



# Dollars & Sense

## The Income and Wages of Utah Women

*“The needle and the midnight candle are yet considered by too many, the proper appliances of woman’s sphere. Custom also says that if a woman does as much work as a man, and does it well, she must not receive equal pay for it, and therein a wrong is inflicted upon her by the deprivation of a right to which she is justly entitled.”*

*Eliza R. Snow  
Prominent Pioneer  
and Utah Author, 1872*

Talking about women’s wages—it’s a complex proposition. Especially when asking for that one piece of information that we really want to know—how do they compare to men’s wages?

Traditionally, economists refer to the wage gap as the difference between the wages of the average male and the average female. Typically, a female-to-male ratio is established. Just divide the average female wage by the average male wage.

Unfortunately, there exists a fairly large number of wage data series. Coming up with a definitive “wage gap” figure is problematic. Basically, wages are measured differently in each series. Therefore, ratios end up with different results. Truth is, the male/female wage gap is determined by which data series you choose to use. The hardest question is, “What series should we use?”

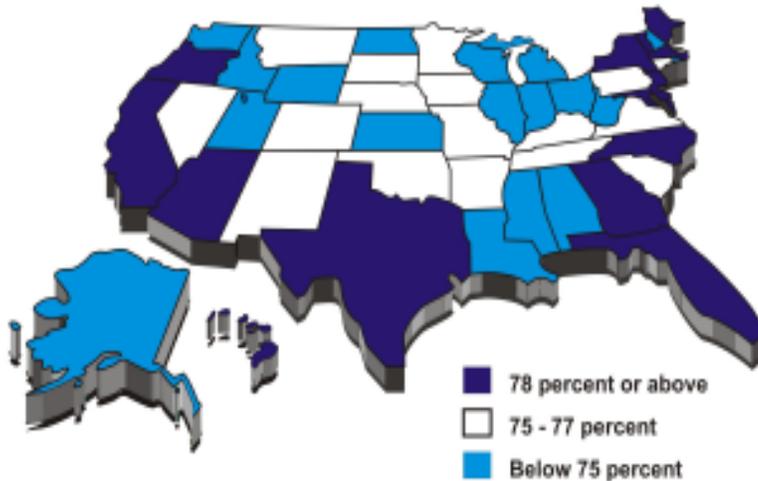
For Utah, until recently, a decent wage gap figure was only available once every ten years when the Census was

## Utah Median Earnings of Year-Round, Full-time Workers, 2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

## Women's 2008 Median Earnings as a Percent of Men's Median Earnings



\*Year-round, full-time workers.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

show the median earnings for year-round, full-time male workers at \$36,935. The comparable figure for female workers measures \$24,872. In other words, the wage gap measured 67 percent.

You'll notice that we used data for year-round, full-time workers. So, seasonal workers and those who work part-time are excluded. It's best when making wage gap comparisons to keep the working characteristics of the two groups as equal as possible. In this way, we make sure we're comparing apples and apples—not apples and oranges.

### Trailing the Pack

Nationally, Census 2000 shows a male/female wage gap of 73 percent. That places the Utah near the middle of a

published. Currently, there are several data sources for Utah's wage gap. Again, which series to use?

There are so many data series with so many different figures; it's enough to make even a data queen's head spin. For example, for Utah, you can come up with wage gap figures ranging from 57 percent to 75 percent—for the same year!

### Census Rules

Because of its sheer size, the decennial Census provides some of the best earnings figures, and is therefore able to show the best detail. Let's start here. Census 2000 figures for Utah

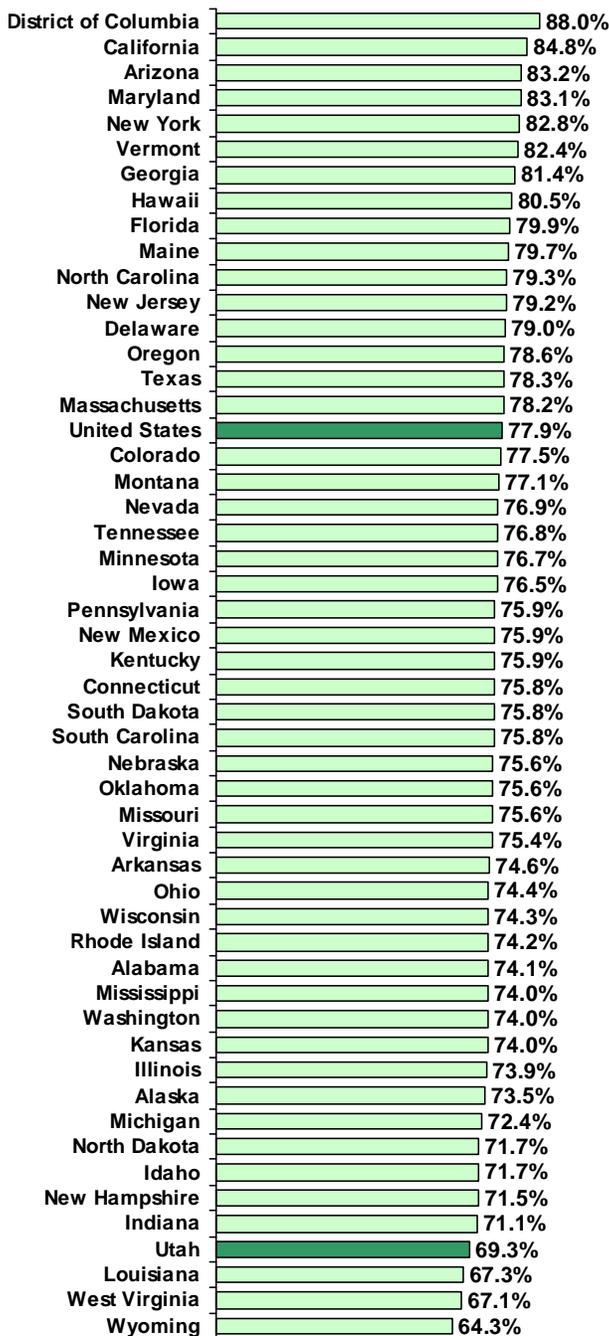
## Utah Female Median Annual Earnings As a Percent of Male Median Annual Earnings, 2008

69 Percent



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

# Female Median Annual Earnings as a Percent of Men's Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, 2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

state-by-state ranking. Yes, that means that Utah (where women make 67 cents on the male dollar) shows one of the largest wage gaps in the nation. In fact, Utah ranked fourth from the bottom—higher than only Michigan, Louisiana, and Wyoming.

Of course, Utah has made some progress. In the 1990 Census, it showed the **largest** wage gap in the United States.

Interestingly, with the exception of Wyoming, Utah was pretty much surrounded by states with smaller-than-average male/female wage gaps in 2000. California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado show male/female earnings ratios of 75 percent or higher.

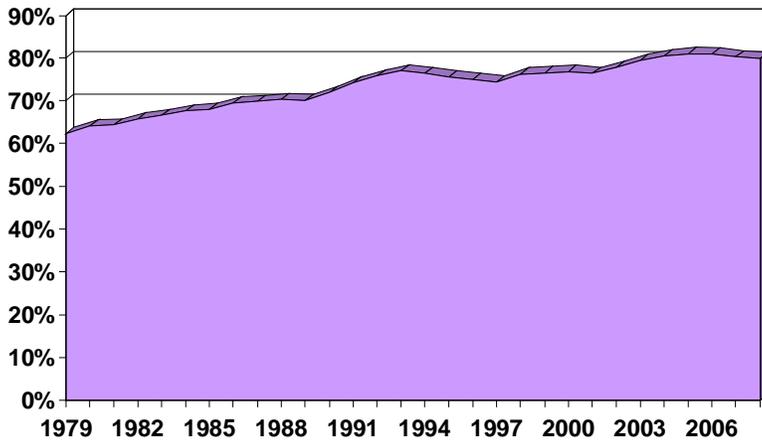
## Newer Numbers

Estimates from the 2008 American Community Survey show Utah's female/male wage ratio improving to 69.3 percent. However, Utah still shows the fourth-largest wage gap in the U.S. In addition, we're still pretty much surrounded by states with small wage gaps. Plus, keep in mind that American Community Survey samples are dominated by larger communities—where the wage gaps tend to be smaller.

## The Good News

The good news for women and their families? The wage gap is now narrowing. In the 30 years following 1950—a period when women made

# U.S. Female Median Weekly Earnings as a Percent of Men's, Full-Time Workers



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

gains in the “high paying” professions—very little changed. Data published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that before the early 80s, the U.S. male/female earnings ratio for full-time workers hovered around 60 percent. There was virtually no significant narrowing in the wage gap—until 1980.

In the last 20-plus years, the wage gap has slowly narrowed. According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics data series, in 1979, the ratio of female-to-male weekly earnings ratio measured about 63 percent. By 2006, the comparable figure registered almost 81 percent. Yes, the gap is narrowing.

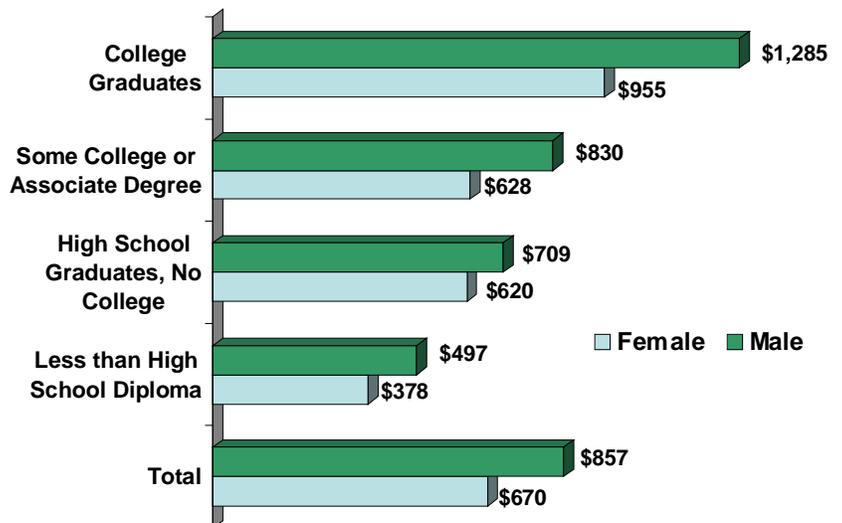
What about in Utah? Using 1980, 1990 and 2000 Census figures, we find that the female/male earnings ratio grew from about 53 percent in 1980 to 57

percent in 1990 to 67 percent in 2000. Yes, here in Utah, women are making earnings gains.

## Other Numbers

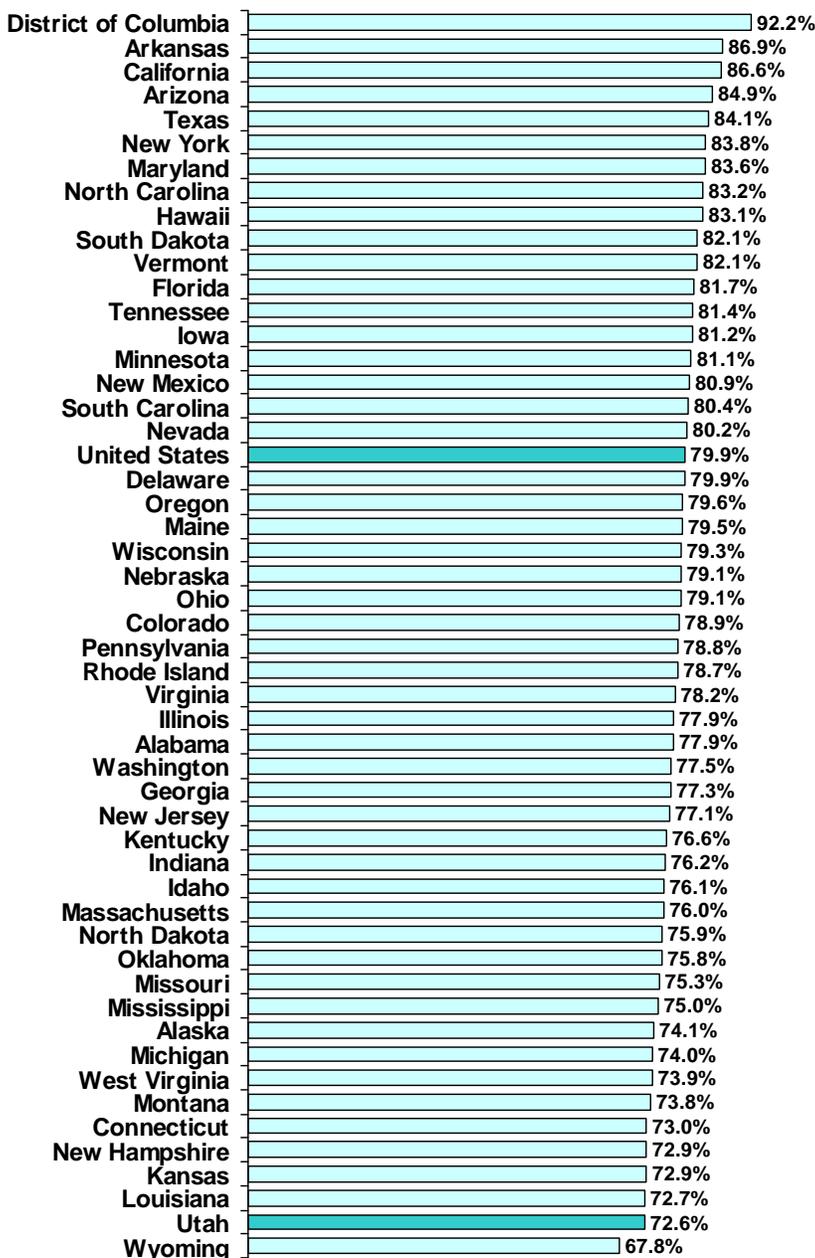
The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) also publishes male/female earnings information. However, instead of publishing annual data, BLS publishes *weekly earnings*. These figures would tend to be more reflective of actual difference in earnings than the annual figures because men tend to work more weeks and hours than women. When we can eliminate any differences in hours/weeks worked, we get a more accurate picture of the true difference in wages by gender. On the

# 2008 U.S. Average Weekly Earnings by Educational Level, for Full-Time Workers



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

# Female Median Weekly Earnings as a Percent of Men's Full-Time Workers, 2008



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

other hand, the sample size is smaller than the American Community Survey which could lead to more bias.

In this case, Utah's female/male wage ratio measures 72.6 percent and in a state-by-state ranking Utah drops to second from the bottom. Only Wyoming shows a higher wage gap.

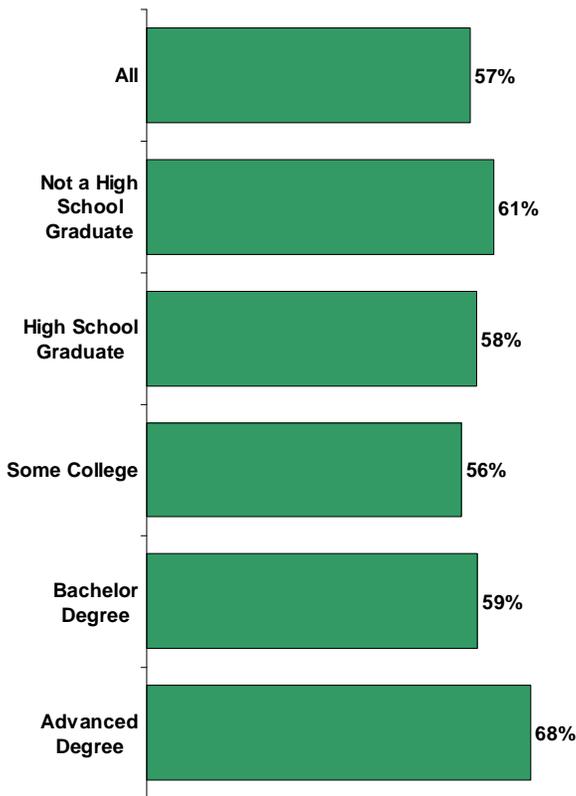
While the Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes wage gap figures for Utah, the series fluctuates dramatically. This is due to the relatively small sample size for this particular survey. However, it's becoming rather obvious that there is certainly no one wage-gap figure.

## Best-Paying Jobs

After perusing Census 2000 data, it becomes obvious that the best-paying jobs for men are also generally the best-paying jobs for women. Physicians, dentists, air traffic controllers, chief executives, lawyers, engineering managers, optometrists, and pharmacists are among the highest-paid positions for both men and women.

However, you just might notice that these jobs are typically dominated by men. For example, in Utah, physicians and surgeons are only 17 percent female, dentists are only 3 percent female, air traffic controllers are 15 percent female, chief executives are 13 percent female, engineering managers are 8 percent female, optometrists are 20 percent female, and lawyers are 18 percent female. Of these high paying occupations only one—pharmacists

# Utah Female/Male Earnings Ratio by Education Workers 25 and Older, 2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

(with 36 percent female)—has more than a one-fifth share of positions held by women.

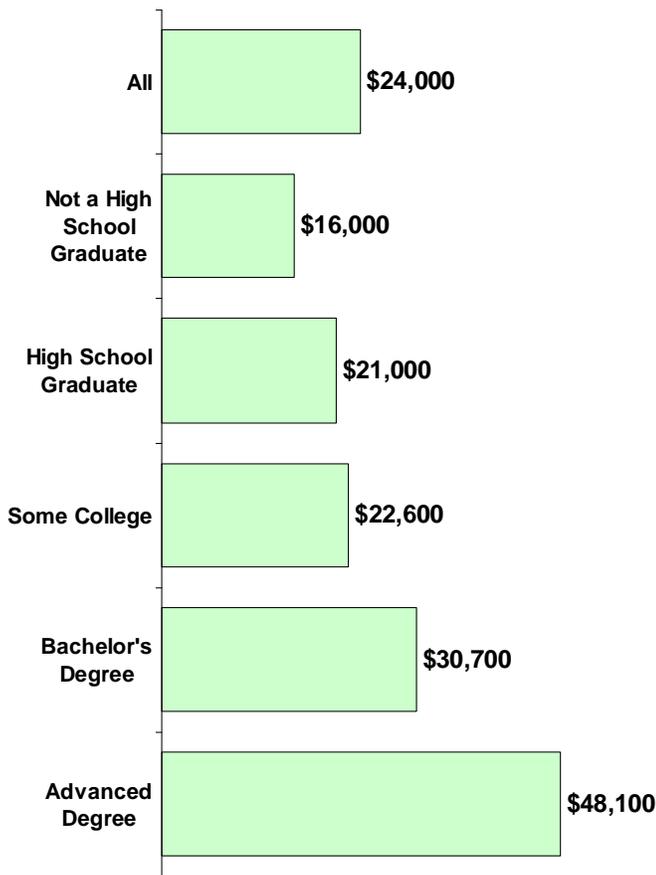
Interestingly, in these occupations women typically make more than 80 percent of the median wage of their male counterparts. In other words, the wage gap is smaller than average for these occupations. Of course, the wage gap often shrinks when individual occupations are examined. As we'll explain later, occupational choice is the primary reason for the male/female wage gap.

## Learning to Earn

How does the wage gap between men and women stack up by educational level? Contrary to what one might suppose, increased education does not necessarily shrink the wage gap. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, on average in 2008, U.S. women with at least a four-year degree made 74 percent of the median weekly wage of men with at least a four-year degree. However, women who only graduated from high school made 87 percent of the comparable male worker.

While comparable figures for Utah are not available from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the American Community Survey data can shed some light on male/female earnings by educational attainment. However, these numbers reflect annual rather than weekly earnings. Also, these numbers are for the entire labor force, not just year-round full-time workers. This means the ratios

# Utah Female Median Annual Earnings by Education Workers 25 and Older, 2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

will be lower than in previously mentioned series—because women are much more likely to work part-time.

In Utah, women who only graduated from high school showed a slightly larger-than-average wage differential with their male counterparts—but smaller than that of college graduates. Getting an advanced degree seems to be the best road for women trying to close the wage gap. Women with an advanced degree in Utah most closely approximate their male counterparts' earnings.

## It Pays. . .

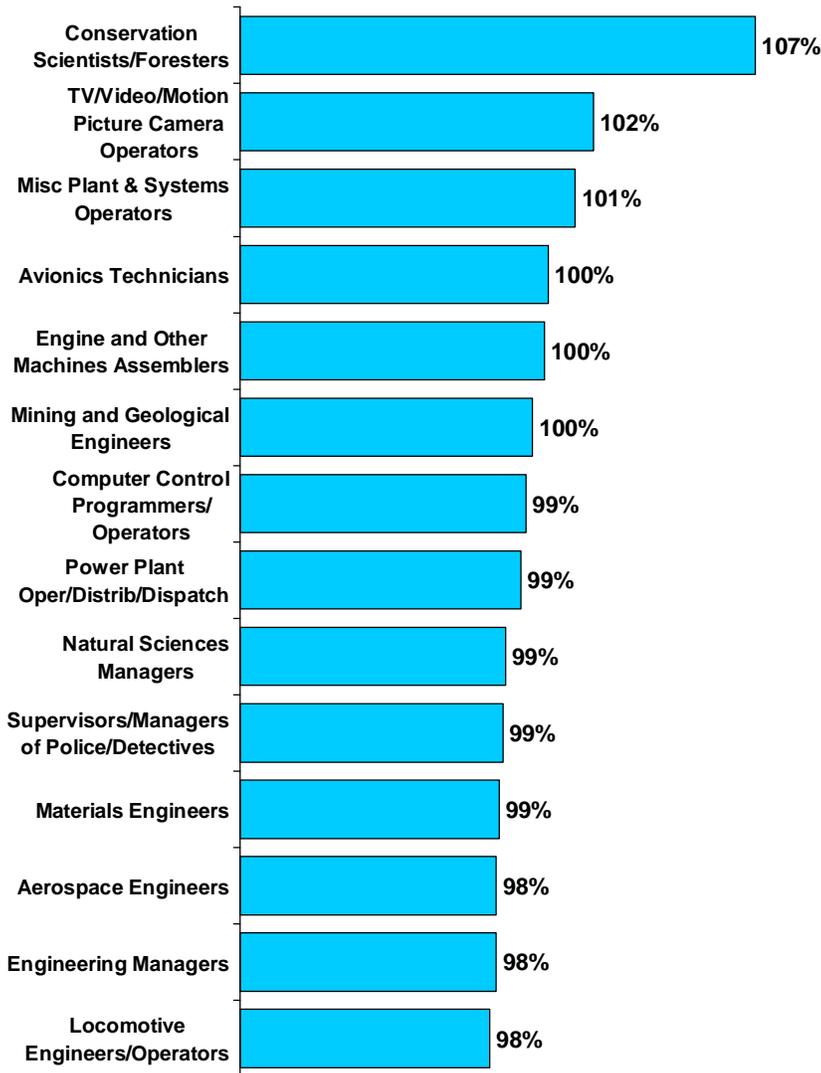
Continuing one's education increases one's earning power—male or female. The differences are particularly striking for women. American Community Survey data tells us that a Utah woman with a bachelor's degree made \$9,700 more a year than one with only a high school diploma.

National 2008 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that a college-educated woman makes **54 percent more** than her high school-only educated sister.

## Jobs with the Smallest Wage Gap

If you're a Utah woman and want a job in Utah where you're most likely to make as much as your male co-worker, what occupation should you choose? According to Census 2000 figures, choose a technical/science/math-related position or one that's typically dominated by men. There are

# Utah Occupations with a High Female/ Male Wage Ratio, Year-Round, Full-Time Workers, 1999



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

almost 60 occupations in Utah where the average woman makes 95 percent or more of the average man's wage.

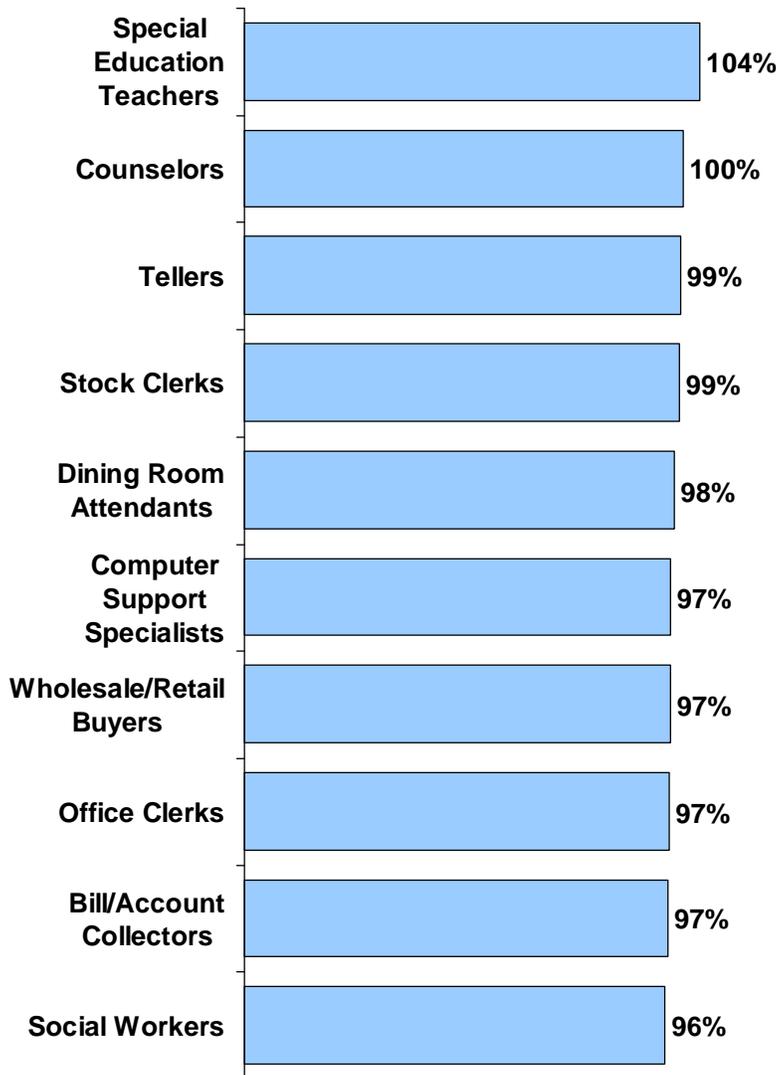
Many of these positions are in science, healthcare, and engineering fields (which also pay extremely well) and require at least a bachelor's degree. Others are technically oriented, requiring some post-high school training. Others require only on-the-job training, but are occupations traditionally held by men.

## Jobs with the Largest Wage Gap

Drilling down to the occupational level doesn't always narrow the wage gap. In some Utah occupations, the male/female wage gap is extraordinarily large. For instance, in Utah, Census 2000 reports that the average female model/demonstrator (working year-round/full-time) made only 15 percent of the average male model/demonstrator.

However, that occupation is an outlier. Where the wage gap is largest, the ratio of women's median annual earnings to men's median annual earnings measures about 35 percent.

# U.S. Occupations with a High Female/Male Wage Ratio, Full-Time Workers, 2008



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In contrast to low wage gap occupations, many of these professions are low-skilled and/or dominated by women. For example, child care workers, teacher assistants, hosts/hostesses, dining room attendants, door-to-door sales, and library clerical assistants are included in this group.

## Sometimes, It Pays to be Young

Does age make a difference when it comes to the wage gap? Yes, in general, the younger the age, the smaller the wage gap. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the U.S. makes it obvious that the wage gap increases with age.

Young women working full-time between the ages of 19 and 24 make roughly 92 percent of the average weekly wage of their male counterparts. Of course, a younger woman's labor force experience is more likely to match that of the typical young man. Moreover, younger women are getting more education and many have not yet become mothers—another life event that affects labor market participation.

Sometimes as folks age, certain parts of their bodies start to sag; so, too does the wage gap. Nationally, the largest wage gap occurs for women

# U.S. Occupations with a Low Female/Male Wage Ratio, Full-Time Workers, 2008



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

between the ages of 55 and 64. They typically make only 73 percent of their male counterparts' wage. Of course, these are the women who are least likely to have a labor market experience or educational attainment similar to their male counterparts.

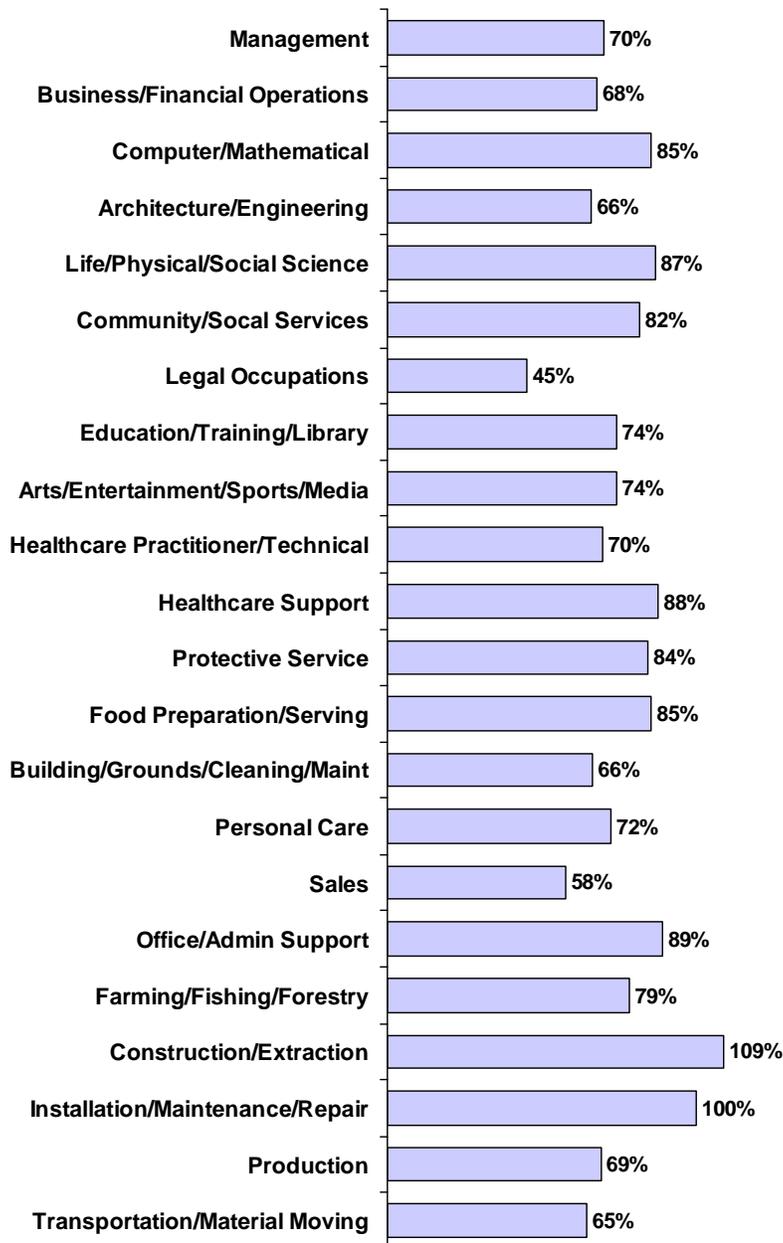
## The Rainbow Connection

Race and ethnicity make a difference when it comes to the wage gap. American Community Survey 2006-2008 data indicates that white men and women in Utah have the largest wage discrepancy. The median wage for year-round, full-time white women workers measures only 68 percent of the comparable figure for white men.

On the other hand, Asians show the smallest wage gap. The average female worker in this racial group makes 81 percent of the average male worker's wages. In fact, every nonwhite ethnic or racial minority group shows a smaller wage gap than does the white, non-Hispanic group.

This makes sense. In general, minority male wages fall noticeably behind white male wages. In other words, many minority workers make lower-than-average wages than do white males—regardless of gender. For example, the median annual wage for a white, full-

# Utah Occupations Female/Male Wage Ratio by Major Occupational Group Year-Round, Full-Time Workers 2006-2008 Average



Source: U.S. Bureau of Census; American Community Survey.

time, year-round *female* worker averaged \$32,500 in 2006-2008 compared to \$27,600 for the average *male* Hispanic worker.

## Sometimes Women Make More

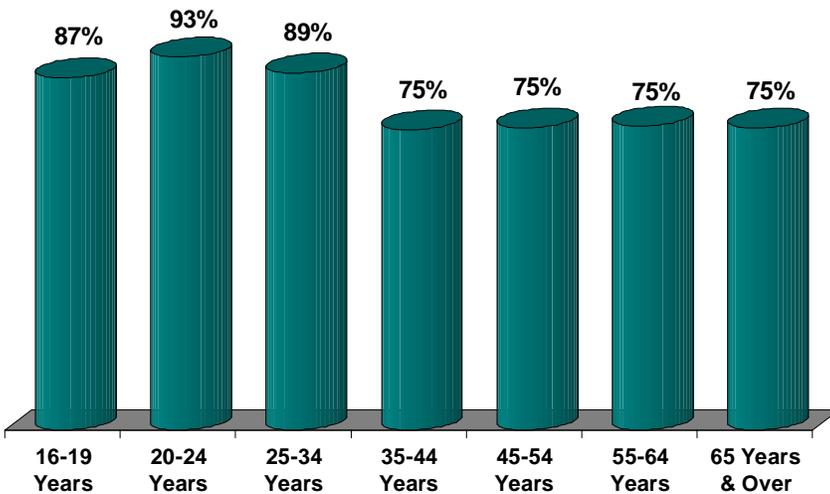
Women do sometimes make more than comparable males. For example, U.S. women who typically work less than 40 hours a week almost always out-earn men who work less than full-time.

Most part-time workers are women. Moreover, men who work part-time are typically at the very young end or post-retirement end of the labor market scale. So, it isn't surprising that older and more experienced part-time women workers out-earn male part-time workers.

## What's Going On?

Okay, in general, men make more than women. Why? After observing some of the figures here you want to precipitously leap to the conclusion that women are discriminated against in the workplace. Don't take make that leap. Remember that many factors determine a person's wage—age, education, profession, experience, time on the job. The discrepancy in male and female wages does not automatically imply discrimination in the labor market.

## U.S. Full-time Female Median Weekly Earnings as a Percent of Men's by Age, 2008



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

that women choose them regardless of their low pay. We've seen right here that in many occupations that are dominated by men—requiring technical/science/math/analytical skills—the wage gap often almost disappears.

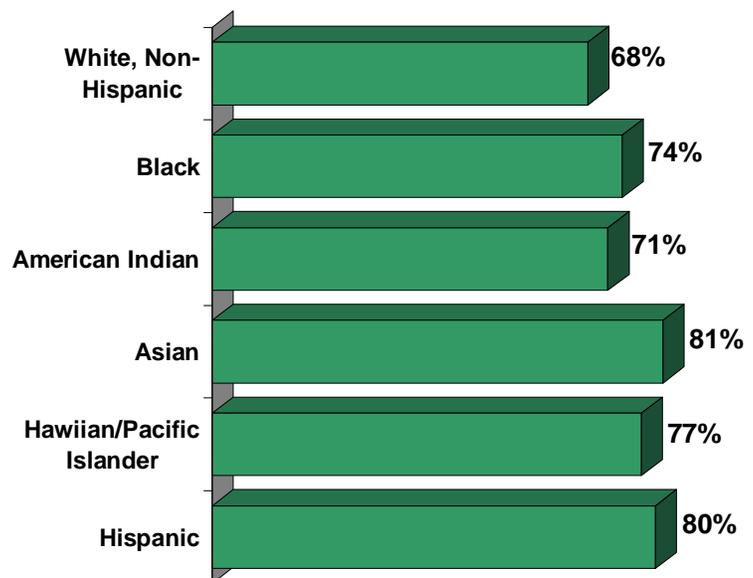
In fact, the general rule of thumb for women and wages? The more nontraditional the job, the higher the pay for a woman. There are two exceptions to this rule—nurses and dental hygienists.

## Occupational Choice

Much of the difference in men's and women's wages occurs because of occupational choice. Women tend to choose employment—for whatever reason (and we've covered a number of them in the previous section)—that is lower paying. This may be one reason that Utah shows a larger-than-average wage gap. Fewer Utah women have moved into male-dominated occupations than in the nation as a whole.

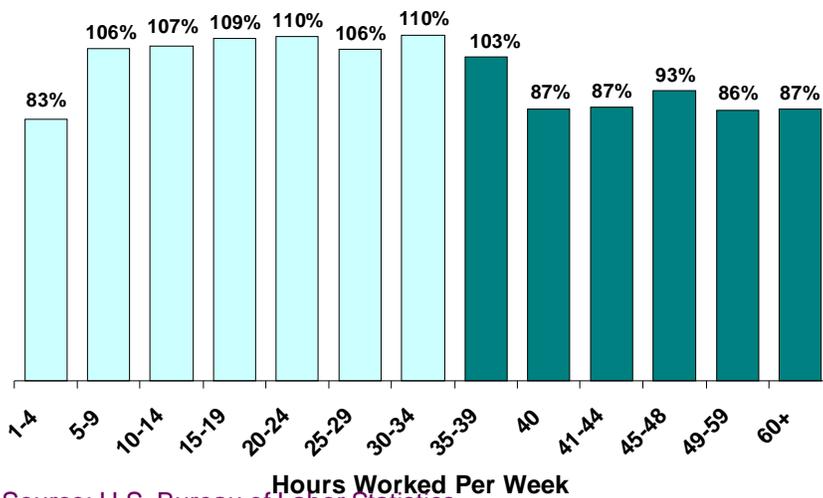
Some may argue that traditional female jobs pay less just because the market discriminates against those jobs. However, this does not remove the fact

## Utah Female Median Annual Earnings as a Percent of Men's, Full-time, Year-Round Workers, 2006-2008 Average



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

# U.S. Female Median Weekly Earnings as a Percent of Men's, by Hours Worked 2008



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Studies suggest that even for college-educated professionals, choice of occupation accounts for 30-70 percent of the entire wage gap.

## Other Factors

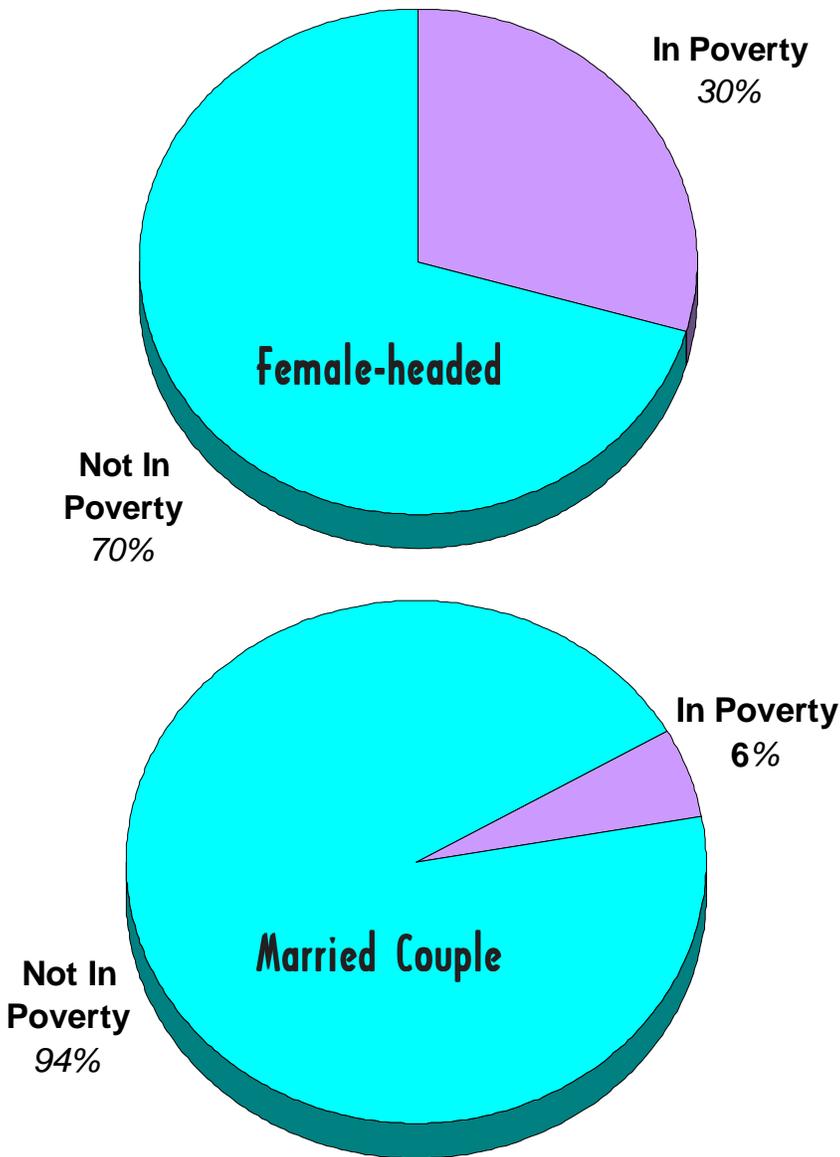
Other factors also influence the wage gap. The labor force experience of women may differ substantially from that of men as women strive to combine home and family responsibilities. Many women move in and out of the workforce choosing to remain at home while their children are young.

Because, in general, women are newer to the labor force than men, they tend to have spent less time in a particular job. Economists call this “occupational tenure.” In addition, because the share of women in the labor force keeps increasing, more women are at the bottom of the career ladder than men. In other words, recent female entrants may depress the average wage.

Women’s educational attainment falls below men’s thus limiting their earning power. Moreover, women remain disproportionately illiterate in mathematics, science, and engineering—the highest paying positions.

Certain groups of women may pull down the average female wage. While many women are delaying marriage/childbirth and obtaining a better education than their predecessors, others are not. Significant numbers of very young women still become pregnant early, marry early or not at all, or divorce with

# Poverty Status of Utah Families with Children Under 18, 2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

inadequate support for their children. Most of these women have few job skills, little education and no male support. They may have addiction problems. They are often relegated to the lowest-paying jobs in the economy. This significant group of women may pull down the average for all women.

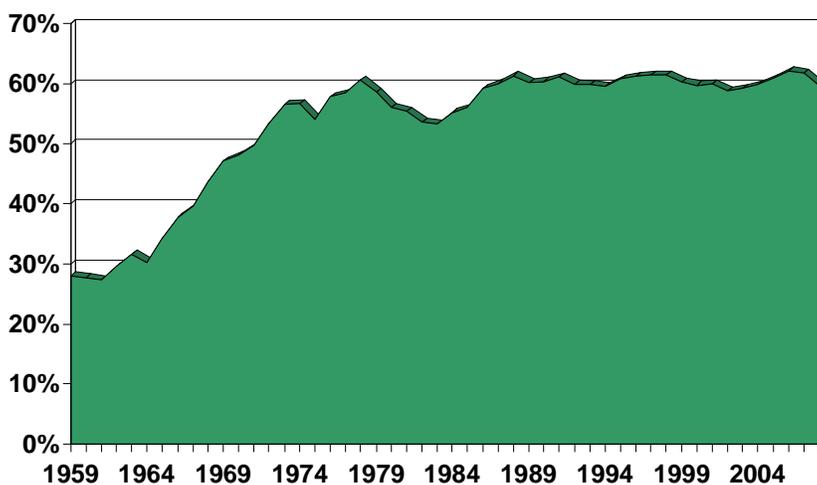
Another factor: women do not seem to advance as quickly as men. We've probably all heard of the "mommy track" where women are sidelined from promotions because of a perceived difference by employers. You may have also heard of the "glass ceiling." Employers, for various reasons, seem reluctant to advance women to the top echelons of corporate power.

## What's left?

However, after explaining away all the demographic characteristics and choices that make men's and women's labor force experience different, there's still some of that old wage gap left. While studies disagree on the level, one consistent finding does emerge from the literature: no analysis can completely account for the entire female/male wage gap. Researchers have estimated that 60 to 70 percent of the difference is attributable to the differences noted above. The remaining share could not be attributed to factors other than gender.

In other words, a large portion of the gap remains unexplainable and may indeed reflect some institutionalized discrimination against women in the workplace.

## U.S. Female-headed Families\* in Poverty as a Percentage of All Families\*



\* With Children under 18.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

### Lower Wages Hurt

Lower wages impact our society and economy. In 2008, according to American Community Survey figures, roughly 30 percent of Utah female-headed families with children had incomes below the poverty line. In comparison, only 5 percent of married-couple families with children and 13 percent for single male-headed families were in poverty.

Despite lower-than-average wages, Utah manages to consistently experience a lower-than-average poverty rate. For example, the U.S. poverty rate from Census 2000 for female-headed families with children measured 35 percent to Utah's 29 percent. Nevertheless, poverty in Utah's female-headed households remains significant—putting a drain on government resources.

In addition, over time, women-headed families are making up a larger and larger share of all families in poverty. Back in 1960, U.S. female-headed families with children accounted for only 27 percent of total families in poverty. By 2008, they constituted 60 percent of families in poverty.

Whether through divorce, desertion, death, or remaining single, more than 85 percent of American women can expect to have to support themselves and/or their children at some time in their lives. If these women are improperly prepared for the labor force, they may find themselves in the ranks of the poor.