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The Gender Wage Gap: Debunking the Rationalizations

by: *Hilary M. Lips, Radford University*
also see: [Blaming Women's Choices for the Gender Pay Gap](#)

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Last year, a labor economist from the Economic Policy Institute made the widely-quoted estimate that the gender pay gap would be closed within 30 years. Other commentators state confidently that the gap does not reflect discrimination, but other factors, such as the high wages of a few white men, and gendered patterns of occupational and educational choice and work experience. The effect of such assertions is to make women feel complacent about the wage gap—and perhaps to feel that they can avoid its impact by making the right educational, occupational, and negotiation-related choices. Such complacency is unwarranted.

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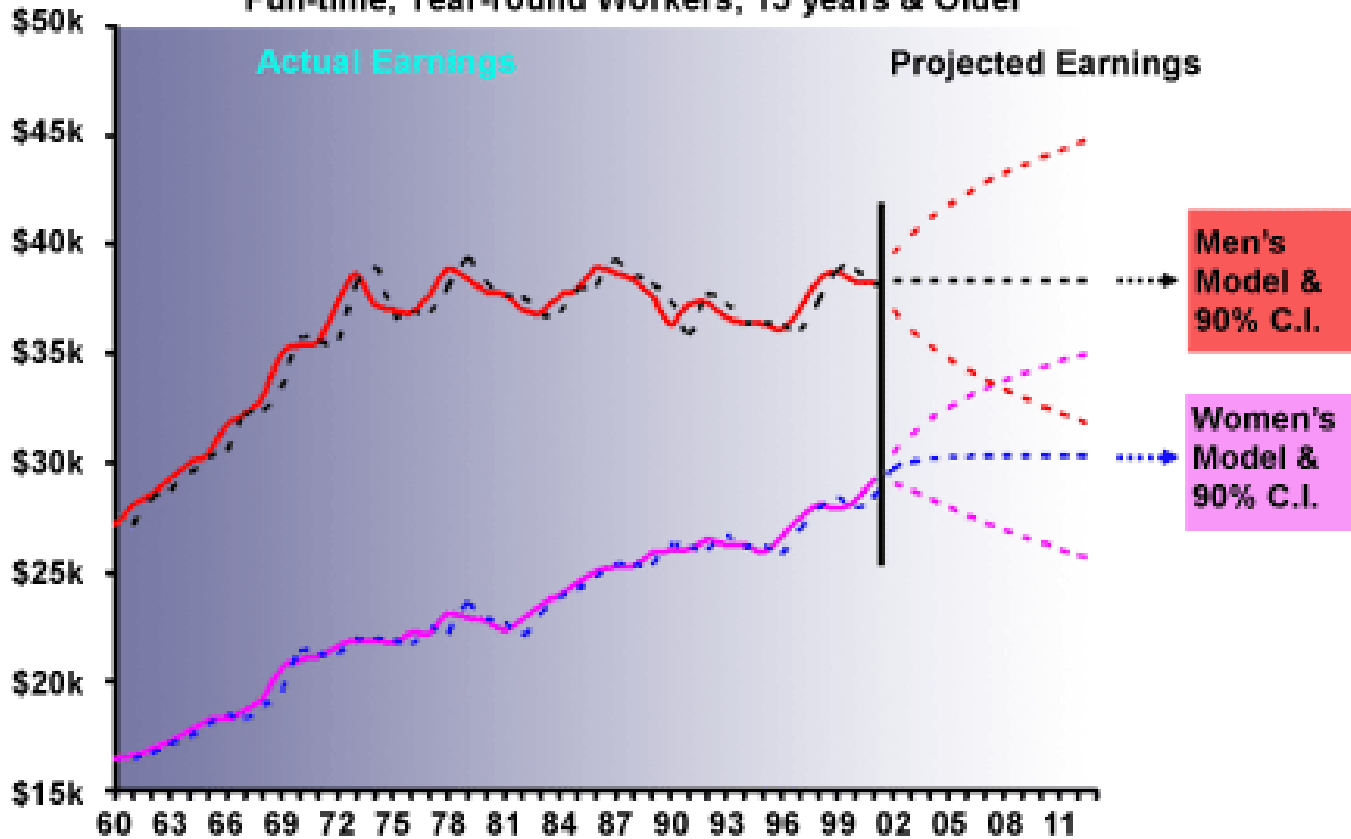
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A Continuing Gap in U.S. Earnings Trends? Past & "Future" Annual Earnings: 1960 -- 2001 Data

Median Wage-Salary Earnings in \$2001
Full-time, Year-round Workers, 15 years & Older



Earnings in Relation to Similarly Educated Men's Earnings

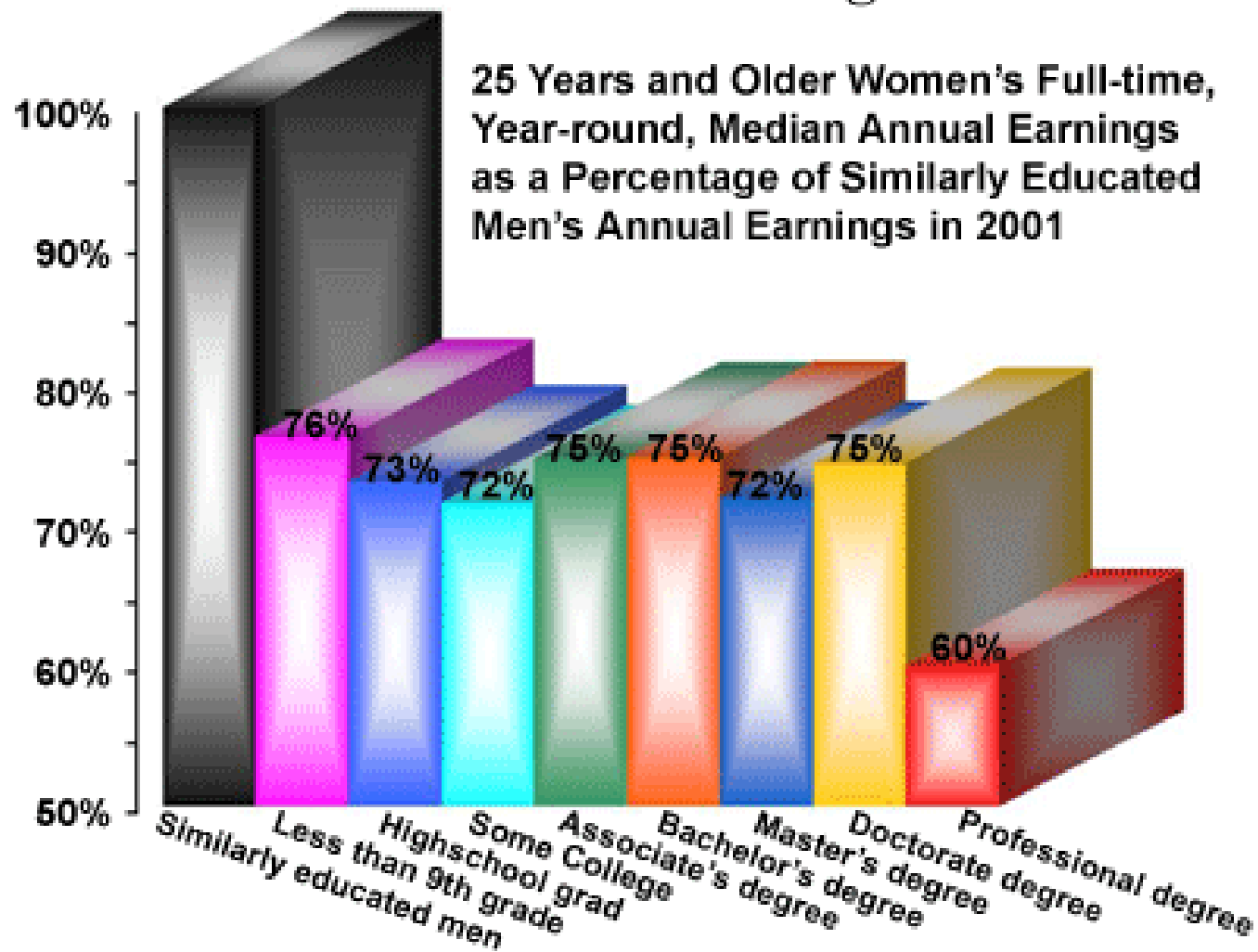
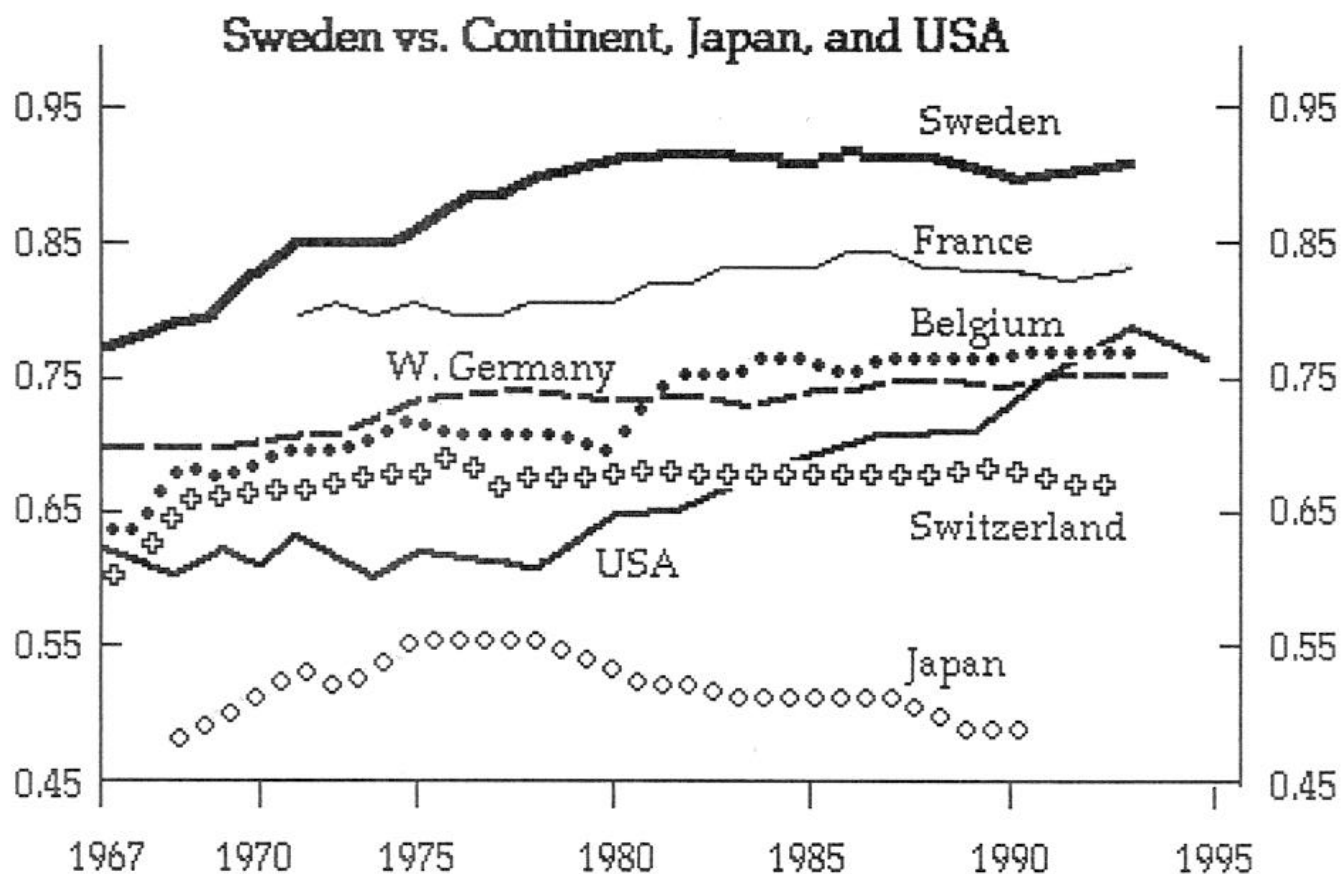
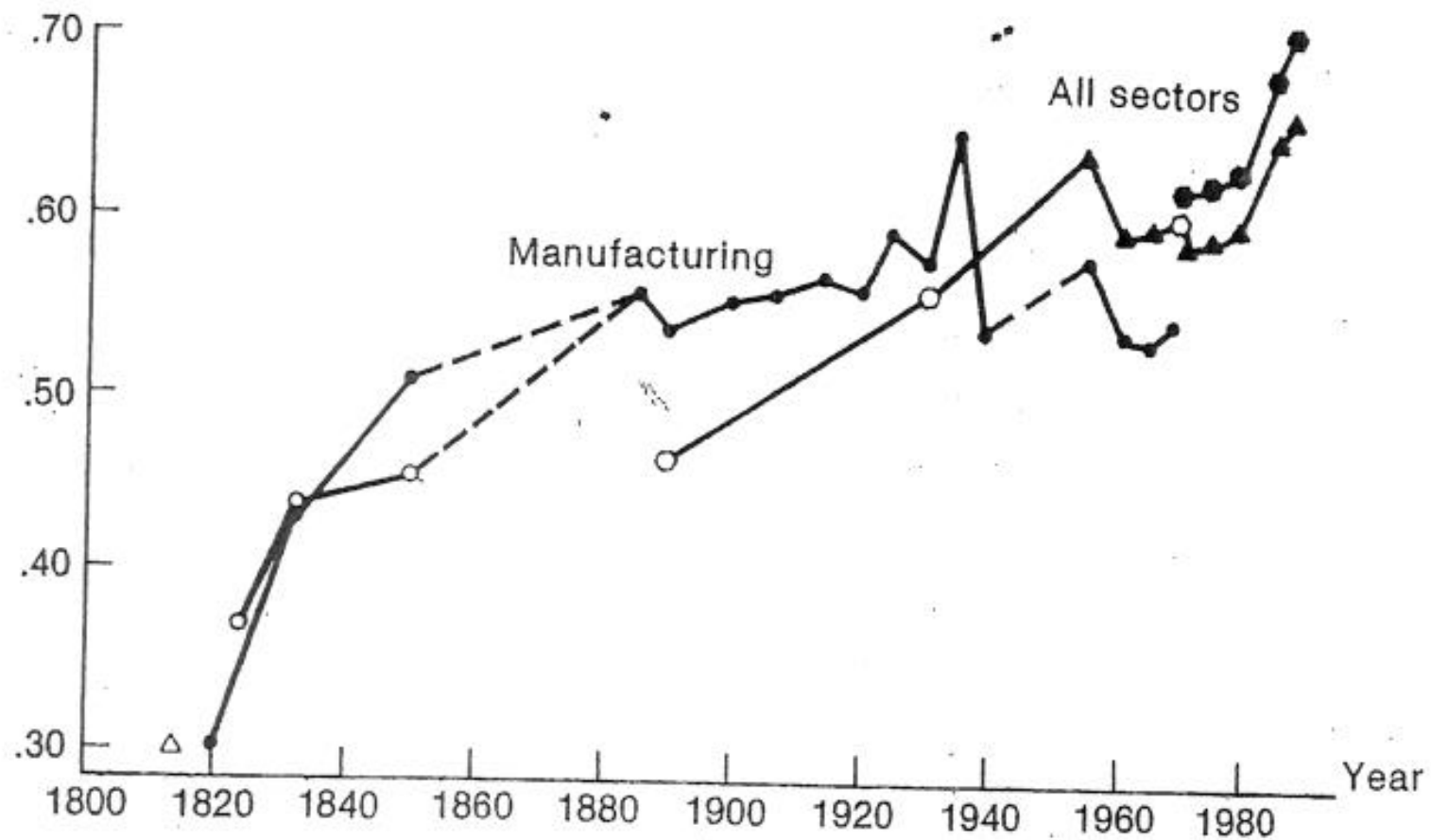


Figure 11.4, continued



Sources: Joshi, Paci, and Waldfoegel (1998, 16-17), Waldfoegel (1998).

to Male Earnings

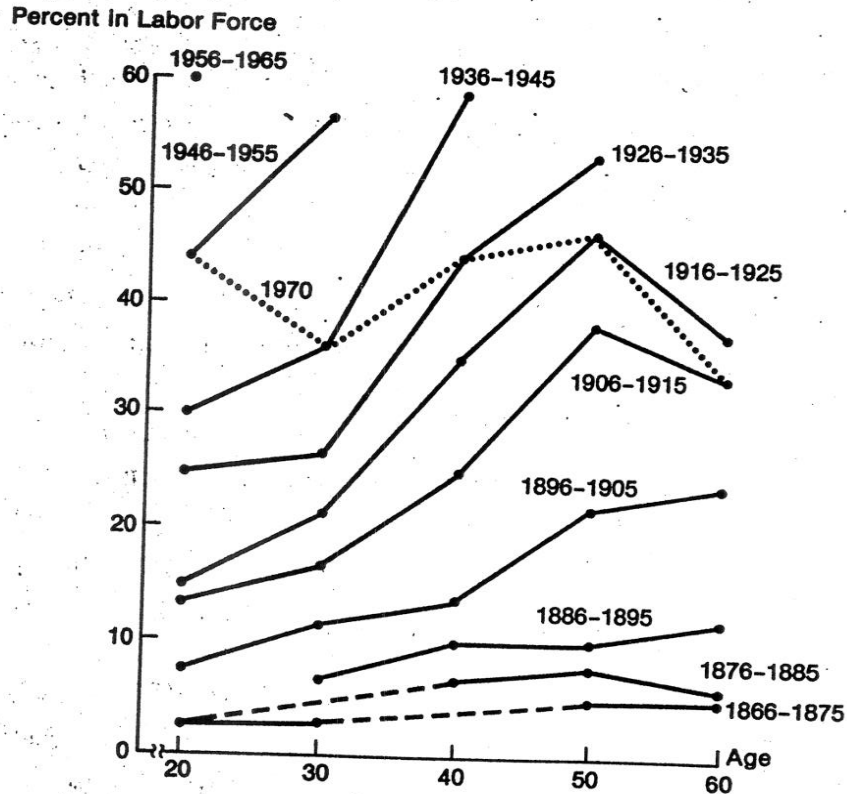


- △ Agriculture
- Manufacturing, New England to 1850 and U.S. after 1850
- Manufacturing, Middle Atlantic
- Weighted average of six sectors
- ▲ Current Population Survey, median year-round
- Current Population Survey, median weekly

FIGURE 3.1. Ratio of Female to Male Earnings, 1815 to 1987. Notes and Sources: Tables

Cohorts

UNDERSTANDING THE GENDER GAP



married White Women
~~married~~

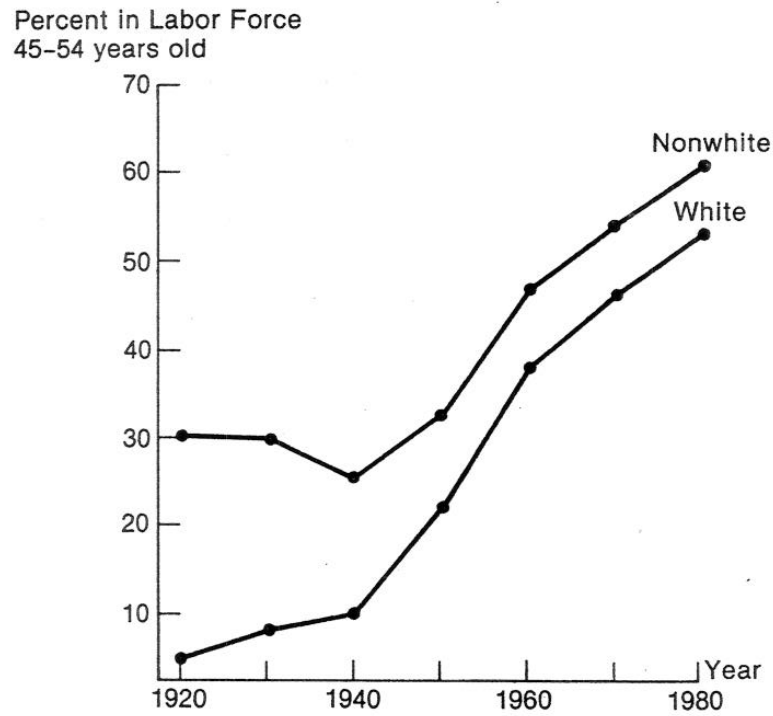


FIGURE 2.1. Female Labor Force Participation Rates for Two Age Groups of Married Women by Race, 1920 to 1980. *Source:* Table 2.2.

TABLE 2.2. Female Labor Force Participation Rates by Age and Marital Status for White and Nonwhite Women, 1890 to 1980

Year	Age					
	15-19 (16-19)	15-24 (16-24)	25-34			
<i>Never Married (Single), White</i>						
1890		35.0	53.1			
1900		37.5	56.7			
1910		n.a.	n.a.			
1920		46.6	67.7			
1930	27.8	42.6	75.4			
1940	n.a.	40.8	79.4			
1950	28.1	42.9	80.6			
1960	28.9	40.0 (45.9)	81.9			
1970	30.1	40.9 (47.9)	81.5			
1980	n.a. (52.7)	n.a. (62.6)	87.8			
<i>Age</i>						
	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	
<i>Currently Married, White</i>						
1890	2.9	2.6	2.5	2.3	1.8	
1900	3.0	3.1	3.1	2.6	2.3	
1910	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	
1920	8.2	7.7	6.3	(4.9)	(4.9)	
1930	13.3	11.5	9.8	7.8	5.1	
1940	14.7	16.7	13.8	10.1	6.4	
1950	24.9	21.0	25.3	22.2	12.6	
1960	30.0	26.7	35.4	38.6	24.6	
1970	44.1	36.2	44.4	46.7	34.1	
1980	60.1	56.0	59.1	53.4	36.8	
<i>Currently Married, Nonwhite</i>						
1890	24.5	23.3	22.4	21.0	19.1	
1900	25.0	27.6	26.2	23.9	21.1	
1910	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	
1920	30.4	33.7	34.5	(30.4)	(30.4)	
1930	29.9	35.9	35.8	30.1	27.6	
1940	23.7	31.4	30.5	25.5	19.3	
1950	23.7	34.8	38.7	32.9	22.3	
1960	31.8	40.7	48.9	47.3	33.7	
1970	48.0	54.8	57.5	54.5	41.2	
1980	60.2	71.4	72.0	61.3	42.0	
<i>Widowed and Divorced, White</i>						
1890	37.2	45.8	42.6	31.4	21.0	
1900	32.3	52.7	53.5	38.1	23.8	
1910	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	
1920	47.6	(63.9)	(63.9)	(37.5)	(32.5)	
1930	56.7	(63.9)	(63.9)	45.1	24.8	
1940	49.3	63.2	59.3	44.1	25.2	
1950	52.0	60.9	65.2	55.7	35.4	