

There Is No Male-Female Wage Gap

By **CARRIE LUKAS**

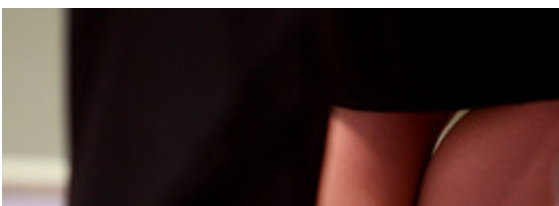
Tuesday is Equal Pay Day—so dubbed by the National Committee for Pay Equity, which represents feminist groups including the National Organization for Women, Feminist Majority, the National Council of Women's Organizations and others. The day falls on April 12 because, according to feminist logic, women have to work that far into a calendar year before they earn what men already earned the year before.

In years past, feminist leaders marked the occasion by rallying outside the U.S. Capitol to decry the pernicious wage gap and call for government action to address systematic discrimination against women. This year will be relatively quiet. Perhaps feminists feel awkward protesting a liberal-dominated government—or perhaps they know that the recent economic downturn has exposed as ridiculous their claims that our economy is ruled by a sexist patriarchy.

The unemployment rate is consistently higher among men than among women. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 9.3% of men over the age of 16 are currently out of work. The figure for women is 8.3%. Unemployment fell for both sexes over the past year, but labor force participation (the percentage of working age people employed) also dropped. The participation rate fell more among men (to 70.4% today from 71.4% in March 2010) than women (to 58.3% from 58.8%). That means much of the improvement in unemployment numbers comes from discouraged workers—particularly male ones—giving up their job searches entirely.

Men have been hit harder by this recession because they tend to work in fields like construction, manufacturing and trucking, which are disproportionately affected by bad economic conditions. Women cluster in more insulated occupations, such as teaching, health care and service industries.

Yet if you can accept that the job choices of men and women lead to different unemployment rates, then you shouldn't be surprised by other differences—like differences in average pay.



Feminist hand-wringing about the wage gap relies on the assumption that the differences in average earnings stem from discrimination. Thus the mantra that women make only 77% of what



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men earn for equal work. But even a cursory review of the data proves this assumption false.

The Department of Labor's Time Use survey shows that full-time working women spend an average of 8.01 hours per day on the job, compared to 8.75 hours for full-time working men. One would expect that someone who works 9% more would also earn more. This one fact alone accounts for more than a third of the wage gap.

Choice of occupation also plays an important role in earnings. While feminists suggest that women are coerced into lower-paying job sectors, most women know that something else is often at work. Women gravitate toward jobs with fewer risks, more comfortable conditions, regular hours, more personal fulfillment and greater flexibility. Simply put, many women—not all, but enough to have a big impact on the statistics—are willing to trade higher pay for other desirable job characteristics.

Men, by contrast, often take on jobs that involve physical labor, outdoor work, overnight shifts and dangerous conditions (which is also why men suffer the overwhelming majority of injuries and deaths at the workplace). They put up with these unpleasant factors so that they can earn more.

Recent studies have shown that the wage gap shrinks—or even reverses—when relevant factors are taken into account and comparisons are made between men and women in similar circumstances. In a 2010 study of single, childless urban workers between the ages of 22 and 30, the research firm Reach Advisors found that women earned an average of 8% more than their male counterparts. Given that women are outpacing men in educational attainment, and that our economy is increasingly geared toward knowledge-based jobs, it makes sense that women's earnings are going up compared to men's.

Should we celebrate the closing of the wage gap? Certainly it's good news that women are increasingly productive workers, but women whose husbands and sons are out of work or under-employed are likely to have a different perspective. After all, many American women wish they could work less, and that they weren't the primary earners for their families.

Few Americans see the economy as a battle between the sexes. They want opportunity to abound so that men and women can find satisfying work situations that meet their unique needs. That—not a day dedicated to manufactured feminist grievances—would be something to celebrate.

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