

## **Season 2 Episode 3:**

### **The Myth of the Gender Pay Gap Myth**

[00:00:00.00] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:11.40] This is In Solidarity, a podcast where we draw connections between power, place, and health and discuss how our lives, our fates are all interconnected. Here are your hosts, Ericka Burroughs-Girardi and Beth Silver.

[00:00:26.40] Hi, there, and welcome to In Solidarity. I'm Ericka Burroughs-Girardi here with my co-host, Beth Silver, for our third and final episode in our series on the gender pay gap. Hey, Beth.

[00:00:39.12] Hi, Ericka. We're finishing our series with some fantastic guests and on an angle that I'm really looking forward to discussing. But first, as a reminder, this is In Solidarity, a podcast from County Health Rankings and Roadmaps at the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

[00:01:00.06] And in this our third and final episode on the gender pay gap, we're going to be doing some myth busting and we're going to talk about how to counter the toxic narratives that stand in the way.

[00:01:10.86] You know, Ericka, when you run a Google search, type in gender pay gap, one of the first results--

[00:01:17.34] I know what you're going to say.

[00:01:18.60] Right. It's the gender pay gap myth. But in this case, it's the myth that's a myth. Website after website argues that the gender pay gap isn't real. That it's a byproduct of the career choices women make, or that it's the result of women choosing to stay home with kids. Basically, that it has nothing to do with systemic gender and racial discrimination. Clearly an attempt by some to hold on to power.

[00:01:43.02] Yeah, Beth. You and I know there will always be resistance to social change and resisting by any means necessary. So cherry picking data is a time honored tradition and one that they're using here.

[00:01:56.98] So true, Ericka. That's why today's episode is so important. We're going to kick things off by talking with Dr. Jonathan Heller. He's a fellow at the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute who is working on a national project to transform narratives that hold back a just and equitable society. In other words, the framing or way we tell stories, in this case, as a means of holding on to power.

[00:02:21.75] As Ericka and I were just alluding to, there are plenty of toxic narratives that lead to women being undervalued and underpaid. And just to remind our listeners what we're talking about when we say the gender pay gap, across the country, women earn, on average, \$0.80 for every dollar a white male makes.

[00:02:40.71] The situation is much more unfair for women of color, especially Hispanic women. And the gap gets worse as women get older. Researchers estimate it will take white women until the year 2069 to reach pay equity, Black women until the year 2369, and Hispanic women until the year 2451.

[00:03:02.76] Wow, Beth. So let's just get into it. Jonathan Heller's work is a crucial part of advancing social solidarity. After Jonathan, we'll be hearing from Dr. Jessamyn Schaller. Last year she contributed to an update on the American Association of University Women's "The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap" report. The AAUW is one of the country's foremost advocacy organizations working for gender equity.

[00:03:30.87] We're lucky to have her as a guest. AAUW has been fighting for women's rights for almost 150 years and much of that work has centered around fighting misinformation. In fact, the very first report they published was an 1885 paper disproving a prevailing myth that college led to infertility in women. Unbelievable.

[00:03:51.78] Yeah, that's just crazy, Beth, and it's an ongoing struggle, especially for women of color.

[00:03:58.02] Well, thankfully, we have the perfect person to talk about transforming those narratives. Dr. Jonathan Heller is the Senior Health Equity Fellow in the Population Health Institute at the UW. Before joining us, he was the co-director of Human Impact Partners, a national nonprofit focused on the power of public health. Please help us welcome, Dr. Jonathan Heller.

[00:04:23.45] Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:04:24.55] Of course. Transforming narratives, we talk a lot about this concept at County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. But can you explain to our audience what we mean when we talk about transforming narratives? And what does that have to do with the gender pay gap?

[00:04:41.29] Yeah, well, let me start really concretely. Let me start with an example. One of the dominant narratives that is present in society today is that individuals are responsible for their own success.

[00:04:53.20] We tell a lot of these pull yourself up by your bootstraps stories based on that narrative, right? The dominance of that narrative impacts policy outcomes. So for example, you can think about welfare reform in the '90s where you can think about how hard it is for people who are unemployed to get unemployment insurance.

[00:05:11.65] Those policies and many others blame individuals for their supposed failures and ignore the systemic and structural causes, the problems that people face like economic recessions and our own education systems. So in this way, these narratives are a form of power. Narratives influence people's worldviews, their underlying beliefs and values.

[00:05:38.42] For example, this rise of this individualism narrative over the last few decades has led to popular support for harsh punishments for people who don't succeed. They support those kinds of policies as opposed to policies that would support those folks because of the failures of the systems around them, the systems that need to be fixed.

[00:05:59.14] The power comes from the fact that a certain set of actions and policies become common sense, while a different set of policies seem like they're absolutely crazy.

[00:06:08.65] And it's power because this individualism narrative and many other narratives around free markets and limited role for government and about racism not really existing, those are intentionally being put out there by people who currently have power, typically rich white men, and they harm a set of people, typically low-income communities of color, for example, because they lead to policies that really benefit the few. So these narratives propagate what becomes common sense, and then gets implemented into policies.

[00:06:40.31] So how does it relate back to the gender pay gap? Well, because of these dominant narratives, people believe a certain set of things about women and particularly women in the workplace.

[00:06:49.06] And because of those beliefs, a set of policies and structures are in place that have created the gender pay gap and a different set of policies that would actually address the issue are thought to be crazy or too invasive or too restrictive.

[00:07:03.76] What are some of the dominant or toxic narratives, the false stories that are perpetuated around wage equity? And what is the narrative you'd like to see replace it?

[00:07:14.17] Yeah, I mean, I think the biggest narrative that's dominant about the gender pay gap is that there is no gap. People deny that it exists. And one of the amazing things about narrative is that no matter how much data you present to somebody, they'll twist that data because it doesn't fit with the way they think about the world.

[00:07:32.57] And so people just to either deny the data or come back with a different set of data that somehow supports their point of view. So essentially, they ignore the data and they basically say the pay gap doesn't exist.

[00:07:45.88] If they do believe that there is a pay gap, that the data is actually there, then there are more specific narratives that help people make sense of why that exists. And they'll say things like, wow, women are choosing lower-paying jobs, or women don't have the math skills to take more lucrative jobs, or women are paid less because they take jobs that are more flexible.

[00:08:10.21] They'll say things like, well, women don't need to earn as much because men are the real breadwinners in those families. All of those are false. They don't match up with the data, but people help explain things like that to themselves so that they can justify not doing anything around this.

[00:08:27.73] When, in fact, a lot of that is due to just undervaluing the work that women have been attracted to or have been taking jobs in, right?

[00:08:36.91] Absolutely. Absolutely. And so all of those are problematic narratives. And you also asked about, what narratives do we actually want to see? Our entire narrative about our economic system seems problematic to me.

[00:08:50.17] And one of the main narratives I would like to see out there is that the economy actually exists to create collective well-being, and to create the conditions in which everyone can thrive, right? If that's what we believed about our economy, we'd have a different set of policies.

[00:09:05.47] There are other supportive narratives that would be good, like all people have inherent value and are worthy of dignity and respect. And by all, we mean all, whether that's men or women, or cis and trans, cis men, cis women, trans men, trans women, people of all races, people all ethnicities, religions, abilities, et cetera.

[00:09:24.77] I would love to see the narrative out there that we can create a world in which everyone has what they need to thrive. We have that in our power if we just stopped some of the hoarding and this view that there's this massive scarcity. We actually have enough in society for everybody to thrive. So there are a few different narratives like that that would really support a different set of policy outcomes in the workplace.

[00:09:49.38] Yeah, Jonathan, you talked briefly about that myth, this idea that women prefer to pursue careers that are less lucrative. What are some of the other myths or misinformation surrounding women and work? Let's just get it all out there.

[00:10:06.62] Well, I named a few. I think this idea that women are not as good at math or science and therefore they're taking jobs that don't pay as well, that's not true. Then we know, for example, that women get harassed in workplace environments and leave jobs because of that. We know that there are internalized biases in how people teach math or science and how people learn it.

[00:10:30.80] There's this myth about more flexible jobs. That women take more flexible jobs and therefore get paid less. Actually, typically men have more flexibility in their jobs. They're more senior, they have more days of vacation. The myths that are out there just don't match the data.

[00:10:45.69] And as I said, they're all based on what we want to believe these worldviews that we have. It creates this kind of cognitive dissonance for people, right? That people want to believe that things are fair.

[00:10:56.72] People want to believe that they got into their positions because of their own hard work, right? And they don't want to see that these systems and structures are in place that will lead to these outcomes. When they see this data, it causes this cognitive dissonance and they can choose to just shut down and ignore it or they can actually grapple with it.

[00:11:15.29] Jonathan, you talked about or you use the phrase that we want to believe. When you say that, we're not just talking about this is what men believe, right?

[00:11:23.63] No, I mean, these are internalized by everybody. These narratives are out there in society. And I'd say that a lot of women believe these narratives too, and people of all races and ethnicities. They are dominant, meaning they are everywhere. They they're in the air we breathe and the water we drink. And they're invisible, but they're just influences in these really impactful ways.

[00:11:45.95] In our intro, we talked about the AAUW's report from 1885. It was a paper disproving a prevailing myth that college impaired women's fertility, if you can believe it. On the one hand, I think that this shows how far we've come, but it also makes me think about how long it takes to transform narratives. What can we do to speed up the process?

[00:12:07.52] Yeah, those narratives about infertility are fascinating. I don't know if you talked about this in your intro, but it also led to fights around women's right to vote. People thought that women were not capable of voting. And that if they spent that mental energy on voting, then it would affect their reproductive systems.

[00:12:27.44] It's just crazy, right? But that is like, this is such a great demonstration of power. If women aren't allowed to vote and aren't allowed to earn money, who has the power then, right? It's crazy.

[00:12:38.57] Anyway, back to your question. Narratives do take a long time to shift. The narratives that we're facing today, like individualism and about free markets, were created or were really starting to take hold in the '70s and in the '80s. And so it's been 50 years of building towards this place where we're so impacted by this current set of narratives.

[00:13:00.63] So we've started a project that is aiming to shift narratives, right? We have to start by building some infrastructure. And we think about our role in this as health equity advocates, but there are others in social justice movements who are also doing this. Can we build an infrastructure that is intentionally trying to put out a different set of narratives?

[00:13:21.15] So we're working with people around the country, many different organizations. We're training people about narrative and narrative power. We're helping them see these currently dominant narratives. We're unmasking them. Even that by itself just helps them lose their power.

[00:13:37.46] We're uncovering and elevating a transformative narrative, and then we're helping groups figure out how to move that into their work. It's not just in their communications work. That's the obvious place it can go. But it can go into people's research, into their planning, into

the campaigns they're running. These kinds of narratives permeate everything. And so they actually need to impact all the work that we're doing.

[00:14:00.76] Yeah. Thank you so much, Jonathan. I'm listening to everything that you're saying and what I'm hearing is that we have to stay focused because we owe it to future generations to remain focused and to continue to think about how we can close the gender pay gap.

[00:14:17.39] And to be perfectly honest, many of the problems we face today are because of short sightedness and unwillingness to think deeply about how our systems and institutions affect people in the future. But we're doing that here on In Solidarity. But we really appreciate that you could join us today on In Solidarity.

[00:14:35.92] Yeah, no, thank you for having me. This is fun.

[00:14:38.32] Thanks, Jonathan--

[00:14:38.89] Good things to think about.

[00:14:40.06] Our next guest on In Solidarity is Dr. Jessamyn Schaller. Dr. Schaller is an associate professor of economics at Claremont McKenna College. She's also a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research and an associate editor at the Journal of Population Economics. Welcome to In Solidarity, Dr. Schaller.

[00:14:58.69] Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

[00:15:00.50] The theme that runs through our shows is the idea of social solidarity. So we want to start by asking you what we've asked so many of our guests. What does social solidarity mean to you, and how does it influence the work that you do?

[00:15:14.48] So to me, social solidarity is about the interdependence that we have with one another. In my economist's view, there are several elements of this interdependence.

[00:15:24.49] So the first that comes to my mind is our economic interdependence. We all have different roles that we play in the economy and we rely on the goods and services that are produced by others. And we all experience aggregate economic growth together and we all experience recessions.

[00:15:39.37] Another element of that interdependence is the externalities that we impose on other people through our actions. And we should be aware of those impacts that we have on other people so that we can encourage activities that generate positive externalities and discourage activities that generate negative externalities.

[00:15:55.54] Another type of interdependence that we have and that I teach about is the role that our governments and communities play in offering safety nets and redistribution of income in case we face hardship.

[00:16:07.85] So programs like welfare, unemployment insurance, and disability insurance, or societal supports that we can access. And also families and communities provide informal safety nets for one another.

[00:16:18.83] And then finally, some of our interdependence is social. We rely on each other for social and emotional support and we share certain values and beliefs. And these different types of interdependence happen at so many different levels within a family, within a city at a national level and at a global level.

[00:16:34.51] In my own research, I've had a particular interest in spillover effects. So the effects that certain events or actions have across individuals. Particularly, for me, I'm interested in extended families.

[00:16:46.85] So for example, when a mother's wage opportunities improve or a father loses their job, how do those things affect children within the family? Or, if an older household experiences a health event or a wealth shock, how do those events transmit across generations to adult children living in other households?

[00:17:05.89] Another theme that I emphasize in both my teaching and research is the idea of heterogeneity, which is just a fancy word for differences or diversity in the impact of different events. So a recession doesn't have a uniform impact across the population.

[00:17:19.36] The COVID-19 pandemic did not have uniform impacts across the population. And I think it's really important to focus on the disparate ways that these big phenomenon affects different groups of people.

[00:17:31.30] Thanks, Dr. Schaller. You contributed to AAUW's whose recent update on its report called "The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap." And you focused on the impact of COVID-19 on women and the workforce. Can you talk a little bit about this and how it impacted the gender pay gap?

[00:17:51.82] Yes, so COVID-19 generated this enormous social and economic shock that really research is showing how the disproportionate effect on women. And this is actually unusual as far as recessions go. Usually, recessions are worse for men.

[00:18:08.11] But one of the key contributing factors to the disproportionate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women was the abrupt closure of schools and daycare facilities. And this caused many women to withdraw from the labor force to reduce their work hours, or to reduce their productivity.

[00:18:24.61] Other researchers have pointed out that while the data do show these big gender disparities in the impacts of the pandemic on labor market outcomes, it actually-- the biggest differences that we see are related to presence of children in the household. And also in my own research, I found that mothers of school-aged children were particularly hurt by the pandemic, school closures and reduced access to childcare.

[00:18:48.47] There were also pretty big disparities by educational attainment. So as we all know, educated people, more educated people in general were able to work remotely and safely. And so were able to continue working throughout the pandemic, versus workers in jobs where working remotely was maybe not an option. And so employment was impacted.

[00:19:11.09] Another key contributing factor to the pandemic's disproportionate impacts on women is women's employment in industries that were especially hurt by the pandemic. So women were employed in restaurants, in child care industry and salons, in home health care and these industries that were impacted.

[00:19:28.02] And again, typically, a recession tends to hit industries in which men are employed a bit harder. So construction and manufacturing, and things like that. So this was a bit unusual.

[00:19:39.21] One thing that's really interesting for me about the COVID-19 pandemic is that while the withdrawal from the labor market that women experienced during the pandemic appears to be mostly temporary-- so if you actually look at the statistics, our labor force participation has rebounded, schools and daycares have reopened, and women are largely going back to work. There's potentially going to be really long-run impacts of this.

[00:20:02.53] So we know from previous research that temporary unemployment spells that temporary labor force exit. And even job changes can have permanent implications for our career trajectories. And so I anticipate that some of the effects from the pandemic could be really long lasting in terms of women's labor force.

[00:20:19.44] Maybe in addition to wealth building, would that be impacted as well?

[00:20:24.87] Yes, absolutely. Yes, so wealth building-- and that's another area where there were very heterogeneous impacts of the pandemic. So some groups really, really suffered more than others in that dimension.

[00:20:39.93] One positive thing to come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, and hopefully we can come back to this a little bit later, is the increases in workplace flexibility. So in my mind, this is something that could actually benefit women in the long-run and potentially reduce the gender wage gap as employers discover that workers can be productive at home.

[00:20:58.86] As many employers sort of optimized their remote work potential, normalize the idea of taking a sick day, normalize the idea of working with flexible hours and things like that. I think that's something that could really end up benefiting wage inequality in the long-run for women. And I'm hopeful that some of that may last beyond the pandemic.

[00:21:20.31] That sounds good. AAUW's report talks about how the motherhood penalty and caregiving expectations harm women in the workplace. So what is the motherhood penalty? And how does that affect the pay gap?



[00:21:34.28] Yes, so there are really two components to what we think of as the motherhood penalty when we discuss the gender wage gap. The first is the change in a women's earning trajectory that happens when a woman has a child

[00:21:46.73] So if you think about the trajectory of our earnings across our life cycle, a man's trajectory is generally upward sloping. We have the steepest earnings growth early in our career right out of college or right after we finish high school as we gain labor market experience. And then that trajectory kind of levels off as we get older. And the trajectory with women without children is pretty similar.

[00:22:07.68] But when we see the trajectory for women with children, what we see is that there's typically a drop in earnings around the time of having a child. And sometimes a gap in employment.

[00:22:16.49] And once a woman has experienced that gap, really, on average, her wages never recover. She's now on a permanently lower and sometimes even flatter trajectory than she would have been without having a child.

[00:22:29.12] And so in some sense, that is one element of the motherhood wage penalty is just that withdrawal from the labor force. And one thing that's particularly striking about that is often that withdrawal happens right at that steepest part of the wage trajectory.

[00:22:43.85] So right when you would be building work experience and relationship with a particular employer and getting on the job training is right at that time when women typically either scale back their hours or scale back their employment to have children. And so that withdrawal can be very costly.

[00:22:59.06] Another component of the motherhood wage penalty is the direct hit to their earnings that women take because they are part of a group that is more likely to spend time on child care, right?

[00:23:10.97] So on average, if you're hiring a 24-year-old man and a 24-year-old woman, the woman is more likely to spend time over the next 20 years having children and spend more time on childcare. And so there can be explicit discrimination where employers expect women to be less productive, less competent, or less reliable.

[00:23:35.15] But there can also be statistical discrimination. So just the fact that employers recognize that, on average, women are more likely to take leave for caregiving, will be more likely to take sick days to take care of sick children and so on, that employers can assume that women will be more costly employees. And so pay them accordingly.

[00:23:55.20] And this is true even for women who never plan to have children, right? Statistical discrimination means that employers sort of broadly apply this assumption to all women, regardless of their personal plans.

[00:24:05.18] Does that trajectory change for women who had children but did not take any time?

[00:24:12.45] Yes, so I think some of the motherhood wage penalty could be due to changes in productivity. So even if you don't take any leave, it may be that in order to pick your kids up when they're home sick from school-- to take care of your children when they're home sick from school, or to pick your kids up from school, when they get out in the afternoon that there's a sort of productivity cost of parenting. And we know that even in two-earner households, that women disproportionately bear the burdens of childcare.

[00:24:45.96] There's also a cost that comes through occupation selection. So we know one of the major determinants of the gender wage gap is that women disproportionately select into lower-paying occupations.

[00:24:58.29] And we think one of the reasons for that is that women sort of anticipating their larger burden of childcare, select into more flexible jobs. And then they pay a price for that in terms of their earnings.

[00:25:08.95] And so a lot of times women, even if they don't exit employment, they might change employers to a more flexible employer, they might choose a part-time job, they might go into teaching. So they choose these jobs and occupations in order to balance work and family. And that itself comes with a wage penalty.

[00:25:26.52] But isn't it true that men that enter those professions that women have self-selected into disproportionately still earn more than women do for the same work?

[00:25:35.80] Oh, absolutely. Yes, so I don't want to give the impression that the gender wage gap is entirely due to occupation. That's just one piece of it. And it's absolutely true that within occupations, whether it's female-dominated occupations or the typically male-dominated occupations, that within occupations that women earn less than men.

[00:25:53.43] And that's true at the very top of the wage distribution, whether we're looking at doctors, at pharmacists, in finance industry. And it's also true across the wage distribution.

[00:26:04.32] Let's get into some of the myths around the gender pay gap. What are some of the most common?

[00:26:09.96] Great question. So in my mind, the biggest myth that the general population has about the gender wage gap is that it's getting a lot better. It did get a lot better over time. In particular, it decreased a lot in the 1980s. But really since the 1980s, the gender wage gap has been somewhat declining but not very quickly. And there is definitely still a substantial gender wage gap.

[00:26:38.37] Another myth that I see about the gender wage gap is this idea that somehow we can get a better measure of the gender wage gap by trying to compare two workers who look exactly the same, right?

[00:26:50.49] So if we could pick a man and a woman who had the same occupation and the same level of education and the same years of work experience and compare those two, that the wage gap between those two workers is somehow an accurate measure of the level of discrimination that women face in the workforce. And this is a big misconception. This is not true at all.

[00:27:10.21] So one aspect of this or one reason for that is that women face different opportunities and social norms and expectations from the very start of their lives. And so in fact, women are actually probably more positively selected in a given occupation than an observationally similar man.

[00:27:26.61] So for example, if you compare a male CEO and a female CEO, the female CEO probably had to work harder and be more competent to get to that position. And so if those two are earning the same amount, that's not reflecting equality, right? That's reflecting perhaps a more qualified woman earning the same amount as a man.

[00:27:48.87] And comparing two similar workers also misses a large component of the inequality between men and women. Because if men and women are choosing different occupations and industries or they're self-selecting into lower-paying jobs, if women are self-selecting into lower-paying jobs because they anticipate discrimination or because they anticipate having to take care of children and facing the motherhood penalty, or because they need the flexibility, that is a component of the gender wage gap in itself.

[00:28:21.78] And that makes this thing really difficult to measure, right? There's really no right way to capture what the gender wage gap is. And it's very difficult to differentiate between choices and things that might reflect sort of discrimination or disparities and social norms and opportunities that women face.

[00:28:40.14] The myths seem so pervasive. Who do you think is perpetuating them?

[00:28:45.09] And that's a very good question. I think there's some politics involved. I think there's some political differences in the way that people view the gender wage gap. I think employers would like to say we're not discriminating.

[00:29:02.02] So I think there's maybe one element of it that says, people would like to think that this-- what we think of as pure discrimination. Like, looking at two identical workers and offering them different wages is somehow fading away. And I think that gives us the idea like we're becoming more equal. Women are now outnumbering men in college and graduating from college at higher rates.

[00:29:22.41] There's this perception that women, they're working at higher rates, they're more likely to be breadwinners. There's more dual earner couples than we've ever had in history. And so there's this perception that we're just doing better, and that somehow discrimination is a thing of the past.

[00:29:38.35] And so I think in part we might all be a little guilty of just sort of this wishful thinking of, if we have good intentions, that there's no way that this level of discrimination could still be happening.

[00:29:48.93] But I think people miss the fact that it's just pervasive at every level of our society and conditioning and culture. And I think maybe our institutions have not yet caught up with our values in many ways. And so I think that's one thing that perpetuates this.

[00:30:08.82] And this is something that Claudia Goldin, who's an expert on the gender wage gap at Harvard economist, talks a lot about is this idea that labor market institutions and the nature of the jobs that we do are still structured in a way that was created when men were the primary earners and women stayed at home and took care of children.

[00:30:27.54] And we have these 9:00 to 5:00 jobs and we have these inflexible work hours. And that's not conducive to this modern way that many families, including men, would like to be living their lives. And yet the way that employers structure their workweek still has not changed, right?

[00:30:42.87] And I mentioned that earlier that's something that maybe the pandemic could contribute to helping with. But I think in some sense, the misconceptions come because our intentions are good. But our reality hasn't caught up yet.

[00:30:55.29] Yeah, I appreciate you laying out those myths and actually those perspectives that I hadn't heard before. So thanks for that. But how do we counter it? How do we debunk these myths?

[00:31:07.57] I think the most important thing-- and I'm a research economist. So my focus is on data and accurate presentations or accurate representations of data. I think-- but in this case, as I mentioned, it goes beyond just showing statistics.

[00:31:23.79] But with the gender wage gap, we really need to both show and also explain the statistics. Because, like I said, there's no easy way to just say, oh, a woman earns \$0.80 on the dollar.

[00:31:36.51] There's these standard statistics that we hear a lot. A woman earns \$0.80 on every dollar a man earns. But these statistics are very dependent on the way in which we're calculating them. And it's really important to understand what it is that's driving these statistics.

[00:31:53.58] An example of that, actually, is if you look at the gender wage gap as measured across the COVID-19 pandemic as I did in my work with the AAUW, it looks like the gender wage gap has gone down when you look at 2020 compared with, say, 2017, 2018, 2019.

[00:32:09.90] But one reason for that is selection. That the women who stayed in the workforce in 2020 were the women who had higher levels of education, who had more flexible jobs. And so the average earnings of a woman working full-time in 2020 actually went up relative to men.

[00:32:28.38] But in fact, if you could capture the disproportionate unemployment, the disproportionate levels of part-time work, of losses of productivity, that women-- I don't think anyone would argue that women were doing better in the pandemic. And so that's an example of ways that data can be misleading and that it's really important to interpret the statistics that we see.

[00:32:48.50] Thanks.

[00:32:48.94] Yeah, context means everything.

[00:32:51.69] What's at stake here if we don't close the gap? In other words, like, how do entire communities benefit when we have pay equity? I've read studies that say pay equity not only improves women's health and the length of their lives, it also impacts men's health and length of life. Why would that be?

[00:33:09.69] So looking at health, there were some recent correlational studies that show that the level of gender equality in a society in a labor market is correlated with life expectancy in that society.

[00:33:21.33] And in particular, some of those studies found that gender equality is correlated with a narrowing of the gender gap in life expectancy, meaning longer relative life expectancy for men, interestingly. And so the gender equality was positively correlated with men's life expectancy.

[00:33:38.13] As a labor economist, one of the things that I'll point out is that women are a huge source of underutilized human capital in our economy. That if we're not efficiently using this large source of intelligence and productivity that's in our female workforce, we're missing out on economic growth.

[00:33:59.41] And so I think-- and that's true for individual employers as well. Diversity and balanced workforces can be more productive within firms. If we're missing out on women's personal effective because we're not offering them jobs because they'll be caring for children, we're really missing out on some productivity.

[00:34:21.57] Pay inequality also leads to poverty and inequality across groups. Women of color are especially disadvantaged in the labor force. Women make up the majority of heads of single parent households. So there are many children who have single working mothers that could benefit enormously if mothers earnings could improve. Paying women fairly can help pull families out of poverty.

[00:34:47.76] Increasing women's relative earnings and family also improves women's bargaining power. And women are known when they have more control over income to spend more money on child welfare and on investments in children. So this could be an investment in our future labor force.

[00:35:04.05] There's also studies that show that domestic violence is lower against women when women have higher relative earnings. So there's many different aspects of that question. But without a doubt that we would be better off with more equal earnings.

[00:35:18.42] Are there any estimates on how many families would no longer be living in poverty if there were pay equity?

[00:35:24.99] I have not seen estimates of that. And to be honest, I think this is a really understudied area. I think there's not a lot of direct empirical research on what the impacts of pay equality would be across dimensions of health and economic outcomes.

[00:35:42.73] Thank you so much, Dr. Schaller, for shining a light on the economic and systemic circumstances that prevent women and families from thriving. So we really appreciate that you were able to join us today. Thank you so much.

[00:35:55.80] Thank you for having me.

[00:36:01.45] Wow, Beth, this has been so insightful. I can't believe how much ground we covered with this series.

[00:36:07.24] So grateful we've been able to bring on all of these guests, experts from our own CHR&R and Population Health Institute, Dr. Jonathan Heller, Dr. Elizabeth Blomberg, and Kiersten Frobom, and from across the country, Drs. Jessica Milli, Jessamyn Schaller, and Elise Gould.

[00:36:23.56] Every single guest was fantastic. So Beth, what was your takeaway from this series?

[00:36:29.17] It's tough. But if I had to choose just one thing, I guess I'd say it's this compounding effect of gender and racial discrimination. That the pay gap worsens over a woman's career with missed opportunities, missed pay raises.

[00:36:44.05] And that the loss isn't just a loss of income. It's the loss of the ability to build wealth, to weather financial emergencies, to be able to pay for things that allow us to lead healthy lives, to thrive.

[00:36:55.51] How about you, Ericka? What are you thinking?

[00:36:57.52] I think, for me, it was just learning how complex the gender pay gap issue is. It is influenced by race, ethnicity, geographic regions, sectors, education, and more. And this variation means that closing the gap will require multiple solutions.

[00:37:14.14] Ultimately, I hope that our listeners finish this series with a better understanding of how serious the gender pay gap is and how much it hurts women and society as a whole. I hope that people will rethink this idea that women are just choosing to go into lower-paid professions

or staying home with the kids. All of these decisions have elements of gender discrimination baked right into them.

[00:37:37.81] For all of the progress we've made, women still face so much discrimination. And then think about the impact on women of color, gay women, or trans women. That's why the intersectional lens we've talked about is so important. On top of that, we're also dealing with the toll the pandemic took on women's employment and the gender pay gap overall.

[00:37:57.64] And just like our guests have said, there's going to be a lot of research emerging on this. And I hope that we can continue to talk about it here on In Solidarity.

[00:38:06.13] And of course, on our website as well. We've recently posted a data spotlight on the gender pay gap, which provides historical context around the issue along with some interactive maps. Check it out at [countyhealthrankings.org](https://countyhealthrankings.org).

[00:38:20.38] We promise to bring you much more on the connections we are making between power, place, and health on this podcast. So stay tuned and stay in touch. Until then, I'm Ericka.

[00:38:32.50] And I'm Beth.

[00:38:33.65] And we're In Solidarity-- Connecting Power, Place, and Health.

[00:38:42.33] In Solidarity is a production of County Health Rankings and Roadmaps from the University of Wisconsin with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Views expressed by guests of In Solidarity are their own. Their appearance on In Solidarity does not imply County Health Rankings and Roadmaps endorsement.

[00:39:00.67] To learn more about our guests' work, to discover additional resources on the topics we've discussed, or to find out how healthy your community is, visit us at [countyhealthrankings.org](https://countyhealthrankings.org).

[00:39:10.33] [MUSIC PLAYING]