GENDER INEQUALITY IN AMERICA

WHY MEN MAKE MORE MONEY

THE END OF ROE V. WADE

PROTECTING TRANS RIGHTS

FIGHTING FOR FAIR TREATMENT

BY LISA WHITE
In March 2019, the U.S. senior women’s national soccer team filed a class action lawsuit against the U.S. Soccer Federation (Morgan v. U.S. Soccer Federation). This high-profile case alleged that for years the U.S. Soccer Federation had been paying the women’s soccer team less than their counterparts on the men’s national team, despite the fact that the women’s soccer team had been more successful and had brought in substantially more money than the men’s team. Protection of equal pay regardless of gender only became law in 1963, with the signing of the Equal Pay Act by President John F. Kennedy, one of the very first laws to address gender-based pay disparity. Despite the passing of this law, decades later there are still lawsuits and complaints filed addressing serious gender bias in workplaces, including Morgan v. U.S. Soccer Federation. In February 2022, the lawsuit reached a conclusion when a settlement was agreed on equal pay claims, providing $24 million in back pay to the women’s soccer players and equal pay moving forward.

It wouldn’t seem equal or fair to be treated differently for doing the same work, would it? But that is the reality for people across the globe due to gender inequality in the workplace. In 2022, women working both full-time and part-time earned an average of 82 percent of what men earned, according to a Pew Research Center report. To put this loss of wages into perspective, March 14, 2023, was designated Equal Pay Day. The date symbolizes how far into a new
year women must work to finally earn what men had earned by the end of the previous year.

To fight wage discrimination based on gender, on March 9, 2023, U.S. Representative Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut and Senator Patty Murray of Washington reintroduced the Paycheck Fairness Act, legislation that would eliminate loopholes in the 1963 Equal Pay Act and strengthen the legal right to challenge employers for pay discrimination. “Women across our country are still being paid less than their male counterparts, still being shortchanged, and it’s time we finally take action to close the wage gap,” Senator Murray said after reintroducing the act. “When we talk about the wage gap, we are ultimately talking about huge, life-changing amounts of pay that women are being cheated out of. Women are paying the price of inaction, and we have to put a stop to sexist pay practices—for good,” Murray added.

NORMS AND PERCEPTIONS

So, how do women end up making less than men in the workplace? There are several factors that contribute to gender inequality in the workforce and society in general, many rooted in long-held cultural gender norms. Many cultures see women as maternal, whether they choose to be mothers or not, while men are taught to be dominant and lead—to provide. The common trope of women as secretaries to male bosses, as seen in countless movies and TV shows, is a prime example of how we are socialized to see specific jobs and roles in society based on gender.

The decision to have children and raise a family also affects the wage gap between men and women, according to a recent Pew Research Center report. According to the data from this report, about half of working mothers felt a great deal of pressure to prioritize their responsibilities at home over their
careers, compared to 35 percent of working fathers. This is far from surprising, given the lack of access to maternity (and paternity) leave for working families in the U.S. Despite being one of the world’s wealthiest nations, the U.S. is one of only a few countries in the world that does not mandate any nationwide paid leave for new parents. The others, such as Suriname and New Guinea, are far smaller and less wealthy. And according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 25 percent of U.S. workers had access to paid family leave through their employers in 2022.

These figures stand in sharp contrast to the paid family-leave policies of other developed countries. According to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), other countries offered an average of 17.3 weeks of paid maternity leave for working mothers and 2.1 weeks of paid paternity leave for working fathers. In these countries, both maternity and paternity leave is usually job-protected, which means employers are required to keep employment available for workers taking leave. And in many countries, parents are also eligible for unpaid leave after exhausting their paid leave benefits.

In France, both parents are allowed to take paid leave until their child’s third birthday. Parents in the Slovak Republic also are entitled to take leave until their child is three years old, but if they do not, they receive a parental allowance monthly to help with expenses. Besides parental leave, most of these countries also offer paid, job-protected leave to employees if they need time off to care for a sick child or other ill family members.

The fallout from gender inequality, from pay disparity to guaranteed paid family leave, affects everyone, regardless of gender. Strengthening these protections also has positive effects for those who are nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and transgender—people who face inequality in the workplace, and other parts of society, due to biases based on one’s assigned sex at birth.
THE ATTACK ON ABORTION RIGHTS

There have been other U.S. policy changes in recent years that have had a profound effect on gender inequality and caused a lack of access and autonomy for many in America. Perhaps most notable among them has been the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, which for half a century guaranteed the right to abortion access in the U.S. on a national level. The June 2022 ruling in the case Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization eliminated these federal standards on abortion access, handing over to each individual state the power to establish laws that will either protect or restrict abortion access.

The Supreme Court’s decision to strike down Roe v. Wade is regressive compared to global trends when it comes to abortion laws. Since 2000, thirty-seven countries have changed their laws to expand access to abortion services. Argentina and Thailand legalized abortion on a national level. Mexico and South Korea decriminalized it. In May 2022, Colombia made abortion legal up to twenty-four weeks of pregnancy, making it the country with the most progressive abortion laws in Latin America.

Better access to abortions and other reproductive health services globally have improved the quality and safety of abortion care. According to data from medical journal The Lancet, almost 90 percent of abortions in countries with more liberal abortion laws are considered safe, compared to 25 percent in countries where abortion is banned. Data from the World Health Organization approximates that 5 to 13 percent of maternal deaths globally are due to complications from unsafe abortions, many of which happen in developing nations.

In some U.S. states, abortion has and will remain available and legal, as prior policies were in place to protect access even in the absence of a federal standard, with many of those states further strengthening state and local laws to protect access since the Dobbs ruling. In August 2022, Kansas

THE DEBATE

SHOULD MINORS NEED PARENTAL CONSENT TO ACCESS ABORTION CARE?

YES
✓ A minor is too young to decide if they should have an abortion or not.
✓ A minor isn’t an adult yet, and their parents should be notified of any medical care, not just abortion access.
✓ It’s too risky, and for safety reasons if a minor is seeking access to abortion care an adult should be present.

NO
✗ Abortion is healthcare that is between a doctor and a patient, and everyone deserves privacy, even minors.
✗ If a minor is afraid to tell their parents, it could lead to them not asking for access to abortion care at all.
✗ If a minor’s parents are against them seeking abortion access, it could lead to them seeking an illegal and unsafe abortion.
punishable by two to five years in prison. Idaho has banned abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with some specific exceptions, since the Supreme Court’s overturning of Roe v. Wade. States including Texas and Oklahoma allow lawsuits to be filed against people who aid abortions access within the state, but Idaho is the first state nationwide to criminalize assisting with an abortion across state lines.

For those seeking another option, especially with the passing of more restrictive laws, self-managed abortions using medicine have seen a steady incline in popularity. In 2020, medication abortion accounted for more than half of all reported abortions, with that number increasing ever since the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Plan C, a group that helps people gain access to abortion pills, has estimated that at least thirty thousand people self-managed abortions using this method within the first six months after the Supreme Court’s decision in 2022. Access to mifepristone and misoprostol, two of the common drugs used, grew in December 2021, when the FDA ruled that both drugs could be safely administered using telemedicine with pills delivered via mail, requiring no in-person doctor’s visit, a hurdle for many patients. As laws languish at various levels state to state, the use of abortion pills is expected to outpace clinical abortions in 2023. However, in 2023, the drugs became a target of Republican judges and legislators seeking legal loopholes that would allow them to overturn the FDA’s decision.

In April 2023, Republicans in the Montana state legislature voted to silence fellow representative Zooey Zephyr after she spoke out about transgender issues. Zephyr, the first openly transgender woman elected to the Montana Legislature, was forced to work from a counter outside the House chambers.

became the first state to vote on abortion rights since the Supreme Court’s decision. Voters rejected a proposed state constitutional amendment that would have declared that there is no right to an abortion in the state. Fifty-nine percent of the turnout voted against the proposed amendment.

In other states, no explicit laws upholding or prohibiting abortion existed prior to the federal changes in 2022, and several states had policies called trigger laws in place that would effectively outlaw abortion as soon as Roe v. Wade was overturned. Some state legislators are moving swiftly to pass anti-abortion laws. In South Carolina, Kentucky, and Arkansas, legislation has been introduced that could include homicide charges for those who receive an abortion. In April 2023, Idaho became the first state to pass a law that restricts travel across state lines to access abortions. The new law makes aiding a pregnant minor getting an abortion, via any methods, in another state
SHOULD TRANSGENDER GIRLS AND WOMEN BE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE IN WOMEN’S SPORTS?

**YES**
- Trans athletes vary in athletic ability just like cisgender athletes.
- Excluding trans people, especially younger athletes, from activities can have a negative emotional effect on them.
- Banning transgender girls and women from participating in women’s sports leagues perpetuates the harmful stereotype that one gender is weaker than the other.

**NO**
- Transgender girls and women might have a biological advantage over cisgender girls and women that could impact their performance in sports.
- It could make cisgender athletes feel uncomfortable competing against trans athletes.
- It could alienate sports fans.

**THE DEBATE**

**TRANS RIGHTS IN THE SPOTLIGHT**
Body autonomy affects all genders, and much legislation being argued on a state level, both currently and in recent years, has targeted individuals based on gender, especially transgender people, looking to limit access to everything from healthcare to bathroom access. As of March 2023, the Human Rights Campaign is tracking more than 110 bills across the U.S. that would limit the rights of transgender people. Much of this legislation focuses on transgender youth, such as the recent passing into law in Iowa of Senate File 538, which prevents doctors from administering gender-affirming care to individuals under the age of 18, and Senate File 482, which prevents transgender students from using school bathrooms and changing room of their gendered identities. According to data from the Williams Institute, there are more than 300,000 transgender youth between the ages of 13 and 17 in the U.S. today, with nearly one in four trans youth living in states that have passed bans on gender-affirming care.

This rise in legislation is happening despite support from numerous medical associations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association (AMA), for gender-affirming care for minors. In 2021, the AMA released a statement of support, citing evidence that has demonstrated that forgoing gender-affirming care can have “tragic consequences.” The AMA stated that transgender individuals are up to three times more likely to report or be diagnosed with mental health disorders. This is widely thought to be related to chronic stress from dealing with discrimination and stigmas because of their gender identity and expression. Because of these factors, transgender youth also face a higher risk of suicide. The AMA noted that studies show a dramatic reduction in suicide attempts and a decreased rate of depression and anxiety, as well as improved overall mental health, in transgender youth after receiving gender-affirming care.

FIGHTING BACK
As bills regarding body autonomy and healthcare access continue to be debated on both a national and state level, both those affected by these issues and allies alike continue to rally against restrictive legislation nationwide. In January 2017, the day after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, the Women’s March was a worldwide protest that focused on highlighting the misogynistic policy and rhetoric that has yielded gender inequality in the U.S. and across the globe. Subsequent marches have put a spotlight on a variety of issues affecting women, including the gender pay gap, income disparity between women based on race, violence against trans women, and the lack of sexual and domestic violence support for women.

**If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, talk to a trusted adult or seek help by dialing 988 on a phone.**

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*Image: Mike Flipp/Shutterstock*
WHAT YOU CAN DO

• **Get informed.** Stay informed of changing laws that directly impact gender equality. With many states swiftly introducing bills that might change access to healthcare dependent on one’s gender, it’s important to know how the laws in your state might affect you.

• **Write or call your elected officials** to let them know what you think should be done.

• **Vote, when you are old enough!** With few exceptions, you can’t vote until you’re 18, but in many states you can register at 16 or 17, and you’ll be all set when 18 rolls around.

• **Get involved.** Volunteer with national organizations or work with local chapters of larger groups that are working on a variety of issues that affect gender inequality. **URGE** is a reproductive justice group founded in 1992 that is led by and focuses on issues that affect young people, specifically LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC youth. **Advocates for Youth** is a nonprofit organization and advocacy group founded in 1980 that focuses on adolescent reproductive and sexual health, working with youth activist networks across 1,200 college campuses.

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TRAILBLAZERS

**LaKia Williams**
LaKia Williams works with **SisterSong**, a national reproductive justice org, runs a podcast that centers around reproductive justice and student activism, is a coordinator with the **Reproductive Justice Action Collective** and also the founder of **Big Easy E.C.**, a program that provides free emergency contraception to Tulane and Loyola students.

**Eve Thompson-Brown**
Eve Thompson-Brown is an organizer and has been involved in activism since she was in eighth grade. She has been a major advocate and organizer for reproductive rights in Utah, and has spoken in front of thousands of people, including members of Congress. She is also the founder of Catcalls of SLC, an organization that raises awareness of harassment of women on the street.

**Maxx Fenning**
At the age of 17, Maxx Fenning founded **PRISM FL**, an LGBTQ nonprofit in South Florida that works to expand access to LGBTQ-inclusive education and sexual health resources for youth in the community. He has been an organizer and leader in Florida fighting against the anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ legislation introduced in that state, and was recently named Person of the Year by **South Florida Gay News**.
SLAYING THE DRAGON

1. What do you think this cartoon is trying to say about gender roles? Why do or don’t you agree?

2. Why do you think the woman is asking the knight if she killed the dragon correctly, even though she was clearly successful?

3. Are there things that men or women are naturally better at? Why or why not?

NOW IT’S YOUR TURN TO MAKE GREAT DECISIONS

1. Why do you think gender inequality is so prevalent in our society? Do you think this issue is getting better or worse over time?

2. What are some things governments and employers could do to improve equality in the workplace?

3. **YOUR STORY:** How have you and people you know personally been affected by gender inequality?

KEY WORDS & TERMS

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