make. And the key word here is "choice." The small wage gap that does exist has nothing to do with paying women less, let alone with sexism; it has to do with differences in individual career choices that men and women make (Miller & Vagins, 2018). In 2009, the US Department of Labour released a paper that examined more than 50 peer-reviewed studies and concluded that the often-cited 23 percent wage gap might be almost entirely the result of individual choices being made by both male and female workers. In a survey, Georgetown University compiled a list of the five best-paying college majors and the percentage of men or women majoring in those fields: Number 1 best-paying major: Petroleum Engineering: 87% male; Number 2: Pharmaceutical Sciences: 48% male; Number 3: Mathematics and Computer Science: 67% male; Number 4: Aerospace Engineering:

88% male; Number 5: Chemical Engineering: 72% male. Notice that women out-represent men in only one of the five top-paying majors— by only a few percentage points. Now consider the same study's list of the five worst-paying college majors: Number 1: Counseling and Psychology: 74% female; Number 2: Early Childhood Education: 97% female; Number 3: Theology and Religious Vocations: 66% male; Number 4: Human Services and Community Organization: 81% female; Number 5: Social Work: 88% female. Here, it's the women who lead in all but one category. Even within the same profession, men and women make different career choices that impact how much money they make. Take nursing, where male nurses, on the whole, earn 18% more than female nurses. One primary reason for such discrepancy is that male nurses gravitate to the best-paying nursing specialties, work longer hours, and disproportionately find jobs in cities with the highest compensation. Professor Linda Aiken of the University of Pennsylvania, the expert on nursing compensation, sums up the data: "Career choices and educational differences explain most, if not all, the gender gap in nursing." The Department of Labour paper concluded that once these differences are accounted for across all professions, the unexplained wage gap is between 4.8 and 7 percent—almost identical to the 6.6 percentage gap found by the AAUW. Additionally, most low-paid wage earners work in highly feminized service industries, such as the caring professions, hospitality, retail, and cleaning (Clare, 2017). Historically, female-dominated occupations such as care work have attracted lower wages than male-dominated occupations, structuring gender segregation of unequal wages.

Womanhood penalty

A vast literature in social sciences has focused on marital status and children as the key drivers of women's employment opportunities and options, wages, and well-being (Del Boca et al., 2008; Dukhovnov & Zagheni, 2015). Women's employment and occupational choices have been found to impact marriage quality and children's well-being. Gibb et al. (2014) utilized a longitudinal study of New Zealanders from birth to age 30. The authors estimated that men's labor force participation was not significantly correlated with having children, while women's employment and hours were correlated negatively with children. The authors concluded that employed mothers earn lower wages than childless women, on average, a.k.a. a wage penalty. In contrast with mothers, fathers have not appeared to suffer from lower employment rates or wages than childless men. This implies that motherhood widens the gender wage gap substantially. In India, the number of hurdles a female has to face during her professional life takes a toll on her, and in most cases, she gives up and quits her job. Early marriage, the birth of children, lack of support from family, health issues, and above all, the never-ending expectations of society make her weak. She starts doubting her capabilities as she sees herself defeated at every front. The overall impact is that a career is short-lived, and the chances of returning are negligible (Agarwal & Agarwal, 2020).

Statistical flaws of gender wage gap studies

Christina Hoff Sommers, a critic of contemporary feminism, in a YouTube interview, questioned the wage gap debate (PragerU, 2017). She stated, "If, for the same work, women make only 77 cents for every dollar a man makes, why do businesses not hire only women?". Wages are the most significant expense for most businesses. So, hiring only women would reduce costs by nearly a quarter, which would go right to the bottom line. Don't businesses want to be profitable? Or are they just really bad at math?" She goes on to state that it's the feminists, celebrities, and politicians spreading this wage gap myth who have the math problem. The 77cents-on-the-dollar statistics are calculated by dividing the median earnings of all women working full-time by all men working full-time. For example, if the average income of all men is 40,000 dollars a year and the average annual income of all women is 30,800 dollars that would mean that women earn 77 cents for every dollar a man earns. 30,800 divided by 40,000 equals .77. But these calculations don't reveal a gender wage injustice because it doesn't consider occupation, position, education, or hours worked per week.

The Census Bureau, which examines the annual pay of full-time employees, is the source of a frequently cited statistic used to characterize the gender wage gap. According to this ratio, women earn 80 cents for every dollar men earn. Another metric examines hourly wages and includes part-time employees. According to the analysis, typical women make 83 cents on every dollar males earn. Other, less-discussed measures display different gaps because they look at the difference at various points along the wage distribution for various demographic subgroups or after adjusting for elements like employment and education. Alternative methods of measuring the gap may lead some people to believe that statistics on the gender wage disparity are unreliable. Why is there any gender wage gap at all? No one knows for sure, as the study was done by AAUW and the Labour Department (Miller & Vagins, 2018) state that many variables drive wages that no single study can cover them all. Few wage gap studies control for variables such as dangerous work environments, where men are vastly overrepresented, for example, on oil rigs. Another variable is that: men are more willing and able to work long hours without advance notice. According to Harvard economist Claudia Goldin, even if two lawyers have the same education, same specialty, and work the same number of hours, the firms pay more to someone willing to always be "on call" and ready to be in the office when the firm needs them, as opposed to wanting a more regular schedule. This isn't sexism but common sense (Goldin, 2014). With more realistic categories and definitions, whatever wage gap remains would certainly narrow to the point of vanishing. So it seems that business leaders aren't bad at math simply because they don't only hire women. Those who claim that women earn 77 cents on the dollar for the same work compared to men, on the other hand, are not merely bad at math --but at telling the truth.

Policies against the gender wage gap

One of how women can be empowered in the wage gap debate is through international and national policies. Women must be updated on comprehensive equal pay legislation, such as the Paycheck Fairness Act of the USA, that discriminatory combat practices (Eisenberg, 2014). To adequately close the multifaceted gender pay gap, additional work-family policies are necessary. This will prevent women, who disproportionately shoulder the majority of caregiving duties in their families, from being unjustly penalized for needing time to take care of themselves. For instance, having access to paid sick days and having a robust paid family and medical leave program are crucial laws that would lessen job losses and guarantee greater economic security for all workers (Boesch, 2018). Family-friendly policies, which emphasize women's employability, especially mothers, may adversely affect women's wages (Mandel & Semyonov, 2005). Finally, an increase in female activity means that less skilled women join the labour market lowering the average female wage (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2008). On the other hand, structural transformation of the economy and labour market may favor female

labour relative to male labour (Rendall, 2013). In that case, an increase in female activity can be observed simultaneously with a reduction in the gender wage gap.

Conclusion

In addition to public policy, society must address cultural biases that continue damaging women, especially women of colour, by undervaluing their labor and restricting them to particular gender roles. The patriarchal systems that persistently undervalue and marginalize women and their families can only be destroyed by enacting crucial legislation and changing cultural attitudes. Whether the gender wage gap is wide, narrow, or does not even exist for one reason or another, certain steps can be taken for a better future. Firstly, by increasing educational attainment by men and women equally. Additionally, organized labor can be beneficial since groups of workers frequently have more power to advocate for workplace improvements, fight against discriminatory practices that target particular worker groups, negotiate for improved pay and working conditions, and do various other things. More substantial group efforts will be advantageous to men and women alike. However, the combined effects of these variables are insufficient to close the gap completely.

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