

Gender Wage Gap in Contemporary America

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Abstract

Gender wage Gap is the median annual pay of women who work full-time and year-round compared to a similar cohort of men. In 1963, the earnings ratio was 59%. This means that women were paid 59 cents for every dollar paid to men (National Equal Pay Task Force, 2013). Consequently, the Equal Pay Act was passed in 1963 to guarantee equal pay for men and women performing equal work for the same employer. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed to expand and strengthen the Equal Pay Act by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of not just sex but race, color, national origin, and/or religion (National Equal Pay Task Force: page 4). The current study reviews the concept of “equal pay for equal work” in contemporary America to assess the extent to which the above legislations have been successful in addressing the issue of gender wage gap. Review of relevant information reveals that even though there have been improvements, substantial differences remain. For example, in 2011, women’s to men’s annual earnings ratio was 77%. This means that for every dollar men were paid in 2011, women were paid 77 cents and in 2018, gender earnings ratio was 81.6% meaning that for every dollar paid to men in 2018, women were paid 81.6 cents (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2019). Study also reveals that gender wage gap is a problem in occupations dominated by men as well as those dominated by women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). It also shows that women tend to congregate in the lower paying occupations. Given these realities, the author suggests that the U.S. Congress needs to pass new equal pay legislations including raising the federal minimum wage and take decisive steps to enforce these and existing legislations.

Keywords: Gender, Wage, Gap, Contemporary, America

What is Gender Wage Gap? Working men and women are paid differently giving rise to what is referred to as gender wage gap. So, gender wage gap is the difference between what women are paid and what is paid to a similar cohort of men (American Association of University Women, 2017; Lora Jones, 2018, & Olivia Waxman, 2018). The difference is mostly expressed in terms of the median annual earnings of women who work full time and year-round compared to the earnings of a similar cohort of men. It can also be expressed in terms of the difference between the hourly or weekly wages of women compared to a similar cohort of men (Elise Gould, Jessica Schieder, and Kathleen Geier, 2016). Either way, gender wage gap is commonly calculated by dividing women’s earnings by men’s earnings, and this ratio is often expressed as a percent, or in dollar terms. For example, in 2018, the annual median earnings of women was \$45,097 whereas the annual median earnings of men was \$55,291 (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2019, & National Partnership for Women & Families, 2019). This means that in 2018, women were paid \$10,194 less than men. Dividing women’s median earnings (\$45,097) by men’s median earnings (\$55,291) yields 0.81563. Expressed in percent, this means that women were paid 81.6% of what men were paid in 2018. If expressed in dollars and cents, it means that for every dollar paid to men in 2018, women were paid about 82 cents.

Gender wage gap can also be expressed in terms of how much less women make compared to men (Anna North, 2018; National Partnership for Women & Families, 2018; Esteban Ortiz Ospina, 2018, & Institute for Women Policy Research, 2019). In 2018, this can be achieved by subtracting the ratio of women to men earnings from 1. So, since the gender pay ratio in 2018 was about 82 percent or about 82 cents on the dollar, this means that a typical woman was paid 18 percent less or 18 cents less per dollar paid to a typical male.

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Consequently, an average woman worker loses more than \$530,000 over the course of her lifetime because of the gender wage gap and the average college-educated woman loses even more-nearly \$800,000 (Institute for Women Policy Research, 2016). Yes, progress was made in the four decades following the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963; but, such progress has stalled according to the American Association of University Women which is concerned that gender wage gap will not close in America until 2093 if things continue at the current rate (AAUW, 2019).

History of Gender Wage Gap-The Road Travelled: Obviously, gender wage gap in America has a long history; a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* questioning why the government paid male employees higher than females in 1869 stated that: "Very few persons deny the justice of the principle that equal work should command equal pay without regard to the sex of the laborer, but, it is one thing to acknowledge the right of a principle and quite another to practice it" (Charlotte Alter, 2015). The author of the letter was concerned of the fact that the 500 women who worked in the U.S. Treasury Department at the time and who were performing the same grade of work made only half as much as their male colleagues (Alter, 2015:2). The House of Representatives passed a resolution to ensure equal pay to government employees that year but the Senate held it up until 1870. The first public demand for fair pay for women was in 1883 when Western Telegraph Company workers unsuccessfully protested for "equal pay for equal work" but it was not until 1911 that female teachers in New York were granted equal pay after a long battle with the board of education (Drew Lamberger, 2018).

Further demand to pay women the same as men was made during World War I (1918) when the United States Employment Service classified certain jobs as suitable for women with the hope that such classification will encourage men in those occupations to switch to jobs that supported the war effort and "prevent any able-bodied man from keeping a position officially designated as woman's work" (Alter, 2015:3). The same was true during World War II (1939-1945) as more and more women filled the void created by the war. During this period, the demand for equal pay was championed by unions and male workers who reasoned that if women were paid less for the same work, management could lower male workers' wages after they returned from the war (Lamberger, 2018).

The demand for equal pay continued to fall on deaf ears even though the National War Labor Board in 1942, endorsed policies that provided equal pay in instances where women were directly replacing male workers (History.com editors, 2019). In 1944, New York Congresswoman Winifred Stanley, introduced H.R. 5056 designed to amend the National Labor Relations Act to make wage discrimination on the basis of the employee's sex illegal. While introducing the bill she remarked: "It has often been remarked that this is a man's world. The war (World War II) and its far-reaching effects have provided the answer. It's our world, and this battered old universe needs and will need the best brains and ability of both men and women" (U.S. House of Representative, National Archives and Records Administration, 1944). In 1945, Congress introduced the Women's Equal Pay Act, which would have made it illegal to pay women less than men who did work of "comparable quality and quantity" (History.com editors, 2019); the measure failed to pass. In 1947, the United States Secretary of Labor-Lewis Schwellenbach-arguing for equal pay stated that: "There is no sex difference in the food she buys or the rent she pays, there should be none in her pay envelop" (Lamberger, 2018:3).

In spite of these efforts, little progress was made on pay equity during the 1940s and 1950s. So, by 1960, women were still paid less than two-thirds of what their male counterparts were paid. In early 1961, Esther Peterson, the then Assistant Secretary of Labor for Women's Affairs suggested that a commission be assembled to look into the status of women in America. In June of that year, she made a formal recommendation to President John F. Kennedy, who on December 14, 1961, by Executive Order 10980, established the President's Commission on the Status of Women. This bipartisan body comprised of twenty-six members was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt (William Leuchtenberg, n/d). The commission was charged with: "developing recommendations for overcoming discriminations in government and private employment on the basis of sex and for developing recommendations for services which will enable women to continue their role as wives and mothers while making a maximum contribution to the world around them" (Jone Johnson Lewis, 2019).

Following the report of the Commission and despite strong opposition by powerful business groups, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act as an amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act and President John F. Kennedy signed it into law on June 10th, 1963. As part of President Kennedy's New Frontier Program, the Equal Pay Act mandated that employers cannot pay unequal wages or benefits to men and women working jobs that require "equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions" (History.com editors, 2019). The law was the first national labor standard that was meant to address the widespread practice of paying women less simply because they were women and it was the first to lay the foundation for future workplace policies (National Equal Pay Task Force, 2013).

The Equal Pay Act also included guidelines for when unequal pay is warranted, specifically, on the basis of merit, seniority, workers' quality or quantity of production, and other factors not determined by gender (History.com editors, 2019).

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed making it illegal to engage in employment discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, national origin, and/or religion. And, between 1965 and 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued a series of Executive Orders designed to ensure non-discrimination in hiring and employment within the federal government and among Federal contractors (National Equal Pay Task Force, June 2013). Further, in 1972, Title IX of the Educational Amendments opened the doors for women to pursue education free from discrimination in those educational institutions that received federal financial assistance. In 1978, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act was passed to protect women who were pregnant, gave birth, or had related medical conditions. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 addressed damages in cases of intentional discrimination by an employer whereas the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 provided further protections for American workers (National Equal Pay Task Force, 2013, p. 5). Under the provisions of the Equal Pay Act, employees who believe they have been discriminated against can either file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or directly sue their employer in court within a specific time frame; the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was passed in 2009 to reduce time restrictions on wage discrimination complaints (National Equal Pay Task Force: p. 5)

Since the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963, women have integrated many previously exclusive male job fields and have achieved success at the highest levels of many fields; they have achieved higher levels of education and now serve at the highest levels of government, the judiciary, in Congress, and in private industry but gender wage gap continues to exist in just about every occupation in America (NEPTF, p. 6). In the legal profession for example, where women constitute about 47% of law school graduates and make better grades than their male counterparts, female lawyers still make about 68 cents for every dollar male lawyers make (Alison Monahan, 2019). The same is true in the medical profession where even though data show that female medical students make better grades than their male counterparts (A. Riese; L. Rappaport; B. Alverson; S. Park; & R.M. Rockney, 2017), in 2018, female primary care physicians were paid 75 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts (Jaime Ducharme, 2019).

The Extent of Gender Wage Gap:

Table A: Gender Wage Gap For Selected Years (in 2018 dollar value).

Year	Women's Earnings	Men's Earnings	Dollar Difference	Percentage Difference
1961	\$16,272	\$27,463	\$11,191	59.2%
1971	\$20,691	\$34,771	\$14,080	59.5%
1981	\$21,830	\$36,854	\$15,024	59.2%
1990	\$25,451	\$35,538	\$10,087	71.6%
1991	\$25,457	\$36,440	\$10,983	69.9%
2000	\$27,355	\$37,339	\$9,984	73.3%
2001	\$29,215	\$38,275	\$9,060	76.3%
2011	\$37,118	\$48,202	\$11,084	77.0%
2012	\$37,791	\$49,398	\$11,607	76.5%
2013	\$39,157	\$50,033	\$10,876	78.3%
2014	\$39,621	\$50,383	\$10,762	78.6%
2015	\$40,742	\$51,212	\$10,470	79.6%
2016	\$41,554	\$51,640	\$10,086	80.5%
2017	\$41,977	\$52,146	\$10,169	80.5%
2018	\$45,097	\$55,291	\$10,194	81.6%

Source: National Committee on Pay Equity, 2019

As can be seen from the table above, the Equal Pay Act and similar legislations did not seem to have much effect on gender wage gap for decades only reaching 73.3% in the year 2000 and remained in the 70s in the next fifteen years and only reaching the 80.5% mark in 2016 and 2017 and the 81.6% mark by 2018. Part of the reason for this could be the slow increase in women's pay between 1961 and 1981 when women's median pay increased from \$16,272 to \$21,830 (an increase of \$5,558) whereas men's median pay during the same period rose from \$27,463 in 1961 to \$36,854 in 1981 (a difference of \$9,391).

The narrowing of the wage gap, which started in 1990, could possibly be due to the slower growth in the wages of men and moderate increases in women's wages from 2000 through 2018.

Whatever be the case, the above table shows that substantial differences still exist in what men and women who do the same or similar work are paid. But, while gender wage gap is an issue in nearly every occupation, some suffer from greater disparities than others (Sarah Jane Glynn and Nancy Wu, 2013). The following table was compiled from the top twenty occupations with the largest gender wage gap along with the share of female workers in those occupations in 2018 according to Samuel Stebbins and Thomas Frohlich (Stebbins and Frohlich, 2018).

Table B: Twenty Occupations With The Largest Gender Pay Gap in 2018:

Occupations	Women's Weekly Median Pay Multiplied by 52 Weeks	Men's Weekly Median Pay Multiplied by 52 Weeks	Women's Pay as a Percent of Men's Pay	Share of Female Workers in Occupation
Personal Financial Advisors	\$50,908	\$86,424	58.9%	32.9%
Administrative Services Manager	\$52,676	\$84,708	62.2%	38.8%
Securities, Commodities, and Financial Services Sales Agents	\$47,372	\$73,632	64.3%	33.3%
Emergency Medical Technicians & Paramedics	\$38,116	\$58,188	65.5%	28.6%
Sales Reps, Services, & Other Sales Related Jobs	\$46,904	\$69,264	67.7%	26.2%
First Line Supervisors of Housekeeping & Janitorial Workers	\$26,780	\$38,948	68.8%	40.5%
Real Estate Brokers & Sales Agents	\$42,536	\$60,268	70.6%	55.1%
Financial Managers	\$63,544	\$89,388	71.1%	55.0%
First Line Supervisors of Production & Operating Workers	\$37,232	\$52,364	71.1%	18.45
Credit Counselors & Loan Officers	\$49,816	\$69,264	71.9%	60.3%
Other Teachers & Instructors	\$42,640	\$58,656	72.7%	63.2%
Taxi Drivers & Chauffeurs	\$23,556	\$32,396	72.7%	14.9%
Drivers, Sales Workers, & Truck Drivers	\$30,628	\$41,964	73.0%	4.9%
Designers	\$44,564	\$60,944	73.1%	45.5%
Human Resources Manager	\$66,560	\$90,896	73.2%	69.4%
Marketing & Sales Managers	\$66,976	\$90,844	73.7%	43.1%
Diagnostic Related Technologists & Technicians	\$54,132	\$73,008	74.1%	68.6%
Retail Sales Persons	\$27,196	\$36,608	74.3%	38.8%
Training & Development Specialists	\$48,724	\$65,260	74.7%	48.2%

Source: 24/7 Wall Street, December 5, 2018.

Annual median earnings calculated by multiplying weekly earnings by 52 weeks for workers in occupations employing 50,000 or more workers.

As can be seen from the table above, women made up at least 40 percent of the workforce in ten of these twenty occupations and constituted the majority of the workforce in six. In four of those six occupations, women made up more than 60 percent of the workforce. Invariably, increasing the representation of women in the workforce does not seem to translate to a more equitable pay. For example, whereas 69.4% of human resources managers were females, women in this occupation were still paid about 73 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts in 2018. It is also worthwhile to examine the top twenty occupations that had the least gender wage gap in 2018.

Table C: Twenty Occupations with the Least Gender Wage Gap in 2018:

Occupation	Women's Weekly Median Pay Multiplied by 52 Weeks	Men's Weekly Median Pay Multiplied by 52 Weeks	Women's Pay as a Percentage of Men's Pay	Share of Female Workers in Occupation
Combined food preparation & serving workers including fast food	\$24,700	\$21,320	115.9%	56.5%
Reservation & transportation ticket agents and travel clerks	\$39,832	\$35,412	112.5%	55.0%
Clinical laboratory technologists & technicians	\$47,372	\$42,588	111.2%	74.1%
Advertising sales agents	\$54,756	\$49,400	110.8%	46.7%
Billing & posting clerks	\$37,700	\$34,528	109.2%	86.6%
Office clerks, general	\$36,452	\$34,840	104.6%	86.2%
Paralegals & legal assistants	\$49,556	\$47,684	103.9%	86.9%
Editors	\$59,176	\$57,408	103.1%	54.0%
Receptionists & information clerks	\$31,512	\$30,836	102.2%	91.3%
Stock clerks & order fillers	\$29,640	\$29,016	102.2%	36.3%
Postal service clerks	\$40,092	\$39,416	101.7%	54.8%
Wholesale & retail buyers except farm products	\$45,760	\$45,656	100.2%	44.2%
Cashiers	\$24,076	\$24,336	98.9%	72.9%
Customer service representatives	\$35,360	\$35,256	98.7%	64.4%
Physical therapists	\$72,124	\$73,320	98.4%	66.5%
Computer occupations, all other	\$62,816	\$64,376	97.6%	19.3%
Construction & extraction occupations	\$40,820	\$42,068	97.0%	3.0%
Office & administrative support occupations	\$36,872	\$38,376	96.3%	71.2%
Miscellaneous life, physical, & social science technicians	\$44,512	\$46,436	95.9%	46.8%
Bookkeeping, accounting, & auditing clerks	\$38,428	\$40,456	95.0%	84.7%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018

Annual median earnings calculated by multiplying weekly earnings by 52 weeks for workers in occupations employing 50,000 or more workers.

Among the top twenty occupations with the least gender wage gap in 2018, women were paid more than men in twelve. That means that among the occupations represented in the Bureau of Labor Statistics report in 2018, women were paid more than men in just twelve occupations and in nine of those twelve occupations, they constituted the majority of the workforce. And, among these twenty occupations, construction and extraction occupations where women are paid 97 cents for every dollar paid to a male worker had the least percentage of female workers. Another observation is the fact that fourteen of the above occupations are dominated by women and in seven of those, more than seven out of every ten employees were women. Given this information, it will be proper to examine gender pay ratio in occupations that had the highest percentage of female workers in 2018.

Table D: Gender Wage Gap in 20 Most Common Occupations for Women, 2018

Occupations	Women's weekly Median Pay Multiplied by 52 Weeks	Men's Weekly Median Pay Multiplied by 52 Week	Women's Pay as a Percent of Men's Pay	Share of Female Workers in Occupation	Share of Male Workers in Occupation as a % of all Male Workers	Share of Female Workers in Occupation as a % of all Female Workers
Elem & Middle School Teachers	\$51,064	\$59,696	85.5%	79.5%	1.0%	4.7%
Registered Nurses	\$60,112	\$66,092	91.0%	87.8%	0.5%	4.4%
Secretaries & Admin. Assistants	\$39,156	\$46,956	83.4%	93.8%	0.2%	3.6%
Nursing, Psychiatric, & Home Health Aides	\$26,676	\$29,016	91.9%	89.1%	0.2%	2.5%
Managers, all other	\$68,732	\$84,656	82.4%	38.4%	3.2%	2.5%
Customer Service Reps.	\$35,360	\$35,828	98.7%	64.4%	1.1%	2.4%
First Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	\$34,944	\$47,372	73.4%	43.9%	2.1%	2.1%
Cashiers	\$24,076	\$24,336	98.9%	72.9%	0.6%	2.0%
Accountants & Auditors	\$57,616	\$73,008	78.9%	60.0%	1.0%	1.9%
First Line Supervisors of Office & Administrative Support Workers	\$43,420	\$54,600	79.5%	69.7%	0.6%	1.7%
Receptionists & Information Clerks	\$31,512	\$30,836	102.2%	91.3%	0.1%	1.7%
Office Clerks General	\$36,452	\$34,840	104.6%	86.2%	0.2%	1.5%
Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners	\$23,764	\$29,068	81.8%	87.6%	0.2%	1.4%
Retail Salespersons	\$28,236	\$39,728	71.1%	38.5%	1.8%	1.4%
Financial Managers	\$65,624	\$92,768	70.7%	57.3%	0.8%	1.3%
Personal Care Aides	\$25,636	\$28,860	88.8%	83.2%	0.2%	1.3%
Social Workers	\$46,644	\$49,816	93.6%	81.1%	0.2%	1.2%
Waiters & Waitresses	\$24,856	\$28,652	86.8%	65.6%	0.5%	1.2%
Bookkeeping, Accounting, & Auditing Clerks	\$38,428	\$40,456	95.0%	84.7%	0.2%	1.1%
Education Administrators	\$64,740	\$81,276	79.7%	65.7%	0.5%	1.1%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018.

Note: Annual earnings data gotten by multiplying weekly earnings by 52 for workers in occupations with 50,000 workers or more.

Forty-one point nine percent (41.9%) of the over 51.42 million women that worked full-time in 2018 were employed in one of these twenty occupations whereas fifteen point six percent (15.6%) of the more than 64.14 million men who worked full-time in 2018 were employed in one of these twenty occupations. Note that even though women constituted the vast majority of workers in these 20 occupations, their male coworkers were still paid higher in 18 of these occupations. That is, in 90 percent of the 20 most common occupations for women in 2018, male workers were paid higher than their female co-workers.

The two occupations where female median pay was higher than the median pay of their male coworkers were receptionists and information clerks, and office clerks-general where women's median pay were 102.2%, and 104.6% the median pay of their male coworkers respectively. Note also that both of these two occupations are at the lower end of the pay scale for the occupations identified. Be that as it may, let's look at the twenty most common occupations for men in 2018.

Table E: Gender Wage Gap in 20 Most Common Occupations For Men, 2018

Occupations	Women's Weekly Median Pay Multiplied by 52 Weeks	Men's Weekly Median Pay Multiplied by 52 Weeks	Women's Pay as a Percent of Men's Pay	Share of Female Workers in Occupation	Share of Male Workers in Occupation as a % of all Male Workers	Share of Female Workers in Occupation as a % of all Female Workers
Drivers/sales Workers & Truck Drivers	\$29,068	\$43,108	67.4%	5.6%	4.1%	0.3%
Managers, all others	\$69,732	\$84,656	82.4%	38.4%	3.2%	2.5%
Construction Laborers	N/A	\$37,284	N/A	3.3%	2.2%	0.1%
First Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	\$34,944	\$47,372	73.8%	43.9%	2.1%	2.1%
Software Developers, Applications & Systems Software	\$85,488	\$98,488	86.8%	20.3%	2.0%	0.6%
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, hand	\$28,132	\$32,240	87.3%	19.9%	2.0%	0.6%
Janitors & Building Cleaners	\$25,532	\$31,564	80.9%	28.7%	1.9%	0.9%
Retail Salespersons	\$28,236	\$39,728	71.1%	38.5%	1.8%	1.4%
Carpenters	N/A	\$39,468	N/A	2.1%	1.5%	N/A
Sales Representative Wholesale & Manufacturing	\$52,468	\$64,428	81.4%	26.5%	1.3%	0.6%
Cooks	\$22,724	\$26,936	84.4%	39.3%	1.3%	1.0%
Ground Maintenance Workers	N/A	\$29,952	N/A	4.3%	1.2%	0.1%
Chief Executives	\$90,272	\$129,376	69.8%	28.0%	1.2%	0.6%
Electricians	N/A	\$50,232	N/A	2.0%	1.2%	N/A

Production Workers, all others	\$29,432	\$37,700	78.1%	26.5%	1.1%	0.5%
Automotive Service Technicians & Mechanics	N/A	\$41,704	N/A	1.4%	1.1%	N/A
Customer Service Representative	\$35,360	\$35,828	98.7%	64.4%	1.1%	2.4%
General & Operations Managers	\$59,228	\$74,204	79.8%	30.1%	1.0%	0.6%
Accountants & Auditors	\$57,616	\$73,008	78.9%	60.0%	1.0%	1.9%
First Line Supervisors of Production & Operating Workers	\$38,740	\$54,600	71.0%	18.0%	1.0%	0.3%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018.

Note: Annual earnings data gotten by multiplying weekly earnings by 52 for workers in occupations with 50,000 workers or more.

As can be seen from this table, men were paid higher than women in all of these twenty most common occupations for men and in the majority of them, they were paid substantially higher. The only occupation where women's pay was fairly close to that of men was customer service representatives which had a gender wage gap of 1.3%. That is, women in this occupation were paid 98.7 cents for every dollar paid to men. It is also noteworthy to point out that the twenty occupations identified above together employed 33.2% or 21.3 million of the over 64.14 million men employed full-time and 16.5% or 8.5 million of the more than 51.42 million employed full-time in occupations with 50,000 or more workers in 2018.

Consequent to this perennial inequity, women collectively lose billions of dollars every year and much more over their lifetime (Jessica Arons, 2008; Stephanie Thomson, 2016; Charisse Jones, 2018, & Pay Scale, 2019). Table six shows the top ten occupations where women collectively lost the most money in 2018. Notice that five of these occupations (financial managers, accountants and auditors, first-line supervisors of retail sales workers, registered nurses, and educational administrators) were among the top twenty most common occupations for women in 2018.

Table F: Top Ten Occupations Where Women Collectively Lost the Most Money in 2018

Occupation	Men's Annual Earnings	Women's Annual Earnings	Women's Earnings as a % of Men's	Number of Women in Occupation	Percent of Female Workers in Occupation	Amount Lost Per Year
Financial managers	\$92,768	\$65,624	70.7%	663,000	57.3%	\$18.0 billions
Physicians & Surgeons	\$130,676	\$87,204	66.7%	352,000	42.6%	\$15.3 billions
Accountants & Auditors	\$73,008	\$57,616	78.9%	969,000	60.0%	\$14.9 billions
Registered Nurses	\$66,092	\$60,112	91%	2,270,000	87.8%	\$13.6 billions
First Line Supervisors of Retail Workers	\$47,372	\$34,944	73.8%	1,062,000	43.9%	\$13.2 billions
Chief Executives	\$129,376	\$90,272	69.8%	307,000	28%	\$12.0 billions
Marketing & Sales Managers	\$96,304	\$70,824	73.5%	447,000	46.4%	\$11.4 billions
Education Administrators	\$81,276	\$64,740	79.7%	563,000	65.7%	\$9.3 billions
Medical & Health Services Manager	\$89,908	\$69,212	77%	418,000	73.7%	\$8.7 billions
Lawyers	\$114,504	\$91,624	80%	344,000	40.3%	\$7.9 billions

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018

Note: Annual earnings data gotten by multiplying weekly earnings by 52 for workers in occupations with 50,000 workers or more.

Theoretical Explanations:

The phenomenon known as gender wage gap lends itself to the ideas expressed in two schools of jurisprudence. One is the feminist school of jurisprudence which holds that law (including employment compensation law) is predominantly a product of males and as such, law has a patriarchal character and a patriarchal bias (David Friedrichs, 2012). So, feminist school of thought is dedicated to exposing this male bias by identifying and articulating biases against women within the American economic system within which notions of value in the work place favor the interests of men and reinforce male dominance (Friedrichs, p. 118).

The second is the critical race feminist school of jurisprudence which calls attention to the special experiences and vulnerabilities of women in America (especially women of color) when they come before the law (Friedrichs, p. 117). But, for the purposes of this research, critical feminist theory which was born in recognition of the various types of oppression and exploitation women experience all over the world will be used. Critical feminist theory views gender wage gap as a consequence of the differential bias against women in a male dominated economic system (Brandi Geisinger, 2011).

The following are the underlying assumptions of critical feminist theory:

1. Gender oppression is endemic in the American society. Gender oppression is normal, ordinary, and ingrained into society in a way that makes it often difficult to recognize.
2. Traditional claims of gender neutrality and objectivity must be contested in order to reveal the self-interests of the dominant (male) groups.
3. Social justice platforms and practices are the only ways to eliminate gender discrimination and other forms of oppression and injustices against women.
4. The experiential knowledge of women is valid, legitimate, and critical for understanding the persistence of gender inequality.
5. Women are differentially discriminated against depending on the interests of the dominant group, and depending upon the intersections of their identities.
6. History and historical contexts must be taken into consideration in order to challenge policies and practices that adversely affect women.

For the purposes of this study, three of the above tenets of critical feminist theory are particularly useful. 1) The idea that gender oppression is endemic in society. Gender wage gap is a form of gender oppression that is endemic in the American society; gender wage gap is so widespread in America that it has become normal, commonplace, and an accepted way of treating men and women in the workplace (Sarah Jane Glynn and Nancy Wu, 2013; National Women's Law Center, 2018; American Association of University Women, 2019, & Dalvin Brown, 2019).

2) The idea that claims of gender neutrality and objectivity within law and policy must be contested: Oftentimes, law and policy are said to be gender neutral; they are said to apply equally to both men and women (David Friedrich, 2012). According to critical feminist theory, this claim must be contested because even though law mandates equal pay for men and women working for the same employer and doing similar work, data show that employers in almost all occupations (whether dominated by males or by females) have continued to pay male employees higher than their female co-workers (National Equal Pay Task Force, 2013). That being the case, one can argue that law, policy, policy-makers, and those in position to hire workers are neither neutral nor free from bias and as a result, are accomplices in perpetuating gender wage gap in America.

3) The idea that any honest attempts to understand the persistence of gender inequality in America today must take into account the experiences of women in the workplace. Granted, there will always be inequality in society no matter what laws are passed (Harold Kerbo, 2012). But, regarding the persistence of gender wage gap, the actual experiences of women in the workplace must be seen as valid, legitimate, and ruled unacceptable otherwise the differential treatment of male and female workers in terms of pay will continue. Critical feminist theory is particularly useful for this study because it recognizes the importance of history, historical contexts, and current practices that tend to perpetuate gender wage gap in America.

The theory also helps identify the depth of this practice, the current implications of this differential treatment of men and women in the workplace, and what could be done to eradicate or at least substantially reduce gender wage gap in America.

Discussion of Findings:

From the foregoing, it can be seen that women are under-represented in the highest-paying jobs and over-represented in the lowest paying occupations; women seem to choose careers that are less lucrative, enter lower-paying professions, and stay towards the bottom rungs of the career ladder (Stephanie Thomson, 2016). While these choices might give them shorter working hours and greater flexibility, it also negatively affect their earnings (Courtney Conley, 2018, & Sarah Kliff, 2018).

Here are the top 20 highest-paying jobs in 2018 along with the percentages of women in those occupations.

Table G: Twenty Highest Paying Occupations in 2018.

Occupation	Share of Female Workers in Occupation
Aircraft pilots and flight engineers	7%
Computer network architects	9%
Mechanical engineers	10%
Aerospace engineers	11%
Electrical and electronic engineers	11%
Chemical engineers	12%
Engineers, all other	12%
Computer hardware engineers	15%
Information security analyst	19%
Applications and systems software developers	20%
Software developers, application, & systems software	20%
Computer programmers	21%
Computer and information systems managers	25%
Chief executive	28%
Judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers	28%
Lawyers	40%
Physicians and surgeons	43%
Marketing and sales managers	46%
Dentists	50%
Pharmacist	63%

Source: United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018.

Note: Annual earnings data gotten by multiplying weekly earnings by 52 for workers in occupations with 50,000 workers or more.

As can be seen from the above table, the percentages of women in these occupations are generally quite small; in 15 of the 20 or 75% of these occupations, women made up less than 30% of the workforce and in 18 or 90% of these occupations, women made up less than 50% of the workforce. It is only in dentistry and pharmaceutical occupations that women comprised 50% and 63% of the workforce respectively. Increasing the representations of women in these occupations would narrow the wage gap between men and women.

Here are the top 20 lowest-paying jobs in 2018 along with the percentages of women in those occupations.

Table H: Twenty Lowest Paying Occupations in 2018

Occupations	Share of Female Workers in Occupations
Dishwashers	20%
Cooks	39%
Dining room and cafeteria attendants	49%
Food preparation and serving related occupations	50%
Food preparation workers	56%
Combined food preparation and serving workers	56%
Counter attendants	56%
Personal care and service workers, all other	57%
Hand packers and packagers	58%
Bakers	59%
Waiters and waitresses	66%
Food servers, non-restaurants	69%
Laundry and dry cleaning workers	70%
Sewing machine operators	72%
Cashiers	73%
Hosts and hostesses	76%
Miscellaneous personal appearance workers	80%
Personal care aides	83%
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	88%
Childcare workers	93%

Source: United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018.

Note: Annual earnings data gotten by multiplying weekly earnings by 52 for workers in occupations with 50,000 workers or more.

As can be seen from these twenty lowest paying occupations in 2018, women made up at least 50% or more of the workers in seventeen; that means that women made up the majority of the workers in 85% of the occupations that paid the lowest wages in 2018. In four of such occupations, women made up 80% or more of the workforce. Given the foregoing, it can therefore be argued that this over-representation of women in the lowest paying occupations and their under-representation in the highest paying jobs is a major reason for the gender wage gap (Andrew Chamberlain, Daniel Zhao, and Amanda Stansell, 2019).

But, at the same time, while it makes sense to pay chief executives (a profession dominated by men) higher than child-care workers (an occupation dominated by women), it is worthwhile to point out that female chief executives are paid 69.8 cents on every dollar paid to their male counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Further, it is also important to point out that while more than 69% of human resources managers in 2018 were females, this occupation had one of the highest gender pay gaps in 2018 with female human resources managers paid about 73 cents on every dollar paid to their male co-workers (American Association of University Women, 2019).

Furthermore, Table F identifies the top ten occupations where women lost the most money in 2018. Among these ten occupations, women constitute the majority of workers in five but were paid less than their male counterparts in all ten occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The total amount of money women as a group lost in 2018 from just these ten occupations amounted to \$124.3 billions. This means that over a period of just ten years, women would lose \$1,243,000,000 from just these ten occupations alone. Gender wage gap is so persistent that the average full-time female worker is said to lose approximately \$530,000 in wages over a 40-year period while an average college educated woman loses about \$800,000 over her lifetime (Institute for Women Policy Research, 2016). This shows how gender wage gap harms women.

What Can Be Done-Solutions:

Raise the federal minimum wage & tipped minimum wage: According to Sarah J. Glynn, Milia Fisher, and Emily Baxter of the Center for American Progress, (2014), women make-up approximately two-thirds of all minimum wage workers and two-thirds of all tipped minimum wage workers. With the current federal minimum wage still at \$7.25 per hour, it means that a woman with children working full-time, year round ($\$7.25 \times 40 \times 52$) only earns \$15,080 a year. This amount is below the poverty threshold for a family of two (U.S. Census Bureau,

2018). At the same time, the federal tipped minimum wage has remained at \$2.13 an hour since 1991. Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and tipped minimum wage to at least 70 percent of this amount is not only the right thing to do but it is also an economic necessity because doing so will surely lift millions of women out of poverty (Alyssa Davis and Elise Gould, 2015), help narrow the gender wage gap (Alanna Vaglanos, 2015), grow the middle class, and boost the nation's economic growth (National Equal Pay Task Force, 2013).

Support pay transparency and encourage women to negotiate their pay: According to Alanna Vaglanos (2015), 57 percent of men negotiate their salaries compared to only 7 percent of women. When women negotiate salaries, she says, they tend to ask for an average of \$7,000 less than their male co-workers. At the same time, women should be free to discuss their pay with co-workers because through such discussions they would know what their co-workers are being paid. Pay transparency would give women better tool to address pay discrimination and make it more difficult for companies to pay male workers more than female workers-an important tool in combatting gender wage gap (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2018).

Pass paid sick days, paid family leave legislations, and a national medical leave insurance program: According to Sarah J. Glynn, Milia Fisher, and Emily Baxter (2014), almost 40 million American workers do not have access to any paid sick days. As a result, they must go to work sick or send their sick children to school for fear they will be reprimanded or fired for missing work. Because caregiving responsibilities most often fall on women, they are the ones that must leave paid employment to care for sick family members. This exposes women to discrimination that men are unlikely to face because research has shown that a little more than 10 percent of the gender wage gap is due to women spending less time than men in the labor force often stemming from disproportionate family care responsibilities (Glynn, Fisher, and Baxter, 2014).

National paid sick days and paid family leave legislations would provide wage replacement to women and men who must take time off to care for their families. Paid sick days and paid family leave would help reduce the gaps in work histories, which women are more likely to experience, that contribute to the wage gap (2014: p. 5). Also, the United States is the only developed country that does not guarantee workers paid maternity leave after the birth of a child (p. 5). A national medical leave insurance program that recognizes the vital work of caregiving would help decrease the impact of gender wage gap (Alyssa Davis and Elise Gould, 2015).

Congressional actions: The United States Congress should pass the Paycheck Fairness Act which is designed to update and strengthen the Equal Pay Act of 1963, the Pay Equity for All Act which would prohibit employers from using salary history to set pay, and the Fair Pay Act, which would require employers to provide equal pay for jobs of equivalent value to help reduce the impact of occupational segregation (American Association of University Workers, 2019 and Glynn et. Al, 2014).The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) under the current the Trump administration has been ordered to stop collecting pay data from employers. Implemented by the Obama administration, the pay data collection identifies trends in pay disparities based on sex, race, and ethnicity. Continuing the data collection efforts would help narrow gender wage gap (Samantha Schmidt, 2020). Finally, more states need to enact and enforce pay equity laws and employers need to conduct regular pay audits, post salary ranges for jobs, eliminate the use of salary histories to set wages, and prohibit retaliation against employees who discuss, disclose, or inquire about their wages (Davis and Gould, 2015; Anna North, 2018).

Conclusion:

This study reveals that men and women who work full-time at similar skill levels have always been paid differently, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 notwithstanding. Granted, the gender wage gap narrowed from 59.2% in 1961 to 73.3% in 2000 and to 81.6% in 2018, the fact remains that by the year 2018, women were still paid less than 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male co-workers. Given this situation, one can argue that if the phrase: "equal work for equal pay" would ever become a reality, politicians from both isles of the political spectrum must unite to pass new legislations that would end this differential treatment of men and women in the workplace. It is evident from the tables above that men and women tend to congregate in different occupations. Logically, it can be argued that such occupational sex segregation explains some aspects of the gender wage gap. But, according to Maggie Koerth-Baker (2018), occupational sex segregation only explains 33 percent of gender wage gap. What this means is that other extraneous variables are at play in perpetuating the gender wage gap.

It is important to point out too that even though gender wage gap exists in almost all occupations, it is more of a problem in male-dominated occupations possibly because male-dominated occupations are viewed as more important than occupations that are dominated by women (American Association for University Workers, 2018). A 2009 study that looked at the relationship between occupational sex segregation and pay over time, found that a ten percent increase in the proportion of women working in an occupation was associated with that

job's hourly wages dropping by between 0.5 and 5 percent over 10 years (Koerth-Baker, 2018). Not only that, men who work in the majority of the occupations that are dominated by women are still paid more than their female co-workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). What that shows is that male workers are valued more than female workers. In fact, a recent study by researchers at Cornell University found that the single largest cause of the gender wage gap is greater number of women entering the field (Claire C. Miller, 2016). This blatant discrimination against women is one of the factors that is behind the wage gap between men and women.

Another aspect of the gender wage gap is the fact that women tend to be over-represented in the lowest paying occupations but under-represented in the highest paying occupations. For sure, this would affect women's lifetime earnings compared to men's. But, according to Koerth-Baker (2018), only 18% of the gender wage gap is attributable to this over-representation of women in the lowest paying jobs and their under-representation in the highest paying jobs. Granted, women tend to congregate in the occupations that pay the least but if only 18% of the gender wage gap can be explained by this choice, it follows that other extraneous factors exist. This could explain why Koerth-Baker (2018) says that 38% of gender wage gap is attributable to discrimination against women in the workplace.

According to the National Equal Pay Task Force (2013), gender-based wage discrimination imposes real costs on the U.S economy; it prevents the nation from fully enjoying the talents of all its workers because it unfairly limits the employment and wage prospects of an entire group of people. The Task Force further notes that:

“Ultimately, the differences in pay for women and men compound over the years. . . . , by age 25, the average young women working full-time would have already earned \$5,000 less over the course of her working career than the average 25-year old man. If that earning gap is not corrected, by age 65, she will have lost hundreds of thousands of dollars over her working lifetime” (p. 36).

And, as President Obama stated in 2013, “wage inequality undermines the promise of fairness and opportunity upon which our country was founded” (p. 37). So, if ‘equal pay for equal work’ will become a reality, the U.S. Congress must pass new legislations in this regard and federal agencies must protect the right to equal pay and make sure that all employers play by the same rules. Fifty-seven years have passed since the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963 yet women are still paid less than 82 cents on every dollar paid to their male co-workers (AAUW, 2019). It should not take another fifty-seven years to close the wage gap.

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