Published in final edited form as:

Soc Sci Res. 2020 November ; 92: 102479. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2020.102479.

The Declining Earnings Gap Between Young Women and Men in the United States, 1979–2018

John Iceland,
Penn State University

Ilana Redstone
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Abstract

We examine the dynamics of the gender earnings gap over the 1979 to 2018 period among full-time workers aged 25–29, focusing on the role of marital status and the presence of children. Using data from multiple years of the Current Population Survey, we find that the earnings gap declined among all groups of men and women, and by 2018 there was earnings parity among the those who were not married and without children. The share of people in this group also grew over the period, and comprised a majority of both men and women by 2018. We also find that while marriage was associated with lower earnings among women in 1979, by 2018 it was associated with higher earnings, suggesting greater positive selection of women with high earnings potential into marriage. The positive association between marriage and earnings among men remained stable. While we found a persistent earnings penalty for having children among women over the period, we found an emerging dampening effect of having children over time among men, which suggests that greater participation in childcare among men has led to lower earnings than in the past (i.e., a causal connection) and/or an emerging selection effect of young men more interested in childrearing over time, perhaps reflecting a cultural shift.

Keywords

Gender Inequality; Earnings; Marriage; Children

One of the most frequently cited indicators of inequality is the earnings gap between men and women. Between 1960 and 1980, a time when women entered the paid labor force in large numbers, this gap remained virtually unchanged: among full-time workers, women's median annual earnings were about 60 percent of men's. After 1980 this gap began to narrow, rapidly at first, reaching 72 percent in 1990, and then gradually thereafter, reaching 82 percent in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). These figures for full-time workers mask the heterogeneity across a number of characteristics, such as age, marital status, and parental

*Direct all correspondence to John Iceland, 211 Oswald Tower, Department of Sociology, Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802, jdi10@psu.edu.

Publisher's Disclaimer: This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for publication. As a service to our customers we are providing this early version of the manuscript. The manuscript will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published in its final form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which could affect the content, and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.

status. The earnings gap is smaller among younger workers in more recent cohorts, and among men and women who are unmarried and without children (Juhn & McCue, 2017). Understanding the subtleties of this gap matters for how we think about gender inequality more generally. As with any social problem, progress depends on having a clear understanding of its patterns and causes.

As the earnings gap gradually narrowed, another gender gap grew—that in educational attainment. In 1980, men were more likely to have a college degree than women. Among those aged 25 to 29, 24 percent of men and 21 percent of women had completed four years of college or more in that year. Parity was reached about 10 years later, but since then, women have been more likely to go to college than men. In 2019, 42 percent of women aged 25 to 29 had completed four years or more of college, compared with 36 percent of men in the same age group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). Some commentators have argued that this trend portends a possible reversal in gender inequality, where men will eventually be disadvantaged in the labor market (Rosin, 2012), although this view is a minority one. Scholars are more likely to express concerns about the slowing or stalled progress in gender pay inequality, and the continued significant gaps in positions of power, such as among CEOs of large companies and in the halls of Congress (Coontz, 2012; England, 2010; Ridgeway, 2011).

Nevertheless, because of the educational gap between men and women, the growing number of women in professional occupations, and the fact that women today comprise the majority of matriculants in a number of professional programs, including medical and law schools (Ward, 2016), it is plausible that the earnings gap will continue to narrow, especially among some groups of men and women. The goal of this study is to examine earnings and the gender earnings gap among young adults over the 1979 to 2018 period to gauge whether progress has stalled, or instead whether there are reasons to believe that the gap will continue to decline, and among which groups and under what conditions.

We focus on young adults for a couple of reasons. For one, most of those aged 25 to 29 have finished their education and are entering the work force, and it is important to see how they are faring near the start of their careers. In addition, because this is an age before many have had a chance to move in and out of the labor force, it yields a relatively clean examination of contemporary barriers to mobility women face in the labor market. Thus, our main contribution to the literature is the investigation of early career outcomes of young adults over time, the role of marriage and childbearing in these outcomes, and changes in the earnings of young men and women by these statuses in more detail and with more recent data than past studies.

Our analysis is based on data from roughly 10 year-intervals of the 1980 to 2019 Current Population Surveys (which collect information on income in the previous calendar year) to track trends in earnings among young adults aged 25 to 29. We restrict our study to full-time workers and examine how the gap varies by marital and parental status. We then run regressions to examine the magnitude of the gap after controlling for other important variables, such as educational attainment and occupation. Finally, we examine the changing association between earnings and marital status and the presence of children among men and

women. In doing so, we aim to understand the early work and family formation experiences of young full-time workers in the United States over the past several decades.

Background

One of the primary goals of second-wave feminism, which began around the time of the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique* in 1963, was to extend the political rights won during the first wave—including the right to vote—to economic and social equality. One of the primary indicators of economic inequality is the earnings gap, where women are paid less than men. This wave of feminism started during a time when women were entering the paid labor force in larger numbers than had been seen previously, including married women, though they still overwhelmingly were the secondary earners in their households. Women also were concentrated in particular occupations, such as teachers, nurses, secretaries, and social workers, and often left the labor market when they had young children (Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1990).

The Civil Rights movement yielded tangible policy achievements that benefited women, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and was applied to voter registration requirements, schools, employment, and public accommodations. While legal discrimination was removed as a barrier to employment and career advancement, initial progress in reducing the gender earnings gap was slow. In 1960, among full-time year-round workers aged 15 and over, women's median earnings was 61 percent of that of men. In 1970, it was 59 percent, and 1980 it was still just 60 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c). Dissatisfaction with the lack of progress was expressed by many commentators at the time. As Heidi Hartmann and Donald Treiman argued in 1983 (404):

The problem of “comparable worth,” or “equal pay for jobs of equal value,” or “pay equity,” arises because of the large and continuing differential in men's and women's earnings and the persistent segregation of men and women in the labor market. The earnings gap has remained at approximately 40 percent for practically as long as statistics have been kept; that is, women who work full time, year round earn on average 60 percent of what full-time, year-round male workers earn.

Women are increasingly expressing their dissatisfaction with their wage rates and, in particular, claim that it is the traditionally women's jobs that are underpaid. Many of these jobs, e.g., nurse, librarian, require several years of specialized education. To these women, the earnings gap may be especially apparent.

As this was being written, the wage gap had finally begun to narrow. As noted earlier, the narrowing of the gap was rapid during the 1980s and slower thereafter, including a period of little change from 2002 to 2012 (women earned 77 percent of what men did during that time), before rising to 82 percent by 2018. While the change was considerable, the remaining 18 percent gap is also substantial, and many see this as strong evidence that women continue to face a number of obstacles in the labor market (England, 2010; Ridgeway, 2006, 2011).

Causes of the Gender Gap in Earnings

The most prominent explanations for the gender earnings gap include labor market discrimination; gender differences in college majors and subsequent occupations, as manifested in occupational sex segregation; and gender differences in the impact of marriage and especially childbearing on work and earnings. We discuss these in turn.

Discrimination against women in the labor market historically was the norm. Men were often presumed to be the primary breadwinner for a family, women's work was devalued, and women were paid less than men, even in similar occupations. Women rarely had the opportunity to hold positions of power in business or government, and were largely excluded from a wide range of high-status occupations such as lawyers, doctors, professors, or scientists (Goldin, 1990). The labor force participation of married women was low due to the institution of marriage bars in a number of occupations and places up until the early 1940s; these bars were regulations that forced women to leave the labor force when they married, and they also prohibited the hiring of married women (Goldin, 2006).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended legal discrimination against women in the labor market. While this reduced employment barriers, discrimination could still occur in several ways, such as women being less likely to be accepted in male-dominated occupations or less likely to be considered for promotion into managerial positions (Blau & Kahn, 2017). As the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2020) argues, "outright discrimination in pay, hiring, or promotions continues to be a significant feature of working life."

Occupational sex segregation also has contributed to the gender earnings gap. Through much of the 20th century women were overwhelmingly concentrated in a relatively small number of occupations, as noted earlier. They rarely were managers, and were excluded from a host of other occupations. Many of the occupations that were principally female offered less pay than those requiring similar levels of education that were mostly male. Also contributing to occupational sex segregation was the fact that men and women chose different fields of study in college, with men well over-represented in business and science, and women in fields that corresponded with their subsequent occupations (e.g., nursing and education) (Goldin, 2006).

There has been a decline in sex segregation in both the choice of college majors and occupations since 1970, though with only slight declines in occupational segregation and no declines in the segregation of majors (or small increases) since around the year 2000 (Blau, Brummund, & Liu, 2013; England, 2010; Mann & DiPrete, 2013; Roos & Stevens, 2018). The decline in segregation has been driven mainly by women entering majors and occupations formerly dominated by men rather than vice-versa. Women today are much more likely to be employed in a broad array of professional positions in management, business, law, and medicine than they used to be (Blau et al., 2013). Moreover, women now comprise the majority of those in many professional schools, including medical and law schools, and are more likely to receive a college education than men (Association of American Medical Colleges, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b; Ward, 2016). However, in high-paying professions like medicine, women are sometimes under-represented in some

high-paying specialties, such as surgery (Alers, van Leerdam, Dielissen, & Lagro-Janssen, 2014). Women also remain under-represented in a number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors, such as computer science, physics, and electrical engineering. Women are over-represented in other majors, receiving 80 percent of Bachelor's degrees in education and 78 percent of those in psychology in 2017 (Perry, 2018; Ward, 2016).

Researchers have offered a variety of reasons for why segregation by education and occupation has not declined by much since 2000. Some have posited that women face hostility, or at least little encouragement, in male-dominated fields, such as in STEM, exacerbated by a lack of role models and social networks (Moss-Racusin, et al., 2012; Steinpreis et al., 1999). Some studies find relatively little evidence of discrimination against women in STEM (Beede, Julian, & Langdon, 2013; Kahn & Ginther, 2017; Williams & Ceci, 2015), while other research indicates that differences in interests and preferences play an important role in the selection of majors and occupations (Blau & Kahn, 2017; Su, Rounds, & Armstrong, 2009). Whether these interests and preferences are formed through socialization and social norms, as emphasized in the sociological literature (e.g., England, 2010; Ridgeway, 2011), or at least in part by mechanisms rooted in evolutionary biology (Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009; Lippa, 2010) will likely be an area of future research.

The differential effect of marriage and especially having children has contributed to the gender earnings gap (Budig & England, 2001). Married women's labor force participation grew over the 20th century, though women still are more likely to leave the labor force after the birth of a child. In 1967, 49 percent of women with children were stay-at-home mothers. This declined substantially to 23 percent in 1999, though rising to 29 percent in 2012. Overall declines in women's (and men's) labor force participation rates and rising immigration may help explain the increase in the 2000s (Cohn, Livingston, & Wang, 2014). Exiting the labor force or working part-time, especially if it is for an extended period of time, leads to a lower accumulation of human capital and hence lower pay for women (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Conversely marriage is associated with higher earnings among men. This could happen either through "selection," as men with higher earnings are more likely to be perceived as desirable partners for marriage, or it could spur men to work harder to provide for their family (Juhn & McCue, 2017; Siassi, 2019).

Empirical Literature

The empirical literature indicates that the earnings pay gap has narrowed over time, as has the portion of it that cannot be explained by a variety of factors, such as work experience and occupations. Nevertheless, an unexplained portion, often attributed to discrimination, remains (Blau & Kahn, 2017; Budig & England, 2001; Juhn & McCue, 2017; U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Blau and Kahn (2017) find that the unadjusted ratio of women's to men's wages rose from 62 percent in 1980 to 79 percent in 2010; the adjusted ratio likewise rose, from 79 percent to 92 percent over the same period of time. Their adjusted models include education, work experience, region, race, and job-specific variables, including unionization, industry, and occupation. Among the most important variables explaining the wage gap were industry and occupation, as well as differences in gender roles

and the gender division of labor, especially in high-skill occupations. In a broad review of the literature, a U.S. Department of Labor (2009) report placed the unexplained gap in adjusted models as a little lower than that posited by Blau and Kahn, somewhere between 4.8 and 7.1 percent. With regards to factors that explain the gap, they also note the importance of women leaving the labor force, or working fewer hours to care for children, as well as the role of differences in occupations and industries.

Juhn and McCue (2017) focused on the role of marriage and children in explaining the gender earnings gap across cohorts, and found that earnings gap attributable to marriage has declined over time, but the gap attributable to children has been more persistent, and the proportion of the gap associated with children increased. More specifically, using data from the 1968 to 2014 Current Population Surveys (CPS), they found that among full-time, year round workers, at age 30 the earnings gap for those born in 1936 to 1945 was 0.54, and that marriage contributed 0.19 points to the gap and children another 0.10. But for the cohort born in 1976 to 1985, the overall gender earnings gap had fallen to 0.14, with marriage and children each contributing 0.04 to the gap. They conclude that women may still identify as the primary caretaker of children, and that workplaces continue to value employees who are willing to work long hours, an environment that tends to favor men. Similarly, Correll and her coauthors use the term “ideal worker” to refer to individuals who are expected by their employers to put work first and be perpetually available. This serves to disadvantage women, who are more likely to face the expectation of reconciling competing caregiving and workplace demands than men (Correll, Kelly, Connor, & Williams, 2014: 4).

It is also important to examine the underlying trends in earnings among men and women to understand the gap. Men’s earnings have been flat since the 1970s, with year-to-year fluctuations mainly associated with the business cycle. In 2018, the median earnings of all male full-time, year-round workers was \$55,291, nearly identical to the 1979 figure, \$55,046 (in 2019 inflation-adjusted dollars). In contrast, women’s earnings steadily increased, from lower levels, over the same period, from \$32,842 in 1979 to \$45,097 in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019c). Moreover, economic independence may have declined for young men in particular, in part as a result of delayed entry into the labor force due to more time in school, but also because of declining opportunities in jobs requiring lower levels of education, such as in manufacturing (Sironi & Furstenberg, 2012).

Furthermore, it is important to note that fewer young men and women are married than in the past. The last several decades have seen the expansion of the “second demographic transition,” which includes a rising age of marriage and nonmarital childbearing, a decline in fertility, and a decline in marriage rates overall, among other trends (Lesthaeghe, 2010). For example, in 1960 nearly 74 percent of households in the United States were headed by a married couple, which declined to under half by 2018. This decline has been accompanied by an increase in the number of people living in nonfamily households, such as living with housemates or alone (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019a). A significant percentage of people in recent cohorts are staying single, or to a less degree cycling in and out of cohabiting relationships (Y. Zhang & Ang, 2020). Those with higher levels of education are most likely to get married, and individuals often wait to get married until they have achieved a level of financial security and stability (Cherlin, 2009; Smock & Greenland, 2010). Low-skill men in

particular are less likely to marry, as they are seen as less “marriageable” in the eyes of women (McLanahan, 2004: 618; Oppenheimer, Kalmijn, & Lim, 1997).

Finally, while our paper does not focus on differences by race and ethnicity, research indicates that the gender earnings gap among full-time workers varies somewhat across groups, with a larger gap among whites (white women earn 78 percent of what white men did in 2019) and Asians (77 percent), than Hispanics (86 percent) and blacks (92 percent) (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2020b). These gaps likely vary due to a combination of factors, such as differences in human capital accumulation and discrimination (Snipp & Cheung, 2016), and perhaps work/family expectations. Sorting the mechanisms for all of these groups is beyond the scope of our analysis; nevertheless, we briefly discuss how our results vary by race and ethnicity and conclude that future research on this issue would be important.

Contributions

We synthesize these strands of the literature and expand on them in a few ways. First, we track the gender earnings gap among full-time, year round workers from the time it began it began to decline to the present, 1979 to 2018. We focus on men and women 25 to 29, an age when most have completed their education and are starting their careers. This yields a direct examination of contemporary barriers to mobility women face in their early years in the labor market. We provide a detailed accounting of the gap by marital status and presence of children, as these are thought to be important contributors to the gap.

Second, while previous studies have examined the effect of marriage and children on the gap, we delve further by examining the earnings of men and women in these categories over time. This allows us to see if the gap is mainly explained by the lower earnings of, say, married women compared to unmarried women, or the lower earnings of unmarried men compared to married men (or both), and how this has changed over time. The literature has described how children play a larger role in the gender earnings gap, at least relative to marriage, in more recent years than in past decades. We apply this to an examination of men’s and women’s earnings themselves. Do children lower the earnings of women more so than in the past, or does marriage lower them by less than in the past? Are the gender earnings gaps explained more by how these factors affect men’s earnings? These detailed analyses are especially important because of large changes in family living arrangements and different trends in earnings among men and women. As such, our analyses will shed light on the extent and contours of the gender earnings gap over time.

Data and Methods

The data for these analyses come from the 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2019 Current Population Survey (CPS), compiled and harmonized as part of the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-CPS) (Flood, King, Rodgers, Ruggles, & Warren, 2020). The CPS is a household survey sponsored jointly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau, and is the primary source of labor force statistics in the United States. We use data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), which contains detailed information about work, earnings, and demographics of respondents. The number of

households surveyed in the selected years varied from about 65,000 to 97,000. The analysis begins with the 1980 CPS (which collects information on respondents' incomes in the previous calendar year), as this marks the point just before the gender earnings gap began to decline. The sample includes people aged 25 to 29 in each of the years who work full-time, year round. We use the age range 25–29 because this is an age when most people will have completed their education (U.S. Census Bureau tables on educational attainment, for example, include only those 25 and over), but they are still early in their labor market experience. We also conducted sensitivity analysis with different cutoffs, as described below. We define full-time, year round workers as those who work on average at least 50 weeks in the previous year and 35 hours a week, for a total of at least 1,750 hours in the previous year. This definition is commonly used by the Census Bureau (and other researchers) in their annual report and tables (Semega, Kollar, Creamer, & Mohanty, 2019). We exclude people in the military and living in group quarters.

Our dependent variable is individual earnings. Earnings are measured as income from wages and salaries, business income (such as from self-employment), and farm (such as a tenant farmer or individuals who operate their own farms). To compare earnings over time, we adjust earnings using the Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers, research series (CPI-U-RS), which is also used in the Census Bureau times series (Semega et al., 2019). We calculate the median earnings in our descriptive analysis and we take the natural log of earnings for the regression analysis to reduce its skew.

Our main independent variables include dichotomous ones for gender, marital status (married or unmarried), and presence of children under 18 in the household. Other control variables include education, occupation, industry, race/ethnicity, age, education, region, and metropolitan status. We compute education with five categories: less than high school, high school only, some college, a Bachelor's degree, and postgraduate education. There is a discontinuity in the way information on educational attainment is collected over time in the CPS, especially with regard to postgraduate schooling. Specifically, before 1992 the question asked about number of years in college, and people who spent 5 or more years are considered as having received a postgraduate degree. Beginning in 1992 the question more directly asked what kind of advanced degree was acquired. Thus, our 1980 and 1990 data likely overstate the number of people with a graduate degree. Given our focus on gender disparities, this likely does not bias our results, as we do not have a reason to believe that this biases the level of educational attainment for one gender much more than the other. We define occupation with 19 categories and industry with 11 categories. We use the IPUMS-CPS crosswalk of these variables over the time period. We define racial and ethnic groups as consisting of the following mutually exclusive and exhaustive groups: non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, non-Hispanic of other races, and Hispanics. Asians are in the "other" race category because Asians were not separately enumerated in the 1980 CPS. Households are classified into four regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. There is a dummy variable for whether a person lives in a metropolitan area.

Analytical Strategy

The analysis proceeds as follows. We begin with a descriptive examination of the median earnings of men and women by marital status and presence of children over the 1979 to 2018 period. For parsimony, we focus on select years 1979, 1999, and 2018. This is followed by OLS regressions to see how the effects of gender, marital status, and presence of children have changed over time. We include interaction terms between gender and marriage and gender and the presence of children, given that the literature suggests that the effects of marriage and children on earnings vary by gender. We include models that examine the extent to which various individual and household characteristics explain the association between earnings and gender. Finally, we run regressions stratified by gender to examine whether the association between earnings and marital status and presence of children has changed over time for men and women.

We conducted additional analyses (with tables in the appendix) to examine the extent to which results vary for different groups. These included looking at racial/ethnic groups separately, combining full-time and part-time workers, and using a slightly different age cutoff (workers aged 24–30). The findings are described at the end of the Results section.

Results

Table 1 provides information about the key variables in our analysis, including median earnings, wages, marital status and presence of children, and educational attainment by selected years and gender. The table indicates that, among full-time, year-round workers aged 25 to 29, annual median earnings of men declined over time (in 2018 dollars), from about \$48,000 in 1979 to \$42,000 in 2019. Meanwhile, the earnings of such women increased from nearly \$33,000 to \$39,000. The corresponding ratio of women's to men's earnings increased from 0.68 in 1979 to 0.93 in 2018. The trend in wages (earnings divided by hours worked) was similar, though a little higher in all years, yielding a 0.95 ratio of women's to men's wages in 2018.

There was a substantial decline in the percentage of full-time working men and women aged 25 to 29 who were married or had children. Among men, the percentage who were married declined from 66 percent to 31 percent, while among women it declined from 54 percent to 33 percent. Educational attainment rose for both men and women. It should be noted that the decline in the proportion of men and women having a postgraduate degree from 1980 to 2000 is likely a function of a change in the way the questions was asked (as described in the data and methods section). The consistency in the question from 1999 to 2018 indicates a substantial increase in the percentage of people receiving a graduate degree over that period.

Table 2 provides a more detailed look at how median earnings of young full-time workers varied by marital status and presence of children over time. The first two rows show information that was in Table 1—overall, women earned 93 percent of what men did, or a 7 percent gap in 2018. The table also indicates that the gap was largest among men and women who are married with children, at 21 percent in 2018 (down from 40 percent in 1979). The gap was smallest among those who are not married and with no children, where there was no gap at all in 2018, down from an 18 percent gap in 1979. In fact, women's

wages were 5 percent higher than men's among this group in 2018. The gap was also relatively small among men and women with no children (who may or may not be married), at 3 percent in 2018.

The table also provides insight into the dynamics of earnings of men and women. Men's median earnings fell among all categories of marital and presence of children statuses, with the exception of little change among married men. Among other groups of men, 2018 median earnings were between 88 and 93 percent of 1979 levels. Among women, median earnings grew by 19 percent overall, with the largest gains for those who were married and married with children (24 percent). Parity between men and women who are not married and without children was realized by 2018 via a decline in men's earnings and a moderate increase in women's earnings in this group. The initial gap in 1979 between men and women in this group was also smaller than among other groups of men and women in that year.

The table also shows that the percent of men and women in the not married, no children category grew substantially over time. Sixty-four percent of men were not married with no children in 2018, up from 34 percent in 1979. For women the increase was from 33 percent to 54 percent over the period. In contrast, the percent of men who were married with children declined from 44 percent to just 16 percent from 1979 to 2018, and for women the decline was from 26 percent to 15 percent. These results are illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 3 shows results from OLS regression estimates of logged earnings over the 1979 to 2018 period. The first model includes dummy variables for gender and year, as well as gender*year interactions. The second model adds a few key variables including hours worked, family variables for whether the person is married and has children, and gender*family interactions, given that marriage and children are thought to have different effects on earnings of men and women. The third model adds the rest of the control variables, including education, occupation, industry, age, race and Hispanic origin, metropolitan status, and region. Results from the first model indicate that men have considerably higher earnings, but that the advantage for men declined significantly over time. The coefficient for the male dummy variable, 0.331, indicates that men earned 39 percent more ($\exp(0.331)=1.39$) than women in the omitted year, 1979. To calculate the gender difference in earnings in 2018 we add the first-order male term (0.331) to the male*2018 interaction term (-0.226), which indicates that men earn 11 percent more in that year ($\exp(0.331-0.226)=1.11$).¹ The year and male*year interaction terms conversely also indicate that while earnings generally increased over time, they did so less for men than women.

The second model has a smaller coefficient for Male (0.161), with the male earnings advantage again declining over time, and also varying according to family characteristics. To understand the effects of gender in this model we also have to take into account the interaction terms. Given the sign on the coefficients and interaction terms, we can see that the earnings advantage is greatest among men who are married with children in 1979. These

¹These earnings differences by gender are somewhat higher than shown in Table 1 because Table 1 shows differences in median earnings (rather than logged earnings), and Table 1 also indicates women's earnings as the percentage of men's while the coefficients in Table 2 show the men's earnings as a percentage of women's (i.e., different denominators).

men have earnings that are 55 percent greater ($\exp(0.161+0.91+0.188)=1.55$) than married women with children in that year. In contrast, men who were never married and without children in 2018 earned virtually the same ($\exp(0.161-0.159)=1.00$) as women who were never married and without children in that year. The first order terms for married and with children indicates that married people earned more than those who are unmarried, but people with children earn less than those without. However, consistent with the findings in the literature, the effect of marriage and children varies by gender, where being married is more beneficial for men than women and having children confers a smaller earnings disadvantage for men than women.

The final model with all of the control variables yields generally similar findings. The first-order male term changes little when controlling for education, occupation, industry, and other such variables. However, the estimated earnings increase over time (as indicated by the year dummy variables) is less pronounced (as the population became more educated). The male*year interaction terms also are modestly reduced in size, partly because of the growing women's advantage in educational attainment. In the full model, men's earnings advantage over women ranges from 50 percent ($\exp(0.167+0.075+0.167)=1.50$) in 1979 among married men and women with children to a low of 3 percent ($\exp(0.167-0.135)=1.03$) in 2018 among those who are not married and have no children. Among this group, the 3 percent difference is not statistically significant (as indicated by the statistical significance of the gender dummy coefficient when running a model using 2018 as the reference year).

Finally, Table 4 provides additional insight into the dynamics of men's and women's earnings separately by key the family variables over the 1979 to 2018 period. In the aggregate men's earnings did not change much over time, as indicated by the mostly nonsignificant year dummy variables.² Marriage is associated with 12 percent higher earnings among men in the full model. With our data, we cannot distinguish a possible causal effect from the positive selection of men into marital status—the latter being a factor that the literature suggests is important. Having children is associated with no earnings benefit in the first model but with 11 percent higher earnings in the full model. The family*year interaction terms indicate that while the positive association between earnings and marriage did not change over time, there is a negative interaction between children and three of the years (1989, 2009, and 2018). In the model without controls, men with children earn 13 percent less in 2018 than those without ($\exp(-0.007-0.133)=0.87$). In the full model, the earnings benefit of children declines from 11 percent to close to zero ($\exp(0.108-0.107)=1.00$). This indicates that the overall positive effect (either causal or due to selection) of children waned over time, such that by 2018 there is no association. The fact that the presence of children has a negative impact on men's earnings in the first model, but that this disappears in the full model, suggests that there is negative selection into parenthood based on observable characteristics, and, upon further inspection, education alone accounts for much of the change in the presence of children coefficients.

²The difference in the trend in men's earnings in the regression models versus those shown in Tables 1 and 2 is attributable to using median earnings in those tables versus logged earnings in the regressions. While median earnings of men in our sample declined from 1979 to 2018, mean earnings of men increased, reflecting growing income inequality. While taking the log of earnings reduces the skew, the mean of men's logged earnings remained relatively flat over the period.

Among women, earnings increased over time, though in the full model the increase is statistically significant only in 2018, indicating that educational and occupational upgrading were important factors in explaining the increase. In contrast to the results for men, being married and having children was associated with lower earnings in the full model (about 6 percent for each). However, the married*year interaction terms indicate that this was only true for the omitted year, 1979. By 1989, there was little difference between the earnings of married and unmarried women, and by 2018 married women have a six percent earnings advantage ($\exp(-0.062+0.129)=1.06$) over unmarried women. Again, this could be a causal relationship, or perhaps more probable, a stronger positive selection of people with higher earnings potential into marriage over time. Notably, the relatively modest effect of having children did not vary over time for women. Finally, the negative effect of having children among women is considerably larger in the model without controls, indicating a negative selection into parenthood based on observable characteristics, such as education.

Additional Analyses

As described earlier, we conducted a few additional analyses to examine the extent to which results vary across different groups. The first of these are by race and ethnicity, shown in Appendix Tables A1 and A2. In Table A1, we see that patterns for the population as a whole (shown in Table 3) similarly apply to whites. For other groups, the coefficients are typically (though not always) in the same direction, often similar in magnitude, but much less often statistically significant, likely reflecting smaller samples with larger standard errors. For example, the first-order male coefficient is 0.148 for whites, 0.110 for blacks, 0.261 for Hispanics, and 0.297 for Asians. The coefficient for blacks is not statistically significant. The gender*year interactions are negative for all groups, but are generally only significant for whites (with one exception for Hispanics (male*2018)).

The results for Asians span from 1989 to 2018, as Asians were not identified in the 1980 CPS. The point estimates for Hispanics and Asians tend to be larger than those for whites, and those for blacks somewhat smaller. The male*married coefficient is significant for whites only, but the point estimate is similar to that for Hispanics. The male*children coefficient is significant for whites and blacks, and smaller and not significant for Hispanics and Asians. Table A2 provides a fairly similar story. Overall, fewer coefficients are statistically significant, even for whites, but especially for other groups. They often point in the same direction across groups, though not always. In short, our analyses by race and ethnicity suggest that the trends for the overall population are evident for whites and are suggestive, but inconclusive, for other groups. We recommend that future research focus on racial and ethnic differences, especially with larger samples.

We ran additional analyses to see if our results are sensitive to the age group chosen. In Appendix Tables A3 and A4 we show results for young adults aged 24 to 30 (instead of 25 to 29, as shown in the main analysis). The results from these analyses are qualitatively similar to those shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Finally, while our paper focuses on the gender wage gap among full-time workers, as generally done in the literature, we ran analyses that include both full-time and part-time

workers, with a dummy variable for full-time workers. These results are shown in Appendix Tables A5 and A6. These results are once again largely consistent with the main regression tables (3 and 4).

Conclusion

We examined the gender earnings gap over the 1979 to 2018 period among full-time workers aged 25–29. Using data from multiple years of data from the Current Population Survey, we investigated not only on the earnings gap, but the earnings of these young men and women by their marital status and presence of children—two factors that have been strongly linked to the earnings gap in the past. By focusing on this age group, we get a clear picture of the barriers young people may face as they start their careers and begin forming families of their own.

Our results confirm some of those of past studies and also extend them. Among our key findings is that gender earnings gap declined over time, as the ratio of women's to men's median earnings increased from 0.68 in 1979 to 0.93 in 2018. The gap declined for men and women in all types of family situations. It was largest between men and women who were married with children (the ratio of women's earnings to men's among this group was 0.79 in 2018, up from 0.60 in 1979). Notably, we find that there was earnings parity among one group in particular: men and women who were unmarried and childless, where the ratio of women's earnings to men's was 1.00 in 2018, up from 0.82 in 1980. Also noteworthy is that only 16 percent of men and 15 percent women in the 25–29 age range in 2018 were married with children, down from 44 percent of men and 26 percent of women in 1980. In contrast, a majority of both men and women (64 percent and 54 percent, respectively) in 2018 were unmarried and without children—the category with earnings parity.

Our descriptive analysis of the earnings of men and women by marital status and presence of children indicated that median earnings fell for most groups of young men, except among those who were married, while they rose for all groups of women. Our final multivariate analysis on the earnings of men and women provided new insights. For men, marriage was positively associated with earnings with and without controls, and its effect changed little over time. In models without controls, children had little association with earnings initially in 1979, but had a negative association in most years thereafter. In models with controls, we also see dampening effect of having children on earnings over time, but it starts out as a positive effect in 1979 and turning into little effect in subsequent years. This suggests that there is a negative selection into parenthood based on observable characteristics for men. In contrast, the negative effects of children on women's earnings did not change over time, though we do see a general negative selection into parenthood in all time periods. The negative effect of marriage on earnings of women observed in 1979 was statistically insignificant by 1989, and was associated with higher earnings by 2018, likely indicating greater positive selection of women with high earnings potential into marriage.

Overall, our results are consistent with the notion that discriminatory barriers to women in the labor market have declined, as indicated by the reduction in the gender earnings gap (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Our finding that there is earnings parity among unmarried and

childless men and women, but greater gaps among those who are married and with children, suggests that family considerations and selection into such family living arrangements play a major role in the remaining disparity. Childbearing in particular is associated with lower earnings (Juhn & McCue, 2017). Our findings are not consistent with the literature that progress in reducing the gender gap has stalled (England, 2010; Ridgeway, 2011). This in part may reflect the fact that, more generally, while the earnings gap did not change much in the first decade of the 2000s (as noted in a number of articles), the 2010s saw the resumption of the gradual decline in the gap. For example, among full-time workers, women's earnings as a percentage of men's rose from 77 percent in 2011 to 82 percent in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019d). Our analyses are consistent with an overall long-term trend of a declining earnings gap among the young adult population.

With our cross-sectional data, we cannot discern whether marriage and/or childbearing has a direct effect on earnings and the gender gap, or whether there is selection into different kinds of living arrangements, which explains the apparent earnings differences. In either case, we do find that marriage no longer appears to confer any earnings disadvantage to women, as it once did (Goldin, 2006), and instead it is associated with greater earnings for both men and women. Because there does not seem to be a strong theoretical causal connection between marriage and earnings among women, we venture that the effect likely reflects a selection effect. The literature suggests that while many young women (and men) aspire to getting married, many feel it's either out of reach, or delay getting married until they are financially secure (Cherlin, 2009; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008; Smock & Greenland, 2010). The positive association between marriage and earnings for men also likely reflects this process, plus the long-held view that high-earning men are viewed as desirable partners for marriage (McLanahan, 2004; Oppenheimer et al., 1997).

Our finding that children continue to be associated with reduced earnings especially among women could reflect a causal mechanism, as taking time to care for children can take away time spent at work (Budig & England, 2001; Juhn & McCue, 2017). But it could also reflect selection—those who choose to have children may have an inclination to prioritize family over work. One of our novel findings is that, while the association between earnings and children has not changed over time for women, we see a growing negative association for men. Much of this can be explained by negative selection into parenthood based on observable characteristics, and education in particular. Nevertheless, the *dampening* of the overall positive association between parenthood and earnings for men in models with full controls suggests that men are spending more time caring for their children than in the past, especially as women are themselves more engaged in the labor market, or again selection, with an increase in the number of men who prioritize family over work as a function of changes in gender norms and cultural values toward childrearing (England & Srivastava, 2013; Raley, Bianchi, & Wang, 2012; Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004).

The cost of raising children and their association with lower wages, especially among women (along with the lack of positive impact among men by 2018), may help explain the steep decline in the proportion of both young men and women being married with children over the time period. Thus, the extent to which policy makers would like to reduce the costs of raising children, a number of policy approaches could be explored, such as providing

family allowances or greater child tax credits (Sawhill & Thomas, 2001), though the evidence on their impacts is beyond the scope of our discussion.

In conclusion, our study indicates that men and women increasingly enter the labor market on more even footing, but many likely struggle to find a balance between work and family. They also are postponing marriage and childbearing until they are better established in the labor force. Our study of the young adult population brings into focus the lack of formal labor market barriers that differentially affect women among those who are unmarried and without children. However, our results are consistent with evidence suggesting that the earnings gap continues to deepen for young people as they proceed through the life course (Juhn & McCue, 2017) (Blau & Kahn, 2017), an important point given that a majority of men and women will likely end up getting married and having children.

Our findings are also consistent with the broader literature on the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 2010), which indicates that in many developed countries there is a general retreat from marriage and declines in fertility to sub-replacement levels, as has occurred in the United States (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, & Driscoll, 2019). This is driven by a number of factors, including the increasing value placed on individual autonomy and freedom that might to some extent be at odds with the responsibilities that come with family and children. Conversely, those who choose to have children—especially women, but increasingly men—may often do so because they value them above work and earnings.

These findings have implications for how we think about and discuss labor market disparities between men and women. They suggest that overt discrimination may be less of a factor shaping differences in labor market outcomes between men and women than in previous decades. However, other important questions remain. First, there is an important issue of the extent to which work that's traditionally fallen in women's domain is valued less than that of men. Certainly, a systematic devaluation of certain types of work that maps onto gender divisions is worthy of further concern. Second, there are questions around the extent to which gender norms continue to serve as constraints. Norms that prevent individuals from achieving their full potential are generally inconsistent with a free and productive society. Moreover, to the extent that restrictive gender norms create a pipeline problem, that too is something meriting serious attention. At a minimum, the current analysis suggests that the narrative around gender pay differences needs more nuance than a simple focus on labor market discrimination. As stated at the outset, as with any social problem, progress depends on having a clear understanding of its patterns and causes.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the National Institutes of Health, Population Research Institute Center Grant, R24HD041025.

Appendix

Appendix Table A1.

OLS Regressions Estimates of Logged Earnings by Race/Ethnicity, 1979–2018

	White			Black		Hispanic			Asian			
	Coeff	Std Err		Coeff	Std Err		Coeff	Std Err		Coeff	Std Err	
Male	0.148	0.026	***	0.110	0.066		0.261	0.084	**	0.297	0.134	*
Year												
1979 (omitted)												
1989	0.027	0.024		−0.049	0.056		−0.066	0.078				
1999	0.108	0.025	***	0.045	0.055		0.019	0.075		0.216	0.119	
2009	0.129	0.025	***	0.024	0.057		0.046	0.072		0.310	0.113	**
2018	0.160	0.025	***	0.034	0.054		0.066	0.071		0.268	0.110	*
Gender * year interactions												
Male *1989	−0.095	0.030	**	−0.016	0.075		−0.093	0.094				
Male *1999	−0.161	0.031	***	−0.080	0.076		−0.170	0.090		−0.228	0.154	
Male *2009	−0.101	0.033	**	−0.070	0.079		−0.163	0.088		−0.220	0.150	
Male *2018	−0.141	0.032	***	−0.090	0.073		−0.172	0.086	*	−0.154	0.143	
Hours worked (000s)	0.154	0.013	***	0.265	0.035	***	0.122	0.028	***	−0.082	0.059	
Family variables												
Married	0.032	0.016	*	0.156	0.036	***	0.033	0.034		0.131	0.073	
With children	−0.139	0.017	***	−0.093	0.033	**	−0.050	0.034		−0.127	0.087	
Gender * family interactions												
Male * married	0.086	0.022	***	−0.058	0.056		0.083	0.046		−0.033	0.101	
Male * children	0.212	0.024	***	0.174	0.054	**	0.017	0.046		−0.018	0.128	
All control variables		X			X			X			X	
Intercept	8.463	0.107	***	8.870	0.259	***	9.648	0.218	***	9.199		
N		24,717		3,339			5,964			1,437		
R-Sq		0.147			0.189			0.119			0.222	

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001

¹ Control variables include education, occupation, industry, age, metropolitan status, and region.

Appendix Table A2.

OLS Regressions Estimates of Logged Earnings, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 1979–2018

	Men											C		
	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian		White					
	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err				
Year														
1979 (omitted)														
1989	−0.042	0.033		−0.039	0.078	−0.151	0.106			−0.015	0.030	0.		
1999	−0.026	0.034		−0.061	0.081	−0.203	0.105	0.121	0.134	0.038	0.031	0.		
2009	0.044	0.035		−0.031	0.080	−0.124	0.101	0.152	0.135	0.043	0.031	−0.		
2018	0.031	0.033		−0.050	0.073	−0.085	0.098	0.222	0.126	0.094	0.029	*** 0.		
Family variables														
Married	0.123	0.039	**	0.056	0.115	0.028	0.152	0.148	0.209	−0.061	0.030	* 0.		
With children	0.105	0.038	**	0.101	0.115	0.048	0.136	0.166	0.258	−0.109	0.032	*** −0.		
Family * year interactions														
Married *1989	0.019	0.053		−0.044	0.150	0.005	0.180			0.082	0.040	* −0.		
Married *1999	−0.063	0.055		0.160	0.150	0.123	0.169	0.054	0.254	0.114	0.041	** 0.		
Married *2009	0.021	0.057		0.189	0.166	0.071	0.164	−0.031	0.258	0.137	0.043	** 0.		
Married *2018	0.017	0.055		−0.034	0.155	0.144	0.163	−0.099	0.238	0.103	0.042	* 0.		
Children *1989	−0.115	0.053	*	−0.009	0.152	−0.041	0.166			−0.008	0.043	−0.		
Children *1999	0.015	0.056		−0.055	0.153	−0.046	0.154	−0.924	0.336	**	−0.011	0.044	−0.	
Children *2009	−0.065	0.058		−0.189	0.167	−0.064	0.149	−0.139	0.321		0.027	0.045	−0.	
Children *2018	−0.043	0.058		0.055	0.149	−0.204	0.148	−0.315	0.305		−0.013	0.045	0.	
All control variables		X			X		X				X			
Intercept	8.398	0.152	***	9.071	0.367	9.749	0.297	***	9.298	0.697	***	8.865	0.144	*** 8.
N		14,492			1,615		3,643		778			10,225		
R-Sq		0.105			0.173		0.091		0.219			0.216		

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001

/ Control variables include hours worked, education, occupation, industry, age, metropolitan status, and region.

Appendix Table A3.

OLS Regressions Estimates of Logged Earnings for People Age 24–30, 1979–2018

	Coeff	Std Err	
Male	0.176	0.019	***
Year			
1979 (omitted)			
1989	0.009	0.017	
1999	0.083	0.017	***
2009	0.104	0.018	***
2018	0.124	0.017	***
Gender * year interactions			
Male *1989	−0.088	0.022	***
Male *1999	−0.147	0.022	***
Male *2009	−0.112	0.023	***
Male *2018	−0.140	0.022	***
Hours worked (000s)	0.151	0.009	***
Family variables			
Married	0.043	0.011	***
With children	−0.095	0.011	***
Gender * family interactions			
Male * married	0.076	0.015	***
Male * children	0.149	0.016	***
All control variables ^I		X	
Intercept	8.548	0.058	***
N		50,016	
R-Sq		0.168	

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001

^I Control variables include education, occupation, industry, age, race and Hispanic origin, metropolitan status, and region.**Appendix Table A4.**

OLS Regressions Estimates of Logged Earnings for People Age 24–30, by Gender, 1979–2018

	Men			Women	
	Coeff	Std Err		Coeff	Std Err
Year					
1979 (omitted)					
1989	−0.060	0.023	*	−0.005	0.023
1999	−0.041	0.024		0.032	0.023
2009	0.014	0.024		0.027	0.023
2018	0.009	0.022		0.061	0.021
					**

	Men			Women		
	Coeff	Std Err		Coeff	Std Err	
Family variables						
Married	0.107	0.029	***	-0.042	0.023	
With children	0.101	0.028	***	-0.056	0.024	*
Family * year interactions						
Married *1989	0.015	0.039		0.026	0.031	
Married *1999	-0.020	0.039		0.109	0.031	***
Married *2009	0.043	0.040		0.138	0.031	***
Married *2018	0.035	0.038		0.111	0.030	***
Children *1989	-0.076	0.038	*	-0.004	0.032	
Children *1999	-0.030	0.039		-0.041	0.031	
Children *2009	-0.098	0.040	*	-0.012	0.032	
Children *2018	-0.094	0.039	*	-0.027	0.031	
All control variables [/]	X			X		
Intercept	8.607	0.081	***	8.837	0.086	***
N	29,084			20,932		
R-Sq	0.138			0.220		

*
p < .05;

p < .01;

p < .001

[/] Control variables include hours worked, education, occupation, industry, age, race and Hispanic origin, metropolitan status, and region.

Appendix Table A5.

OLS Regressions Estimates of Logged Earnings, Including Full- and Part-Timer Workers, 1979–2018

	Coeff	Std Err	
Male	0.187	0.021	***
Year			
1979 (omitted)			
1989	0.045	0.018	*
1999	0.140	0.019	***
2009	0.171	0.019	***
2018	0.216	0.018	***
Gender * year interactions			
Male *1989	-0.152	0.024	***
Male *1999	-0.226	0.025	***
Male *2009	-0.180	0.025	***
Male *2018	-0.213	0.025	***
Hours worked (000s)	0.658	0.010	***
Family variables			
Married	0.019	0.012	

	Coeff	Std Err	
With children	-0.141	0.012	***
Gender * family interactions			
Male * married	0.103	0.018	***
Male * children	0.183	0.018	***
All control variables ^I	X		
Intercept	7.344	0.081	***
N		50,782	
R-Sq		0.410	

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001

^IControl variables include full-time work status, education, occupation, industry, age, race and Hispanic origin, metropolitan status, and region.

Appendix Table A6.

OLS Regressions Estimates of Logged Earnings for Full- and Part-Time Workers, by Gender, 1979–2018

	Men			Women		
	Coeff	Std Err		Coeff	Std Err	
Year						
1979 (omitted)						
1989	-0.093	0.026	***	-0.072	0.028	*
1999	-0.067	0.026	*	-0.033	0.029	
2009	-0.015	0.026		0.001	0.028	
2018	0.028	0.025		0.068	0.027	*
Family variables						
Married	0.104	0.033	**	-0.119	0.027	***
With children	0.120	0.033	***	-0.148	0.027	***
Family * year interactions						
Married * 1989	0.032	0.044		0.141	0.036	***
Married * 1999	0.019	0.045		0.199	0.037	***
Married * 2009	0.078	0.044		0.184	0.037	***
Married * 2018	0.043	0.044		0.158	0.036	***
Children * 1989	-0.094	0.045	*	0.041	0.036	
Children * 1999	-0.069	0.046		0.067	0.036	
Children * 2009	-0.115	0.045	*	0.101	0.036	**
Children * 2018	-0.139	0.046	**	0.060	0.036	
All control variables ^I	X			X		
Intercept	7.625	0.113	***	7.514	0.117	***
N		26,433			24,349	
R-Sq		0.314			0.495	

* p < .05;

**
p < .01;

p < .001

/ Control variables include hours worked, education, occupation, industry, age, race and Hispanic origin, metropolitan status, and region.

References

- Alers M, van Leerdam L, Dielissen P, & Lagro-Janssen A (2014). Gendered specialities during medical education: a literature review. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 3(3), 163–178. 10.1007/s40037-014-0132-1 [PubMed: 24980516]
- Association of American Medical Colleges. (2017). 2017 Applicant and Matriculant Data Tables. Retrieved from https://aamc-black.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/5c/26/5c262575-52f9-4608-96d6-a78cdaa4b203/2017_applicant_and_matriculant_data_tables.pdf
- Baughman R, & Dickert-conlin S (2009). The earned income tax credit and fertility. *Journal of Population Economics*, 22, 537–563. 10.1007/s00148-007-0177-0
- Beede D, Julian T, & Langdon D (2013). Women in stem: A gender gap to innovation. *STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Workforce Trends and Policy Considerations*, 51–61.
- Blau FD, Brummund P, & Liu AYH (2013). Trends in Occupational Segregation by Gender 1970–2009: Adjusting for the Impact of Changes in the Occupational Coding System. *Demography*, 50(2), 471–492. 10.1007/s13524-012-0151-7 [PubMed: 23055237]
- Blau FD, & Kahn LM (2017). the Gender Wage Gap. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 55(3), 789–865. 10.2307/j.ctt1tm7gsm.15
- Budig MJ, & England P (2001). The Wage Penalty for Motherhood. *American Sociological Review*, 66(2), 204–225.
- Ceci SJ, Williams WM, & Barnett SM (2009). Women's Underrepresentation in Science: Sociocultural and Biological Considerations. *Psychological Bulletin*, 135(2), 218–261. 10.1037/a0014412 [PubMed: 19254079]
- Cherlin AJ (2009). *No TitleThe Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Cohn D, Livingston G, & Wang W (2014). After Decades of Decline, A Rise in Stay-at-Home Mothers. Retrieved from <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/04/08/after-decades-of-decline-a-rise-in-stay-at-home-mothers/>
- Coontz S (2012, 9 29). The Myth of Male Decline. *The New York Times Sunday Review*.
- Correll SJ, Kelly EL, Connor LTO, & Williams JC (2014). Redesigning , Redefining Work. *Work and Occupations*, 41(1), 3–17. 10.1177/0730888413515250
- Costa DL (2000). From mill town to board room: The rise of women's paid labor. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14(4), 101–122. 10.1257/jep.14.4.101
- England P (2010). The gender revolution: Uneven and stalled. *Gender and Society*, 24(2), 149–166. 10.1177/0891243210361475
- England P, & Srivastava A (2013). Educational differences in US parents' time spent in child care: The role of culture and cross-spouse influence. *Social Science Research*, 42(4), 971–988. 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2013.03.003 [PubMed: 23721668]
- Flood S, King M, Rodgers R, Ruggles S, & Warren RJ (2020). Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 7.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2020.
- Gauthier AH (2007). The impact of family policies on fertility in industrialized countries : a review of the literature. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 26, 323–346. 10.1007/s11113-007-9033-x
- Goldin C (1990). *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goldin C (2006). The quiet revolution that transformed women's employment, education, and family. *American Economic Review*, 96(2), 1–21. 10.1257/000282806777212350

- Hartmann HI, & Treiman DJ (1983). Notes on the NAS Study of Equal Pay for Jobs of Equal Value. *Public Personnel Management Journal*, 12(4), 404–417. 10.1177/009102608301200410
- Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2020a). Pay Equity and Discrimination. Retrieved April 15, 2020, from Employment, Education & Economic Change website: <https://iwpr.org/issue/employment-education-economic-change/pay-equity-discrimination/>
- Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2020b). The Gender Wage Gap : 2019 Earnings Differences by Race and Ethnicity. Retrieved from <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/2020-Weekly-Wage-Gap-2020-FINAL.pdf>
- Juhn C, & McCue K (2017). Specialization Then and Now: Marriage, Children, and the Gender Earnings Gap across Cohorts. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(1), 183–204. 10.1257/jep.31.1.183
- Kahn S, & Ginther D (2017). Women in Stem. In NBER working paper (No. Working Paper 23525). Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w23525%0ANATIONAL>
- Lesthaeghe R (2010). The unfolding story of the second demographic transition. *Population and Development Review*, 36(2), 211–251. 10.1111/j.1728-4457.2010.00328.x
- Lippa RA (2010). Gender Differences in Personality and Interests: When, Where, and Why? *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, Vol. 4, pp. 1098–1110. 10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00320.x
- Mann A, & DiPrete TA (2013). Trends in gender segregation in the choice of science and engineering majors. *Social Science Research*, 42(6), 1519–1541. 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2013.07.002 [PubMed: 24090849]
- Martin JA, Hamilton BE, Osterman MJK, & Driscoll AK (2019). National Vital Statistics Reports Births : Final Data for 2018. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 68(13), 1–46.
- McLanahan S (2004). Diverging Destinies: How Children are Faring Under the Second Demographic Transition. *Demography*, 41(4), 607–627. [PubMed: 15622946]
- McLanahan S, & Percheski C (2008). Family Structure and the Reproduction of Inequalities. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34(1), 257–276. 10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134549
- Moss-Racusin CA, Dovidio JF, Brescoll VL, Graham MJ, & Handelsman J (2012). Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 109(41), 16474–16479. 10.1073/pnas.1211286109 [PubMed: 22988126]
- Oppenheimer VK, Kalmijn M, & Lim N (1997). Men's career development and marriage timing during a period of rising inequality. *Demography*, 34(3), 311–330. 10.2307/3038286 [PubMed: 9275242]
- Perry MJ (2018). Table of the Day: Bachelor's degrees for the Class of 2016 by field and gender. Oh, and the overall 25.6% degree gap for men!le
- Raley S, Bianchi SM, & Wang W (2012). When do fathers care? Mothers' economic contribution and fathers' involvement in child care. *American Journal of Sociology*, 117(5), 1422–1459. 10.1086/663354
- Ridgeway CL (2006). Gender as an organizing force in social relations: Implications for the future of inequality In Blau FD, Brinton MC, & Grusky DB (Eds.), *The Declining Significance of Gender?* (pp. 265–287). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Ridgeway CL (2011). *Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roos PA, & Stevens LM (2018). Integrating occupations: Changing occupational sex segregation in the United States from 2000 to 2014. *Demographic Research*, 38(1), 127–154. 10.4054/DemRes.2018.38.5
- Rosin H (2012). *The End of Men: And the Rise of Women*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Sawhill I, & Thomas A (2001). *A Tax Proposal for Working Families with Children*. Washington, D.C.
- Sayer LC, Bianchi SM, & Robinson JP (2004). Are parents investing less in children? Trends in mothers' and fathers' time with children. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(1), 1–43. 10.1086/386270
- Schellekens J (2009). Family allowances and fertility: socioeconomic differences*. *Demography*, 46(3), 451–468. [PubMed: 19771939]

- Semega J, Kollar M, Creamer J, & Mohanty A (2019). Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018. Report # P60–266. Current Population Reports, (9), 1–88. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.pdf>
- Siassi N (2019). Inequality and the marriage gap. *Review of Economic Dynamics*, 31, 160–181. 10.1016/j.red.2018.06.004
- Sironi M, & Furstenberg FF (2012). Trends in the Economic Independence of Young Adults in the United States: 1973–2007. *Population and Development Review*, 38(4), 609–630. 10.1111/j.1728-4457.2012.00529.x
- Smock PJ, & Greenland FR (2010). Diversity in pathways to parenthood: Patterns, implications, and emerging research directions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 72, pp. 576–593. 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00719.x
- Snipp CM, & Cheung SY (2016). Changes in Racial and Gender Inequality since 1970. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 663(1), 80–98. 10.1177/0002716215596959
- Steinpreis RE, Anders KA, & Ritzke D (1999). The impact of gender on the review of the curricula vitae of job applicants and tenure candidates: A national empirical study. *Sex Roles*, 41(7–8), 509–528. 10.1023/A:1018839203698
- Su R, Rounds J, & Armstrong PI (2009). Men and Things, Women and People: A Meta-Analysis of Sex Differences in Interests. *Psychological Bulletin*, 135(6), 859–884. 10.1037/a0017364 [PubMed: 19883140]
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2019a). FM-2. All Parent/Child Situations by Type, Race, and Hispanic Origin of the Householder or Reference Person: 1970 to Present Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/families.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2019b). Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed High School or College, by Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex: Selected Years 1940 to 2019. Retrieved April 1, 2020, from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/educational-attainment/cps-historical-time-series.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2019c). Table P-38. Full-Time, Year-Round All Workers by Median Earnings and Sex: 1960 to 2018 Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-people.html>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2019d). Women's Earnings as a Percentage of Men's Earnings by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1960–2017. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-people.html>
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2009). An Analysis of Reasons for the Disparity in Wages Between Men and Women Containing A.
- Ward SF (2016). Women outnumber men in law schools for first time, newly updated data show. *ABA Journal*
- Williams WM, & Ceci SJ (2015). National hiring experiments reveal 2:1 faculty preference for women on STEM tenure track. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 112(17), 5360–5365. 10.1073/pnas.1418878112 [PubMed: 25870272]
- Zhang J, Quan J, Meerbergen P. Van, The S, Resources H, Winter N, ... Meerbergen P. Van. (1994). The Effect of Tax-Transfer Policies on Fertility in Canada , 1921–88 Communication The Effect of Tax-Transfer Policies on Fertility in Canada , 1921–88. 29(1), 181–201.
- Zhang Y, & Ang S (2020). Trajectories of Union Transition in Emerging Adulthood: Socioeconomic Status and Race/Ethnicity Differences in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 Cohort. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(2), 713–732. 10.1111/jomf.12662

Figure 1.
Ratio of Women's Earnings to Men's Among 25 to 29 Year Old Full-Time Workers, by
Marital Status and Presence of Children: 1979–2018

Table 1.

Characteristics of Fulltime Workers Aged 25–29, by Gender: 1979, 1999, and 2018

	Men			Women			Ratio, Women/Men				
	1979	1999	2018	Ratio,2018/1979	1979	1999	2018	Ratio,2018/1979	1979	1999	2018
Income											
Median earnings (\$2018)	\$ 47,964	\$ 45,356	\$ 42,000	0.88	\$ 32,677	\$ 37,796	\$ 39,000	1.19	0.68	0.83	0.93
Median wages (\$2018)	\$ 21.0	\$ 19.4	\$ 19.2	0.92	\$ 15.8	\$ 17.4	\$ 18.3	1.16	0.75	0.90	0.95
Hours worked in previous year	2,287	2,289	2,234	0.98	2,107	2,172	2,146	1.02	0.92	0.95	0.96
Family											
Married	65.7	47.6	30.7	0.47	54.0	45.1	32.9	0.61	0.82	0.95	1.07
Has a child	45.2	34.6	21.7	0.48	38.5	39.2	28.4	0.74	0.85	1.13	1.31
Education											
Less than high school	12.3	11.2	5.6	0.46	7.0	4.3	2.3	0.33	0.57	0.39	0.40
High school	38.4	32.1	28.2	0.73	42.3	25.5	18.3	0.43	1.10	0.79	0.65
Some college	24.0	27.4	27.4	1.14	22.4	32.7	28.1	1.26	0.93	1.19	1.03
BA	16.9	24.5	30.7	1.81	19.8	30.0	37.5	1.89	1.17	1.22	1.22
Postgraduate	8.3	4.7	8.1	0.98	8.6	7.5	13.8	1.60	1.04	1.59	1.70
N	5,484	3,238	3,682		3,203	2,411	3,041				

Source: IPUMS-CPS

Table 2.
Earnings of Full-Time Workers Aged 25–29, by Gender, Marital Status, and Presence of Children: 1979–2018

	Men				Women				Ratio, Women/Men			
	1979	1999	2018	Ratio,2018/1979	1979	1999	2018	Ratio,2018/1979	1979	1999	2018	
All full-time workers (ages 25–29)												
Median earnings (\$2018)	\$ 47,964	\$ 45,356	\$ 42,000	0.88	\$ 32,677	\$ 37,796	\$ 39,000	1.19	0.68	0.83	0.93	
Median wages (\$2018)	\$ 21.0	\$ 19.4	\$ 19.2	0.92	\$ 15.8	\$ 17.4	\$ 18.3	1.16	0.75	0.90	0.95	
Percent of full-time male and female workers	100%	100%	100%		100%	100%	100%					
Married												
Median earnings (\$2018)	\$ 48,530	\$ 46,384	\$ 49,100	1.01	\$ 32,353	\$ 37,796	\$ 40,000	1.24	0.67	0.81	0.81	
Median wages (\$2018)	\$ 21.8	\$ 20.9	\$ 21.6	0.99	\$ 15.6	\$ 17.8	\$ 19.2	1.24	0.71	0.85	0.89	
Percent of full-time male and female workers	66%	48%	31%		54%	45%	33%					
Not married												
Median earnings (\$2018)	\$ 43,030	\$ 40,820	\$ 40,000	0.93	\$ 33,971	\$ 37,291	\$ 38,000	1.12	0.79	0.91	0.95	
Median wages (\$2018)	\$ 19.4	\$ 18.2	\$ 18.3	0.94	\$ 16.1	\$ 16.8	\$ 17.5	1.09	0.83	0.92	0.96	
Percent of full-time male and female workers	34%	52%	69%		46%	55%	67%					
With children												
Median earnings (\$2018)	\$ 48,530	\$ 43,844	\$ 43,000	0.89	\$ 29,118	\$ 30,237	\$ 32,000	1.10	0.60	0.69	0.74	
Median wages (\$2018)	\$ 21.8	\$ 19.2	\$ 19.2	0.88	\$ 14.0	\$ 14.6	\$ 15.4	1.10	0.64	0.76	0.80	
Percent of full-time male and female workers	45%	35%	22%		39%	39%	28%					
No children												
Median earnings (\$2018)	\$ 45,295	\$ 45,356	\$ 42,000	0.93	\$ 35,589	\$ 42,332	\$ 40,800	1.15	0.79	0.93	0.97	
Median wages (\$2018)	\$ 20.2	\$ 19.6	\$ 19.2	0.95	\$ 17.0	\$ 18.9	\$ 19.2	1.13	0.84	0.97	1.00	
Percent of full-time male and female workers	55%	65%	78%		61%	61%	72%					
Married, with children												
Median earnings (\$2018)	\$ 48,530	\$ 45,356	\$ 45,477	0.94	\$ 29,118	\$ 33,261	\$ 36,000	1.24	0.60	0.73	0.79	
Median wages (\$2018)	\$ 21.8	\$ 19.6	\$ 20.6	0.94	\$ 14.2	\$ 15.7	\$ 17.3	1.22	0.65	0.80	0.84	
Percent of full-time male and female workers	44%	30%	16%		26%	23%	15%					
Not married, no children												
Median earnings (\$2018)	\$ 43,192	\$ 42,332	\$ 40,000	0.93	\$ 35,589	\$ 40,820	\$ 40,000	1.12	0.82	0.96	1.00	
Median wages (\$2018)	\$ 19.4	\$ 18.2	\$ 18.3	0.94	\$ 16.8	\$ 18.3	\$ 19.2	1.15	0.86	1.01	1.05	

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

	Men			Women			Ratio, Women/Men				
	1979	1999	2018	Ratio,2018/1979	1979	1999	2018	Ratio,2018/1979	1979	1999	2018
Percent of full-time male and female workers	34%	48%	64%		33%	39%	54%				

Source: IPUMS-CPS

Table 3.

OLS Regressions Estimates of Logged Earnings, 1979–2018

	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err	Coeff	Std Err
Male	0.331	0.021	***	0.161	0.024	***
Year						
1979 (omitted)						
1989	0.063	0.022	**	0.050	0.022	*
1999	0.152	0.022	***	0.151	0.022	***
2009	0.174	0.022	***	0.178	0.022	***
2018	0.226	0.021	***	0.210	0.021	***
Gender * year interactions						
Male * 1989	−0.146	0.028	***	−0.120	0.028	***
Male * 1999	−0.226	0.029	***	−0.202	0.028	***
Male * 2009	−0.201	0.029	***	−0.160	0.029	***
Male * 2018	−0.226	0.027	***	−0.159	0.027	***
Hours worked (000s)						
Family variables						
Married				0.095	0.014	***
With children				−0.286	0.014	***
Gender * family interactions						
Male married				0.091	0.019	***
Male children				0.188	0.020	***
All control variables						
Intercept	10.332	0.017	***	10.009	0.030	***
N		36,209			36,209	
R-Sq		0.015			0.039	

* p < .05;

** p < .01;

*** p < .001

Control variables include education, occupation, industry, age, race and Hispanic origin, metropolitan status, and region.

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Table 4.

OLS Regressions Estimates of Logged Earnings, by Gender, 1979–2018

Year	Men			Women		
	Coeff	Std Err		Coeff	Std Err	
1979 (omitted)						
1989	-0.031	0.030	-0.037	0.030	0.029	-0.014
1999	-0.023	0.030	-0.035	0.098	0.030	**
2009	0.025	0.030	0.028	0.085	0.029	**
2018	0.067	0.028	* 0.034	0.136	0.027	***
Family variables						**
Married	0.163	0.037	*** 0.112	0.035	0.030	-0.062
With children	-0.007	0.035	0.108	0.034	0.030	***
Family * year interactions						*
Married * 1989	0.030	0.049	0.004	0.046	0.039	*
Married * 1999	0.000	0.050	-0.025	0.047	0.039	***
Married * 2009	0.061	0.050	0.036	0.047	0.040	***
Married * 2018	0.057	0.048	0.031	0.045	0.039	***
Children * 1989	-0.133	0.049	** -0.102	0.046	0.041	-0.026
Children * 1999	-0.066	0.050	-0.031	0.047	0.040	*
Children * 2009	-0.115	0.051	* -0.098	0.048	0.041	-0.005
Children * 2018	-0.133	0.049	** -0.107	0.047	0.040	-0.036
All control variables ¹			X			X
Intercept	10.558	0.023	*** 8.684	0.122	0.023	*** 9.099
N		20,940				15,269
R-Sq		0.011		0.128	0.053	0.220

*
p < .05;

**

p < .01;

p < .001

Control variables include hours worked, education, occupation, industry, age, race and Hispanic origin, metropolitan status, and region.

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript

Author Manuscript