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Race and Ethnicity  
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Issue Brief

### Issue Brief: Women/Gender Issues and Discrimination

#### **Key Words (4-6):**

Women, Discrimination, Gender, Workplace, Equality, Contraception, Abortion

#### **Description (2 Sentences):**

This issue brief will investigate the topic of discrimination in the United States as it relates to women and issues that have arisen regarding gender equality. It will examine the perceived and factual inequalities that have arisen in American society in regards to this issue.

#### **Key Points (4-6):**

- The United States has encountered the issue of gender discrimination since the middle of the Nineteenth Century.
- Most important moment was the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.
- Since the obtainment of Suffrage Rights, women have also progressed in receiving due social rights and equalities.
- Most pertinent issue in recent history is fair and equal employment as well as the wage gap between men and women, as well as differences in workforce participation.
- The wage gap is a current ongoing issue in the United States that headlines gender based discrimination.

#### **Issue Brief (500-700 Words):**

The United States of America is a nation that is traditionally perceived by many around the world to be an accepting, welcoming, “melting pot” of races, genders, sexualities, and backgrounds. However, the US has also encountered the historic reoccurring theme of discrimination based upon these exact differences. While the most well known movement towards ending these discriminations and promoting equality was the famed Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s, the

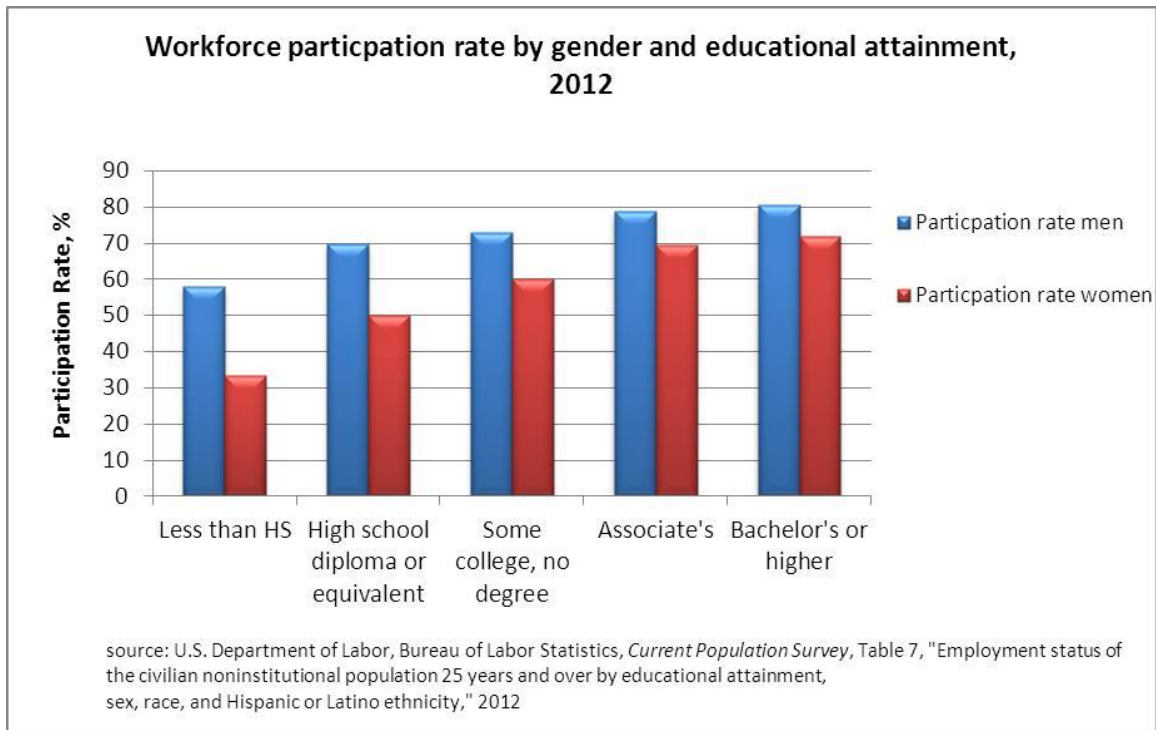
movement for Women's Rights and equality in America has also been very notable and important for social and political development.

The Women's Rights Movement in the United States dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when the first organized meeting on the issue was held in the famed convention in Seneca Falls, New York, led by Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott. The resulting action of the convention was a draft including a set of 12 resolutions that were aimed at achieving equality for women in American society, with the right to vote being a prominent desire. The momentum from this convention drove the movement until the groundbreaking moment in 1869, when the state of Wyoming decided to pass a state law allowing for women's suffrage. While three other states, Idaho, Utah, and Colorado, followed suit by enfranchising women by the end of the 1800's, the push for women's rights began to gain significant traction in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Preceded by a series of national protests that including demonstrating in front of the White House, the United States Senate decided on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1920, for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which made it illegal for any citizen of the United States to be denied the right to vote or run for office based upon their gender.

While the momentous decision for Women's Suffrage in 1920 accomplished legitimization by the federal government in a sense, the push for gender-based equality against discrimination has not slowed down, as women continue to pursue equivalence to men in other facets of society. For example, in terms of social equality, Margaret Sanger founded the Planned Parenthood Foundation in 1942, which lobbied for the right for women to legally undergo contraceptive measures if

they so desire. This wish was brought to fruition by the 1960 decision by the FDA to approve birth control pills in America. The Supreme Court ensured this measure in 1965, when they ruled in favor of the right of women to consume contraceptives in the *Griswold v. Connecticut* case, which reversed the state law in Connecticut and made for a unilateral dissolution of state law prohibiting the act. Similarly, the right to a safe and legal abortion was made possible by the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, and was supported by the 1992 *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* ruling.

Given this, the preeminent current issue and ongoing discrimination regarding gender equality in the United States has to do primarily with the notion that women are paid less and treated unfairly in the American workforce in comparison to men. Employment discrimination has been addressed by the Equal Pay Act of 1963, as well as Title VII of the 1964 Civil Right Act, with the Equal Pay act aiming to equalize pay rate between men and women, and Title VII targeting equal employment practices. Title VII also provided for the founding of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which fights for and regulates grievances against gender based equality in the workplace. Since then, gender based discrimination has been addressed by affirmative action policies, laws banning gender specific work ads in newspapers and discrimination based on pregnancy, as well as the right for women to file a grievance if they believe they have received less pay than their male peers. All of these advances have contributed to the increase in power of women in the workforce, however, as figure one shows, there is still a discrepancy in the US in regards to workforce participation.



**Figure 1**

This figure shows that even as recent as 2012, the participation rate of women in the workforce is markedly behind that of men. The difference between the genders shrinks as the level of education is raised, showing that women who attain higher levels of education join the workforce more readily, which should be expected. However, the difference among the lower levels of education is far too drastic to be acceptable in modern society.

Furthermore, even today, the 'wage gap' between men and women in America continues to exist. Throughout the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women have averaged a steady discrepancy of 77-80% compared to their male equivalents, this number holds true as recently as 2013 (Forbes.com). The lowest average comes interestingly in Wyoming (as Wyoming was the first state to allow suffrage), at 65

cents to the male dollar, and the highest average comes in Nevada and Vermont, at 85 cents to the male dollar.

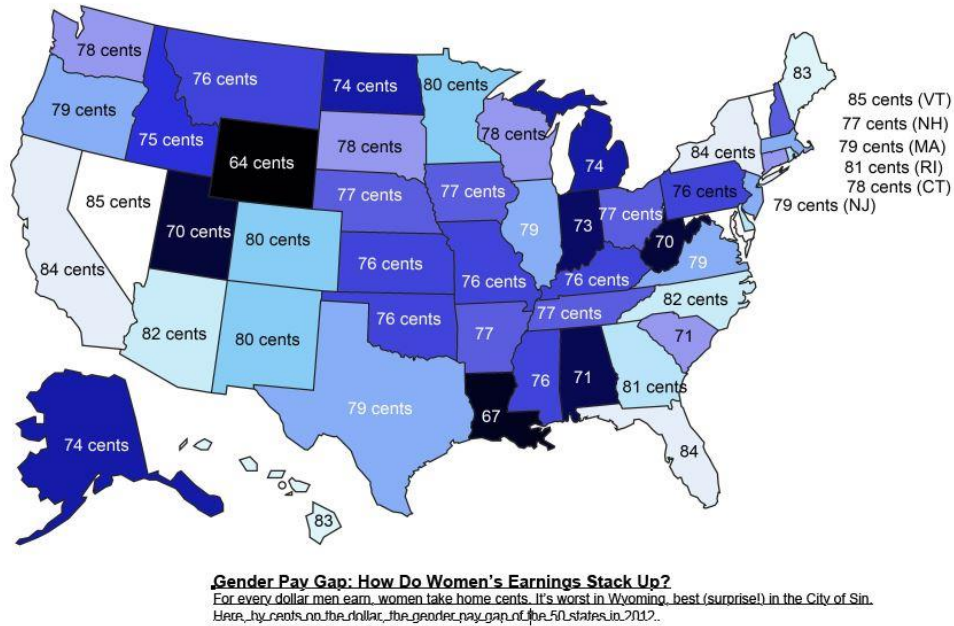


Figure 2

This shows the national need for an improvement upon this illegal and blatant discrepancy into the future, if the headlining issue in gender based discrimination is to be eradicated.



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