

GIRLSGETAHEAD

ONE IN SIX WOMEN HAS DISCOVERED THAT A MAN AT THE SAME LEVEL AS THEM WAS BEING PAID MORE AND ONLY A THIRD OF THEM COMPLAINED

AS WE KICK OFF THIS YEAR'S #GIRLSGETAHEAD CAMPAIGN, FLEUR BRITTEN REVEALS THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT GENDER IMBALANCE AT WORK AND HOW FAR WE STILL HAVE TO GO

By Tuesday, working women will effectively stop earning for the year in relation to men. Worse still, the gender pay gap has actually widened rather than continuing its recent meagre improvements. Oxfam predicts that we won't reach global equal pay until 2075 and, as yet, no country sees women paid as much as men.

Our exclusive YouGov poll, conducted to establish the realities for working women today, revealed that more than one in six women have discovered that a man at the same level of responsibility was being paid more — and only one-third of them complained. "That's appalling," says Professor Binna Kandola, a business psychologist and co-author of *The Invention of Difference: The Story of Gender Bias at Work*. "And this only covers the women who were aware." He points to recent inflammatory comments by Microsoft's CEO, Satya Nadella, who told his female audience: "It's not really about asking for the raise, but... having faith that the system will give you the right raises." Kandola says: "You only have to look at these comments to understand how unacceptable it is for a woman to complain."

Our poll also found that people are still more than twice as likely to say it's mainly male colleagues who make the decisions rather than female (40% to 18%). "It could be a classic in-group/out-group effect," says Kandola. The in-group is in the majority, and can be created using unconsciously excluding conversations about, say, Formula One or football. "Out-groups tend not to get their due recognition, whereas in-group contributions are better remembered," he adds. "In-group membership offers privileges, power and opportunities." All potentially out of women's reach if you don't talk bloke.

We also found that men are 24% more likely to have a

2/3

say their boss holds them back or does nothing to help their career

Female bosses are 10% more likely to help your career

42%

of women feel excluded from decision-making

TWICE as many men make the decisions at work

male boss, while women are equally more likely to have a female boss. "There's a self-perpetuation that happens, even unconsciously, so people recruit in their own image," says Daisy Sands, the head of policy and campaigns at Fawcett, the women's rights society. The big problem is that there are far more men at the top than women. A recent government report jubilantly declared that women now comprise 22.8% of FTSE 100 directors, but if you remove the non-executive directors who aren't employees or on the management team, only 8.5% of executive directors are female. "That old saying 'You can't be what you can't see' is really powerful," says Sands.

Finally, 36% of respondents said their boss helps their career development, but 10% more of those with a female boss said as much. "Women tend to be more relational in the way they manage," says Susan Vinnicombe, professor of women and leadership at Cranfield University. "The downside for women is this gets discounted by organisations in the promotional process."

It's a complicated issue, says the City superwoman and mother-of-nine Helena Morrissey. It starts with stereotyping in child-raising. "There are subtle differences between the education of boys and girls," she says, including the fact that girls play fewer team sports. And though a company might have diversity policies in place, "living and breathing it is difficult for a working population used to another way", she says. The road is long, ladies. ❖

To see the full results of our YouGov survey, go to thesundaytimes.co.uk/style

HOW SHE DOES IT

FROM GMTV TO WESTMINSTER, ESTHER McVEY HAS REACHED THE TOP TABLE OF POLITICS. SHE TELLS KATIE GLASS WHAT IT TAKES TO GET AHEAD

Esther McVey, the Conservative minister for employment, is to me what Margaret Thatcher is to her: a politician whose politics I don't like, but a woman whose career I admire. If that sounds like a backhanded compliment, then, before we met, I don't think I would have even given her that.

To see McVey flicking her sleek blonde blow-dry on television is to suspect she is a former GMTV presenter (which she is) looking for something to do post-40. Watching her sashay into the office in a split-thigh Whistles dress, one wonders if she is more interested in her outfit than her job. And yet, having met her, I could kick myself for making such lazy assumptions, because she is bright, sharp, funny, inspiringly ambitious and focused on her job. Although she will probably hate me saying so, she has an air of the pussy-bowed one about her.

As an ambitious career woman encouraging other women into work, McVey embodies Style's #girlsgetahead campaign, championing other women's progress in the workplace. Now the minister of state for employment, she started Winning Women, a business network for women in the northwest of England. As part of the Merseyside Entrepreneur Commission, she explored women's hesitations about entering work, finding a key issue was the lack of role models. So in 2010 she launched *If Chloe Can*, a magazine project that published the experiences of successful women (from an astronaut to a whisky distiller to a musician) to inspire girls to achieve their potential.

Growing up, McVey's hero was Rose Heilbron, one of the first women QCs. "The Judge Judy of her day," she says. What about Margaret Thatcher? "She isn't my political role model because of where I'm from, but what you can't take away from her as an individual is that she became the first female prime minister of this country. She was a strong woman."

McVey thinks success is largely a matter of resilience. "Every knock-back — every bloke who's dumped me, every race at school I didn't win — they all build you up." She has mottos she

lives by: "Nothing good comes easy. Pick yourself up, dust yourself down. I've got a whole repertoire of them."

Her own brand of feminism stresses action over insecurity. She doesn't believe in positive discrimination for women and worries some current feminism misfires. Is she a feminist then? "A modern-day feminist," she says carefully, "because it does bring so many connotations."

What's most appealing about McVey is that she is not prescriptive about what a successful woman is. She's not down on glamour models, pop stars or Wags — she thinks girls need a full range of role models. "What I like to see is people like Beyoncé. Here is a woman who is bling-a-ding. Not only does she look like that and act like that — I've seen her perform and I was blown away — but she is at the top of her profession."

Since McVey joined the government, "sexy" pictures from her TV career have surfaced in the press. Instead of being defensive, she's proud: "I'm not embarrassed. That is part of my life, part of my journey in life. I've worked in business, in TV, in construction. They've all made me the person I am."

Do women face different challenges? She is single, I note. Yes, she says, but insists: "It wasn't a sacrifice for work. I never got married, but it wasn't a decision, it just didn't happen." Ditto having children. "I wanted to have children, but it didn't happen. Then, the older I got, the less important it became for me." What about now? "It's not looking promising," she laughs. She seems dubious about Apple and Google's egg-freezing programmes. "If it is a woman's choice, I think that's totally different to an imposition."

"I believe in the choice of the woman," she says again. And with that she cuts our interview short, heading out of her office, still with a full face of photoshoot make-up, to vote. Or, perhaps, cut some more benefits. An uncompromising woman, focused on her job.



The cabinet minister Esther McVey

PHOTOGRAPH: RICK PUSHSINSKY. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: CELINE MONDIN AT TERRI MANOUCA