

9 Reasons Your Salary Isn't Higher

Forget working hard for the money. Some factors that influence salary are beyond your control

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It's a rare individual who wouldn't like to make a bit (or a boatload) more money each year. It's not as if most people don't try: They work hard. They endeavor to boost their performance—and, it seems to follow, their pay—with training programs and career coaches and workplace mentors. They even schedule weekly tête-à-têtes with their bosses to measure their progress and reassess benchmarks.

The truth is that some factors correlated to higher pay are impossible for a person to control. Studies show that [taller people make more](#) money, but can people increase their height? Similarly, can a man become a lefty after decades as a right-handed man? Can a woman become a man? What's more, there are factors in how you behave outside the office that are associated with higher pay. For example: If you like rum in your Coke, you'll make more money. (It is, at least, a good argument against prohibition.)

Men seem particularly affected by salary advantages and disadvantages that aren't related to work performance. Consider the [premium paid to some lefties](#). While researchers at Lafayette College and Johns Hopkins University found no wage difference between left-handed and right-handed women, left-handed men who have some college education average about 13 percent more than right-handed men. Lefty males who are college graduates average as much as 20 percent more than their right-handed counterparts.

A report from the Reason Foundation found that while male and female drinkers [make more than nondrinkers](#), men who hit the bar at least once a month—thereby satisfying the definition of social drinkers—seem to make even more.

[Married men tend to make more](#) than men who have never been married. Researchers at the Federal Reserve of St. Louis found there may be a few reasons for this. For one thing, employers may have a bias in favor of married men because marital status might signify a man's stability or responsibility. Old-fashioned or not, another possibility is that marriage frees men up to focus on work, rather than on household tasks. The most likely reason, however, is that the observable qualities that appeal to an employer are similar to those that appeal to a mate—characteristics such as background, education, and appearance.

Men who choose to go into Christian ministry will find that they dominate the field but [make less than their female counterparts](#). A survey of church employees conducted by Christian Today International's Your Church ministry found that women made up only 6.3 percent of full-time solo pastor positions, but they reported 10.4 percent higher total compensation.

Women are generally acknowledged to be underdogs in the compensation world, but a report from American Association of University Women Education Foundation noted that [women choose college majors that pay less](#)—majors such as education, psychology, and healthcare. Men choose more lucrative majors, like engineering and mathematics.

The pay difference has, however, undergone [a surprising shift](#) in some metropolitan areas. Andrew Beveridge, a sociology professor at Queens College, found that New York women in their 20s earned an average of \$7,000 less than their male counterparts in 1970 but were making about \$5,000 more in 2005.

[A 2007 study](#) from University of Northern Iowa looked at 2000 census data and found that cohabitating lesbians earn about 10 percent more annually than married women. They also earn more than cohabitating, unmarried, heterosexual women.

Perhaps the research that suggests the most potential for control over pay has to do with hours logged. Two [MSN-Zogby polls](#) found 37 percent of workers with household incomes of \$100,000 or more report working between 41 and 50 hours a week, while only 8 percent of those with household income less than \$25,000 work as many hours. Of course, there's plenty that could explain this, as illness, old age, and disability can affect a worker's hours. But there may be some hope that putting in the time will pay off.

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