

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In 2008, about 90 percent of young adults aged 18–24 had earned a high school diploma or general equivalency degree; this is an increase over 83 percent in 1972.¹² While there has not been a sex disparity in high school educational attainment, a large disparity in post-secondary educational attainment has been eliminated or reversed over the last 4 decades. In 1969–1970, men earned a majority of every type of post-secondary degree, while in 2006–2007, women earned more than half of all associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees, and half of all first professional degrees. The most significant

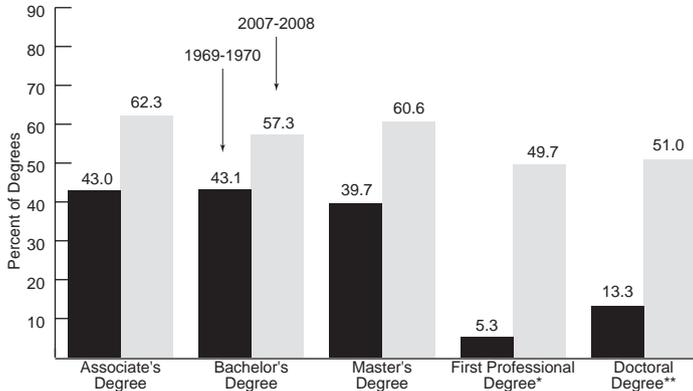
increase has been in the proportion of first professional degree earners who are women, which jumped from 5.3 percent in 1969–1970 to 49.7 percent in 2007–2008. Although the sex disparity in degrees awarded has disappeared or reversed, there are still disparities by discipline. For example, women are underrepresented in engineering and physical science and overrepresented in education and psychology.¹³

There are also racial and ethnic disparities in educational attainment. Although one-third of all young adult women (aged 25–29 years) had a college degree in 2007–2009, this ranged from about 15 percent among Hispanic, non-

Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander women to over 60 percent among non-Hispanic Asian women. Hispanic and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native young adult women were most likely to lack a high school diploma (28.2 and 14.7 percent, respectively). Education confers great benefit to health status, both through greater knowledge of risk and protective factors, as well as the economic resources to facilitate healthy behaviors.¹⁴ Increasing educational attainment will depend, in part, on improving school quality and the affordability of college.

Degrees Awarded to Women, by Type, 1969–1970 and 2007–2008

Source I.12: U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics



*Includes fields of dentistry, medicine, optometry, osteopathic medicine, pharmacy, podiatry, veterinary medicine, chiropractic, public health, law, and theological professions. **Includes Doctor of Philosophy degree and degrees awarded for fulfilling specialized requirements in professional fields such as education, musical arts, and engineering; does not include first professional degrees.

Educational Attainment Among Women Aged 25–29, by Race/Ethnicity, 2007–2009

Source I.13: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

