

# Pay Parity Is Possible If We Do These Three Things

by Nicole Armstrong

If we keep advancing at the pace we are now, we won't see pay parity in the United States until 2058. We won't see parity in the C-suite for another 100 years. And that's just for white women.

If we are going to achieve pay parity, there are three things we must do:

## 1) Shift the focus from behavior to systems

Even though women are 60% of college graduates, they are less likely to be hired for entry level jobs than men, receive fewer promotions early on in their career, and are paid less—significantly less. And the disparities are even more pronounced for women of color.

A study by Merrill Lynch found that if a man and woman work full time until retirement, a woman will earn \$411,000 less.

When you take into account the time women take off to care for children and aging parents, the difference jumps to over \$1 million.

Beyond the individual implications of this disparity, gender inequality costs the United States 2 trillion in lost GDP.

Some argue that the disparities in hiring, pay, and promotion are due to differences in behavior. That women need to “Lean In,” assert themselves more, ask for raises, apply for leadership roles.

But a Harvard Business Review study used sensors to track the behavior of men and women in a large multinational firm.

It turns out that women had the same number of contacts as men, spent the same amount of time with senior leadership, and used their time in the same way. They even received statistically identical evaluation scores.

And yet women made up 40% of entry level jobs in that firm but only 20% of senior leadership.

We also know women ask for raises and promotions at the same rates as men, they just don't get them as often.

So women's actions aren't different than men's, they are just perceived differently.

If we are going to reach pay parity, we need to recognize our biases, understand how they influence outcomes, and then redesign our systems so that we can overcome the barriers that get in the way of progress.

## 2) Address occupational segregation

Skeptics often argue that pay disparities are due to career choice. If we can get more women into high paying jobs like STEM, maybe we can close the pay gap.

While discrimination is responsible for 38% of the pay gap, occupational segregation is responsible for a little over half. However, studies have shown that when women take over male-dominated fields the pay drops—for the same exact jobs that men were doing before. The reverse is also true. When men take over female-dominated fields, pay increases.

For example, the first computer programmers were women. In fact, the very first computer programmer was Ada Lovelace. She wrote the very first algorithm for an “analytical engine” that existed only in theory in the 1840s.

Fast forward to [today](#), and the industry is now dominated by men. And what do you think happened to average pay as more and more men entered the field? Right—the pay increased.

So it's not that women are attracted to or choose lower paying jobs, it's that we value jobs less when they are filled by women. In fact, even though women make up nearly half of the labor force, they are 62% of minimum wage workers and only 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs. For women of color, the gender divide is compounded by race. They are segregated into jobs with lower wages than their white peers at all education levels.

If we are going to tackle pay disparities, we need to address occupational segregation and take an honest look at how we actually value work. We do need women in STEM. But we also need men in teaching and nursing and early childhood education.

### **3) Share caregiving and unpaid labor**

We won't reach pay parity if we don't have shared caregiving responsibilities at home. Women still shoulder the majority of housework and family care. Cornell University found that women with children face a “motherhood penalty”—they are perceived as less competent than women without children, offered lower starting salaries, and considered less suitable for future promotions. Men with children, on the other hand, receive a fatherhood bonus and are typically offered more money than men without children.

At Queen City Certified, we encourage employers to get rid of their maternity leave policies and replace them with an equal amount of paid parental leave for people of all genders. Employers need to encourage all new parents to use it, or better yet, require them to.

A [Swedish study](#) found that for every month a new father takes off, the mother's income rises 6.7%. Amazing, right?

So I challenge you [today](#), to think about the systems that maintain the status quo. That allow certain groups to remain the majority. That allow some voices to be heard and valued, but not others. How can you interrupt those biases?

Because it's not about changing people to fit systems that were never designed for them, it's about redesigning our systems to include, value, and support all people. It's the right thing to do and it's good for business, it's good for our communities, and it's good for families."