
George Nezlek, Grand Valley State University, USA
Gerald DeHondt, Grand Valley State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates trends and changes in the gender earnings gap for individuals employed in clerical and professional level information systems positions in the U.S. labor market for the period of 1991 through 2008. It examines changes in the earnings gap for IS workers, specifically considering changes relative to the so-called “Internet bubble” observed primarily during the late 1990s. Quantitative analysis of changes in the wage gap, adjusted for key determinants, is based on data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Examination of these data suggests that the gender earnings gap is persistent despite frequent claims to the contrary from industry surveys and that the gap is narrower for professional level positions. Furthermore, the data suggest that female IS workers, particularly in professional level occupations, may have experienced a beneficial effect from the internet bubble, but it is unclear whether or not that beneficial effect may be fading in the post-bubble internet bust of the early 21st century.

Keywords: Current Population Survey, Gender Discrimination, Gender Wage Gap, Human Capital Theory, Internet Bubble

INTRODUCTION

Robust gender-based differences in earnings persist in the U.S. labor force, spanning industries, occupations, job levels, and economic climates. In spite of decades of legislation, diversity initiatives, significantly increased public awareness, support networks, and individual strategies, women have not achieved total salary parity with men. Researchers in a variety of academic disciplines have attempted to understand this phenomenon, in the hopes of contributing to the development of change strategies for public policy, educational institutions, business organizations, and individual women. These theoretical explanations have primarily emerged from the disciplinary frameworks of economics, sociology and social/cognitive psychology (Baroudi & Igbaria, 1995; Truman & Baroudi, 1994).

The last half century has witnessed the rapid expansion and emergence of a dynamic occupational sector in Information Systems (IS), accompanied by the growth of a powerful mythology of a kind of sub-culture within the world of work. IS occupations include
the programming, operation and maintenance of computers and other information systems technologies, management and administration of data processing operations, networks and databases. These well-documented (Truman & Baroudi, 1994) beliefs comprise a self-depicted saga of meritocracy, innovation, and individualism, largely freed from the baggage of the industrial heritage of the 20th Century. In the past, one widely held belief was that IS professionals were somehow different (Couger & Sawicki, 1980; Ginzberg & Baroudi, 1988), and that traditional rules did not apply. IS jobs were somehow different, and IS professionals possessed uniquely transferable job skills applicable across a very broad range of organizations and industries. Others have suggested that any differences that may have existed have diminished or disappeared as the Information Technology related sectors of the economy have matured and the use of such technologies has become ubiquitous (Kraft, 1984). It has also been suggested that gender wage discrepancies that persist in the US economy at large do not appear, or are vastly diminished, between men and women who work in IS. Finally, while there may be significant cultural and structural differences in IS occupations outside the US economy, these differences are beyond the scope of this inquiry.

The purposes of the current study are to track the gender wage gap among domestic IS workers during the period from 1991 through 2008, using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), with particular emphasis on the period commonly referred to as the “Internet Bubble” of the late 20th century. While a universally accepted time period for the Internet Bubble may not be agreed upon, it can generally be thought of as beginning in the early 1990’s (with the advent of the World Wide Web) and ending in the early 21st century, around the time of the collapse of the dot.com sector in approximately 2001. A previous study (Heywood & Nezlek, 1993) investigated the gender wage gap using samples taken from CPS data at five year intervals from 1975 through 1990, inclusive. The analysis here begins where that study left off. The authors’ long-term intention is to integrate the findings from both of these studies in a future work. This study is designed to discover whether an enduring and significant wage gap actually remains, even after the typical sociological explanations (e.g., occupational segregation into “hard” and “soft” subfields) and economic explanations (e.g., differential human capital inputs) are accounted for, and how, if at all, the nature of that gap might have changed during a period of unprecedented demand for information technology professionals.

This research considers the following questions:

- Have IS occupations exhibited a diminishing gender wage gap since 1990?
- Did the “internet bubble” result in a smaller gender wage gap – suggesting that organizations might alter or abandon discriminatory practices when facing a relative scarcity of skilled IS workers?
- Did the collapse of the internet bubble have a disproportionate affect on female knowledge workers? As the so-called “new economy” contracted, was there a return to a higher level of gender wage inequity in IS occupations?

**Theoretical Foundation**

Numerous studies have demonstrated the existence and persistence of the gender wage gap in the general US economy. Isaacs (1995) cites a finding from American Demographics that women employed full-time with two years or less experience earn 72% of the level for their male peers. A Wall Street Journal study of corporate managers found that women with the same credentials as their male peers earned approximately 82% of the wages for their male counterparts. Other studies (e.g., McDonald & Thornton, 2007) have found that after adjusting for college majors, starting salaries for male and female college graduates are approximately equivalent. It may appear that while both men and women begin their careers on equal footing, the gender wage gap can develop very quickly.
Older Adults with AMD as Co-Designers of an Assistive Mobile Application
www.igi-global.com/article/older-adults-with-amd-as-co-designers-of-an-assistive-mobile-application/107990?camid=4v1a

Learners and Mobile: A Reflexivity
www.igi-global.com/chapter/learners-and-mobile/156989?camid=4v1a