

Breaking the Chains: Unveiling the Gender Pay Gap through Socialist Feminism and Intersectionality in Aotearoa New Zealand

Palupi Aathira Maheswari Maulana

School of Social Sciences, University of Auckland

aathira.maheswari@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This essay explores the intricate landscape of the gender pay gap in Aotearoa New Zealand, delving into the complexities through the lenses of socialist feminism and intersectionality. Despite New Zealand's commitment to gender equality since the introduction of the Equal Pay Act in 1972, persistent disparities remain, particularly for Māori and Pacific women. The socialist feminist perspective uncovers the roots of gender-based oppression intertwined with broader class-based inequalities, emphasizing the need for a unified labor movement. Simultaneously, intersectionality reveals that pay gaps are shaped by intersecting identities such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Māori and Pacific women face heightened challenges due to systemic racism and discrimination. To address these issues, policy initiatives are suggested, advocating for an intersectional approach that includes minimum wage increases, universal basic income, childcare support, and enhanced parental leave policies. The essay concludes by emphasizing the importance of recognizing and rectifying in-work poverty and promoting a collective, intersectional approach to achieve full gender parity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Keywords: Gender pay gap, Socialist feminism, Intersectionality, Aotearoa New Zealand, Gender equality policies

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menjelajahi kompleksitas situasi kesenjangan gaji berbasis gender di Aotearoa New Zealand, menggali pemahaman tersebut melalui perspektif feminisme sosialis dan interseksionalitas. Meskipun New Zealand telah menegaskan komitmennya terhadap kesetaraan gender sejak diberlakukannya Undang-Undang Upah Setara pada tahun 1972, disparitas yang bertahan terus ada, khususnya bagi perempuan Māori dan Pasifik. Pendekatan feminisme sosialis mengungkap akar ketidaksetaraan gender yang terkait dengan ketidaksetaraan kelas yang lebih luas, menekankan perlunya gerakan buruh yang bersatu. Sejalan dengan itu, konsep interseksionalitas mengungkapkan bahwa kesenjangan gaji dipengaruhi oleh identitas yang saling berpotongan, seperti gender, ras, dan etnisitas. Perempuan Māori dan Pasifik menghadapi hambatan ekstra akibat rasisme sistemik dan diskriminasi. Untuk mengatasi permasalahan ini, diusulkan adanya inisiatif kebijakan, yang mendorong pendekatan interseksional yang mencakup peningkatan upah minimum, pendapatan dasar universal, dukungan perawatan anak, dan perbaikan kebijakan cuti orang tua. Penelitian ini diakhiri dengan menegaskan pentingnya mengakui dan mengatasi kemiskinan di tempat kerja, serta mendorong pendekatan kolektif dan interseksional guna mencapai kesetaraan gender penuh di Aotearoa New Zealand.

Kata Kunci: Kesenjangan gaji berdasarkan gender, Feminisme Sosialis, Interseksionalitas, Aotearoa New Zealand, Kebijakan Kesetaraan Gender

I. Introduction

New Zealand introduced its Equal Pay Act in 1972. Employment New Zealand defines the Equal Pay Act as a legislation that prohibits discrimination in pay on the basis of sex. The purpose of the Equal Pay Act is for women to be paid the same as men for doing the same work under the same conditions.¹ The New Zealand Equal Pay Act played an important role in addressing and mitigating gender pay gaps in the country, the primary objective of the Equal Pay Act is to eliminate discrimination in pay based on sex, and to ensure both men and women receive equal remuneration for performing the same amount of work. In order to emphasize that jobs requiring similar skills and effort should receive equal pay, regardless of traditional job titles, the Act introduces the concept of comparable worth. Even though the Equal Pay Act has played a significant role in closing the gender pay gap and promoting gender equality, issues still exist.

Compared to other developed countries, New Zealand's gender pay gap is relatively small, but it has never fully closed throughout the years.² The news article *From Today, Kiwi Women are Working for Free* by Theresa Gattung illustrates gender pay gaps in Aotearoa New Zealand. The current percentage of the gender pay gap is at 9.2%, while the gap for Māori and Pacific women is at 15.7%. This article also emphasized that women make up 47% of the workforce in Aotearoa New Zealand. Gender pay gap is an issue in society perpetuated by various factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity which then cause inequalities in the labor market. The Equal Pay Act was introduced 50 years ago in 1972, with the rising number of immigrants, the Equal Pay Act does not address intersectional gender pay gaps for Māori, Pacific, and Asian women. However, amendments and some cases such as The Court of Appeal decision in *Terranova vs Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) and Bartlett* in 2014 has proven that pay equity, not just equal pay, is covered by the Equal Pay Act of 1972. A working group was formed in 2015 with the goal of recommending guidelines for pay equity that offer employers, employees, and unions useful practical advice. The 2020 modifications to the Equal Pay Act of 1972 took into account the working group's recommendations regarding pay equity.³

Gender pay gaps in the public service have already been reduced to their lowest level ever from 12.2% in 2018 to 8.6% in 2021 due to actions taken by government ministries with the Public Service Commission's assistance.⁴ The Public Commission unveiled a new action plan to build on the achievements of the Public Service Gender Pay Gap Action Plan 2018–20. This new action plan intends to accelerate the advancement of women from ethnic

¹ Ministry for Women. "Pay Equity and Equal Pay." *Women.govt.nz*. Accessed October 12 2023. <https://www.women.govt.nz/women-and-work/pay-equity-and-equal-pay>.

² Dutta, Mohan J., and Camille Nakhid. "Decolonising Communication for Social Change: A Culture-Centered Approach." *Journal of Communication* 70, no. 5 (2020): 660–681. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185620929374>.

³ Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. *Structural Reform Measures to Improve Women's Access to Labor Markets, Finance and Capital*. Singapore: APEC Policy Support Unit, 2019. <https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/Publications/2019/10/Structural-Reform-Measures-to-Improve-Womens-Access-to-Labor-Markets-Finance-and-Capital/219PSUStructural-Reform-Measures-to-Improve-Womens-Access-to-Labor-Markets-Finance-and-Capital.pdf>.

⁴ New Zealand Public Service Commission, *Eliminating the Public Service Gender Pay Gap: 2018–2020 Final Progress Report*, November 2021, <https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/assets/DirectoryFile/Final-Progress-Report-November-2021-Eliminating-the-Public-Service-Gender-Pay-Gap-2018-2020.pdf>

communities, close the gender, Māori, Pacific, and ethnic pay gaps in the public service, and create more equitable workplaces for all, including members of rainbow communities and people with disabilities.

Although New Zealand has implemented important legislative and policy reforms to address gender-based pay disparities, there is still insufficient analysis of how these policies account for the intersecting roles of gender, ethnicity and class. There has been limited focus on how current policy narratives around pay equity tend to overlook the everyday experiences and systemic barriers encountered by Māori, Pacific, and Asian women. Few studies have explored this issue using an intersectional lens or through a critical policy analysis framework that questions how inequality is conceptualized in the first place.

According to Employment New Zealand, men in New Zealand make 10% more money on average than women do in 2022.⁵ Women are underrepresented in higher-level jobs nationwide. Indeed, a large number of women work in fields where the proportion of female employees exceeds 80%. These are typically lower-paying professions. This essay will analyze gender pay gaps for women and women of color in Aotearoa New Zealand with a socialist feminist and intersectional perspective and using Carol Bacchi's (2006) 'What's the Problem?' approach to policy analysis.

II. Literature Review

In "Beyond the Us-Them Binary: Power and Exclusion in Intersectional Analysis," Myra Marx Ferree explores the intricacies of intersectionality by going beyond crude dichotomies. Ferree highlights the need of moving beyond a binary understanding of identity categories, like "us" versus "them," and instead advocates for an intersectional analysis that takes a more nuanced look at power dynamics and exclusions. In order to recognize the complex and interwoven nature of social injustices, the author contends that intersectionality should investigate how power functions at the intersections of diverse social categories rather than only emphasizing additive approaches to identity.⁶

Ferree presents the idea of intersectionality as a dynamic framework that acknowledges how various social categories and power dynamics simultaneously affect people and groups. She calls on academics to reconsider the complex ways in which power structures function within the intersections and to abandon simplistic models that uphold binary distinctions. By doing this, Ferree promotes a more thorough and nuanced comprehension of social inequalities and provides advocates and researchers with a useful viewpoint when addressing the intricacies of exclusion, power, and identity in intersectional analyses.

The necessity of adding a gender perspective to the comparative analysis of welfare states is discussed in "Gendering the Comparative Analysis of Welfare States: An Unfinished Agenda" by Ann Shola Orloff. According to Orloff, conventional analyses of welfare states frequently overlook the gendered dimensions of social policies and fail to take into account the

⁵ Employment New Zealand, "Gender Pay Gap in New Zealand," last modified 2022, <https://www.employment.govt.nz/fair-work-practices/pay-and-gender-equity/gender-pay-gap>.

⁶ Myra Marx Ferree, "Beyond the US-Them Binary: Power and Exclusion in Intersectional Analysis," *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (2015): 33, <https://doi.org/10.11116/jdivegendstud.2.1-2.0033>.

ways in which these policies affect men and women differently.⁷ The author highlights the significance of understanding the gendered aspects of welfare state structures, illuminating the ways in which social policies can either perpetuate or contest current gender disparities.

The unfinished business of viewing welfare states through a gender lens is highlighted by Orloff's work. She urges academics and decision-makers to consider gender issues when analyzing and creating welfare programs. By doing this, it becomes feasible to assess how well social programs support gender equality and pinpoint areas in need of improvement. In the end, Orloff's paper advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach to social policy analysis and development by calling on academics and decision-makers to acknowledge and address the gendered dynamics within welfare states.⁸

III. Methodology

This research uses qualitative methods, in order to fully comprehend gender pay gaps in Aotearoa New Zealand, this research collects and analyzes descriptive data. It usually involves collecting information through document analysis, interviews, and observations. Interpretive qualitative data analysis was used to identify the significance and patterns that emerged (Sugiyono, 2020). The data were gathered from literature review of past research and an analysis of government websites. This research also uses Carol Bacchi's (2006) 'What's the Problem?' approach to policy analysis by answering these questions:

1. What key 'problem' does the author identify in the text?
2. What assumptions or values underlie this understanding of the 'problem'?
3. What policy initiatives would result from this understanding of the 'problem'?
4. What does this understanding of the 'problem' ignore or leave silent?
5. How would policy initiatives differ if the 'problem' were understood differently?

A. Theories

1. Socialist Feminist Perspective

Socialist feminism in the early days had very few followers and had only become prevalent in the late twentieth century. This group of feminists believed that it would require a profound social revolution to be able to alleviate the differences women face in society. This ideology was sparked by the statement made by Friedrich Engels where Engels viewed that women's standing in society fundamentally changed due to capitalism. In pre-capitalist societies, lineage and property inheritance were done in the female line.⁹

However, this quickly changed with the rise of capitalism where property ownership was done by the men in the family. This started what Engles called the world historical defeat of the female sex'. This was further concretized by the bourgeoisie culture that was patriarchal as well as oppressive. This culture set the seal on the male inheritance line as men wished

⁷ Ann Shola Orloff, "Gendering the Comparative Analysis of Welfare States: An Unfinished Agenda," *Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3 (2009): 317–343, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2009.01350.x>.

⁸ Ann Shola Orloff, "Gendering the Comparative Analysis of Welfare States: An Unfinished Agenda," *Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3 (2009): 317–343, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2009.01350.x>.

⁹ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press, 2014), 226–250.

it to be. In addition, the paternal way of inheritance was warranted by the monogamous marriage enforced by men. This was however enforced one-sidedly, restricting only the wives to one partner while the husbands with countless others.¹⁰

2. Intersectional Theory Perspective

The intersectional theory emphasizes that gender, race, sexuality, and other markers of differences intersect and reflect oppression and privilege differently for every person.¹¹ Intersectional theory gives a different perspective to gender pay gaps because many cases of pay inequality are not based on only gender, as it will help identify different dimensions of identity. Intersectional theory can also be used to address structural inequalities such as systemic racism, sexism, and classism.

According to **Beyond the Us-Them Binary: Power and Exclusion in Intersectional Analysis** by Myra Marx Ferree, intersectionality recognizes different experiences of individuals based on their social identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and others. Power is also a central theme in an intersectional analysis, it operates differently for individuals with different intersecting identities. Intersectionality adds layers of complexity in understanding social identity and exclusion in the society which contributes to the current pay gap in Aotearoa New Zealand. Each individual has their own unique experiences of privilege and disadvantage, that is why the complexity in our society must be acknowledged.¹²

Doing or 'Using' Intersectionality? was a study on the application of intersectionality in knowledge translation theory and practice is "Opportunities and Challenges in Incorporating Intersectionality into Knowledge Translation Theory and Practice," written by Christine Kelly and colleagues. The writers explore the subtleties of using intersectionality as a real-world tool and theoretical framework for comprehending and resolving health disparities.¹³ This paper addresses the difficulties and possibilities of incorporating intersectionality into knowledge translation initiatives, emphasizing that it is imperative to go beyond a passive recognition of it. The writers contend that in order to effectively inform interventions and policies targeted at lowering health inequities, intersectionality demands a transformative approach in

¹⁰ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Houndsmills: Macmillan Press, 2014), 226–250.

¹¹ Colleen Kelly et al., "Doing' or 'Using' Intersectionality? Opportunities and Challenges in Incorporating Intersectionality into Knowledge Translation Theory and Practice," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 20, no. 1 (2021): 187, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01509-z>.

¹² Myra Marx Ferree, "Beyond the US-Them Binary: Power and Exclusion in Intersectional Analysis," *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (2015): 33, <https://doi.org/10.11116/jdivegendstud.2.1-2.0033>.

¹³ Colleen Kelly et al., "Doing' or 'Using' Intersectionality? Opportunities and Challenges in Incorporating Intersectionality into Knowledge Translation Theory and Practice," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 20, no. 1 (2021): 187, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01509-z>.

research and practice. This approach acknowledges the intricate interplay of multiple social categories and power dynamics.

Kelly and colleagues emphasize the advantages of embracing intersectionality, including the possibility of creating focused and efficient interventions as well as a more sophisticated comprehension of the varied experiences that exist within populations. However, they also go over the difficulties that come with operationalizing intersectionality in research and knowledge translation, such as problems with data interpretation and collection, as well as the risk of essentializing a variety of identities. The paper challenges scholars and professionals to approach intersectionality critically, going beyond a cursory grasp and actively putting it to use to increase the significance and effectiveness of knowledge translation projects, especially when it comes to health disparities.

IV. Analysis

A. Socialist Feminism

The explanation above has shown that the gender pay gap is more than just sexual oppression. This would argue that a social revolution should be themed as a class war as opposed to a sex war. This would mean that feminist movements should be focused more on a uni-front labor movement compared to separated and divided movements.

Socialist feminism also relates to gendered welfare states, it has different impacts on men and women based on their social and economic roles, therefore welfare states are not neutral. In Orloff's article it was mentioned that it is important to take gender analysis into consideration in the context of policy making. This article also suggests that different welfare states have different approaches to gender analysis - this article introduced gender regimes as a concept. Each welfare state has their own structure and influence regarding gender relations. The current gender pay gap in Aotearoa New Zealand suggests that with the government's approach and understanding regarding gender regimes, full gender parity has not yet been achieved.¹⁴

Socialist feminism provides an invaluable viewpoint for comprehending and resolving gender wage disparities in New Zealand. The interdependence of capitalism, patriarchy, and other oppressive systems that fuel gender-based economic inequality is highlighted by this framework. Notwithstanding the country's dedication to gender equality, persistent pay disparities in New Zealand highlight the need for a more thorough examination that takes economic structures and power dynamics into account. Socialist feminists contend that women's labor is intrinsically exploited and undervalued by capitalist systems. Women, particularly those from Māori and Pacific backgrounds, frequently find themselves in lower-paying roles and industries in the workplace. Historical and systemic factors, such as the devaluation of traditionally female-dominated professions and the disproportionate amount of unpaid domestic

¹⁴ Ann Shola Orloff, "Gendering the Comparative Analysis of Welfare States: An Unfinished Agenda," *Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3 (2009): 317–343, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2009.01350.x>.

labor performed by women, exacerbate this. Socialist feminists push for structural adjustments, such as laws that upend capitalism's profit-driven incentives and encourage resource distribution.

A socialist feminist viewpoint in New Zealand would advocate for measures that tackle the underlying economic systems that sustain inequality in addition to gender pay disparities. This could entail fighting for improved labor laws, giving women the same chances to hold leadership roles, and eliminating discriminatory practices at work. Furthermore, a comprehensive socialist feminist approach to reducing the gender pay gap in New Zealand must address the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity, as demonstrated by the difficulties faced by Māori and Pacific women. Socialist feminism offers a framework for promoting significant change in the direction of a more equitable society by comprehending and contesting the larger economic and social structures at work.

B. Intersectional Theory

Māori and Pacific women have a larger percentage pay gap in Aotearoa New Zealand. According to Dr Sereana Naepi, Pacific people in Aotearoa New Zealand experience perceived discrimination and structural racism in the society and also in workplaces. This is due to New Zealand's history of colonialism in the Pacific, which relates back to white supremacy.¹⁵ Pacific migration to Aotearoa New Zealand during the 1950s-1960s should also be highlighted because during that time, Pacific people filled labor shortages in specific industries, thus creating a racially biased system.¹⁶ This continues in the society to this day, Pacific people are often seen as "less valued" and not fit for higher roles in companies, which is one of the reasons for the ongoing pay gaps.

It's important to recognise the intersectionality of Māori and Pacific women's experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand, in addition to the challenges they face. In addition to dealing with gender-based wage gaps, women from these communities also have to deal with the aggravating effects of racial discrimination. The obstacles that people face in both social and professional contexts are exacerbated by the intersection of gender and ethnicity. The research conducted by Dr. Sereana Naepi highlights the widespread influence of historical colonialism, which established the groundwork for institutional racism and white supremacist ideologies in New Zealand. Understanding the complex issues Māori and Pacific women face in their quest for equitable opportunities and just compensation requires acknowledging the systemic biases ingrained in the history of the country. Attempts to deal with the pay gaps should take into account and address the complex dynamics of both racial and gender inequality.

Professor Dr. Camille Nakhid of Auckland University of Technology claims that the current government's proposal and action plan to address the gender pay gap will only benefit Pākehā (white) women (Bhatia, 2023). She further states that ethnic women should be the government's primary focus in order to close the pay gap. Pākehā

¹⁵ Sereana Naepi, "Beyond the Dusky Maiden: Pasifika Women in Academia," *New Zealand Sociology* 37, no. 2 (2022): 29–45.

¹⁶ Sereana Naepi, "Beyond the Dusky Maiden: Pasifika Women in Academia," *New Zealand Sociology* 37, no. 2 (2022): 29–45.

women are automatically referred to as women. Policies should prioritize Māori women, Pacific women, Pākehā women, and ethnic women who have the largest gender pay disparity in order to prevent this prejudice. Reduced gender pay gap for Pākehā women will mean that the issue of reduced gender pay gap will no longer be relevant. Nonetheless, closing the gender pay gap for ethnic women first will close it for all women as well. According to Nakhid, institutional and systemic racism in Aotearoa is the root of the issue.¹⁷

Incorporating a wider range of studies, both theoretical frameworks enhance the understanding of the gender pay gap faced by Māori and Pacific women. As Orloff's work suggests, gendered welfare policies can have varying effects on men and women, and this holds true for Aotearoa New Zealand where historical and systemic factors contribute to a persistent pay gap, especially for ethnic minorities. For instance, studies by the Human Rights Commission reveal that Māori and Pacific women are disproportionately underrepresented in higher-paying roles, and a significant wage gap remains even when controlling for education and experience.¹⁸

The intersectional theory applied by Naepi and Nakhid highlights how gender and racial inequalities intersect to deepen the wage gap experienced by Māori and Pacific women. These groups often remain concentrated in a pattern rooted in colonial histories that undervalued their contributions. National data shows that Pacific women earn around 25% less than Pākehā women.¹⁹ Moreover, government responses have tended to center on Pākehā women's experiences, overlooking the compounded challenges faced by ethnic women, which has hindered broader progress toward wage equity.

C. Policy Initiatives Suggested

1. Intersectional Approach and Welfare State Reforms

According to the World Economic Forum in its Global Gender Gap Report, per June 2023 no country has achieved full gender parity, but the country with the smallest gender pay gap is Iceland, followed by Norway, and Finland. New Zealand is the fourth country with the smallest pay gap. An ideal situation for the society would be achieving full gender parity in the workplace, one of the ways to achieve that is having a minimum wage increase for lower-paid workers and people who are experiencing in-work poverty. An alternative for a minimum wage increase would be a universal basic income. Under this policy, everyone would receive a modest amount of benefit from the government to cover basic needs, this policy would be beneficial to accommodate casual or part-time workers.²⁰ Although, a minimum wage

¹⁷ Bhatia, Ruchika. "Ethnic Women Should Be the Focus to Close Pay Gap – Professor," *RNZ*, June 2023. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/491993/ethnic-women-should-be-the-focus-to-close-pay-gap-professor>.

¹⁸ Mohan Dutta and Camille Nakhid, "Decolonising Communication for Social Change: A Culture-Centered Approach," *Journal of Communication* 72, no. 3 (2022): 416–432.

¹⁹ Sereana Naepi, "Beyond the Dusky Maiden: Pasifika Women in Academia," *New Zealand Sociology* 37, no. 2 (2022): 29–45.

²⁰ Michael Goldsmith, "Universal Basic Income and Poverty: Relating Anti-Poverty Measures to Basic Income Levels," in *Beyond Poverty: Citizenship, Welfare and Well-Being in the 21st Century – Conference Proceedings*, ed. Mike O'Brien and Celia Briar (Auckland: Peoples Centre, 1997).

increase and universal basic income policy done universally can be problematic because it would not solve the problem, rather than making rich people richer, a minimum wage increase and universal basic income policy for people with lower paying jobs can help get rid of the problem slowly, this will also help people with in-work poverty to meet their basic needs.

Another suggestion would be having a policy for childcare support and parental leave. By improving the access to an affordable and high-quality childcare service, this will help women to return to work feeling supported and secure. Having childcare policy support will help prevent career setbacks for women while returning to work. On the other hand, an enhanced parental leave policy would provide longer and better paid leave options for parents, this would also help prevent career setbacks for women.

To recognize intersectionality in society, the government needs to implement data collection systems that gather information on both gender and other intersecting identity factors, such as ethnicity and race. This data can provide a more nuanced understanding of pay disparities and help identify groups that are particularly affected. In addition, full gender parity can be achieved if employers are willing to fix this problem. The ongoing pay gap is caused by systemic bias in the workplace by the employer. The first step to solve this would be recognizing and addressing intersectionality of genders and other factors such as race, ethnicity and to raise awareness for the purpose of educating employers, and the society about the ongoing gender pay gap, its implications.

Policy initiatives designed to address this issue must go beyond generalized frameworks that primarily focus on Pākehā women. As stated by Naepi and Nakhid, the intersection of race and gender significantly shapes wage disparities particularly for Māori and Pacific women, who face systemic disadvantages rooted in colonial histories that devalued their labor and confined them to underpaid sectors. Despite Pacific women earning approximately 25% less than Pākehā women (Bhatia, 2023), current government initiatives have failed to meaningfully respond to these compounding inequities. To rectify this, policy reforms should include pay transparency requirements disaggregated by both gender and ethnicity, targeted investments in training programs that facilitate access for Māori and Pacific women to higher-paying industries, and regular intersectional audits of public and private sector practices. Additionally, co-designing policies with input from Māori and Pacific women, rather than relying solely on consultation, would ensure more responsive and equitable outcomes. Finally, revisiting and amending the Equal Pay Amendment Act (2020) to explicitly address ethnic pay disparities and require intersectional impact assessments can help ensure that future interventions are comprehensive and effective in closing the wage gap for all women.

D. What the Understanding of the Problem Ignores

1. In-Work Poverty

Many cases of pay inequality are not based on gender, such as the working poor, which can also happen to men. The working poor are people who are in paid work, but their income is below the poverty line; in most cases, people are already working full-time. The best theory to analyze what this news article ignores is from a decolonial perspective because Maori, Pasifika, and other ethnic groups are more prone to in-work poverty due to ethnic segmentation in the labor market. This means that ethnic group members are often in low-paying and non-standard jobs.

While the focus on gender-based pay inequality is crucial, it overlooks the broader issue of in-work poverty which is an economic condition that affects both women and men. In-work poverty refers to individuals who are often employed full-time, but they still earn wages below poverty level.²¹ It highlights the structural inequalities that disproportionately affect Māori, Pasifika, and other ethnic minorities. These communities are more likely to be concentrated in low-wage, precarious, and non-standard forms of employment due to ethnic segmentation in the labor market.²² Thus, the problem is not solely about gender pay disparities, but also about how colonial legacies and systemic labor inequalities continue to shape economic vulnerability among marginalized ethnic groups. Addressing pay inequality, therefore, requires not only gender-based solutions but also strategies that confront the racialized and class-based dimensions of in-work poverty.²³

E. Different Understanding of the Problem

If this problem were to be understood differently, from an individual perspective, policy initiatives would differ by having an emphasis on individual skill development. This can be done to enhance the skills and qualifications of women in the labor market - enhancing individual skills would include expanding access to equity in education, training, and career development programs to help women acquire the skills needed for higher-paying jobs. Individual career choices are also one of the primary drivers of pay gaps, raising awareness for women to enter male-dominated and higher paying industries might also help to achieve full gender parity in Aotearoa New Zealand.²⁴ On the other hand, the disadvantage of being neoliberal or individualistic to this problem is that it might ignore systemic and structural barriers that contribute to the pay gap. An individualistic approach might only solve this problem for a group of

²¹ Claire Dale, "The Gender Pay Gap – A Human Rights Issue," *The University of Auckland Retirement Policy and Research Centre*, 2021, <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/business/about/our-research/research-institutes-and-centres/RPRC/Gender%20Pay%20Gap%20Human%20Rights%20Issue%20Final.pdf>.

²² Ministry for Women, "Bridging the Gap: Developing a Public Service Action Plan for the Gender Pay Gap," New Zealand Government, 2018, https://women.govt.nz/sites/public_files/Bridging%20the%20Gap%20Report.pdf.

²³ Human Rights Commission, *Te Kāhui Tika Tangata – Pay Transparency and Pay Gaps: A Human Rights Approach*, 2022, https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/2916/6270/3585/HRC_Pay_Gaps_Report_2022_FINAL.pdf.

²⁴ Arama Rata and Francis Collins, "Decolonising the Workplace," *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations* 45, no. 1 (2020): 25–36.

people. In reality, what society needs is a collective solution that will solve the problem for all women including women of color in Aotearoa New Zealand, as gender pay gap is an issue in the society not an individual issue.²⁵

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the gender pay gap in Aotearoa New Zealand is a complex issue that cannot be fully understood or addressed without considering the perspectives of socialist feminism and intersectionality. Socialist feminism highlights the importance of addressing not only gender-based oppression but also the broader class-based inequalities perpetuated by capitalism. It emphasizes the need for a unified labor movement to combat systemic forms of inequality and discrimination in the workplace. On the other hand, an intersectional perspective recognizes that pay gaps are influenced by multiple intersecting identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, class, and others. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori and Pacific women face even larger pay gaps due to the ongoing systemic racism and discrimination.

To address the gender pay gap while recognizing intersectionality in the society that contributes to inequality, policy initiatives should have an intersectional approach, this entails implementing measures like increasing the minimum wage and a universal basic income policy for lower-paid workers, providing affordable childcare, and enhancing parental leave policies. Employers should also be encouraged to recognize and address systemic bias in the workplace, promoting diversity and inclusivity.

Finally, it's important to acknowledge that the understanding of the problem should not ignore the issue of in-work poverty, which affects both men and women, particularly among ethnic groups due to labor market segmentation. An individualistic approach that focuses solely on individual skill development may not address the systemic and structural barriers that contribute to the pay gap. A collective and intersectional approach is essential to achieve full gender parity in Aotearoa New Zealand, recognizing the diverse experiences and identities of all women in the workforce.

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²⁵ Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner, "Closing the Gender Pay Gap," New Zealand Human Rights Commission, accessed October 14, 2023, <https://www.hrc.co.nz/our-work/equal-employment-opportunities/closing-gender-pay-gap/>.

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