



Cornell University
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School
DigitalCommons@ILR

CAHRS ResearchLink

Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies
(CAHRS)

1-2010

Taking Attitude into Account for the Gender Wage Gap: Compensating employees equally when gender role attitudes differ

Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies, ILR School, Cornell University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cahrs_researchlink

Thank you for downloading an article from DigitalCommons@ILR.

[Support this valuable resource today!](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS) at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in CAHRS ResearchLink by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact hlmdigital@cornell.edu.

Taking Attitude into Account for the Gender Wage Gap: Compensating employees equally when gender role attitudes differ

Abstract

Key Findings:

- In the U.S, men still earn more than women, and this effect is even more pronounced when considering gender role orientation—or the beliefs people have about the proper roles for men and women at work and home.
- Men who view their gender role traditionally (to be the primary breadwinner working outside the home) earn more than men with egalitarian views (i.e. more relaxed, accepting views of gender roles).
- Women, no matter how they view their gender role, tend to earn less than men.
- The wage gap between men with traditional views and men with egalitarian views is greater than the wage gap between men and women.
- The effect of gender role orientation on men's and women's wages is real—regardless of the complexity of someone's job or the percentage of women in the occupation.
- As people age, their gender role views become more egalitarian.

Keywords

diversity, inclusion, employee engagement, pay equality, policy

Comments

Suggested Citation

Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies. (2010, January). *Taking attitude into account for the gender wage gap: Compensating employees equally when gender role attitudes differ* (CAHRS ResearchLink No. 2). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, ILR School.



R ResearchLink

No. 2, January 2010

Taking Attitude into Account for the Gender Wage Gap: Compensating employees equally when gender role attitudes differ

THE TOPIC: HOW GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES EXPLAIN GAP IN MEN'S AND WOMEN'S INCOME

Although today's workforce is made up of nearly even numbers of men and women, men generally earn more. Many researchers have investigated the gender wage gap, but it's particularly relevant now. While the gender gap in earnings had been narrowing since the 1970s, a 2006 study showed that it has begun to widen again.

This study looks at two types of *gender role orientation*—or the beliefs people have about the proper roles for men and women at work and at home (Fortin, 2005).

This study is the first in 25 years to directly link people's perceptions of gender roles with their income. It's also the first to investigate how individual differences like attitudes affect the gender wage gap—which is typically studied as a product of economic factors like occupation, hours worked, education, and marital status. Studying how attitudinal characteristics of people themselves affect the gender wage gap opens a new avenue for researchers, practitioners and policy makers to further define what really causes the wage differential between men and women.

KEY FINDINGS

- ◇ In the U.S, men still earn more than women, and this effect is even more pronounced when considering gender role orientation—or the beliefs people have about the proper roles for men and women at work and home.
- ◇ Men who view their gender role traditionally (to be the primary breadwinner working outside the home) earn more than men with egalitarian views (i.e. more relaxed, accepting views of gender roles).
- ◇ Women, no matter how they view their gender role, tend to earn less than men.
- ◇ The wage gap between men with traditional views and men with egalitarian views is greater than the wage gap between men and women.
- ◇ The effect of gender role orientation on men's and women's wages is real—regardless of the complexity of someone's job or the percentage of women in the occupation.
- ◇ As people age, their gender role views become more egalitarian.

Gender Roles: Traditional or Egalitarian?

Some people have a *traditional* gender role orientation. This is where a man sees his role to be working outside the home as the primary breadwinner, and a woman sees her role as putting her home and family duties first, with her wage-earning to be secondary.

Other people have a more *egalitarian* gender role orientation. Their views are more relaxed about the gendered separation of work and family, accepting that either men or women can be involved in each to varying degrees.

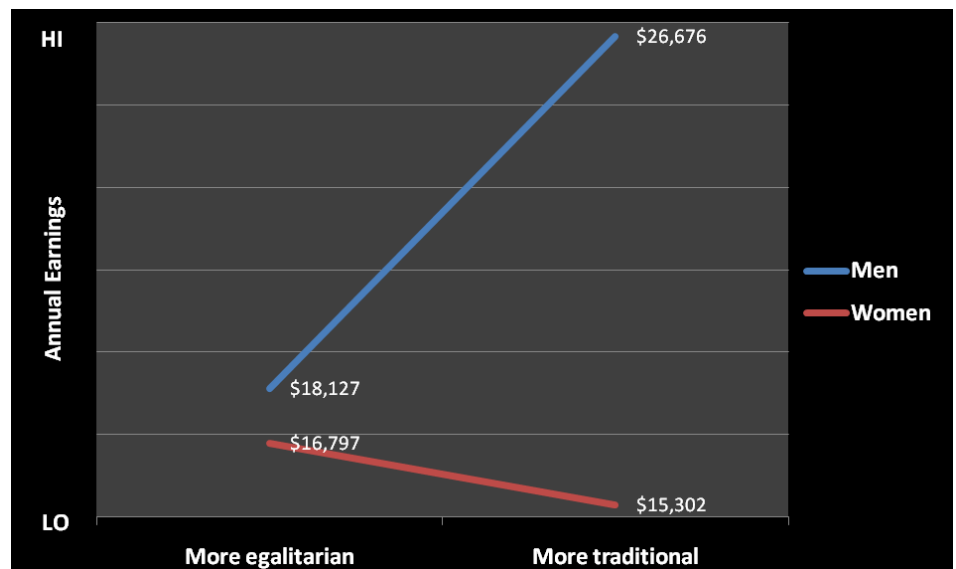
THE STUDY QUESTIONS

In this study, researchers asked the following questions:

- ◇ How do certain factors—demography, intellectual background, familial environment, parental education and employment—predict whether someone holds a traditional or egalitarian view of gender roles?
- ◇ As they age, do people become more traditional or more egalitarian in their views of gender roles?
- ◇ How does a person's gender role orientation affect their income?
- ◇ Does gender role orientation affect income differently for men and women?
- ◇ Will the gender-dependent effect of gender role orientation on income be explained by a person's occupational choice (i.e., choosing a job with more complexity or occupations largely dominated by one gender), such that men and women with certain gender role orientations will choose different types of jobs, leading to differential incomes?

THE RESULTS

The researchers found several factors that predict whether people hold a traditional or egalitarian view of gender roles. People with traditional views of gender roles were more likely to: be male, Caucasian and married; have lower levels of education and general mental ability; live in small towns or the Southern U.S.; have been raised in a religious tradition, with less educated fathers and mothers who were homemakers. Conversely, people with egalitarian views of gender roles were more likely to: be female, younger, African American, and unmarried; have higher education and general mental ability; live in cities or the Northeast U.S.; have a non-religious upbringing, with more educated fathers and mothers who worked outside the home.

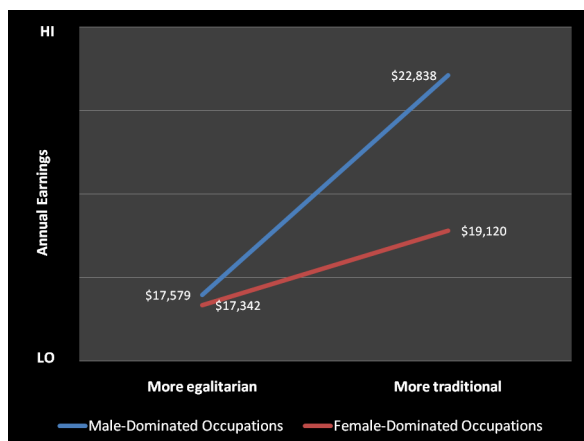


Older people do not have more traditional views of gender roles; in fact, as they age, people tend to change their gender role views to become more egalitarian. Over time, men changed their views more than women did.

Traditional gender role attitudes were positively related to income—people with more traditional gender role attitudes earned more money.

The effect of this relationship was dependent on a person's gender, and was more positive for men than for women. In fact, men with traditional gender role attitudes earned the highest incomes, but women with such attitudes had slightly decreased earnings compared to their egalitarian counterparts (see graph, above right). This effect was significant even when other relevant factors were controlled for—such as a person's education level, number of hours worked, job complexity, and whether or not they work in a male or female dominated field (occupational segregation).

Occupational choice partially explains why women have lower earnings when they have traditional gender role attitudes, but men who have such attitudes experience higher earnings. Traditional men and women make different occupational choices when it comes to gender segregated jobs and job complexity. Having a traditional gender role orientation gives a distinct earnings advantage in male-dominated jobs (which are statistically more likely to be held by men), but not as much in female-dominated jobs (see chart below).



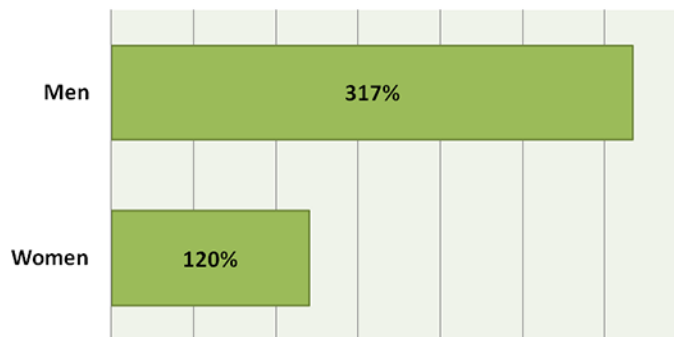
The gender wage gap is real: workplace and policy implications

This study sought to bridge the gap between psychology and economics by presenting a model combining the central variables of both disciplines: gender, gender role orientation, and earnings. The results suggest that a person’s gender and gender role orientation jointly affect their earnings, which may explain part of the gender wage gap. The wage gap—the difference between men’s and women’s earnings—was made worse in the presence of traditional gender role attitudes, suggesting that traditional gender role orientations work against the achievement of gender equality in the workforce.

Described another way, few women working outside the home, even those with traditional values, would likely endorse women earning dramatically lower salaries than men for comparable work (i.e., the same types of jobs)—yet this is exactly what the results of this study show for traditional men and women, as the analyses controlled for whether people worked more or less hours, at more or less complex jobs, or within gender-segregated occupations.

And while traditional men earned the most, this study found that gender role attitudes were much less predictive of earnings for women—women in general tended to make less than men (regardless of their gender role attitudes). Over the twenty-five years of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (from which this study analyzed a subset of data), women’s earnings increased an average of 120 percent, while men’s earnings increased an average of 317 percent.

Percent Increase in Earnings 1979-2004



less pay than men even when factors such as education, hours worked, and job complexity are held constant. There is another way, though, that these results challenge legislative, external solutions to the gender wage gap.

Beyond equal pay for equal work: attitudes, self-fulfilling prophecies and employer actions

Time may appear to be on the side of those with more relaxed gender role views (gender role orientations are growing more egalitarian over time), but historical trends often stall or reverse themselves, as evidenced by the recent widening of the gender wage gap after years of narrowing (Blau & Kahn, 2006). Parents, educators, employers and the media reinforce social norms and mores; given the results observed in this study, these groups should pay careful attention to the values and attitudes they communicate through messages, policies and behavior.

From a public policy perspective, the passage of the 1963 Equal Pay Act (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1997) shows political recognition of the structural and external causes of the gender wage gap (as does the more recent political debate over the Fair Pay Act of 2007). The Equal Pay Act specifically states that employers should provide equal pay for work of equivalent value, as a composite of skills, effort, responsibility, and working conditions, regardless of whether the jobs themselves are different. For instance, the skills required by a job may be equal (e.g., social workers and probation officers), but because of occupational segregation (e.g., social workers are predominately female and probation officers predominately male), pay is not equal, favoring the male-dominated positions.

At a practical level, the study results confirm the problem that the Equal Pay Act sought to address in that, in the survey sample, women received significantly

The study’s results suggest that women do appear to suffer a wage penalty in that they are paid less even when background (e.g., education), work input (e.g., hours worked), and occupational (e.g., job complexity) factors are held constant. Although this might support instituting corrective measures such as the Equal Pay Act, results also suggest that unless the passage of such legislation changes attitudes and social mores, the gender wage gap is likely to persist.

Specifically, the researchers controlled for both job complexity and occupational segregation in the analysis of the substantial earnings differential between men and women. This suggests that even eliminating the effect of these factors (i.e. those ascribed to discriminatory or exclusionary practices) will not eliminate the pay gap when employees have a traditional conception of gender roles.

Traditional attitudes toward gender roles may disadvantage women's earnings and advantage men's earnings through a few different mechanisms. First, gender role orientation might create self-fulfilling prophecies for employees.

For instance, women who do not see their primary role as work-related or who feel ambivalent about working outside the home (i.e., women with traditional gender roles) might not expect to be paid as much as their male counterparts. This may be one reason that women set less aggressive goals during salary negotiations (Stuhlmacher & Walters, 1999).

On the other hand, traditional men whose identities are wrapped up in their work role, and being the primary breadwinner, might negotiate very aggressively for higher wages.

The findings of this study might also be due in part to actions by employers and HR professionals. Research has established that women who act in masculine, non-feminine, ways often encounter backlash at work in terms of increased bias (Rudman and Glick, 1999). Thus it follows that men who do not embrace masculine stereotypes might face bias as well.

If a man seems to value his work and family roles equally and does not aggressively negotiate for salary, this behavior could result in biased performance evaluations or reduced pay compared to men who engage in such stereotypically masculine behaviors.

Managers and HR professionals can, unfortunately, fall victim to such bias, especially when compensation and performance review systems are based on subjective evaluations.

THE TAKEAWAY

How can this study's explanation of the gender wage gap help HR practitioners guard against the effects of attitudes on compensation and other HR functions?

- ◊ **Companies should continue to keep current statistics on pay levels within their organization, but with a special eye toward places within gender groups where there might be unfair disparities. Don't forget that it can be unfair to treat a group of men differently than another group of men as well. Though these statistics may not be legally mandated, the law has stated that discrimination based on arbitrary gender stereotypes is illegal.**
- ◊ **Explicitly train managers in charge of selection to be aware of their personal gender biases in order to help prevent their own gender role attitudes affecting whom they hire or promote. Most managers don't want to admit their gender role attitudes might make them less likely to hire a single mother than a single dad, nor do they want to admit that the man who leaves the office at 5 PM to pick up his kids from daycare may be a better asset to the organization than the man who works until 8 PM and leaves his wife to pick up the kids.**
- ◊ **Companies should be aware that even if certain men don't negotiate aggressively or fit an ascribed version of masculinity, they may still be worth a certain salary level because of the actual skills and abilities they bring to the job. Yet another reason that point-factor compensation systems are so important in organizations.**
- ◊ **Always promote awareness. No company likes to think their managers are biased in any way, yet researchers know that, on average, many are. This is one reason objective tools and techniques are so strongly encouraged in HR. The critical point is for HR leaders to be aware that these disparities might exist, and be willing to train and prepare to guard against them.**
- ◊ **Finally, employers reinforce social norms through their policies and activities; and they can change social norms through the same mechanisms. HR practitioners should be mindful of these dynamics when examining their hiring and compensation policies.**

THE DATA SOURCE

The researchers studied a subset of people enrolled in the [National Longitudinal Survey of Youth \(NLSY\)](#), a long-term panel study by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics that has been following over 12,000 people since 1979. Due to sample attrition (from funding constraints, trouble locating participants, death, or dropping from the survey), the response rate for the NLSY is 80 percent.

The survey participants, now 45 to 53 years old, are interviewed every other year about questions on many topics. The most recent round of interviews was in 2004–2005. Participants live in all 50 states and represent both genders. They also represent a wide variety of types of families earning different amounts of money. Sixty-nine percent of the people in this survey are Caucasian. Twenty-four percent are African American.

To assess their gender role orientation, researchers asked survey participants whether they agreed, strongly agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with statements such as, "A woman's place is in the home, not the office or shop," "A wife with a family has no time to work outside the home," and "It is much better for the man to be the achiever outside the home and the woman to take care of the home and family."

THE RESEARCHERS

This study was conducted by:

- Timothy A. Judge, McKethan-Matherly Eminent Scholar, Department of Management, Warrington College of Business, University of Florida
- Beth A. Livingston, Assistant Professor, Human Resource Studies, ILR School (Industrial and Labor Relations), Cornell University

For an in-depth discussion of this topic, see:

Judge, Timothy A. & Livingston, Beth A. (2008). Is the Gap More Than Gender? A Longitudinal Analysis of Gender, Gender Role Orientation, and Earnings. Journal of Applied Psychology, 91, 5, 994-1012.

◇ Questions about this research should be directed to Beth Livingston at bal93@cornell.edu.