

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In 2009, 89.8 percent of female and male young adults aged 18–24 had earned a high school or general equivalency degree; this is an increase from the 1972 level of 82.3 percent (data not shown).¹² While there has not been a sex disparity in high school educational attainment, a large disparity in post-secondary educational attainment has been eliminated or reversed over the last four decades. In 1969–1970, men earned a majority of every type of post-secondary degree, while in 2008–2009, women earned more than half of all associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees, and

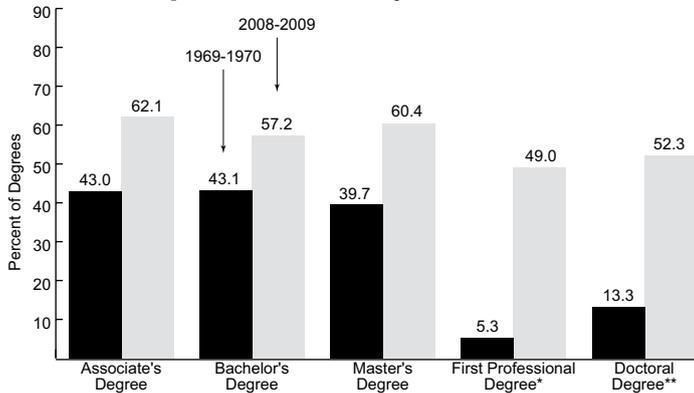
nearly half of all first professional degrees. The most significant increase has been in the proportion of first professional degree earners who are women, which jumped from 5.3 percent in 1969–1970 to 49.0 percent in 2008–2009. Although the sex disparity in degrees awarded has disappeared or reversed, there are still disparities by discipline. For example, women are under-represented in science and technology and over-represented in education and nursing.¹³

There are also racial and ethnic disparities in educational attainment. Although slightly more than one-third of all young adult women had a college degree in 2008–2010, this ranged from

15 percent or less of Hispanic, non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander women to more than 60 percent of non-Hispanic Asian women. Hispanic and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native young adult women were most likely to lack a high school diploma (27.6 and 14.9 percent, respectively). Education confers great benefit to health status both through greater knowledge of risk and protective factors, as well as the economic resources to facilitate healthy behaviors.¹⁴ Increasing educational attainment will depend, in part, on improving school quality and the affordability of college.

Degrees Awarded to Women, by Type, 1969–1970 and 2008–2009

Source I.9: U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics



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

Educational Attainment Among Women Aged 25–29, by Race/Ethnicity, 2008–2010

Source I.10: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

