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The gender wage gap just shrank for the first time in a decade



This week, the Census Bureau reported some bright news: Middle-class incomes rose last year to the highest level ever recorded, a long-awaited sign of healing from the Great Recession.

Along gender lines, the numbers revealed a more complicated story. Women are closing the pay gap with men — the national disparity shrank by the largest amount since 2007. But it's not just because women are landing more raises. Men, it seems, are hitting a wall. Since the economic downturn, female workers — who still make less money as a group than their male counterparts — have seen more income growth. However, that is true for only white and Asian women. Wages for Latino women flatlined, and pay for African American women declined. Men, meanwhile, have dealt with more wage stagnation.

Last year, the female-to-male earnings ratio climbed to 80.5%, the highest ever, financier Steven Rattner pointed out on his website. That's up from 80% in 2014 and 2015. The typical woman earned \$41,554 in 2016, while the average man took home \$51,640. Neither sex experienced a statistically significant income jump compared with the previous year. But from 2014 to 2015, median pay for men rose a dismal 1.5% while women saw a 2.7% increase, according to census data. Last year's family numbers, meanwhile, show a similar trend.

Married-couple households, per usual, had the highest median income (\$87,057), up 1.6% from 2015, followed by single male breadwinners (\$58,051), whose wages have held steady. Over the last two years, though, households led by women, including single mothers, recorded a pay jump of 7.2%. So, is something holding men back, specifically?

David Wessel, a senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution, argued in a blog post that, adjusting for inflation, men haven't gotten a collective raise since 1973. Women, though, have seen a 30% pay increase over the last four decades.

Part of that is easy to explain: Women have surged into the workforce since the 1970s as attitudes have changed and career advancement for mothers has become more socially acceptable.

And economists know that some male-dominated fields, such as manufacturing and mining, have faced steep declines over the last two decades, taking away some of the best-paying opportunities for workers without college degrees. Danielle Paquette (368 words)¹

shrank : was reduced

downturn : recession

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