

**Explaining the Gender Wage Gap:
Pay Expectations for Self, Others, and Perceptions of "Fair Pay"**

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The issue of pay equity or the gender wage gap has received well documented attention by a variety of social scientists. Studies on pay satisfaction have shown ironically that women were equally satisfied as men with their jobs even in the presence of pay inequity (Crosby, 1982). Crosby has labeled this phenomena, "the paradox of the contented female worker."

Research has focused on explaining this pay paradox. Terborg and Ilgen (1975) focused on gender stereotypes as a theoretical explanation for pay inequity. Other avenues have been pursued including comparative referents (Major, 1989), pay expectations (Major and Deaux, 1982), and perceptions of fair pay (Jackson and Grabski, 1988). Most studies have focused on career peak pay situations and have not really concentrated on entry level salaries with the exception of Jelinek and Harlan (1980) and Major and Konar (1984).

At entry level for MBA students, Major and Konar (1984) found that women had lower entry pay expectations than did men. Salary comparisons for a large group of undergraduates over an eight year period during the 1980s by Gardner and Hwang (1987) found only a small gender difference in starting salary levels after controlling for academic major, grade point average, and job location. A significant major X gender interaction was reported, however, that indicated within some majors significant salary differentials existed between men and women. Available

information on academic performance, job type and employer failed to mediate the differences, leaving questions as to whether the residual difference was due to labor market discrimination or poorly formed pay expectations.

This study investigated the pay expectations for graduating seniors to examine the relationship between gender and pay expectations for self and others. Also, the concept of fair pay was introduced to determine gender perceptions toward the fairness of the wage gap. The questions were designed to elicit starting salaries and peak career salaries from men and women majoring in traditionally male, traditionally female and gender balanced majors. The main purpose was to determine if women and men differed in their initial pay expectations.

Explaining the Gender Wage Gap

Recent literature reviews on the gender wage gap (Jackson, 1989; Major, 1987) provide a concise critique of recent developments to the understanding of this issue. A recent edition of the Journal of Social Issues (Vol. 45, No. 4) was devoted to this issue and carried articles from various viewpoints. A brief review of several of the key theoretical approaches used by researchers offers a context for the following study and its ensuing discussion.

Relative Deprivation Theory

Building on the early research on deprivation by Stouffer and his colleagues (1949) and later by Runciman (1966), Crosby (1976) developed a model of relative deprivation that could be applied to the situation of working women. Relative deprivation theory assumes that the experience of deprivation depends on a wide variety of factors (emotional, cognitive, and structural) in addition to the objective situation at hand. Crosby focused on the emotional aspects within certain prescribed preconditions: (1) the individual perceives that another possesses an outcome; (2) the individual desires that outcome; (3) the individual feels entitled to the outcome; (4) the individual considers attainment of the outcome as feasible; and (5) the individual does not feel personally responsible for the absence of the outcome (Jackson, 1989).

Crosby and her colleagues (Berstein and Crosby 1980; Crosby 1982) conducted studies using this model. The results from Berstein and Crosby's (1980) research supported some but not all of the model's preconditions. The 1982 examination of working men and women led to more insightful results. Crosby found that despite income disparity between men and women holding a position with similar job-related characteristics, women were just as satisfied with their jobs, including the pay they received.

These particular results tended to substantiate earlier findings that had lead to the "paradoxically contented woman worker" explanation (Deaux, 1979; Schreiber, 1979; and Weaver, 1978).

Using this evidence, Crosby (1982) revised her model. As revised, the model offered two explanations of the paradoxically contented woman worker. The first argument contended that women are contented with less pay than men because they do not perceive a discrepancy between the pay they want and the pay they receive. The second argument followed that they were content with less pay because women do not perceive a discrepancy between the pay they want and the pay they receive. Recent research by Major (1989) pursued this second list of reasoning.

Match to Reality

Research into how men and women may differ in the value attached to the money they receive has not produced clear and consistent finding. Nieva and Guter (1981) concluded that women value pay and promotions less than men while desiring more interpersonal relationships and pleasant work environments. Apparently women have adjusted their job values to the reality of low-paying/low status occupations. This "match to reality" explanation has been used to explain women's pay outcomes (Kanter, 1977; Martin, 1986).

Recent studies have found gender differences in job values. For example, Major and Konar (1984) found women rated pay less important than men. Beutell and Brewner (1986) found that women placed greater value on friendly co-workers and good working conditions while men sought opportunities to earn money, supervise others and solve important problems.

In some occupations, no gender differences have been found. Among lawyers, for example, Golding, Resnick and Crosby (1983) found that female and male attorneys held very similar values. Likewise, Crosby (1982) found no gender differences among men and women in higher status occupations.

Distributive Justice Theory

Equity or distributive justice theory is based upon four propositions (Homan, 1961; Walster, Walster and Berschied, 1978): (1) individual will maximize their own outcome; (2) groups maximize their collective outcomes by evolving a system of equitable rewards; (3) individuals in an inequitable situation become distressed; and (4) distress is relieved by restoring equity or changing one's perception. According to Major and Deaux (1982), women allocate less pay to themselves than men do after outperforming co-workers. If women prefer interpersonal relations, then the higher allocations to co-workers would appear

reasonable (Major and Deaux, 1982). However, research addressing this point have not produced definitive results.

Jackson and Grabski (1988) took a more direct approach in measuring pay expectations through distributive justice theory. Arguing that previous research had not examined pay expectations for others not the occupational status' influence on pay expectations, these researchers demonstrated that women had lower fair pay estimates for higher and moderate status positions than men but were similar for low-status occupations. Lower pay was also seen as fair pay by women. The general result was that women had lower pay expectations for others than men did.

Value of Money

Crosby's explanation of the paradoxically contented woman workers suggests that women value pay less than men do. Distributive justice theory also implies value differences with regards to the meaning of money. An implicit assumption of the gender wage gap issue is the correspondence between wanting and valuing (Jackson, 1989). However, the value of pay or the meaning of money has not been directly dealt with and consequently neglected in earlier research.

One aspect of the research underlying this study is the development of a model that incorporates the meaning of money and yet, retains the key value-based explanation (Nieva and

Guter, 1981) and the entitlement-based explanation (Major, 1987). This model will be presented and elaborated upon in the discussion.

Methods

Colleges were classified based on the enrollment status of women. Two colleges were selected where men comprised 70% or more of the students (Agriculture and Engineering); two where the ratio of men to women was about 50-50 (Business and Social Sciences); and a group of colleges, labeled "Other," where women made up 70% or more of the enrollments (Education, Nursing and Human Ecology). Except for Business and Social Sciences, a stratified weighted random sample was taken by gender. In Business and Social Sciences a simple random sample was obtained. A total of 1,588 students were identified for the study.

An instrument was designed that incorporated questions that supported the major theories used in studying gender differences in the value of pay. Among the items included in the survey were six questions about starting pay and peak pay expectations for self and others, and perceptions of "fair pay." Respondents indicated a "gross annual income" for each item. In addition, questions were asked regarding attachment to the labor force, work expectations, job status and time out of the work force for family responsibilities.

The instrument was pretested among a group of 100 senior Social Sciences and Business students, not previously identified for the main sample. The instrument was evaluated for clarity and completeness. No major revisions were made and the pilot sample was included with the main sample for analytical purposes.

The surveys were mailed to the student's local address. Surveys were to be returned in business reply envelopes. Reminder letters were sent to all non-respondents two weeks after the original mailing date. The follow-up notice raised the level of participation slightly. Analysis of variance was selected as the statistical method. The basic experimental design was a 2 (gender) X 5 (college) factorial design with covariants.

Results

Surveys were received from 447 college seniors, including the pretest group, for a response rate of 26.5%. Women responded at a slightly higher rate than men, 29.6% and 22.5% respectively. Respondents were majoring in Agriculture (50), Business (104), Engineering (81), Social Sciences (103), and an "Other" category (97) that included majors in Nursing, Education and Human Ecology.

Analyses were performed on the six pay measures: Expected starting salary for self, expected peak salary for self, expected

starting salary for others (currently seeking the same type of job), expected peak salary for "best" others in your field, "fair" starting salary, and "fair" peak salary for the "best" others in your field. The means responses for these measures by college and gender are presented in Table 1.

In all cases except for women in Social Sciences, respondents expected their starting salaries to be higher than other starting salaries and the "fair" starting salary they designated for the field. When comparing peak salaries for self and the "best" others, all respondents except those in Agriculture would expect to find their salaries below the "best" in the field. In comparing to "fair" peak salaries, however, nearly every group indicated that they would be earning salaries higher than this level. The exception were both men and women in Social Sciences.

On each of the six pay measures, 2 (gender) X 5 (college) analyses of variance were performed. The main effects of gender were significant for all three peak salary measures, but for none of the starting salary measures (Table 2). Compared to males, females expected lower peak salaries for themselves, lower peak salaries for the "best" others in the fields, and believed lower peak salaries were fair salaries.

The main effects for college were significant for all six

measures. For all starting salary measures, Engineering majors reported expecting or anticipating the highest salaries. Following Engineering and rather closely bunched together were Business, Social Sciences and Agriculture majors. At the low end were "Other" majors, comprised largely of traditional women's occupations.

With regards to peak salaries for themselves, Engineering and Business were at the top with Social Sciences and Agriculture in the middle, and "Other" at the bottom. Across all colleges, except "Other", women expected fairly comparable salaries irrespective of major. For "best" peak salaries, Engineering salaries were noticeably lower than Business and Social Sciences. The "best" from Agriculture and "Other" were very comparable. "Fair" peak salaries provided much less variation between majors; in fact the college effect was only significant at the $p \leq .10$ level.

Planned contrasts within college majors clarified the gender differences in initial starting salary estimates (self). Females in Engineering, Business, and "Other" expected lower initial salaries for themselves, and believed lower starting salaries were fair salaries, as compared to males in those fields. In contrast, there was a tendency for females in Agriculture and Social Sciences to expect higher starting salaries than males. Females in agriculture also expected higher peak salaries for

themselves while females from other majors had lower salary expectations.

Additional analyses were attempted to identify mediators of the observed gender differences in pay expectations. Among the mediators considered were self-ratings on qualifications for the job, number of hours per week expected to work at the job, number of years expected to work in this job, how hard one expects to work and time out of the work force for family responsibilities. On each of these potential mediating variables, 2 (gender) X 5 (college) analyses of variance were formed. Only hours worked per week (HRSPERWK), how hard one expects to work (HARDWORK) and TIMEOUT of the work force had a significant gender effect. Females indicated that they expected to work longer and harder than males did.

The average time students expected to be out of the work force was 28 months. Women indicated that they would have to take a total of 38 months or three years out of the work force for children; men only reported they expected to be out 14 months. There was some variation by college with Engineers expecting to be out only 21 months and "Other" was 36 months. When gender by college averages are compared, women in traditionally male fields tend to be willing to take as long out of the workforce as women from traditionally women's fields. Men from traditionally male fields, on the other hand, have the

lowest time expected to be out of the work force (about 11 months).

There were also significant college effects for the variable, how confident are you that you will get the job you are applying for (GETJOB) and the status (prestige) of the job being applied for (JOBSTAT). Engineers and Business majors were more confident that they would get the job they wanted and rated their jobs as more prestigious than the other three college groups. For JOBSTAT, there also was a significant college X gender interaction effect. Females in Business and Engineering assigned higher prestige ratings to their jobs than males in these fields; likewise, females in the other three majors rated their jobs less prestigious than males.

When the mediators were entered as covariants in the analyses of variance with gender and college as the main effects, the mediators failed to account for the gender differences (where they occurred) in pay expectations (Table 3). Generally, the covariants had more influence on the college main effect. Several mediators were found to be important, especially HRSPERWK and number of years expected to work in this job (NYRSJOB)

Discussion

The absence of gender differences on the starting salary measures and the presence of gender differences on the peak

salary measures beg to be explained. Information on starting salaries, particularly among Engineering and Business majors, can be helpful in framing initial salary expectations. Students from these majors are more likely to use the placement office on campus where information on salaries is often given as part of career advising program. Salary information is also reported annually by the Engineering Manpower Commission. As a result, major companies recruiting engineers (also accountants) have very similar salary ranges that range at the maximum between \$3,000 and \$4,000 about the average. Starting salary studies by Gardner and Hwang (1987) found no significant or practical gender differences among engineers and similar results among selected business majors, such as accounting.

Gender differences for starting salary levels in the other colleges tended to favor women, except in those traditionally women's majors. The differences may in part be attributed to the combination of majors represented by males and females within these colleges. A check, however, of Agriculture and Social Sciences found men and women distributed similarly across majors. Women apparently were more optimistic about their starting salaries than men.

The difficulty occurs when attempting to explain the emergence of strong male dominated salary levels at peak career. The match to reality explanation can account for these findings

only if it is assumed that women majoring in Engineering and Business are aware that a gender gap does not exist at labor market entry, but that the gap increases with tenure (Blau and Ferber, 1986). This argument is plausible; yet given findings by Major and Forcey (1985) that women's low pay expectations are in part due to their lack of knowledge about pay structures, the argument is not very strong. An alternative explanation is that men in Engineering, Business and Social Sciences have unrealistic explanations about peak salaries in these fields. Even so, Majors et. al (1984) have found that unrealistically high pay expectations often result in higher actual pay than realistically low pay expectations.

More troubling were the findings that women have lower peak salary expectations for others, and perceive a lower peak salary as fair compared to men. Even with possible mediators that account for breaks in labor market participation and difference in attachment to the labor market (e.g. length of time with first employer), gender differences remain strong. Thus, the explanations based on occupational gender linkage and job status, the most common rationals, appear inadequate to account for these findings.

Returning to the reality explanation, this argument that applies equally to men and women suggests that graduating students have only a slight grasp on the realities of the world

of work prior to labor market entry. Women who buy into the "we can have it all" mentality fail to realize the tradeoffs that will have to be made, depending on marriage and family status. Men also need to be aware of similar tradeoffs as they seldom factor non-work related activities into work decisions. If Martin (1989) is correct, students fail to grasp the reality of the labor market, specifically pay structures, even when information is supplied to them prior to making a decision.

Comparative - referents also provides a rich rational explaining these differences. Work on women in Engineering (Gardner and Broadus, 1990) has shown that these women have fewer friends in Engineering than men. If same sex referents are used to develop pay structures, women may be forming their structures within a group where pay expectations are already low. Men, on the other hand, are not only using more input from contemporary males in the field, but have access to older males (e.g. fathers) who are more likely to coach them on pay expectations.

These solutions and others have produced inconsistent reasonings as to the gap in pay expectations. Inconsistencies may be traced to inadequacies in defining (operationalizing) the meaning of money or the value of pay. Gender differences in the meaning of money may assist in further understanding the "paradoxically contented woman worker."

Consider the proposed model that is illustrated in Figure 1. The model attempts to integrate the value-based and comparative-referents explanations of the "paradoxically contented woman worker" (Jackson, 1989). The model introduces the concept of the meaning of money to the causal relationship between gender and pay satisfaction. Also included in this model are job choice and role commitments.

The instruments designed for the meaning of money measure the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of the meaning of money. The cognitive dimension refers to the individual's knowledge about money that includes actual pay rates and cost of living estimates. The affective dimension captures the individual's evaluation of money. For example, is money good or bad -- moral or immoral. This dimension is conceptually related to past research on the value of money and more recently developed measures on the meaning of money (Furnham and Lewis, 1986). The final dimension, refers to the individual's behavior with regards to acquiring monetary outcomes when other desirable outcomes are also available, but only one outcome can be selected. A common example is the choice between working and engaging in leisure activities. The cognitive and behavioral dimensions are expected to have a reciprocal influence on the affective dimension (e.g. how one feels about money depends on one's knowledge of money). Gender differences are hypothesized to exist along these dimensions.

Gender will further influence role commitments through stereotypic beliefs about family and work roles. Gender also influences job choice through these same types of stereotypical beliefs about the appropriate careers for men and women (Deaux and Lewis, 1984). Role commitment is also hypothesized to influence directly job choice (e.g. provider role or care-giver role).

The meaning of money variable has proposed causal relationships with pay values, pay expectations, and choice of comparative referents. In the latter case, those who hold similar views on the meaning of money will serve as referents or reinforcers of these values. For example, people who place more meaning on money will seek out other people who also evaluate money the same way (Suls, Gaes and Gastorf, 1979; Suls and Miller, 1977; Wheeler and Koestner, 1984). Comparative referents also influence pay expectations. Having higher paid referents will result in higher pay expectations than having lower paid referents for pay comparisons (Major, 1987).

This model draws together both the value-based and comparative referents explanations to pay satisfaction. Pay value has a direct effect while referents affect satisfaction indirectly. The most important aspects of the model is that the meaning of money directly influences both values and referents. Thus one could explain the paradoxically contented woman worker

as someone who will accept less pay than a man because money is less meaningful to them; they therefore value the pay less; and subsequently choose comparative referents who do not facilitate an evaluation of their pay outcomes (Jackson, 1989).

This study has failed to explain adequately the gender wage gap through traditional explanations. An alternative explanation appears warranted. This model suggests strongly that the meaning of money may provide this alternative explanation. By hypothesizing that men and women hold different meanings for money, future research can consider a wide range of issues facing women in the work place, e.g. Do married mothers value pay more or less than childless married women? The model also offers an opportunity to investigate how men may adjust to the "daddy track."

Table 2: Gender X College Analyses of Variance: Significant Effects

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|-----------------------------------|--|
| Starting Salary - Self: | College F = 14.049 $p \leq .001$ Gender X College F = 2.188 $p \leq .055$ |
| Peak Salary - Self: | Sex F = 3.386 $p \leq .038$ College F = 2.286 $p \leq .045$ |
| Starting Salary - Others: | College F = 16.154 $p \leq .001$ |
| Peak Salary- Best Others: | Gender F = 5.863 $p \leq .016$ College F = 2.312 $p \leq .001$ |
| Fair Starting Salary: | College F = 9.37 $p \leq .001$ |
| Fair Peak Salary: | Gender F = 9.508 $p \leq .002$ College F = 1.90 $p \leq .093$ |
| Hours Worked Per Week (HRSPERWK): | College F = 5.401 $p \leq .001$ |
| Work Hard: | Gender F = 5.806 $p \leq .016$ |
| Get Job You Want (GETJOB): | College F = 1.953 $p \leq .085$ |
| Job Prestige or Status (JOBSTAT): | College F = 12.142 $p \leq .001$ Gender X College F = 2.781 $p \leq .017$ |
| TIMEOUT of work force: | Gender F = 47.486 $p \leq .001$ |

Table 3. Gender X College Analyses of Variance with Covariants for Pay Expectations

Starting Salary - Self:

Main: College F = 13.185 $p \leq .001$
 Gender X College F = 2.599 $p \leq .025$
 Covariants: HRSPERWK F = 2.976 $p \leq .085$
 NYRSJOB F = 16.275 $p \leq .001$

Peak Salary - Self:

Main: College F = 2.64 $p \leq .037$
 Gender F = 3.049 $p \leq .082$
 Covariants: HRSPERWK F = 7.102 $p \leq .009$

Starting Salary - Others:

Main: College F = 15.092 $p \leq .001$
 Covariants: HRSPERWK F 4.916 $p \leq 0.27$
 NYRSJOB F = 14.424 $p \leq .001$

Peak Salary - Best Others:

Main: College F = 2.557 $p \leq .022$
 Gender F 3.199 $p \leq .064$
 Covariants: HRSPERWK F 3.4365 $p \leq .009$
 NDIFFEMP F = 13.099 $p \leq .001$

(NDIFFEMP: Number of Different Employers Work For)

Fair Starting Salary

Main: College F 8.710 $p \leq .001$
 Covariants: HRSPERWK F = 11.146 $p \leq .001$
 NYRSJOB F = 19.538 $p < .001$

Fair Peak Salaries - Best Others:

Main: College F = 2.073 $p \leq .100$
 Gender F 7.836 $p \leq .004$
 CoVariants: HRSPERWK F 8.206 $p \leq .005$

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