

Portland State University

PDXScholar

Book Publishing Final Research Paper

English

Spring 2023

Struggling to Thrive: NYC Publishing Salaries in the Age of Inflation & Implications for Diversifying the Publishing Workforce

Em Villaverde

Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/eng_bookpubpaper



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Publishing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Villaverde, Em, "Struggling to Thrive: NYC Publishing Salaries in the Age of Inflation & Implications for Diversifying the Publishing Workforce" (2023). *Book Publishing Final Research Paper*. 78.

https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/eng_bookpubpaper/78

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Book Publishing Final Research Paper by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Struggling to Thrive:

NYC Publishing Salaries in the Age of Inflation &
Implications for Diversifying the Publishing Workforce

Em Villaverde

Portland State University

Research Question

How has the rate of inflation and cost-of-living impacted entry-level book publishing roles based in New York City? What are the implications for diversification of the book industry workforce?

Introduction:

There are very few people who are entering the publishing industry under the impression they will be making a substantial amount of money. Publishing, as an industry, is run primarily with passion. People enter into this industry hoping to make a difference or to become a part of the storytelling process. Yet the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in New York City in 2022 is around \$4,450,¹ and the average salary of an entry-level role in publishing is around \$46,000, meaning entry-level employees are taking home approximately \$3,100 per month after taxes (methodology for these numbers seen below).

New York City is infamously the most expensive city to live in the United States, occupying twenty-six out of fifty most expensive zip codes in the US. All of the Big Five publishers are based out of New York City—Manhattan specifically, on a street known as Publishers’ Row. (For reference, when this paper refers to the Big Five publishers, those are as follows: Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, MacMillan, Simon & Schuster, and Hachette.) With no end in sight for the cost-of-living crisis affecting the entire world,³ the thought of moving to NYC for a low-paying, entry-level job is often enough to convince some that working in publishing may not be all it’s cracked up to be. The expenses frequently outweigh the benefits of experience. There are many barriers to entry for someone trying to start a career in publishing. There are even more barriers to overcome as a non-white person; the statistics on diversity in publishing prove that to be the case.⁴

This paper investigates whether, if salaries remain low and unable to sustain an adult with a full time career, underrepresented people would have the same opportunities or the luxury to take the chance on a low-paying role if they are not already based out of NYC. Stephanie Guerdan, an associate editor for HarperCollins—which went on a workers’ strike from November 10, 2022 to February 23, 2023—is quoted in *the New York Times* saying, “There’s a running joke in publishing that you have to have a rich partner to be able to make it in the industry.”⁵ It should not be absurd to think that a fully independent adult should be able to live and work in publishing in New York City and sustain themselves, even if they are just starting their careers, especially considering publishing is a multi-billion dollar industry.⁶ As low wages tend to disproportionately affect BIPOC workers, the lack of diversity and the prevalence of inequity in publishing—highlighted by recent movements like the protests of 2020⁷ and #PublishingPaidMe⁸—are problems that can no longer be ignored.

¹ “Cost of Living in New York City, NY 2022 | RentCafe,” accessed November 15, 2022, <https://www.rentcafe.com/cost-of-living-calculator/us/ny/new-york-city/>.

² Sanziana Bona, “The Most Expensive ZIP Codes in America in 2019,” RentCafe Rental Blog (blog), September 30, 2019, <https://www.rentcafe.com/blog/rental-market/market-snapshots/americas-most-expensive-zip-codes-2019/>.

³ “Weak Growth and a Cost-of-Living Crisis in Emerging Europe and Central Asia Region,” World Bank, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/04/06/weak-growth-and-a-cost-of-living-crisis-in-emerging-europe-and-central-asia-region>.

⁴ Laura B. McGrath, “Comping White,” Los Angeles Review of Books, January 21, 2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/comping-white/>.

⁵ Elizabeth A. Harris and Alexandra Alter, “HarperCollins Workers Strike for Increased Wages, Benefits and Diversity,” *The New York Times*, July 20, 2022, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/books/harpercollins-strike.html>.

⁶ Amy Watson, “U.S. Book Publishing Industry Revenue 2008-2020,” Statista, July 27, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271931/revenue-of-the-us-book-publishing-industry/>.

⁷ Kyle A. Heatherly et al., “Words, Money, or Action? How Corporate Social Advocacy Drove Media Coverage in Response to the Black Lives Matter Protests of 2020,” *Public Relations Journal* 15, no. 2 (September 2022): 22.

⁸ Concepción de León and Elizabeth A. Harris, “#PublishingPaidMe and a Day of Action Reveal an Industry Reckoning,” *The New York Times*, June 9, 2020, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/08/books/publishingpaidme-publishing-day-of-action.html>.

Methodology

In order to get a perspective of the entry-level job market for the publishing industry, I chose to gather data about various entry-level positions available from November 2022 to April 2023. Because it would be rather impossible to look at every single job listing from every single US publisher based out of New York City, I narrowed the scope by a few categories: size being first and foremost, then by department. I gathered data from New York City specifically due to the city containing the largest cluster of publishing companies in the US and its being considered the mecca of the US publishing industry. I then researched the largest publishers in the country since they employ the highest number of people. Finally, I gathered all entry-level positions open between November 2022 and April 2023 with a focus on editorial, which is a highly competitive department to break into typically. To get a proper idea of entry-level salaries, I pulled listings from each of the Big Five publishers (excluding HarperCollins, reasoning mentioned below) as well as some other large publishers based out of NYC to get a thorough understanding of the job market within the bounds of New York publishing.

With a spreadsheet used to organize the job listings, I was able to generate the average take-home publishing pay in NYC by calculating average taxes for the city, state, and federal tax rates. Taxes were calculated by taking the gross salary and subtracting the federal taxes (\$4,807.50 plus 22% of the amount over \$41,775),⁹ then subtracting the New York State taxes (\$600 plus 5.85% of the amount over \$13,900).¹⁰ For example, the formula utilized in the spreadsheet is as follows:

$$\text{If } x \text{ is yearly salary, then} \\ x - (((4807.5) + ((x - 41,776) * 0.22)) + ((600) + (x - 13,901) * 0.0585))$$

Each of these roles were posted between November 2022 and April 2023 and was collected in this dataset to then be analyzed within the context of this research.

As I analyzed the data for salary implications on the industry and found that most of the roles required employees to work in-person, I realized that it is also important to look at the cost of living in NYC. Rather than use a known cost of living average, I chose to calculate the most cost effective listings so that there would be a breakdown of each neighborhood's costs, and so that the listings that are far outside the price range of a professional earning around \$45,000–\$50,000 per year were excluded. To do this, I gathered a number of examples of current housing in various areas around NYC concurrently with gathering data from publishers. Using Apartments.com, a very common way for people to locate housing, I collected listings across New York City by searching in the five major boroughs: The Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island. Within the boroughs, I sorted the listings low to high and collected the ten cheapest non-income-restricted housing options.

It is also prudent to ensure there is a standard of measure for what is being considered as *housing* for the purposes of this paper. Within the context of this research, *housing* refers to one-bedroom apartments rather than studio or two-bedroom or larger apartments. New York City is also notorious for having expensive, “shoebox-sized” apartments. As a professional working full-time, one should be able to afford a comfortable standard of living, which “shoebox-sized” apartments do not meet. Therefore, references to *housing* or *one-bedroom apartments* refer to housing greater than 400 square feet in size, and all housing data collected meets these standards. I took the salaries of the roles found on publishers' websites and created an income-to-housing-cost ratio. I also did not consider the reduced cost of living with roommates since it is a fairly common goal for a fully independent adult to live on their own.

⁹ “2022-2023 Tax Brackets and Federal Income Tax Rates,” NerdWallet, April 20, 2023, <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/taxes/federal-income-tax-brackets>.

¹⁰ “New York State Income Tax: Rates, Who Pays in 2022-2023,” NerdWallet, May 12, 2023, <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/taxes/new-york-state-tax>.

A Note About HarperCollins

At the time of writing this paper and during the collection of data, HarperCollins did not have any entry-level roles open and therefore could not be sampled. The lack of roles is a direct result of the HarperUnion workers' strike, which began November 10, 2022 and ended February 16, 2023. Because HarperCollins is the second-largest publisher in the world, it was my intention to include its job role statistics. There will be an analysis of the strike in the reflection section of this paper due to its relevance to the argument that publishing salaries do not support the cost of living in New York City. Perhaps the strike is a cautionary tale to other publishers.

Data Collection

Over the course of my data gathering (from November 2022 to April 2023), it was my intention to collect approximately five to ten entry-level job postings per company at publishers around New York. However, a number of factors drastically reduced the number of listings I was able to gather. Those factors included:

- The HarperCollins Union strike and walkout (discussed in the section HarperCollins: An Outlier below).
- Simon & Schuster being on the market for sale; there were low numbers of entry-level roles over this period of time in comparison to other publishers. My theory is that, while the company was optioned for sale to Penguin Random House, they were not hiring entry-level roles, and were just hiring for higher level roles on an as-needed basis. When company ownership changes hands, employees often experience turnover, so there would be no point in hiring new employees that have the potential of being replaced in the event of acquisition.

In total, there are fifty entry-level job listings, collected directly from publishers' websites. Of those fifty, the highest salary for an entry-level role is \$50,000 per year, whereas the lowest is \$42,000 per year. Within this data set, the median salary is \$45,000 per year across the various publishers, and the average pay is \$46,061 per year.

The average salary of large New York City publishers is around \$46,000, only 65 percent of the median New

York City income of \$67,046.¹¹ If the average rent is approximately \$4,450/month,¹² that would mean that rent would be 141 percent of an entry-level publishing professional's post-tax, monthly income. By gathering data and sorting according to lowest prices via Apartments.com, I learned that ample housing can be found at a much lower monthly cost than the previously stated average. As noted in the methodology section above, I did not take into account the much more expensive housing that can be found in NYC, and therefore gathered what could be considered a more realistic look at what the cost of housing a professional beginning their career might be looking for.

The average apartment in the data sets below, using the methodology defined above, is approximately \$1,895 per month, and the median cost is approximately \$1,550 per month. And according to ApartmentList.com, these numbers fall much closer to the median rent for a one bedroom apartment:

Publisher	Avg Salary	Avg Take Home Pay post state and fed taxes	Avg Salary/Month	Avg Take Home Pay/Month
Hachette	\$46,667	\$38,266	\$3,889	\$3,189
MacMillan	\$45,136	\$37,162	\$3,761	\$3,097
Penguin	\$46,500	\$38,146	\$3,875	\$3,179
Simon & Schuster	\$50,000	\$40,671	\$4,167	\$3,389
W.W.Norton	\$42,000	\$34,899	\$3,500	\$2,908
NYC Publishing Average	\$46,061	\$37,829	\$3,838	\$3,152
NYC Median	\$45,000	\$37,064	\$3,750	\$3,089

¹¹ "Cost of Living in New York City, NY 2022 | RentCafe."

¹² "Cost of Living in New York City, NY 2022 | RentCafe."

\$2,006.¹³ With the average cost of utilities being around \$187 per month,¹⁴ the total housing cost rises to an average of \$2,083 per month.

Post-tax income in NYC for \$46,061 per year is approximately \$38,266 per year or approximately \$3,189 per month. Considering those figures, housing costs alone for a one-bedroom apartment are approximately 65 percent of take-home income. With only around \$1,100 for all other costs (i.e., food, credit card bills, medical payments, loan repayments, insurance, and often many more), there is little room for someone working in an entry-level role to save part of their income. There was a theme from the HarperCollins Union Instagram—which chronicled the strike—that mentioned that entry-level employees should be able to live without roommates at some point in their careers, but that it is incredibly difficult to do so, if not impossible.¹⁵

Implications:

These averages found above are well below the median household income for NYC, which sits at \$67,046. Per the 2022 Cost of Living Index, the after-tax cost to maintain a “professional/managerial” standard of living, or the standard of living for a working professional, was more than twice the than the national average in Manhattan, NY.¹⁶ There are many implications of low salaries across industries, but in publishing especially, this topic has been making headlines much more often as of this past year. This topic is at the forefront of the mind for a lot of publishing professionals because so many aspects of the industry are in flux. The cost of materials is rising because of global supply chain issues; the Simon & Schuster sale was blocked by the Supreme Court; and the one-day HarperCollins strike devolved into the indefinite strike that lasted ninety-eight days. Low wages in publishing are something of a stereotype and generally accepted as a fact within the industry. But there are ways in which these low wages affect the diversification of the industry. Passion for the written word is what drives the industry, but in words from the HarperCollins Union strike signage, “passion doesn’t pay the rent.”¹⁷

Diversity in Publishing

It can be argued that publishing experiences a lack of diversity. A study done by the LA Review of Books, found that publishing professionals were, “overwhelmingly,” 86 percent white as of early 2019.¹⁸ The article from the LA Review of Books, “Comping White,” used data gathered from the Publishers Weekly “Publishing Industry Salary Survey,” which is conducted yearly—excluding 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. And as of 2022, the percentage of white workers has dropped to 83 percent;¹⁹ this is a rate of approximately 1 percent per year. Many employees in the industry believe that “low pay [is] seen as an impediment to diversifying the industry’s workforce.”²⁰ However, while 80 percent of the workforce are non-men, there is an approximate \$15,000 wage gap between women and men on average in management positions.²¹ It is clear from analyzing the statistics of the publishing workforce that there is a large equity gap to fill.

There was a large shift in attention toward this lack of diversity in publishing as an effect of the 2020 protests after the murder of George Floyd. Many Fortune 500 companies reacted to the social justice movement Black Lives Matter by making diversity, equity, and inclusion statements open to the public

¹³ “Average Rent in New York City, NY & Rent Price Trends,” accessed November 27, 2022, <https://www.apartmentlist.com/rent-report/ny/new-york>.

¹⁴ “Cost of Living in New York City, NY 2022 | RentCafe.”

¹⁵ “HarperCollins Union (@hcpunion) • Instagram Photos and Videos,” accessed May 14, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/hcpunion/>.

¹⁶ “Quarter 3, 2022 Cost of Living Index Released,” *C2ER Cost of Living Index* (blog), October 31, 2022, <https://www.coli.org/16025-2/>.

¹⁷ Alexandra Alter and Elizabeth A. Harris, “HarperCollins Workers Strike for Better Pay and Benefits,” *The New York Times*, November 10, 2022, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/10/books/harpercollins-strike.html>.

¹⁸ McGrath, “Comping White.”

¹⁹ Jim Milliot, “The PW Publishing Industry Salary Survey 2022,” *PublishersWeekly.com*, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/91157-the-pw-publishing-industry-salary-survey-2022.html>.

²⁰ Milliot.

²¹ Milliot.

(rather than keeping them internal) and publishing them on their websites.²² Publishing was no different; each of the Big Five publishers has a diversity, equity, and inclusion statement, easily searchable and easily located, on their websites. “Contrary to expectations, however, companies that announced the implementation of programs aimed at increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion did not generate more impactful media coverage in the immediate aftermath of the events.”²³ Two years later, however, the rate of diversity within the workforce maintains its regular pace of diversification and decline in whiteness.

Low Wages Disproportionately Affect Underrepresented Groups

It is well documented that there are pretty significant wage and labor disparities among white and black workers,²⁴ and while the publishing industry might have similar pay rates across races, low wages still disproportionately affect workers of color. The average black or Latino household earns approximately half as much as the average white household, and BIPOC households own only 15 to 20 percent as much net worth as their white counterparts.²⁵ This makes BIPOC households much more likely to be living paycheck to paycheck, a phenomenon that was only exacerbated by the pandemic for people across the country regardless of race.

Folks that live paycheck to paycheck also tend to have a higher cost of living than those who have the ability or cushion to save some of their income each month.²⁶ This higher cost of living is due to a number of reasons, but a higher expense can be attributed to relying on credit in the short-term which raises payments in the long-term; more frequently replacing lower-cost but lower-quality items like clothing or appliances; and just generally having a higher debt-to-income ratio from bills they do not have the income to pay all at one time. Many of these workers are flooded with debt already—from school, medical bills, or other types of loans—and are just one emergency away from being overwhelmed with additional bills and costs that they may not be able to handle on their own with low wages. Not only this, but “[b]lack workers have suffered some of the greatest harm from policy decisions that allowed excessive unemployment in pursuit of misguided inflation targets intended to limit wage growth.”²⁷ Lack of wage growth in publishing, therefore, has a disproportionate impact on the industry’s workers of color, and maintains the many barriers of entry associated with this already highly competitive field.

Out-of-State Workers

For those young professionals who are not already based out of New York City, publishing roles come with the additional challenges of moving across state lines—more expenses, in other words. For example, moving a one-bedroom apartment from Portland, OR to New York, NY can cost anywhere from \$4,295 to \$5,985 according to Moving.com.²⁸ Bear in mind, this is simply an estimate and can cost upwards of \$8,000 for some one-bedroom coast-to-coast moves depending on the services included, weight, and other factors. So individuals living paycheck to paycheck are less likely to be able to move into New York unassisted, much less afford some of the typical start-up costs associated with moving such as deposits, renters insurance, and necessities—i.e. furniture or appliances—not kept from previous housing. If these individuals do not have a “nest egg” saved up for moving, it would be much harder

22 Kyle A. Heatherly et al., “Words, Money, or Action? How Corporate Social Advocacy Drove Media Coverage in Response to the Black Lives Matter Protests of 2020.”

23 Kyle A. Heatherly et al.

24 Valerie Wilson and William Jr. Darity, “Understanding Black-White Disparities in Labor Market Outcomes Requires Models That Account for Persistent Discrimination and Unequal Bargaining Power,” Economic Policy Institute, March 25, 2022, <https://www.epi.org/unequalpower/publications/understanding-black-white-disparities-in-labor-market-outcomes/>.

25 Wilson and Darity.

26 Alina Selyukh, “Paycheck-To-Paycheck Nation: Why Even Americans With Higher Income Struggle With Bills,” NPR, December 16, 2020, sec. Business, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/16/941292021/paycheck-to-paycheck-nation-how-life-in-america-adds-up>.

27 Wilson and Darity, “Understanding Black-White Disparities in Labor Market Outcomes Requires Models That Account for Persistent Discrimination and Unequal Bargaining Power.”

28 “Moving Cost Calculator for Moving Estimates | Moving.Com,” accessed May 9, 2023, <https://www.moving.com/movers/moving-cost-calculator.asp>.

(as noted via the above data sections) to regenerate any savings or pay back any loans or bills accrued during the move.

Low Entry-Level Pay

With entry-level pay as it stands, there are quite a few implications for those who are looking to begin their careers in the industry. When young professionals are looking to join publishing, they generally must acquire housing in New York if they are hoping to work for a large publisher. However, the cost of living, as shown above, is a big barrier to entry. New York is considered a “superstar city” or a “high-income, globally connected metropolitan area diverging from the rest of [its] respective countr[y].”²⁹ For example, some other superstar cities are San Francisco, London, and Paris.³⁰ And of course, housing is a major factor in these metropolitan areas regarding what opportunities young professionals from other areas of the country have. In *Daedalus*, Patrick Le Galès and Paul Pierson write,

Yet rising housing prices have profound indirect effects on the transmission of inequality as well. Increasingly linked to the sites of greatest economic opportunity, changes in housing prices have a powerful impact on the distribution of life chances. For those without access to this increasingly valuable property, the new urban economy is becoming a landscape of exclusion. Economic advantage is increasingly concentrated and reproduced through property, which carries with it the cumulative advantages of social proximity. If you don’t have it (or stand to inherit it) you are pushed down, into increasingly precarious conditions, or out, forced to relocate or remain at a distance. Exclusion from these economic centers has consequences for life chances. Structures of social advantage – access to elite education, social networks, employment, and the acquisition of cultural capital – are geographically concentrated. Distance from these structures, fueled by housing costs, comes with an increasing penalty.³¹

Even if someone lowers the cost of housing by living outside of the city, they deal with either an extremely long or extremely stressful commute to work—often both. In a study of commuter tweets by resume.io, New York City is the most stressful commute in the US, and “45.09 percent of commute-themed tweets from NYC showed signs of stress.”³² The pandemic opened many people’s eyes to the better work-life balance they gained without spending an hour or more commuting to their offices, and many workers across the country are hesitant to head back into the office.³³ That ninety-minute commute each way,³⁴ or three full hours per day, is time employees are not getting paid for but is time that is required for them to take out of their day for work.

The reason this all matters is because, while the publishing industry is trying to adjust their diversity statistics for the better, they currently face a privilege hazard. Privilege hazard is “the phenomenon that makes those who occupy the most privileged positions among us—those with good educations, respected credentials, and professional accolades—so poorly equipped to recognize instances of oppression in the world.”³⁵ Publishing holds a lot of power in the media. Editors especially choose which books get acquired, whose voices get a space in the market, and whose stories get told. When 83 percent of the industry is white, there is a much higher chance the voices which are allowed space in the market

29 Patrick Le Galès and Paul Pierson, “Superstar Cities’ & the Generation of Durable Inequality,” *Daedalus* 148, no. 3 (July 1, 2019): 46–72, https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01750.

30 Le Galès and Pierson.

31 Le Galès and Pierson.

32 Lotte van Rijswijk, “The US and UK Cities With the Most Stressful Commutes,” Resume.io, August 22, 2022, <https://resume.io/blog/the-us-and-uk-cities-with-the-most-stressful-commutes>.

33 Milliot, “The PW Publishing Industry Salary Survey 2022.”

34 Rijswijk, “The US and UK Cities With the Most Stressful Commutes.”

35 Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren Klein, “1. The Power Chapter,” *Data Feminism*, March 16, 2020, <https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/vi8obxh7/release/4>.

will also be white. If entry-level wages stay as low as they are, the chances of diversifying the industry also remains low and slow moving.

Remote work was almost an option for not moving to and living in New York during the pandemic, but there are very few entry-level opportunities that are optioned for remote work in the data collected and represented here. According to the PW 2022 Salary Survey, "...[E]mployees cited remote work as the most important benefits companies offered during the pandemic. Several said they believed the policy, if carried forward, would bring more diversity to publishing..."³⁶ This alternate path could help those who want to work for the largest publishers accept lower paying positions but maintain a higher quality of life because \$46,000 per year goes much further in other places throughout the country than it does in NYC.

Why Companies May Be Hesitant to Raise Wages

There are a plethora of reasons why companies are hesitant to raise wages despite the cost of living crisis currently ongoing with no end in sight. Inflation is not just affecting cost of living, however, and publishing companies do face some increase in expenses.³⁷ Businesses are often passing those increased costs of products or services on to consumers whose wage stays the same, therefore costing their consumers more in the long run. Reuven Glick, in the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco 2022–21 Economic Letter, writes, "The considerable rise in short-run inflation expectations may lead workers to demand higher wages to compensate for the anticipated rise in the cost of living. However, businesses may be reluctant to give large pay increases if price pressures are expected to be temporary, particularly if they are unable to pass higher costs on to consumers."³⁸ Books are also seeing a rise in pricing as the supply chain issues from the pandemic begin to appear a couple years later. So, while the cost of doing business rises, the costs may lower some time in the future, causing companies to hesitate when raising wages. Not raising wages is very cyclical and detrimental to workers-as-consumers directly. The economic letter goes on later to say, "many firms have relied on one-time bonuses to attract and retain workers instead of permanently raising wages."³⁹ So while signing bonuses, production bonuses, and the like may be a nice gesture for employees in the short-run, they could also be considered slightly predatory because of the lack of a consistently higher pay rate over time.

Publishers saw a very large year-over-year increase in sales due to people having more time to read, and using the stay at home order to find new, and cultivate their old, hobbies. Publishers 2020–2021 sales led to "record profits", as seen in one Big Five publisher, HarperCollins. "Whatever doom and gloom surround the publishing industry in the midst of the COVID crisis, sales cannot be singled out for scorn."⁴⁰ However, the absence of wage increases despite record profits led to the one-day strike which made headlines over the summer of 2022 and eventually led to the indefinite strike which lasted a record three months.⁴¹ HarperCollins saw profits so high, in fact, that the company is making attempts to purchase Simon and Schuster, the third largest publisher, even after the US Department of Justice blocked the proposed merger by Penguin Random House.⁴² The publishing industry is simply a slower moving machine, and might continue to see more unionization and strikes if wages do rise to meet the record breaking inflation rates and account for cost of living adjustments.

³⁶ Milliot, "The PW Publishing Industry Salary Survey 2022."

³⁷ Ed Nawotka, "Publishing Remains Predictably Unpredictable, Says Ingram," *PublishersWeekly.com*, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/88438-publishing-remains-predictably-unpredictable-says-ingram.html>.

³⁸ Reuven Glick, "Will Workers Demand Cost-of-Living Adjustments," 2022, 6.

³⁹ Glick.

⁴⁰ Cliff Guren, Thad McIlroy, and Steven Sieck, "COVID-19 and Book Publishing: Impacts and Insights for 2021," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-021-09791-z>.

⁴¹ Alter and Harris, "HarperCollins Workers Strike for Better Pay and Benefits."

⁴² "HarperCollins Wants to Buy Simon & Schuster If Penguin Bid Fails, Judge Told," *Bloomberg.Com*, August 9, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-09/harpercollins-wants-to-buy-simon-schuster-if-penguin-bid-fails>.

HarperCollins: An Outlier

The storm by the HarperCollins Union had been brewing for quite some time. On July 20, 2022, employees from HarperCollins went on a one-day strike because the union believed that the company executives were not coming to the negotiation table for salary and benefits talks “in good faith.”⁴³ After not gaining traction from the one-day strike, the union workers went on strike again, indefinitely this time around, starting on November 11, 2022. They broke their previous strike record of seventeen days from 1974 when they hit day eighteen on December 5, 2022.⁴⁴ The union asked people to not cross the picket line during their strike, which is to say that they were not asking people to boycott buying HarperCollins books because that would not support their authors, who are not the targets of the strike. Rather, they wanted readers and reviewers to avoid writing or posting reviews and authors to deny any prizes awarded by subsidiaries of HarperCollins.⁴⁵ The strike lasted a record-breaking ninety-eight days, and they successfully obtained a ratified contract that raised the base salary of the company from \$45,000 to \$47,500 per year. By 2025, the base salary will also be raised to \$50,000 per year.

The union was a direct effect of the low wages in the industry. This hit with full force because the second largest publisher in the world was paying their employees only \$42,000 for a substantial number of years, before bumping the pay rate to the \$45,000 it was before the strike. Over the next couple of years, the HarperCollins workers should see the benefits of the hard work their union made to improve their wages. And as more and more unionization happens within the industry, there will be more power in the hands of the workers to demand pay more aligned with what they are worth.

Conclusion

So, how has the rate of inflation and rise of cost-of-living impacted entry-level book publishing roles based in New York City? Short answer: it hasn't—much. The cost-of-living crisis is not going to end anytime soon, yet the strides being made for salaries can feel quite insubstantial in comparison to the rise in cost of housing. With housing at its current rate, accepting positions at publishers for approximately \$46,000 per year makes acquiring new talent from around the country quite difficult. Yet limiting the talent pool to just New York is reductive. And at the rate that publishing is “diversifying” it seems as though it will be many years before there is a real change and equity in the professional workforce within the industry.

With New York City being one of the most expensive cities in the US, it is difficult for those outside of the city to break into industry based within city limits. While the research above is not overly extensive due to a few companies like HarperCollins and Simon & Schuster not hiring entry-level roles, the information provided does reveal the gaps publishing has to fill. The barriers to entry for lower income households are extensive, disproportionately affecting BIPOC, and the expenses of living in New York tend to outweigh the benefits of beginning a career in the industry for those who do not have the means to move across the country or are living paycheck-to-paycheck.

As seen from the HarperCollins strike, the more unionization that happens in publishing, the more power workers will have to demand their worth. As a hopeful professional, I aim to help make this change in the industry by advocating for higher salaries, encouraging diversity not just for diversity sake, and supporting the unionization of publishers, especially the Big Five. One way others might be able to support change within the industry is to only apply for jobs which pay what their talent is worth, reducing applicants for the largest publishers, and hopefully causing them to examine why their talent pools might be drying up.

⁴³ John Maher, “HarperCollins Union Workers Hit the Picket Line,” PublishersWeekly.com, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/89894-harpercollins-union-workers-hit-the-picket-line.html>.

⁴⁴ “HarperCollins Union on Instagram,” Instagram, December 5, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cly5j41p7EL/>.

⁴⁵ “The DOs and DON'Ts of Supporting the Harper Union,” Instagram, November 18, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIHDK1cu4fA/>.

Appendix

Figure 1

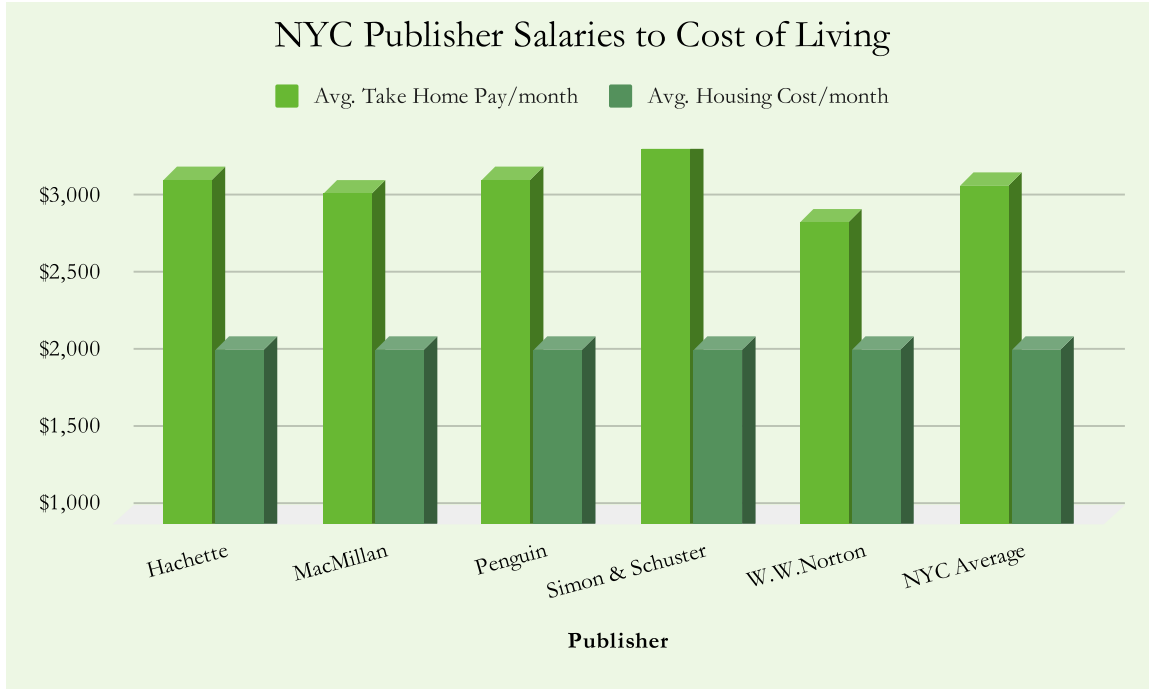


Figure 1. A visual representation of the average take home pay per month in comparison to the average cost of housing—as found while gathering data—in New York City. This monthly residual income can be viewed in Fig. 2 below.

Figure 2

Publisher	Avg Take Home Pay/Month	Avg. cost/per month	Monthly residual income
Hachette	\$3,189	\$2,083	\$1,106
MacMillan	\$3,097	\$2,083	\$1,014
Penguin	\$3,179	\$2,083	\$1,096
Simon & Schuster	\$3,389	\$2,083	\$1,306
W.W.Norton	\$2,908	\$2,083	\$825
NYC Average	\$3,152	\$2,083	\$1,069

Figure 2. The above data set showcases the average take home pay per month (after taxes) of each publisher, compared to the average monthly cost—as found while gathering data—with the theoretical residual income a worker might expect to have left for the rest of their expenses.

Figure 3

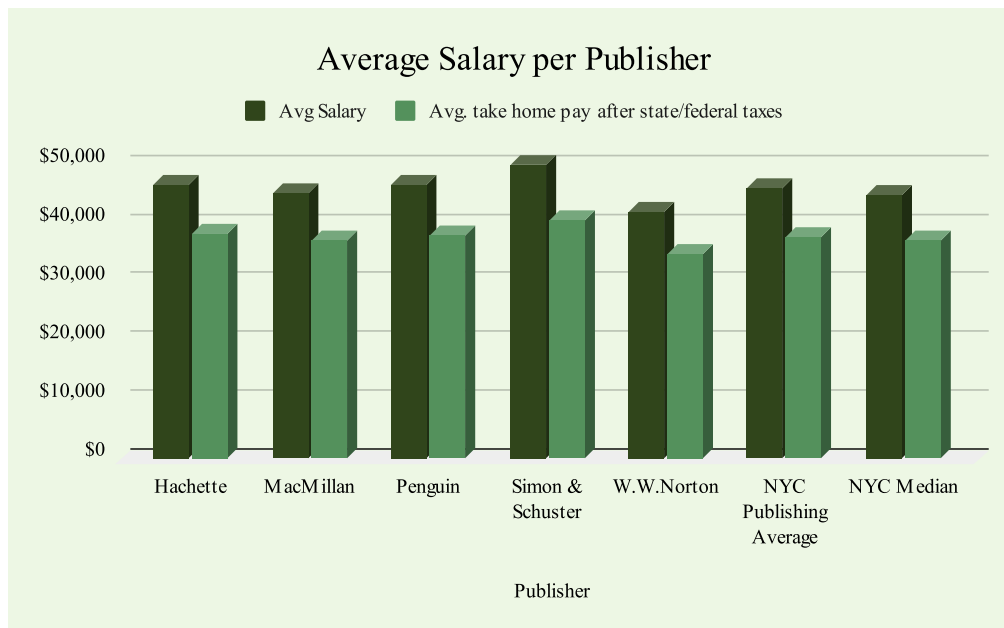


Figure 3. A per publisher view of the average salary found next to the average take home pay (after taxes).

Bibliography

- Alter, Alexandra, and Elizabeth A. Harris. "HarperCollins Workers Strike for Better Pay and Benefits." *The New York Times*, November 10, 2022, sec. Books. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/10/books/harpercollins-strike.html>.
- Amy Watson. "U.S. Book Publishing Industry Revenue 2008-2020." Statista, July 27, 2022. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/271931/revenue-of-the-us-book-publishing-industry/>.
- "Average Rent in New York City, NY & Rent Price Trends." Accessed November 27, 2022. <https://www.apartmentlist.com/rent-report/ny/new-york>.
- Bloomberg.com*. "HarperCollins Wants to Buy Simon & Schuster If Penguin Bid Fails, Judge Told." August 9, 2022. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-09/harpercollins-wants-to-buy-simon-schuster-if-penguin-bid-fails>.
- Bona, Sanziana. "The Most Expensive ZIP Codes in America in 2019." *RentCafe Rental Blog* (blog), September 30, 2019. <https://www.rentcafe.com/blog/rental-market/market-snapshots/america-most-expensive-zip-codes-2019/>.
- C2ER Cost of Living Index. "Quarter 3, 2022 Cost of Living Index Released," October 31, 2022. <https://www.coli.org/16025-2/>.
- "Cost of Living in New York City, NY 2022 | RentCafe." Accessed November 15, 2022. <https://www.rentcafe.com/cost-of-living-calculator/us/ny/new-york-city/>.
- D'Ignazio, Catherine, and Lauren Klein. "1. The Power Chapter." *Data Feminism*, March 16, 2020. <https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/vi8obxh7/release/4>.
- Glick, Reuven. "Will Workers Demand Cost-of-Living Adjustments," 2022, 6.
- Guren, Cliff, Thad McIlroy, and Steven Sieck. "COVID-19 and Book Publishing: Impacts and Insights for 2021." *Publishing Research Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-021-09791-z>.
- "HarperCollins Union (@hcpunion) • Instagram Photos and Videos." Accessed May 14, 2023. <https://www.instagram.com/hcpunion/>.
- Harris, Elizabeth A., and Alexandra Alter. "HarperCollins Workers Strike for Increased Wages, Benefits and Diversity." *The New York Times*, July 20, 2022, sec. Books. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/books/harpercollins-strike.html>.
- Instagram. "HarperCollins Union on Instagram," December 5, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cly5j41p7EL/>.
- Kyle A. Heatherly, Sung-Un Yang, Nicholas Browning, and Eugene Kim. "Words, Money, or Action? How Corporate Social Advocacy Drove Media Coverage in Response to the Black Lives Matter Protests of 2020." *Public Relations Journal* 15, no. 2 (September 2022): 22.
- Le Galès, Patrick, and Paul Pierson. "'Superstar Cities' & the Generation of Durable Inequality." *Daedalus* 148, no. 3 (July 1, 2019): 46–72. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01750.
- León, Concepción de, and Elizabeth A. Harris. "#PublishingPaidMe and a Day of Action Reveal an Industry Reckoning." *The New York Times*, June 9, 2020, sec. Books. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/08/books/publishingpaidme-publishing-day-of-action.html>.
- Maher, John. "HarperCollins Union Workers Hit the Picket Line." *PublishersWeekly.com*. Accessed April 30, 2023. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/89894-harpercollins-union-workers-hit-the-picket-line.html>.
- McGrath, Laura B. "Comping White." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 21, 2019. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/comping-white/>.
- Milliot, Jim. "The PW Publishing Industry Salary Survey 2022." *PublishersWeekly.com*. Accessed May 11, 2023. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/91157-the-pw-publishing-industry-salary-survey-2022.html>.
- "Moving Cost Calculator for Moving Estimates | Moving.Com." Accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.moving.com/movers/moving-cost-calculator.asp>.
- Nawotka, Ed. "Publishing Remains Predictably Unpredictable, Says Ingram." *PublishersWeekly.com*. Accessed April 30, 2023. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/88438-publishing-remains-predictably-unpredictable-says-ingram.html>.

- NerdWallet. "2022-2023 Tax Brackets and Federal Income Tax Rates," April 20, 2023. <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/taxes/federal-income-tax-brackets>.
- NerdWallet. "New York State Income Tax: Rates, Who Pays in 2022-2023," May 12, 2023. <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/taxes/new-york-state-tax>.
- Rijswijk, Lotte van. "The US and UK Cities With the Most Stressful Commutes." Resume.io, August 22, 2022. <https://resume.io/blog/the-us-and-uk-cities-with-the-most-stressful-commutes>.
- Selyukh, Alina. "Paycheck-To-Paycheck Nation: Why Even Americans With Higher Income Struggle With Bills." NPR, December 16, 2020, sec. Business. <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/16/941292021/paycheck-to-paycheck-nation-how-life-in-america-adds-up>.
- "The DOs and DON'Ts of Supporting the Harper Union." Instagram, November 18, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/p/ClHDk1cu4fA/>.
- Wilson, Valerie, and William Jr. Darity. "Understanding Black-White Disparities in Labor Market Outcomes Requires Models That Account for Persistent Discrimination and Unequal Bargaining Power." Economic Policy Institute, March 25, 2022. <https://www.epi.org/unequalpower/publications/understanding-black-white-disparities-in-labor-market-outcomes/>.
- World Bank. "Weak Growth and a Cost-of-Living Crisis in Emerging Europe and Central Asia Region." Accessed April 21, 2023. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/04/06/weak-growth-and-a-cost-of-living-crisis-in-emerging-europe-and-central-asia-region>.