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## DIVERSITY2007

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By Anne Fleckenstein



Usual excuses can't explain the continuing wage gap between women, minorities, and white men.

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Phoebe Leboy of the Association for Women in Science recalls a conversation she had with a departmental chair, a man not unfamiliar with the issues women in science face.

"It is inevitable that women will earn less than men for comparable jobs," he told her. "Women simply cannot negotiate as aggressively as men for better salaries. And if I met a woman who could, I would not hire her because I would not like her personality."

This anecdote may help explain why a woman will still make less money than a man with the same job, despite the great strides women have made in science over the past 40 years. The same discouraging statistics hold true for minorities in science compared to whites, and the same sorts of subjective factors may be at work.

In the life sciences the average median salary for white men is \$80,000, compared to \$72,000 for Hispanics, \$65,000 for African Americans, and \$65,000 for women, according to the most recent figures from the Commission on Professionals in Science and Technology.

Many economists argue that women and minorities tend to be newer in their fields and therefore have less experience, so are naturally paid less than more experienced, senior men. Once women and minorities have been in the workforce as long as men have, these scholars say, there will be no salary gap. They also claim that women and minorities are overwhelmingly drawn to fields that historically pay less than fields to which white men flock, or they may work in less prestigious institutions.

**"I think if full transparency of salaries for female and minority scientists existed, we'd all be even more shocked."  
—Sonya Summerour Clemmons**

Let's put aside the question of why certain disciplines and institutions attract more women and minorities than other fields, and study the salaries of people with the same rank, working in the same field, in the same type of institution. A significant salary disparity remains. Female full professors in the life sciences earn, on average, \$3,000 less per year than equally ranked men.

A 1993 study of women and men in academic medicine showed that female faculty members, even when performing similar professional tasks, receive fewer rewards for their work, both in professional rank and salary. <sup>1</sup> Nothing much had changed by 2004, when another study of faculty in academic medicine showed that even when controlling for total publications, years of seniority, and hours worked per week, female faculty members were paid on average \$12,000 less than their male peers. <sup>2</sup>

The gender wage gap is frequently attributed to women taking time off to have children or working fewer hours a week to take care of their families. There may be some truth to this; the family workload continues to fall disproportionately on women, and less time spent on research can hurt productivity. But this doesn't explain why even unmarried women without children advance more slowly in their careers and are paid less than men with equal experience. Women without children may be paid more than those with children, but they still lag behind men.

The common explanations for the wage gap can't completely account for these disparities. Bias and differences in progression provide the missing link. While the salary gap is very narrow for younger scientists, it widens as careers progress because women and minorities are less likely to be promoted than white men, even when their experience and productivity are comparable. Women are often perceived as being less productive than men, even when there is no evidence to support this.

A study in 1997 found that reviewers of the Swedish Medical Research Council consistently gave female applicants lower scores than equally productive men. <sup>3</sup> In fact, the study demonstrated that women had to be even more productive (on the order of three extra papers in *Science* or *Nature* or 20 extra papers in other journals) to be ranked the same as male applicants. Often promotion committees tend to judge applicants based simply on the number of papers authored. While it is true women tend to publish less than men, their work tends to get cited more and appears in more high-impact journals, <sup>4</sup> making their scholarly output greater than comparable men's.

What can be done to close this wage gap? One of the main problems is that salaries and benefits are not commonly known. People don't talk about their income, so while minorities may know that they are underpaid, they are often unaware of just how much less they are earning than their white, male peers. How can you know what to negotiate for when you don't know what salaries and benefits your peers are receiving?

According to Sonya Summerour Clemmons, a member of the executive board of the Association for Women in Science, the salary gap for women and minorities persists in science because of fully subjective salary criteria, which need a complete overhaul with regard to how initial salaries and subsequent raises are determined.

"I think if full transparency of salaries for female and minority scientists existed, we'd all be even more shocked," she says. Her advice is to stop blaming women and minorities for the wage gap, and lay the responsibility on the shoulders of the decision-makers holding the purse strings.

**Anne Fleckenstein is the postdoctoral research intern at the Association for Women in Science.**

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