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The Injustice of the Gender Wage Gap

Why should women be paid less than men simply based on the fact that they are female? Despite the efforts made by women in this field and the progress in this area, the fight for equal pay still continues today. The gender wage gap is the inequality between the wages that men and women earn based on similar work ("Washington: Explaining the Gender Wage Gap"). Women have tried to combat this gap in many different ways but none have effectively closed the gap. This leaves something that is true, but is unfair to working women all over the nation; women simply do not make the same as men, and will not until a change is made. With such a large presence of women in the workplace today, something must be done about this. Men and women should be paid equally for work requiring equal skill, effort and responsibility. In order to close the gender wage gap, a three-step plan will be enacted. Education of employers and employees on the issue, government surveillance of company payrolls as well as the passing of the Paycheck Fairness Act will be essential in making a change.

When most people think of the gender wage gap, they think of the idea that women make 77 cents for every dollar that men make. This is one of the most misleading myths, which is not entirely true. An article written by Sarah Glynn, an associate director for Women's Economic, explains that the true meaning of this is that if one were to take the average of what all full time working women make in a year and compare that to the average of what all full time working men make in a year, women only make 77 percent of what men do (Glynn). Since this is the

most common piece of knowledge that people have on this fact it is important to address it but to also explain what can be done about the issue.

Women are primarily affected by this situation, seeing how they are affected by the gap can be instrumental in trying to change it. Female activists around the country are trying to close the gap. In Jessica Bennet's article, she writes about college lecturer, Professor Babcock who states, "I think they're starting to understand that we have to train the next generation of women while they're young" (Bennett). These women are the ones that are trying to make change, they are working to teach the younger generation about the gap and try to help to close it. It is these women that are important when trying to show the importance of this situation. While these women are crucial to the movement, the message that they are providing for women across the country is even more important. This message speaks to women all over the country and because they hear this message, they can fight for equal pay.

While it is evident that this issue is something that needs to be changed, not everyone is willing to make the necessary changes for equal pay in the workplace. For some, they do not believe that this is an issue in their personal life or in the companies. In one specific instance of this, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella stated that there is no gender pay gap present at the company. After researching the situation, Glassdoor discovered that a male senior software development engineer makes roughly \$137,000 per year while a female in the same position makes roughly \$129,000 per year (Rigby). This information sheds light on the fact that even the CEO of a major corporation does not recognize the fact that there is a significant difference between the salaries of men and the salaries of women in the company. With the lack of recognition of this issue, it is no surprise that advances in the area have not been made. How can individuals work to fix a problem that they do not believe exists in their own companies?

Others may believe that the responsibility to fix this issue does not fall within their responsibilities. The government may feel like they cannot control the gap and the salaries that women are being paid is what they will continue to be paid unless private companies make a change. For others, like those private companies, they may feel that it is not their responsibility to try to close the gender wage gap and since this is a private company they can pay their employees whatever they see fit. Regardless of who believes they are responsible, responsibility must fall on someone or change will never occur.

The gap may seem like it might be difficult to fix and leaves individuals questioning what can be done to close it. When The Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibits discrimination based on gender between men and women performing jobs requiring equal skill effort and responsibility (“The Equal Pay Act of 1963”), was passed, the wage gap began to close, but the rate at which it is closing is still concerning. Rep. Sandy Levin’s, the Ranking Member of the House Ways and Means Committee states in his article “The Fight For Women’s Equality Continues,” that in 1963 women were making, on average, 59 cents for every dollar men made (Levin) and while women today are making much more than that, there is still a lack of total wage equality between men and women. This step that was taken has proven to be somewhat effective, but there is still more that society can do to change this imbalance in the workplace. The act is now 51 years old, it is now outdated and in order to make changes, there must be a revision to this act or a shift to a different solution.

Another act that was put into effect is Title VII, which is a federal law that prevents employers from discriminating against employees based on race, sex, or religion. This addresses the issue of women being overlooked for higher-paid jobs (Kim 281-282). President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, which overruled The Supreme Court ruling that

stated an employee only had 180 days after receiving their paycheck to file a discrimination claim (“Fact Sheet: Fighting For Equal Pay). This act showed promise and was thought to be the spark that was needed for great change, but unfortunately it fell short, and the gap has remained consistent since then. These policies are important to note because they help to illustrate the change that the nation has been trying to make in this area. But even with all of the attempts made to close the gap, and few of them working, there is a need for a solution that can make a substantial difference.

While the aforementioned acts have not been wildly successful, because of them, research has been done to find why they are not effective in closing the gap. In the past two decades, the gender pay gap has narrowed greatly and women have begun to infiltrate male dominated fields. Between 1978 and 1999 the gender wage gap narrowed and female fulltime workers pay increased from 61 percent of male earnings to 76.5 percent of male earnings (Blau and Kahn 2). Since then, the gap has plateaued, a fact that women should be wary of. Other solutions should be addressed but more insight into the reasons behind the gap is also necessary.

One important team that is greatly involved in working to close the gender wage gap is the National Equal Pay Enforcement Task Force. This committee works for the government and its main job, as stated in its title, is to work to achieve equal pay. They have been working to minimize the gender wage gap and have made recommendations and created an action plan that includes the education of employers and employees, government supervision of company wages as well as The Paycheck Fairness Act, which could all help to minimize the gap. By exploring these various options, the government can work to implement some into society, potentially putting an end to this issue. The necessary changes would be initiated by President Obama and

Congress and would take effort from other departments in the government as well (“National Equal Pay Enforcement Task Force”).

An important step that could be taken to close the gender wage gap is the education of employers and employees. In the article, “The National Equal Pay Enforcement Task.” It discusses a campaign that would educate employers on their obligations and their employees on their rights. By doing this, both employers and employees would have a better understanding of the wages that should be earned by working individuals. Guiding employers on how they should pay their employees will prevent them from paying employees unjustly based on lack of knowledge of the situation. Similar to this, educating employees, will provide them more insight regarding their rights in the work place, allowing them to intelligently address the situation and request fair pay for their work. If employers and female employees were both given more information on the subject, they would be better equipped to handle these situations. If Microsoft CEO, Satya Nadella knew his obligations to his employees he might be better informed about the inner workings of his company and his obligations to his employees. Knowledge is power, and by giving women the knowledge that they need to speak out against the discrimination that they might experience, the gender wage gap could be made smaller.

In addition to the education of employers and employees, the end of pay secrecy could make a substantial change in the gap. Since many people are unaware of the discrepancies between the salaries of men and the salaries of women, keeping salaries private does not help the situation. In “The National Equal Pay Enforcement Task,” it is written that collecting salary data from the private workforce can help to understand what is occurring in private corporations across the country (“The National Equal Pay Enforcement Task Force”). By collecting data, the government will be able to see which companies are not complying with equal pay regulations.

Since companies do not have anyone to answer to when it comes to paying their employees, they have free reign over what they are doing. If they chose to do so, corporations could pay women much less than men simply based on gender and no one would know the difference. By having their payroll data under government surveillance, paying their employees would be something that would be monitored and they would be much more difficult for companies to have a gap in pay between their male and female employees. Private companies may be opposed to this idea because they feel it is unfair, but compared to the injustice that women constantly experience in the workforce this is a small price to pay. The government would not be mandating what companies would be paying their employees but they would be ensuring that women would not be paid less than their equal male counterparts.

The final step in this effort to make a change in the gender wage gap is the passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act. In order to pass this act, the Administration and Congress must work well together. Since The Equal Pay Act of 1963 has not been updated in over half a century, this would be considered a supplement to that law. This Paycheck Fairness Act would “allow women to receive the same remedies for sex-based discrimination as those available under some laws to individuals subject to race or national origin discrimination” (“The National Pay Enforcement Task”). This means that women would be able to fight gender based discrimination in a similar manner as employees fighting racism, allowing for more radical change to be made and hopefully propelling a close in the gap. This act is extremely important because it highlights the government’s support of women in the workplace and shows that even though the old system has not fixed everything, law makers will continue to work to make a change. With the passage of this law, the hope is that the efforts to change women’s equality in the workplace permanently.

One of the largest reasons that previous legislation has not been effective is because the law lacks the ability to correct all of the variables that cause the gap to exist. Since the gap cannot be explained by one distinct set of variables, trying to get one act to cover all of the causes seems near impossible. Some may argue that because of all of these variables at play, no ruling will ever be able to fix the problem but it is important to look specifically at the variables. After looking at possible solutions, it is important to examine the variables that could affect these solutions and possibly interrupt the progress that these important plans could be making.

Overwork is one issue that is involved in causing the gender wage gap. In their research, Youngjoo Cha and Kim Weeden, authors who work at Indiana University and Cornell University, respectively, found that the amount of overwork that men and women are engaged in affects the pay gap. The long hours that men work have offset wage-equalizing trends and because of this, the wage gap has been affected. Their research caused them to question what caused men to perform more overwork than women and so they looked at various factors that could have an effect on women's overwork. One of the largest reasons for women's underrepresentation in overworking is their duty to look after their children and homes (Cha and Weeden 459). Since women cannot perform as many overwork hours, the wages that they make are not equal to what men make. Since women are primarily engaged with the household dealings, they cannot devote nearly as much time to the workplace as the average male can. This is not to say that men are not active participants at home, but on average, women seem to be. This factor is important to take into account because it examines the various duties that women must perform and sheds light on the fact that the job that women have in the workplace may not be their only job.

Stereotyping and discrimination are also evident in the workplace and can contribute to the wage gap. Joel Nadler and Margaret Stockdale, authors at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, examine the types of discrimination and stereotyping seen in the work place. They noted that gender bias favoring men has been found in hiring, promotion and career opportunities and state "...there is still a significant bias against women in both upper management positions and in compensation (Nadler and Stockdale 285). Because there is a bias in hiring, promoting and compensation, women cannot receive the same pay as men. Because women are being discriminated against, it is unlikely that they will be able to make the same amount as men in these conditions. This discrimination against women is causing a decrease in their pay and until that issue is resolved, women will not see the salaries that men do.

By identifying the variables that could affect the three-step plan, these could be kept in mind when enforcing the plan. Since both variables and the solutions have been explored, the plan can be put into action and can make a difference. Since this issue would be predominately dealt with by the government it would be crucial that they receive cooperation from the public as well as the companies that they would be dealing with. The changes that the government makes are important in helping to regulate the salaries of men and women all across the nation. After these changes are made, the gender wage gap can be reduced and men and women will be treated as equals.

All of these steps are important to take and will not be able to solve the problem independent of each other. The gender wage gap is much larger than just employers being misinformed or discrimination in the workplace, it is a collection of all of these shortcomings and therefore it will only be overcome when we can move past each and every variable that plays a role in causing it. The government must also remain steadfast in their support of closing the

gender wage gap, by doing so they will improve the salaries of women around the nation. It is also equally important that society is working towards a brighter future. Recognizing the problems that this nation has had but also working to fix them and move forward is imperative to a brighter future and the equality of men and women within the workplace.

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