

Close the Gender Pay Gap

by Michael Curtis



It is a truth universally acknowledged that the treatment of women throughout history, whether for economic, social, or ontological reasons, has been unequal in all spheres of life, making them as Simone de Beauvoir wrote, a “Second Sex.” This truth has been confirmed at the highest level, the firmament itself. Jennifer Lawrence, said to be the highest paid female star in Hollywood, understood she was paid less than male stars in the same film *American Hustle*. Emma Stone, star of *La La Land*, declared that in Hollywood women should all be treated fairly and paid fairly.

As a result, women are now more conscious that they are generally paid less than their male colleagues and are becoming more articulate about pay differences. That disparity is evident in all spheres of activity. In the US, the Equal Pay Act of June 1963 Act makes it illegal to pay women differently for the same type of work that requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, performed under similar working conditions. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of June

2009 provides protection against gender pay discrimination.

Nevertheless, in the U.S. on average, women are paid 78 cents for every dollar a man earns. The ratio of women's to men's weekly full time earnings is 82% and lower for black and Hispanic women.

In spite of the prominence of some women in contemporary politics, Angela Merkel, Theresa May, Aung San Sun Kyi in Myanmar, Burma, Julia Gillard, former prime minister in Australia. and Dilma Rousseff, former president in Brazil until impeached, women have played and still play a lesser role in political activity. Even the surprising unveiling in Copenhagen in April 2018 of a large statue, "I am Queen Mary," of a 19th century black woman, who led a revolt against Danish rule in the Caribbean, may be a challenge to the Danish collective memory as a colonial power, but does not alter reality.

That reality is evident globally since statistics of 2017 show that only 22.8% of all members of national parliaments were women, only 11% were heads of state, and only 12% were heads of government. Curiously, the highest percentage is the 63% in Rwanda. In 38 countries, women number less than 10% of parliament. Only two countries, Rwanda and Bolivia, have more than 50% or more women in a single or lower chamber.

The figures in the U.S. are clear in politics and in business. In 2018, there are 105 women in Congress, 22 in the Senate and 83 in the House. Women comprise 25% in U.S. state legislatures, and 22% of the 312 elective positions. The discrepancy is similar in business, where in spite of the 1963 and 2009 statutes, the gender gap earnings is 20%, though it has been reduced from 45% in 1960.

The problem of inequality been understood by and agitated British Prime Minister Theresa May. In a strong statement, underlying the axiom that equality for women is a right, she

has declared that the difference in pay between men and women, the gender gap, is a burning injustice that must be tackled. May in 2018 therefore ordered British companies with 250 or more employees to publish the gap between average earnings of male and female staff, details of salary differences between male and female employees.

The findings of the 10,015 firms who reported, are significant, with hard data revealing the considerable sexual inequality. The nation as a whole and the individual employers are now fully aware of the existing inequality. Women can ask hard questions about the present discrepancy. In general, this accurate reporting of gender pay data is the first step to obtaining more equal workplaces in the country.

Previously there have been different calculations in Britain of the gender pay gap, the gap measuring the difference between the average salaries of men and women, expressed as a percentage of men's average earnings, though they are all in the same direction, of inequality of women. The gender pay gap is not the same as unequal pay which has been illegal under the Equal Pay Act of 1970 largely superseded by the Equality Act of 2010 which prohibit discrimination in terms of pay and conditions of employment for women. For 47 years it has been illegal in Britain to pay men and women different rates for the same job.

The data now available show that 78% of the 10,015 firms that reported pay men more than women, while 14% pay women more. These figures are based on the median measure which is the difference in the level of pay of an employee in the middle range of male wages and the middle employee in the range of female wages .

The medium hourly earnings rate gap for full time workers is 9.7%. This figure is different from the mean gender gap figure, calculated by adding the wages of all employees and dividing that figure by the number of employees. The mean gender gap,

commonly known as the average, is 14.1%. It is higher than the medium gap because the very highest pay goes to men; in 60% of firms the majority of the highest paid quarter of employees is male. Inequality is greatest at the high end of the pay scale. As the pay level increases, the proportion of women in that section decreases.

The largest gender gap occurs in the construction and repair business, in finance and in insurance, transport, technical services, and even in schools including some of the most prestigious schools, the "public schools." Even Oxford has a gap of 24.5%. Men are more likely than women to work for more productive, higher paying firms. Women are more numerous in occupations such as accommodation, health, education, social care, administrative support jobs, and food services.

Women of course suffer various forms of discrimination in time on the job and a bias in pay negotiation, and do not move as quickly or as often as do men to leadership positions. But objective factors are more likely to account for the gender gap. Women are not in higher paying jobs. They are far more likely than men to be part time workers, 41% to 12%, often after starting a family. They are more likely to care for young children or elderly relatives, and more likely to work in lower paid and lower skilled jobs. In this regard shared parental leave will be helpful in reducing the disparity.

Some of the gap is understandable. Many of the largest gender gaps are in the airlines. For example Ryan Air has a gap of 71.8% because there are 546 male pilots and only 8 females. Easy Jet has a 45% gap because 95% of its pilots are men. Yet, some are less understandable. For example, London's Millwall Football Club has a gap of 80%, Stoke F.C. has 92%, and banks including the Bank of England, and computer programming have considerable gaps. Shell, the largest company, reports that men earn on average 22% more than women, and that 27% of its senior management positions are held by women,

Change are coming. The BBC is no longer going to be a “good old boy’s network.” It plans to have half of its expert voices heard on news and current affairs programs to be women by April 2019, though the new plan refers only to experts, not to women officials. The BBC has made two changes already. In 2013, it created a women’s expert data base to make it easier for programers to find and book female contributors for TV and radio. About 100 women are enrolled. The second change is that “select programs” have been put on with a 50-50 sex balance.

In Britain, 30% of all women are in the lowest paid quarter of employees, while only 11% are in the highest quarter. Moreover, as the pay level increases, the proportion of woman in a sector decreases, though the gap has narrowed for younger workers. It will take more than a generation to close this gender gap, but the journey in Britain has started. The truth has been universally understood, not only that discrimination must end, but that it is in the national interest to make the most of women’s talents, experience, and academic achievements.