

What's Money Got to Do With It?



[en Espanol](#)

A Quick Eye-Opening Group Exercise on Inequality in the USA and the Role of Violence in Sustaining It

This is a five or ten minute exercise that can be used in any size group to quickly reveal common misperceptions about inequalities in the U.S.. A few notes follow for prompting discussions about how these inequalities are related to violence, and, in particular, to violence against women.

P 2. Exercise Handout and Instructions

P 3. Some Notes for Discussion

P 4. Answer Page in Graphic Form
(Don't look before you try the exercise yourself!)



EXERCISE HANDOUT AND INSTRUCTIONS

MEDIAN ANNUAL INCOMES: USA (based on U.S. 2010 census data.)

\$40,000

\$35,000

\$30,000

\$25,000

\$20,000

\$15,000

\$10,000

\$5,000

EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS

Using the graph on the left, for each of the following six groups give your best guess as to the median annual income* of the group.

The six groups are: Black Males (BM), White Males (WM), Hispanic Males (HM), White Females (WF), Hispanic Females (HF), Black Females (BF).

Indicate your best guess for the median annual income for each group by placing a dot and the corresponding initials of the group at the point on the graph of your best guess for that group.

The correct numbers are given on the last page of this document, following discussion notes...and, of course, don't look before doing the exercise!

(*Median income means half the people in the group make more than the median and half make less than the median. A median is not exactly the same as an average, but for the purposes of this exercise if you think of the median income as an average annual income that will be close enough.)

SOME NOTES FOR DISCUSSION



In our experience doing this exercise in many diverse groups, there are usually two common inaccuracies in many people's responses, inaccuracies which reveal some glaring misperceptions about class structure and inequalities in the U.S.. The two common inaccuracies are as follows:

First, although most people correctly place white males at the top of the income hierarchy, what almost everyone misses is the large gap between white male income and the income of every other group. In other words, after placing white males at the top of the list, most people then place other groups following close behind in quick succession.

Without being conscious of the depth of this gap between white males and the rest of society, people can hold the belief that inequalities in America are merely minor imperfections in a basically democratic egalitarian structure. But looking at the reality in graphic form, one can see that the American social structure really more closely resembles an autocracy of an elite class.

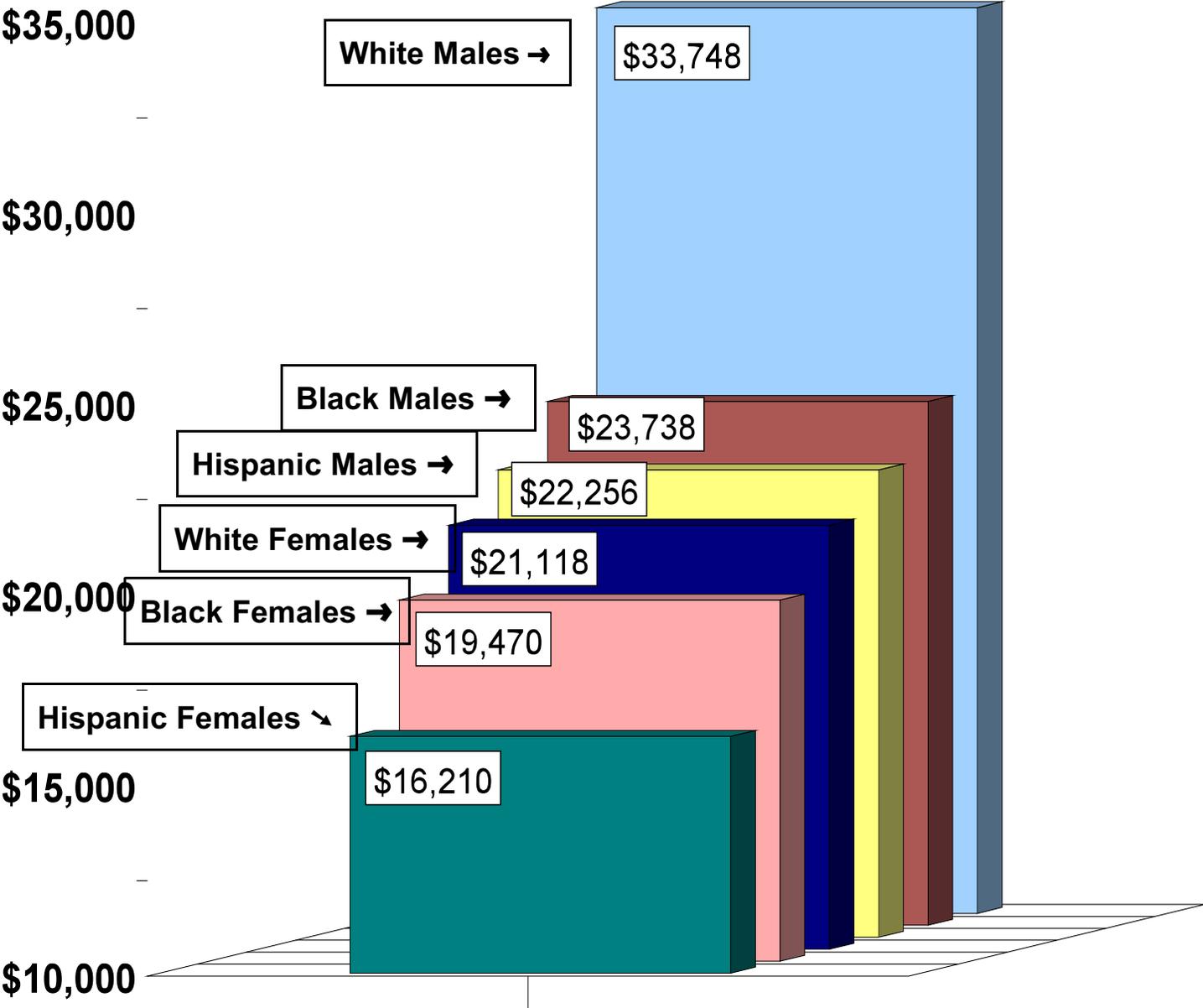
The second common and significant error is that so many people incorrectly place white female median income immediately below, and next in rank after white male income. This reveals the incorrect belief among many that sexism, by itself, isn't that big of a deal and doesn't really have that much negative economic impact. Clearly, it does. And the picture of sexism's damage is even worse when you consider that the U.S. census doesn't factor in the daily hours of unpaid labor done by most every woman in the country.

Once people have compared their responses with the actual data, we ask the group if they think the people on the bottom of the income structure are there because they want to be there. Interestingly, pretty much everyone answers, 'no', they don't think people are there because they want to be there. This opens the door to a whole range of discussions about the forces and obstacles that hold so many people at the bottom of economic ladder, at mere subsistence level, in the richest country in the world, while only one class of people thrives.

Because our mission focuses on ending violence, and because violence is such a powerful mechanism of social control and inhibitor of liberties, we usually focus the discussion on the ways in which violence, particularly state violence, contributes to holding individuals and whole groups at a level of perpetual economic struggle, while sustaining white male access to excess. Discussing discriminatory policing and high incarceration rates for men of color, and denial of protection and denial of access to justice for violence against women yields valuable insights. Exploring the various mechanisms by which the state generates discriminatory violence people can see not only how these mechanisms contribute to so many groups being pinned down economically, but also how these mechanisms serve to preserve affluence for those at the top, even for members of the elite group who are not individually violent themselves.



Median Annual Income - 2010 US Census Data



SOURCE: 2010 US Census, Table 701, (Table 701 is at the bottom of linked page, median income data for year 2009.) <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0701.pdf>

Graphic by [Women's Justice Center](http://www.justicewomen.com/), <http://www.justicewomen.com/>