

Female Discrimination in the Labor Force

In the past decades there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women participating in the labor force. This expansion has unfortunately shown how women are still being treated as inferior citizens when comparing their wages and the jobs they are hired for to that of men. Many women in similar occupations as men, and having the same qualifications are only paid a fraction of what their male counterparts are paid. The only reasonable explanation that can be found for this income gap is discrimination. This unfair treatment shown throughout the handouts illustrate how far people still have to go before equal treatment becomes standard.

The increase in female participation started occurring during the 1970's. The number of women in the civilian labor force jumped from 23 million in the 1960's to 31 million in the 1970's. This leap would continue and increase in the 1980's and on into the 1990's. The result, in 1995, is a female labor force that numbers over 60 million. This comprised 46 percent of the civilian work force (10).

A reason for the rise in participation by women may be in the way women saw marriage and children. Fewer women saw marriage as a settling down. Women who had children began to return to their jobs. The number of working women that were either married or had children or both increased dramatically. In 1965, women with children under 18 years of age numbered 35.0 percent of the labor force. This number increased to 47.4 percent in 1975. In ten years it was 62.1 percent and finally in 1995 it had grown to 69.7 percent (7). This showed that the female attitude towards having children and marriage has changed.

According to the handouts, in 1970 women were paid poorly when compared to their male counterparts. The female worker had a median yearly earning of 19, 101 dollars. This was only 59.4 percent of what the males made. This does start to change in the 1980's as female earnings rose to 60.2 percent of men's. Five years later it had reached 64.6 percent. By 1990, the female's earnings had risen to 71.6 percent of what a man would make (2).

Women in the workplace have always been discriminated against. Ever since the first women started to work, they got paid less in the same positions that men held before them. In 1995, the top level managerial and professional specialty jobs were held by 7 million men and 5 million women. Those women made a weekly salary of 570 dollars while those men made 833 dollars. This is also true in many other occupations such as sales and technical operations (6). Some would say that this is the case because men are

better qualified and more competent in their jobs.

Since the year 1981, women have graduated from college in greater numbers than men. Women had 465, 000 graduates while men had 470, 000 in 1980. This gap would be closed and eclipsed by women in 1981. That year 480, 000 women earned a bachelors' degree while men only had 473, 000 (4). The gap in the number of college graduates is increasing in favor of women. So, it would seem that there are more highly qualified women out there than there are men. Then why is it that men are still being paid more?

Discrimination seems the only viable answer to the earnings gap. When one looks at the mean income of year-round workers in 1994, men with only some college experience still made more than women with a bachelors' degree. This gap increases as the level of educational accomplishment rises. Men with a master's degree made an average yearly salary of 62, 368 dollars while women with the same degree made only 43, 601 dollars (5). These numbers seem to greatly support the discrimination case.

When women first entered the labor force they were hassled by the males because they were traditionally supposed to only work in the house and take care of the family. This is one of the reasons why women are still to this day paid less than men. Male disapproval of female workers is reflected in their low wages and the small number of women in managerial positions. In 1986 only 23.7 percent of the female working population held managerial positions. The number increased to only 29.4 percent in 1995 (8). This stagnation shows that women are still not making inroads into the upper echelon of businesses.

Another reason for the earnings gap between men and women may be because of the types of jobs women typically hold. Of the 57 million female workers employed in 1994, a majority worked in technical, sales, and clerical occupations. These jobs are typically low paying jobs that have been traditionally filled by female workers. However, in the past few years, substantial progress has been made by women in obtaining jobs in the managerial and professional specialties. Even with the increases, women are still employed mostly for technical, sales, and administrative support positions (3).

Even with these reasons, women are still being paid less than men in the same jobs. In almost every occupational category, women are paid less than men. In 1995 women in managerial and professional specialties were paid a median weekly earning of 605 dollars where men made 829 dollars. Even in jobs that are traditionally dominated by females, men make more. In 1995, there were 3 million male workers and 10 million female workers in the clerical and administrative support fields. Yet the median weekly earnings of these full-time workers were much higher on the men's side. They made on average 489 dollars while the females made only 384 dollars (6). With this in

mind, one

can see that men are being paid more than women no matter what the job.

Since 1970, statistics drawn by the Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census has shown that the earnings gap between men and women has been closing. In 1970 women made 59.4 percent of what men made. In 1985, this number increased to 64.6 percent and in 1990 would become 71.6 percent. In the same period men have seen

a slight drop in the amount of pay they got (2). However, this is in no way a justification

for the unfair wage practices that male heads of businesses have been practicing over the last few decades.

The female labor force is seen as an inferior working force. When looking at earnings and job distribution, a person could assume that women were in some way not

as accomplished or competent as men. Yet, a more in depth investigation would show that women are just as qualified, if not more so, than men. A principal of equal pay for

equal work should be employed by all businesses and would definitely close the income gap.

Most people want to correct the unequal treatment of women in the work force. One method that can be used to support equality would be to introduce a federal legislation to guarantee equal pay for equal work if there isn't one already. The logistical

problem with this solution though would be great. How would people measure the value

of one person's work to another's? Who would decide this and how would it be implemented? Much still has to be done before this important issue is laid to rest.

People's attitudes towards women in the work force is slowly starting to change.

More opportunities are appearing for women workers. The unequal treatment of working

women will take years to change, but change is occurring. This topic will remain until

the day people are treated and paid equally based upon their abilities and not anything

else.

