

Margaret
Cuninggim
Women's Center

Male/female wage gap narrows

Kathryn H. Anderson, Associate Professor,
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The status of women in the labor force has changed in the last thirty years. These changes include increased participation in the labor market, an increase in hours worked per week and in weeks worked per year, and a narrowing of the wage gap between male and female workers. In addition, women are making serious inroads into some male-dominated occupations although they still tend to work in female-dominated, low-paying jobs. The reasons for these changes and the policy implications have been the subject of much recent research. (See Gunderson (1989) for a review of some of this literature.)

Table 1 presents evidence of the change in labor force attachment of women and men between 1955 and 1988. Even more dramatic is the increase of married women in the labor force. In 1960, 30.6% of these women entered the labor force while in 1988, 56.7% were employed or looking for work.¹

During this same period, average hours worked per week by women ages 25-54 increased from 35.7% in 1968 to 36.8% in 1986. In addition, the percentage of women working between 50 and 52 weeks per year increased from 55.3% in 1966 to 68.5% in 1986. (Shank, 1988)

Although women are more likely to work today than in recent history, they continue to work in the lowest paying occupations and industries. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) ranked 52 major United States industries in 1982 and calculated a strong inverse relationship between the percentage of total workers in the industry that were women and the average hourly wage paid in that industry. For example, the industry with the largest percentage of women workers -- apparel and other textile products -- had the lowest hourly wage at \$5.18/hr., and the industry with the lowest percent-

age of female workers -- bituminous coal and lignite mining -- had the highest hourly wage at \$13.05 (Norwood, 1982).

Women are most likely to choose clerical and service jobs but, since 1970, have significantly increased their participation in certain male-dominated white collar jobs such as accounting, financial management, and sales. In 1970, 25%, 18%, and 39% of workers in these three occupations were women; by 1988, participation by women had increased to 50%, 42%, and 49% of all workers in these jobs. Some occupations -- craft (carpenters and mechanics, for example) and operative positions -- are still resistant to the participation of women.

Male/female wage gap

These changes in the labor force commitment of women have begun to reduce the male/female wage gap. Table 1 presents data on median weekly earnings of women and men from 1970 - 1988. Between 1970 and 1980, women earned about 62% of men's earnings per week. The failure of this wage differential to narrow during a period of rapid change in labor market activity of women was a puzzle to economists and prompted feminists to call for more government interference in the determination of wages through comparable worth policies. However, in the 80s the wage gap began to narrow. The most recent BLS statistics find women earning 70% of what men earn. In a 1984 study, Smith and Ward forecast this change in the wage gap and projected a further narrowing (to a female - male earnings ratio of 74% or more) by 2000.

Why was the wage gap constant for so many years and why should we expect it to narrow in the near future without government action? Smith and Ward center their explanation on human capital changes among the group of women workers; human capital is the stock of job-related skills, such as a

worker's education and training. As the labor force participation of women increased, cohorts of increasingly inexperienced women entered the market. This lack of job experience kept average wages of workers low. Between 1950 and 1980, they estimated that working women fell behind working men in education by one year, on average, but only increased their market experience by half of a year. After 1980, however, the increase in experience of working women as well as an increase in their average level of education combined to produce the increase in the female/male earnings ratio. This wage gap reduction occurred despite the reduced enforcement of affirmative action policies by the Reagan administration. Continued commitment to work and investment in job skills by women will lead to future increases in the wages of women relative to men.

While progress is being made in narrowing the male/female wage gap, it is unlikely that in the foreseeable future

(continued page two)

Table 1. Employment status of civilian noninstitutional population 16 years and over and earnings of workers by sex.

Year	Labor force participation rate	Median wk earnings
1955		
M	86.2	--
F	35.7	--
1960		
M	84.0	--
F	37.8	--
1970		
M	80.6	\$151
F	43.4	94
F/M	--	.62
1980		
M	78.0	317
F	51.7	200
F/M	--	.63
1988		
M	76.2	449
F	56.6	315
F/M	--	.70

Source: "Employment and Earnings," Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 1956 - January 1989.
Notes: M=male, F=female

Free to choose?

Laura Milner, Community Services
Director, Planned Parenthood Association of
Nashville (PPAN)

My best childhood friend called last week to tell me that after two years of "trying," she and her husband were going to have a baby. She couldn't wait to share her good news with the god-mother-to-be.

While thrilled about her own pregnancy, my friend believes motherhood is a special, lifelong endeavor that a woman should choose -- not something to be forced upon her. In a world of abused and neglected children, only motherhood by choice makes sense.

On an average day PPAN's waiting room is filled with a combination of college students, young mothers with children in tow, one or two entire families, a few women in their thirties or forties, and assorted pairs of males and females -- sometimes married, sometimes not, sometimes father-daughter.

Early one morning, I was sitting at the front desk answering the telephone. The elevator opened, and a gray-haired man stepped off with a girl who looked no older than fifteen. What struck me was her face. Her blonde hair was pulled neatly away from her forehead and fell smoothly down her back. Her skin was white, unblemished; she wore no makeup, and needed none.

Most startling was her look of innocence. She smiled shyly and appeared vulnerable. Later, as the man checked her in and paid the standard abortion fee, I found myself staring at her. She reminded me of my newly pregnant friend when we were giggling sixth graders... same silky hair, same high cheekbones and natural, wide-eyed look. How could this girl be pregnant?

Then I was struck by my stereotyping. This teenager became pregnant the same way 17,000 other Tennessee teens -- and one million nationally -- get pregnant each year. They are either sexually active or sexually assaulted. Sometimes the lines blur when the girl knows little about her body and feels less about herself and her future.

Unlike my friend who is celebrating, these young women find themselves trapped in a bind with no easy way out. They have three options, all difficult: have the baby and raise it as a single mother, facing almost certain poverty; have the baby and give it to adoptive

parents; or terminate the pregnancy. Whatever choice she makes, each woman must continue to decide for herself, privately, in a safe, legal environment.

My friend who is so happy now about being pregnant would have been devastated at fifteen. She grew up in a church-going family where her father often hit his wife and children. Had my friend been sexually active, much less gotten pregnant, her father may have killed someone.

Seeing the fresh-faced teenager that morning stirred a new awareness in me. Unwanted pregnancy can and does happen to anyone, regardless of age, race, religious upbringing, socioeconomic status, knowledge, or naivete.

For this reason, abortion *must* remain a safe and legal option for all. If women are not free to decide if and when to have children, women are not free. ■

Wage gap (continued from page one)

women will earn wages equivalent to men. As long as the "conflict between career and family" is primarily a female conflict, women will be less committed to market work than men (Fuchs, 1988). This will be reflected in fewer hours and years of work, less investment by firms and women workers in the development of skills, and the choice of occupations and career paths ("the Mommy track") that are compatible with family responsibilities. Government may be most effective if it helps women and men resolve this conflict through child care and family policies rather than through wage setting comparable worth programs.

The 1960 statistic was obtained from Census of Population, 1960: Employment Status, Bureau of the Census, Table 4. The 1988 statistic was obtained from Employment and Earnings, January 1989.

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It's your health

Beth Colvin Huff, RN, MSN
Department of OB/GYN

One of the most important health issues for menopausal and post-menopausal women is whether or not to take replacement hormones. Hormone replacement therapy, HRT, just like all other medications, comes with its share of risks and benefits. Your decision should be a collaborative effort between you and your health care provider.

HRT refers to two hormones, estrogen and progesterone. Both of these hormones are produced by the ovaries before the menopause. Estrogen builds up the lining of the uterus and progesterone causes that lining to shed, thereby producing a menstrual period.

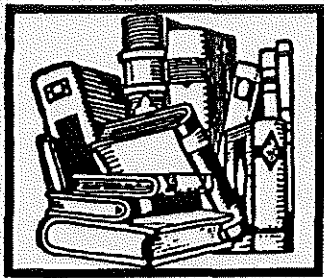
Around the time of menopause, the ovaries begin to shut down their function and levels of estrogen and progesterone drop. Menstrual periods cease and PMS goes away, but hot flashes and vaginal dryness begin. Bone density is rapidly lost (osteoporosis) and heart disease increases.

Estrogen replacement therapy (ERT) became popular after a book called *Feminine Forever* was published in the 1960s. ERT relieved hot flashes and vaginal dryness and decreased the risk of osteoporosis and heart disease, but by the mid-seventies it was apparent that ERT was also responsible for a huge increase in cancer of the uterus.

Today, both estrogen and progesterone are given to more naturally mimic the ovarian function before menopause. And, the addition of progesterone to the estrogen has decreased the incidence of uterine cancer.

Because both hormones are used, menstrual periods will still occur for most women. Some women will also experience the symptoms usually attributed to PMS (bloating, breast tenderness, mood changes). Many women will decide that these side effects of HRT are worse than the hot flashes and choose to manage osteoporosis and heart disease by exercise and diet. Vaginal dryness can often be treated with vaginal estrogen cream at much lower doses than in oral form.

If you are considering HRT, educate yourself as much as possible. The April, 1989 issue of *Ms.* magazine has an article discussing the pros and cons of hormones. Talk to others and bring your questions to your physician or nurse. With information, you can make the best decision for you. ■



In the library

Lauri Wright, BS, MLS
Women's center librarian

Status of the American woman

Even for those of us concerned about women and our life in the United States, it is difficult to keep the big picture clearly in mind. Too often we think only of women's experiences in relation to our own: women in our geographic area, our race, our age, our marital status, or our economic situation. *The American Woman 1988-89: A Status Report*, edited by Sara E. Rix for the Women's Research and Education Institute (WREI), helps bring the total composite of American women to our consciousness. It looks at the status of all women in America: the rich, the poor, women of color, women of various traditional and nontraditional occupations, the old, and the young.

This is the second annual report on American women released by WREI. Last year's report, *The American Woman 1987-88*, "documented and analyzed the extent and nature of the changes in the role of women over the past two to three decades and commented on the nature of those changes." This second report does not attempt to update or replace the 87-88 report but to supplement its information with reports from areas not covered. The plan, then, is to update the composite of the American women with different information each year.

The book is divided into three sections. The first is a series of in-depth reports: "1987 in Review," "A Reflection on the Women's Movement," "The Political Woman," "Women's Paid Work, Household Income, and Household Well Being," and "Women and Health Care."

The second section is a series of sixteen shorter articles that looks at such varied topics as the educational status of black women; the young Hispanic women;

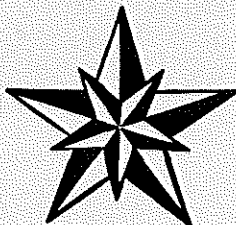
women in various professions: music, nursing, clergy, construction, law enforcement, and farm women. There are reports on women and AIDS, battered women, women in prison, and women and pension coverage. This section ends with the official reports from The Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues in the 100th Congress.

All of the reports, both long and short, are written by experts in the field.

The third section of the book, the appendices, are statistical charts. The appendices begin with a paragraph for each table or chart that gives a short highlight of its data. The statistics include information about the U.S. population, employment, unemployment, child care, and income.

Bibliographies for each section conclude the book.

Although no single volume could paint the entire portrait of the American woman in 1988-89, this book chronicles the highs and the lows of American womanhood today. It shows us how far we've come but also how far we have yet to go. ■



Do you know who discovered a way of measuring the distance of stars from the earth?

Is a star bright because it is close, or is it so intrinsically bright that it appears bright in our sky even though it is very far away? Because the distances are so immense, it is not simple to establish how far it is to any object in the sky.

The answers came out of the painstaking work of Henrietta Leavitt, an astronomer at Harvard in the early years of this century. She spent thousands of hours scanning photographic plates of the Southern sky, looking for variable stars: those that brighten and/or dim over time.

Leavitt found a direct correlation between their true (as opposed to apparent) luminosity and the length of these brightening and dimming cycles. Suddenly astronomers had a yardstick.

Smithsonian, January 1989

Women's center programs

Call 322-4843 for further information on the programs listed below.

Dissertation Writers continues to meet monthly. At press time a May date had not been set. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, please call the women's center. Women of all schools and disciplines are welcome to join.

Book Group will meet on Monday, May 8, 5:15 p.m. until 6:15 p.m. at the women's center. Jane Dubose will lead the discussion of *You Must Remember This* by Joyce Carol Oates. New members welcome. Light refreshments.

New Employees Brown Bag Lunch will be held on Wednesday, May 17, between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. at the women's center, Franklin Building, West Side Row. Women's center staff will be available throughout this time to talk with those who come. Please come and go as your schedule permits. All recently hired VU employees are invited. Anyone is welcome. Bring your lunch. Hot and cold drinks will be provided.

Take Charge of your Financial Planning for staff and faculty will be held on Thursday, May 18 at 12:15 p.m. in Sarratt 118. Sandy Shawhan, Life Underwriter Training Council Fellow, will give a "nuts and bolts" approach to learning to determine your own financial future. Some subjects to be included are the "Financial Planning Pyramid," "A Guide to Five Vital References on Investing," retirement, renting versus buying a home. ■

I married beneath me. All women do.

Nancy Witcher, Lady Astor

Address correction request. If this newsletter is addressed to someone else, please request your own copy by sending the form on the address page along with the incorrect mailing label. We'd like to know who is reading our newsletter.

Announcements et cetera

Karen Thompson was at last allowed to visit her severely disabled lover, Sharon Kowalski. Kowalski's father had successfully blocked Thompson's visitation for the past three years. But in December a Minnesota district judge ruled that Sharon Kowalski's wishes on visitation should be respected if they were "reliably expressed." The couple reunited in early February.

The Eleanor Smeal Report,
February 28, 1989

Sarratt Gallery will continue the showing of recent mixed media works of Margaret Ecker (VU '70) through May 25. Sarratt Gallery exhibitions and related events are open to the public and free of charge. For additional information call JoEl Logiudice, Assistant Director for Arts.

In case your newspaper didn't print this: "Who's Crying Now?" John Sununu bid a teary farewell to New Hampshire's legislature, but the press hardly noted his waterworks. Quite a contrast there to articles appearing when Congresswoman Pat Schroeder (D-CO) ended her presidential bid.

Women's Times
March 7, 1989

"Redfaced and Speechless," Planned Parenthood of Nashville workshop Saturday, May 13 from 9:30 a.m. until noon. The workshop is designed to help parents and pre-teens to begin talking about the issue of sexuality. Call Sandy Millikin at 327-1097 for more information or to register.

B WISE

By Deborah S. Strauss
Attorney
Washington, DC

My four-and-a-half-year-old son and I play a guessing game in which one of us gives a clue about an object, together with its initial letter, and the other tries to figure out what the object is. During a recent game, my son said he was "thinking of something ladies carry that begins with a B." After being informed that (hand)bag and (pocket)book were incorrect, I gave up. Then he told me the answer: *briefcase*.

Savvy, March 1986

Vanderbilt students march in women's rights rally



Susannah Jones, co-chair SWC

Paige Williams, co-chair of Students for Women's Concerns (SWC), and *Mary Lowe*, president Women's Political Caucus, (photo left) celebrate at the Women's Rights March in Washington, D.C. on April 9. Jones (photo right) commented after her return, "All this year I had sensed the support for pro-choice, but at the march I felt it and was caught up in it -- seeing all of the different people, all ages, made me realize that the issue of choice is important enough for thousands of people to come together and that it should be important to every woman in America."

Edited by JUDITH T. HELFER

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