

HER IMPACT INITIATIVE

Resource Guides for Women & Allies

Informing and empowering to activate.

Inspired by conversations with women leaders and advocates.

The Pay Gap Is a Class Issue Too

Understanding who the gender pay gap actually affects — and the class dynamics that shape the conversation.

What the Pay Gap Actually Measures

The gender pay gap compares median annual earnings of full-time workers. It does not mean every woman is paid less than every man at the same job. It reflects systemic patterns: the jobs women are concentrated in, the hours they can work, and the seniority they're able to reach.

The Class Dimension

"If all you ever earn is minimum wage, there's no gender pay gap to you. That kind of thing is only applicable when you're in a professional, salaried position."

This is a crucial insight. For women working in minimum wage jobs — retail, food service, caregiving — hourly rates are set by law and apply equally. The pay gap becomes visible when women enter salaried, professional, and leadership roles. That means:

- Working-class women may not personally experience the pay gap in the traditional sense
- But they face other compounding inequities: lack of paid leave, benefit instability, physical safety risks
- Women of color face both the race wage gap AND the gender wage gap simultaneously
- The gap widens significantly as women age, particularly after having children (the "motherhood penalty")

The Numbers

- **Overall gap:** Women earn ~84 cents for every dollar men earn (2023 data, full-time workers)
- **Black women:** Earn approximately 67 cents per white male dollar
- **Latina women:** Earn approximately 57 cents per white male dollar

- **Lifetime impact:** The average woman loses \$400,000–\$1 million over her career due to the pay gap

Why Salary Negotiation Matters

Women are less likely to negotiate their starting salary — and research shows they are sometimes penalized socially when they do. But negotiating matters enormously: a \$5,000 difference in starting salary compounds over a career.

- AAUW offers free salary negotiation workshops — find one at aauw.org/resources/programs/salary
- Know your worth: use Glassdoor, LinkedIn Salary, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Practice the ask: role-playing negotiation with a friend or coach makes a real difference
- Negotiate everything: not just salary, but PTO, remote flexibility, professional development budgets

Try this: Before your next negotiation, research three salary data points for your role, industry, and location. Go in with a specific number, not a range.

Resources

- AAUW Work Smart (free online salary negotiation training) — aauw.org
- Institute for Women's Policy Research — iwpr.org
- "Women Don't Ask" by Linda Babcock & Sara Laschever
- Lean In Salary Insights — leanin.org