

How early career women help to open up the gender pay gap

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Perhaps Gary Lineker *is* worth more than Clare Balding? After all, the

former footballer fronts the BBC's coverage of the world's most popular sport. Balding, on the other hand, presents the BBC countryside radio programme Ramblings and the BBC faith programme Good Morning Sunday, alongside other jobs for BBC Sport. In truth, though, the kerfuffle over the BBC gender pay gap is a distraction, and part of a wider trend towards public sector bashing.

Research suggests that the real issue behind gender pay gaps is that [women](#) too readily accept low pay offers. And the cost of not negotiating job offers is compounded significantly during a career. In her book, *Women Don't Ask*, Linda Babcock reported that only seven percent of women negotiate, compared with 57% of men. Those who did negotiate gained at least a seven percent higher salary. This will clearly accumulate over a lifetime. It appears that many women just assume their hard work [will naturally be rewarded](#).

So are women just naïve or lacking self-belief? Often it doesn't cross their minds to question an initial offer. Carol Frohlinger, Managing Partner at consultancy and training firm, *Negotiating Women*, says [only 16% of women](#) will always seize the opportunity to negotiate pay when the opportunity arises. In their research, economists Andreas Leibbrandt and John List found that women were more likely to negotiate [if they are aware](#) this option is open to them. Whether those offering jobs would ever want to make that clear is another question altogether.

Managing expectations

Some women may feel it is vulgar to discuss gender pay gaps, as [Kate Winslet has suggested](#). Many are anxious about [blowing an offer](#) completely by negotiating. Some fear they will be penalised for asking for more money when they also need to ask for flexibility over childcare – for which they [may also be punished](#). They feel grateful for flexibility in conditions and are willing to prioritise this over pay. Women also feel

uncomfortable about taking full credit, opting to talk instead [about the team's](#) rather than their own contribution.

David Fahey, a consultant and part-time PhD student at Huddersfield Business School, has observed this among executive women in the UK over the past decade. He says that they often comment in salary negotiations: "I know my salary is below market rate but I'm being challenged intellectually, learning a lot." They sometimes say they "haven't really thought about the salary". The argument should go that big challenges justify bigger salaries.

Men tend to be more assertive. If expectations fall short, men are more likely to leave the table. Curiously, in an article on gender differences in tough negotiations, Sara Solnick even found that women offer [larger salaries to men](#). Perhaps women can learn something on assertiveness from Amy Cuddy's popular TED talk?

In Hollywood, even extraordinarily successful women appear to lack confidence. Meryl Streep recalls [how the initial offer](#) for her to act in *The Devil Wears Prada* was a dramatic moment:

The offer was to my mind ... not perhaps reflective of my actual value to the project. There was my 'goodbye moment', and then they doubled the offer. I was 55, and I had just learned ... how to deal on my own behalf.

Taking responsibility

The common discourse around the gender pay gap absolves women of any responsibility for creating it. Both male and female leaders, HR professionals and especially early career women must engage in uncomfortable conversations if they are serious about tackling it.

We do not suggest that if women simply did what men do the pay gap would vanish. Jawad Syed, Dean of Dawood School of Business, Lahore University of Management Sciences and a gender scholar, has noted historical gender stereotyping [remains prevalent](#) and life cycle differences between the sexes are not yet accommodated and valued.

And it is hard to spot that young women have failed to negotiate early pay deals properly until it is too late. If they take time out for childcare, then the accumulated pay disparity may worsen as they miss annual reviews or have gaps in experience come pay review time. An early career lawyer breaking into a male-dominated firm might be tempted to thank her lucky stars and take whatever she's offered. You might expect lawyers to be natural negotiators, but it is revealing to find that three former female partners [have filed a US\\$100m lawsuit](#) against US law firm Chadbourne & Parke for gender pay disparity. Chadbourne is contesting the claim.

The more male-dominated the context and the greater the demands in terms of hours and travel, the harder it may be for women to ask for more pay. Well-educated and well-qualified women frequently assume pay is just on the basis of merit, a myth that the sociologists Stephen J. McNamee and Robert K. Miller, Jr [discredited in their 2004 book](#).

Gender pay differentials are not just happening among Hollywood and BBC celebrities. It happens at all levels and is taking new forms as business models change in the gig economy. Clearly, more transparent internal systems and legislation on mandatory, granular gender gap reporting would be helpful in addressing this issue, as [we see in Nordic countries](#).

The [gender](#) gap is gouged out by an incremental process as women's salaries are repeatedly undercut during their careers. Over successive jobs, and for a variety of reasons, women can be too ready to accept the

offer on the table. Each time they move, their pay parity with men can worsen, particularly when the new pay is related to their current salary package. This is also compounded generally by worse pay [for mothers and older women](#).

The quiet scandal, though, is why women consistently feel that they need to accept low offers. We should be discussing behavioural economics rather than bashing the BBC. The focus instead should be on supporting women to negotiate fairer pay.

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