

# Even holding the same job title, men and women play different roles at work

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2017/06/14/even-holding-the-same-job-title-men-and-women-play-different-roles-at-work/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2017/06/14/even-holding-the-same-job-title-men-and-women-play-different-roles-at-work/)

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During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our understanding was that one of the primary drivers of the gender wage-gap came from the type of careers that [women chose](#) to pursue. There was an assumption that as more women would enter the ranks of traditionally male occupations, we would observe a [gradual decrease](#) in the gap.

Thankfully, the gender wage-gap has decreased since the 60s and women today have a higher presence in occupations that used to be male-dominated. But the gap is still very much present. What is extremely surprising, however, is that in recent studies [for the US](#) and [Australia](#), the majority of the gender gap in wages is observed among men and women who are classified as doing identical work.

I confirm the same fact for another nine European countries, using data from the OECD. Once we control for individuals' demographic characteristics, hours worked and education, at most 35 per cent of the overall female gender wage gap is accounted for by women's choice of occupations – a similar statistic to the US. In other words, the majority of the gender wage gap exists among men and women declaring to be doing identical occupations. Why do we observe this?

One potential explanation is that men and women perform different roles at work, even when on paper they appear to have the same job title. I investigate this hypothesis by looking at the daily activities undertaken by people performing the same job and I find evidence of segregation of job tasks by gender. For example, a male executive secretary will report spending more time reading manuals, negotiating, advising and solving complex problems compared to a female executive secretary. The highest levels of segregation of tasks by gender are among shop sales assistants, accounting associate professionals, and accounting clerks.

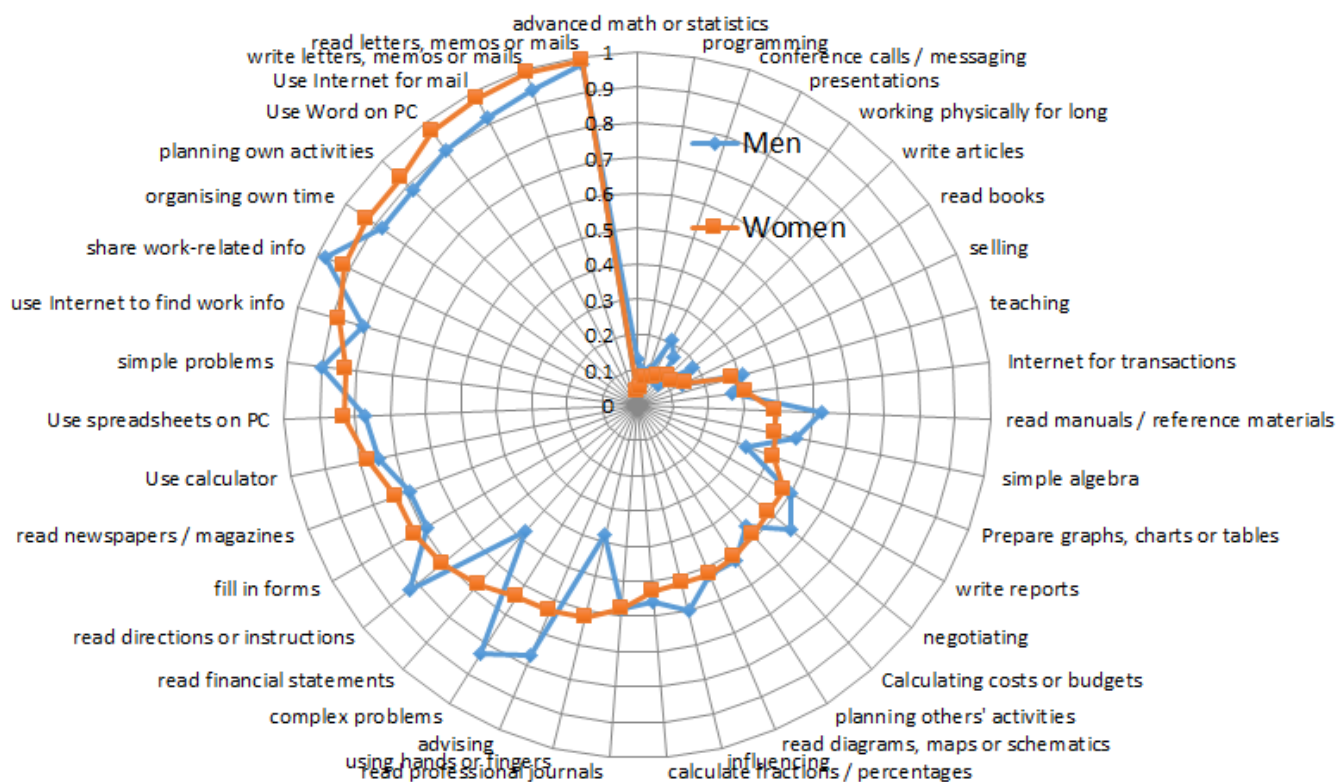
At first glance, gendered tasks on the job may not necessarily mean that women are negatively affected by focusing on different activities to men. In fact, I observe that – on average – both genders would experience a wage boost if

they were to move to an occupation with higher gender specialisation. However, the boost would be up to seven times higher for the men than the women. Accounting for the extent to which men and women do different activities under the same job title can explain up to 50 per cent of the remaining and unexplained gender wage-gap.

So why do the men benefit more from task specialisation by gender than women? Both genders have a relatively equal distribution of lower and middle-paying activities such as typing, writing emails or selling – however, men are observed to spend much more time than women in activities that appear to increase wages across all occupations, whether high or lower-skilled. These activities are communication tasks such as presentations, planning and negotiations and numeracy-based tasks such as using spreadsheets. Nevertheless, even once the task segregation has been accounted for, part of the gender wage-gap still remains.

The novelty of studying men and women’s task roles within occupations is an exercise that was made possible thanks to [high-quality data](#) about the labour force collected by the OECD, and which was subsequently made available for free to researchers and the general public. The next step in the research agenda is to understand why we observe such patterns – is it because of men’s and women’s preferences for certain job tasks or is it because certain employers are more likely to assign some tasks to men rather than women?

**Figure 1. Distribution of female and male tasks among administrative and executive secretaries (48 men, 198 women)**



**Notes:**

- This blog post is based on the author’s paper [Task Profiles and Gender Wage-Gaps Within Occupations](#), presented in the Royal Economic Society’s annual conference, at the University of Bristol, April 2017.
- The post gives the views of its authors, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of

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