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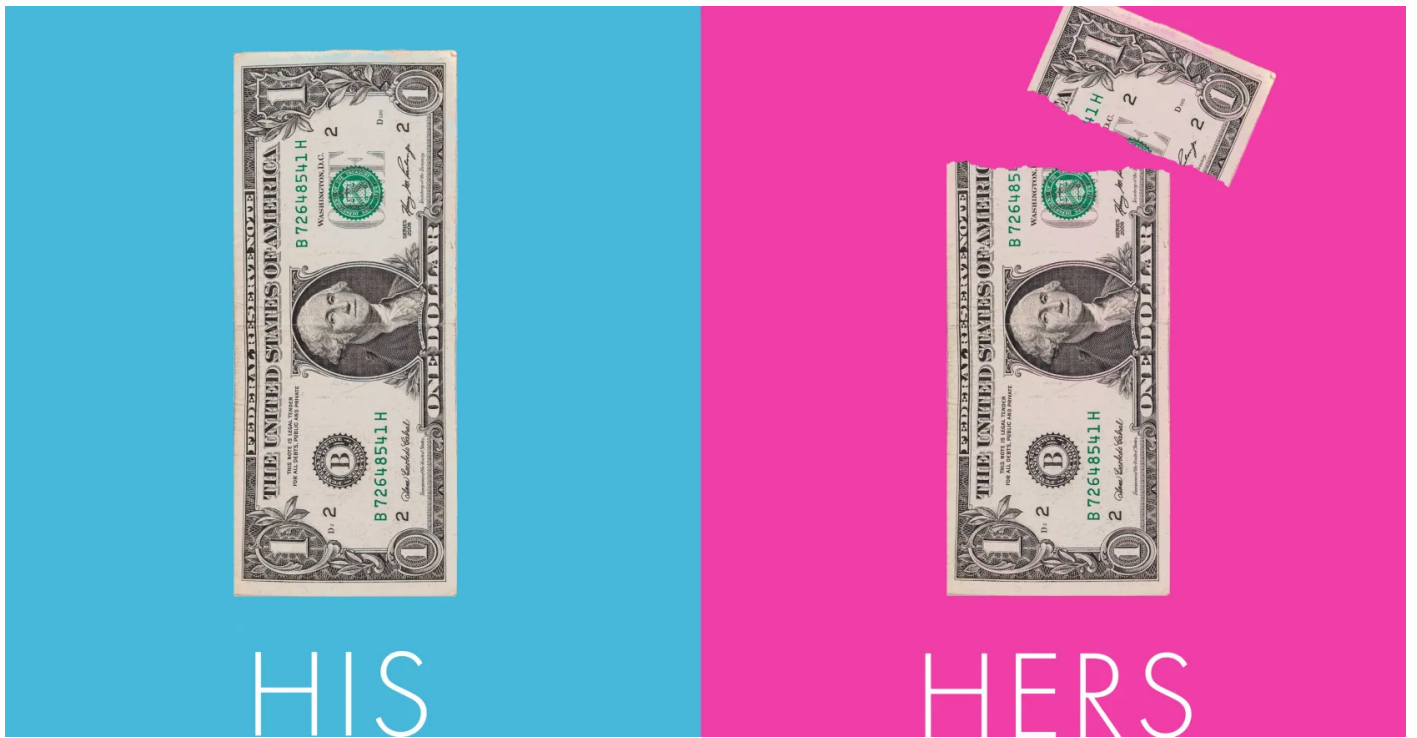
Opinion: Yes, Utah, the gender pay gap is real

When I get emails from people attempting to 'educate' me with their opinions, I continue to direct them to the research and facts.

By Susan Madsen | Feb 28, 2022 9:20 a.m. MST

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Women consistently earn less than men in Utah for the same work. | Illustration by Elise Madsen, Deseret News

Even though the national reports continue to rank Utah as one of the worst states for the gender pay gap, I still hear many Utahns say that this gap is a myth.

Most use two different reasoning patterns: First, that the full gap can be explained away by all the differences between men and women; and second, that the wage gap is fully based upon “women’s own choices.”

Although there are differences between men and women and their employment choices (remember that the way we socialize boys and girls heavily influences these choices), in every study, a portion of the gap has been found to be connected to purse discrimination and bias. In other words, when comparing apples to apples, women are still paid less, and this is indisputable.

In fact, when I get emails from people attempting to “educate” me with their opinions, I continue to direct them to the research and facts. So, the question is not, “Is there a pay gap?” It is, “What does the gap look like in Utah?”

It is clear that the gender wage gap is complex and it is influenced by many elements (see more details in the recent report titled [“Utah Gender Wage Gap: A 2021 Update”](#)). Yet, I think hearing the experiences of Utah women themselves will help us all see the discrimination/bias portion of the gap more clearly.

Here are just a few that focus on the assumption that “women don’t need more pay”: “In the process of discussing a raise in pay, the owner of the company I work for told me that that my husband did a great job of providing for our family so I shouldn’t need to make more ... even though he admitted I was doing a lot more work than I was being paid for.”

“I was told the following discussion happened: ‘She doesn’t need as much of a bonus as Joe (a male counterpart with lower title) because her husband has a good job and Joe is the main breadwinner in his family and needs the money more.’”

“I discovered that I was being paid drastically less than all of my male counterparts at my job, who had the same level of education and experience as my own. I asked my boss for an increase in pay to match the others and he said the reason that I was paid less

“A co-worker said, ‘Women don’t deserve to make as much as us, because they clearly don’t work as hard.’”

“You really should be promoted for all the work you do and contributions you make. But you understand that Rick has a career here and has a family to take care of. He needs the opportunity to make a name for himself — besides, you will probably get married and leave so it won’t make any difference to you or your career.”

“A male owner of the business I work for was discussing how a male manager needed to make more money because he was the breadwinner of the family and how a woman at the same level wouldn’t need to because their income is usually extra money.”

“When my boss discussed annual pay increases, he said that a female employee should get less of a raise because her income is supplemental.”

The experiences of these women cannot be explained away by their career choices. These women are being financially and professionally punished because of the cultural perception about who “deserves” what pay. Shouldn’t wages be based on the quantity and quality of work?

But, I am an optimist. I believe that if made aware of the injustice of the gender wage gap, most people would agree that things need to change. Utahns are advocates for fairness and hard work, and if we can commit to narrowing the gap, I think we’ll finally be able to make more progress and ensure that compensation is commensurate with the job being done.

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