**The Rationale Behind Talking Specifically to Women About Money**

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Years ago, when I first authored my Women and Their Money program, women were becoming empowered by then current social mores to consider marrying later or staying single as viable life choices. It made sense under those conditions that more women would seek to understand finances and investments. Decades later, despite broad advances in lifestyle and career opportunities, a majority of women still lack the requisite confidence to comfortably navigate their investments.

A 2018 Merrill Lynch/Age Wave study[[1]](#footnote-1) found that sixty-one percent of women would rather talk about their *own death* than money. And forty-five percent of women say they do not have a financial role model.

A recent client admitted she was embarrassed to voice her questions, as it would expose her lack of knowledge regarding investments. In further discussions, it became apparent that her unease was a direct reflection what she absorbed around the dinner table as a young girl. Much of what we learn at home are attitudes and behaviors around money, credit, debt, and investing. A growing body of evidence points to the impact parents’ financial beliefs and behaviors have on their children’s financial outcome. Because children observe behaviors and draw their own conclusions, money topics need to be specifically addressed.

As a young woman, I saw this play out. How money was regarded, how easy or difficult it was to earn, and how it could be used as a cudgel over weaker partners; these were all lessons I learned. Like so many other women of my generation, there were few female role models in finance for me to help provide balance. Math became a dreaded subject for me.

Today, young women are embracing STEM education, although their confidence in investing is still low. From the same Merrill Lynch/Age Wave report, ‘fully 63% of women ages 18 to 29 say wealth planning is too difficult to even think about’, and ‘one in four women ages 18 or older, and as many as 30% of women ages 30 to 44—critical years for retirement savings—say they have not planned at all for their future.’

We can blame parents again, along with the educational system.

According to a 2015 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),[[2]](#footnote-2) “OECD pinned the blame for the disadvantage for girls in maths and science on low expectations among parents and teachers, as well as lack of self-confidence. Girls were more likely than boys to report that they ‘just weren’t good at maths’ and less likely to agree that math was one of their best subjects.”

Importantly, the report also found that gender disparities in performance do not stem from innate differences in aptitude. This has also been the finding from Edutopia,[[3]](#footnote-3) a part of The George Lucas Educational Foundation.

Regardless of our confidence in or exposure to math and investing, women have gender-based hurdles in achieving parity in retirement readiness.

Our life expectancy is longer. The gender pay gap means that the average woman earns close to one million dollars less over her career than the average man. Women take off from the workforce more, as we are the primary caregivers for children and elderly parents. Our Social Security benefits reflect both lower earnings and inconsistency in the workforce.

While there is much to be done on the political spectrum in addressing these disparities, many more resources exist now to help women in their readiness to tackle retirement readiness and investing confidence.

Training within the financial services industry aimed at helping to educate women and to change advisors’ approach in dealing with female clients is a good start. The growing body of online resources and apps are another sign of the importance of financial literacy. AskFinny[[4]](#footnote-4) is one such app, and I am pleased to be a coach on the platform. Finny’s number of users and the degree of interaction between them points to how much financial literacy conversations are needed.

In the years since Women and Their Money was first introduced, I have been on the front lines of helping provide financial literacy guidance to women. I now see an important shift in this area. Bringing us back to the lessons we absorbed around the kitchen table, we are beginning to examine the beliefs we hold about money. Often subconscious, these beliefs dictate how we spend and save, how we interact with partners around money, and how successful we will be in achieving our financial goals.

Working together, we are bringing financial literacy to the forefront, which is a great start. Uncovering limiting beliefs is the next step. Changing behaviors is our ultimate goal.

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1. [Woman and Financial Wellness: Beyond the bottom line](https://mlaem.fs.ml.com/content/dam/ML/Registration/Women-Age-Wave-White-Paper.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Girls lack self-confidence in maths and science problems, study finds | Education | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/05/girls-lack-self-confidence-maths-science-oecd-school-engineering) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [The STEM Gender Gap: Encouraging Girls to Persist in Science and Math | Edutopia](https://www.edutopia.org/article/keeping-girls-stem-3-barriers-3-solutions) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Learn personal finance for free with Finny (askfinny.com)](https://www.askfinny.com/learn) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)