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Wednesday, August 17, 2011

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## Women See Value and Benefits of College; Men Lag on Both Fronts, Survey Finds

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## Women See Value and Benefits of College; Men Lag on Both Fronts, Survey Finds

By Wendy Wang and Kim Parker

At a time when women surpass men by record numbers in college enrollment and completion, they also have a more positive view than men about the value higher education provides, according to a nationwide Pew Research Center survey. Half of all women who have graduated from a four-year college give the U.S. higher education system excellent or good

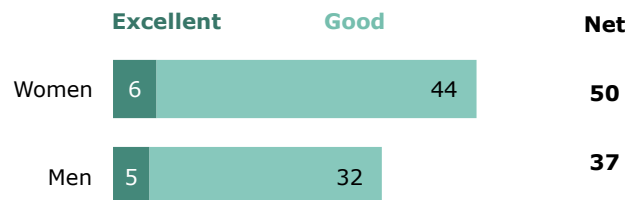
marks for the value it provides given the money spent by students and their families; only 37% of male graduates agree. In addition, women who have graduated from college are more likely than men to say their education helped them to grow both personally and intellectually.

Also, while a majority of Americans believe that a college education is necessary in order to get ahead in life these days, the public is somewhat more inclined to see this credential as a necessity for a woman than for a man. Some 77% of respondents say this about women, while just 68% say it about men.<sup>1</sup>

This new survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,142 adults ages 18 and older was conducted at a time when women are outpacing men by significant numbers in college enrollment and completion. In 2010, a record 36% of women ages 25-29 had attained a bachelor's degree. This compares with 28% of men in the same age group. Until roughly 1990,

### How College Graduates Grade the Higher Education System

% rating the job the higher education system is doing in providing value for the money spent by students and their families as ...



Note: Based on four-year college graduates, n=757.

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<sup>1</sup> A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends project in July 2009 included a similar question without specifying gender. "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? In order to get ahead in life these days, it's necessary to get a college education." Some 73% agreed with the statement, and 25% disagreed. (<http://pewsocialtrends.org/2009/09/03/recession-turns-a-graying-office-grayer/>). In the new Pew Research survey, half of the respondents were asked specifically about the importance of a college education for men, and the other half was asked about women.

young men had outpaced young women in educational attainment. Women surpassed men in 1992, and since that time the gap has continued to widen.

There are also racial and ethnic patterns underlying these gender trends. Among young adults, whites are more likely than blacks or Hispanics to complete college. In 2010, 39% of whites ages 25-29 had at least a bachelor's degree. That compares with 19% of blacks and 13% of Hispanics. Asian-Americans are more likely than any of these racial or ethnic groups to graduate from college—53% of those ages 25-29 had at least a bachelor's degree in 2010.

Across all of these racial and ethnic groups, young women are more likely than young men to be college-educated. The gender difference in completion rates is reflected in the makeup of college graduates. Among all college graduates ages 25-29 in 2010, 55% were women and 45% were men. The gap was largest within the black community, where 63% of college-educated young adults were women and only 37% were men.

Data for this report come mainly from a Pew Research Center survey and Pew Research calculations of the educational data from the Current Population Surveys (CPS). The Pew Research survey was conducted by landline and cellular telephone March 15-29, 2011, among a nationally representative sample of 2,142 adults living in the continental United States.

### Other Key Findings

- Women seem to see more benefit in their college education than do men. College-educated women are more likely than their male counterparts to say college was “very useful” in increasing their knowledge and helping them grow intellectually (81% vs. 67%), as well as helping them grow and mature as a person (73% vs. 64%).
- More women than men question the affordability of college. Only 14% of women who graduated from college agree that most people can afford to pay for college these days. This compares with 26% of male college graduates. Large majorities of both women and men say that college is no longer affordable for most people.
- Women who graduated from college are more likely than their male counterparts to report that their parents financed their education. Four-in-ten women say their parents paid for most of their college expenses, compared with 29% of men.

- Public reactions to the changing gender patterns in higher education are mixed. By a ratio of 52% to 7%, Americans say the fact that more women than men are graduating from college is a good thing, rather than a bad thing, for society. However, when presented with the flip side of the story, the public's enthusiasm disappears. Some 46% of Americans say the fact that *fewer* men than women are graduating from college is a bad thing, while just 12% say it is a good thing.

### About the Survey

This report is based on findings from a recent Pew Research Center survey as well as analyses of Current Population Survey (CPS) data on education trends.

**The general public survey (GP)** is based on telephone interviews conducted with a nationally representative sample of 2,142 adults ages 18 and older living in the continental United States, including an oversample of 336 adults ages 18-34. A total of 1,052 interviews were completed with respondents contacted by landline telephone and 1,090 with those contacted on their cellular phone. The data are weighted to produce a final sample that is representative of the general population of adults in the continental United States. Survey interviews were conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International in English and Spanish.

- Interviews conducted March 15-29, 2011
- 2,142 interviews
- 757 respondents with a four-year college degree or higher education
- Margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.7 percentage points for results based on the total sample and 4.6 percentage points for college graduates at the 95% confidence level

### Notes on Terminology

Unless otherwise noted, "college graduates" refers to those who graduated from a four-year college and hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

Whites include only non-Hispanic whites. Blacks include only non-Hispanic blacks. Hispanics are of any race.

### Acknowledgement

Paul Taylor, director of the Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends project, provided editorial guidance for this report. Richard Fry, senior researcher, provided the data on educational attainment based on the March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample. Eileen Patten did the number checking, and Marcia Kramer copy-edited the report.

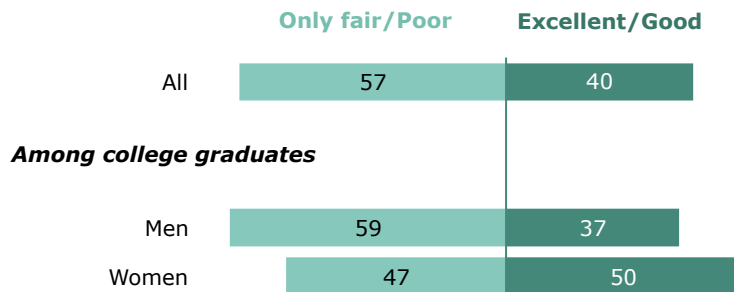
## The Value, Usefulness and Cost of College

Overall, a majority of Americans (57%) give the higher education system negative ratings for the job it is doing providing value for the money spent by students and their families. Only 40% of all adults say the higher education system is doing an excellent or good job in this regard. However, college-educated women have a more positive view of higher education. Among women who have at least a four-year college degree, 50% say that the nation's higher education system is doing an excellent or good job in providing value for the money, a view shared by only 37% of their male counterparts. Fewer than half of female college graduates (47%) say the system is doing only a fair or a poor job, compared with 59% of male college graduates.

In addition to giving more positive ratings to the higher education system, women who have graduated from college are more likely than their male peers to say their education was useful. Specifically, more than eight-in-ten women (81%) with a four-year college degree say that their college education was "very useful" in

### Female College Graduates Rate Higher Education System More Positively

*% rating the job the higher education system is doing in providing value for the money spent by students and their families as ...*



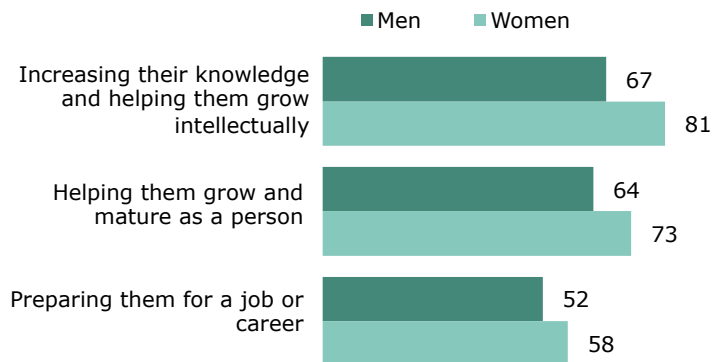
Note: N=2,142 for all respondents and 757 for college graduates. Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

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the nation's higher education system is doing an excellent or good job in providing value for the money, a view shared by only 37% of their male counterparts. Fewer than half of female college graduates (47%) say the system is doing only a fair or a poor job, compared with 59% of male college graduates.

### How Useful Was Your College Education?

*% saying that college education was very useful in ...*



Note: Based on four-year college graduates, n=757.

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increasing their knowledge and helping them to grow intellectually, a view shared by 67% of men. College-educated women are also more likely than their male counterparts to say that their college education helped them grow and mature as a person (73% vs.64%). In terms of how useful college was in preparing them for a job or career, both men and women are somewhat less enthusiastic: 58% of women and 52% of men say college was very useful in this regard. Here the gender difference is not statistically significant.

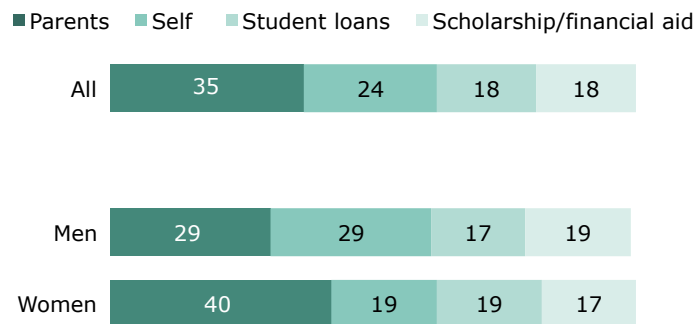
While women see a greater value and usefulness in higher education, they may also be more concerned about the rising cost. College costs have been on the rise for several decades, and only one-in-five Americans (22%) now believe that college is affordable for most people (75% say college is no longer affordable). Among college graduates, women are less likely than men to agree that most people can afford to pay for college (14% vs. 26%).

When asked how they paid for their college education, more than one-third of four-year college graduates (35%) say that their parents paid for most of their college expenses, roughly a quarter (24%) say that they paid for college themselves, 18% relied on student loans, and the same share relied on scholarships or financial aid.

Women are more likely than men to say their parents paid most of the cost. Among women with at least a bachelor's degree, 40% say their parents paid for most of their undergraduate college expenses, and about half as many (19%) say they paid for college themselves. Men are less likely to say they relied on their parents to finance their college education: 29% say their parents paid most of their expenses, while an equal proportion say they paid most of the costs themselves.

### Who Paid For Your College?

*% saying that most of their college expenses were paid by ...*



Notes: Based on four-year college graduates who are under age 65 and not currently enrolled in school, n=513. "No main sources," "some other source" and "DK/Refused" responses not shown.

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## How Important Is a College Education?

Most Americans believe that a college education is necessary for people to advance in life. According to a 2009 Pew Research survey, 73% of all adults agreed that, in order to get ahead in life these days, it is necessary to get a college education.<sup>2</sup> The current survey finds that the public is inclined to see college as being more important for women than for men. When asked whether they agree or disagree that “In order to get ahead in life these days, it is necessary for a woman to get a college education,” more than three-in-four respondents (77%) say they agree. In contrast, when the same question is asked about a man, only 68% agree. Men (75%) are just as likely as women (78%) to say that it’s necessary for a woman to have a college education. Both men and women place less importance on a man’s attaining a college education—66% of men and 70% of women say that for a man to get ahead, it’s necessary to go to college.

### College Is More Important for a Woman Than for a Man

*% agreeing that in order to get ahead in life, it is necessary for ... to get a college education*



Note: Split form, n=1,104 for question on woman and n=1,038 for question on man.

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In general, college-educated adults are more likely than those who do not have a four-year college degree to say it’s necessary for both women and men to have a college education in order to get ahead in life these days. More than eight-in-ten college graduates (83%) say it’s necessary for a woman to have a college education, and 74% say college is necessary for a man. By contrast, among non-college graduates, 74% say it is necessary for women to have a college education, and 66% say the same about men. Similarly, first-generation immigrants are more likely than those who have longer roots in America to agree that a college education is necessary for both men and women.

Those who live on the East Coast place a great deal of importance on women’s education. Among East Coast residents, nearly nine-in-ten (88%) think that college is necessary for a woman. This compares with 74% of adults in the rest of the country. When it comes to men’s education, there are no regional differences. Those who hold liberal political views are more likely than conservatives to agree that a college education is a necessity for a woman (82%

<sup>2</sup> See Pew Social & Demographic Trends, “Recession Turns a Graying Office Grayer,” Sept. 3, 2009 (<http://pewsocialtrends.org/2009/09/03/recession-turns-a-graying-office-grayer/>).

vs.74%). Liberals and conservatives do not differ in their views on the importance of a college education for a man.

## Public Reactions to Changing Gender Patterns

Since the early 1990s, more young women than young men have been completing college. The survey attempted to gauge the public's reaction to this educational trend. Respondents were asked whether the fact that women are now more likely than men to get a college degree is a good thing for society, a bad thing or if it doesn't make much difference. Slightly over half of the public (52%) say this is a good thing for society, 39% say that it doesn't make much difference, and only 7% view this as a bad thing.

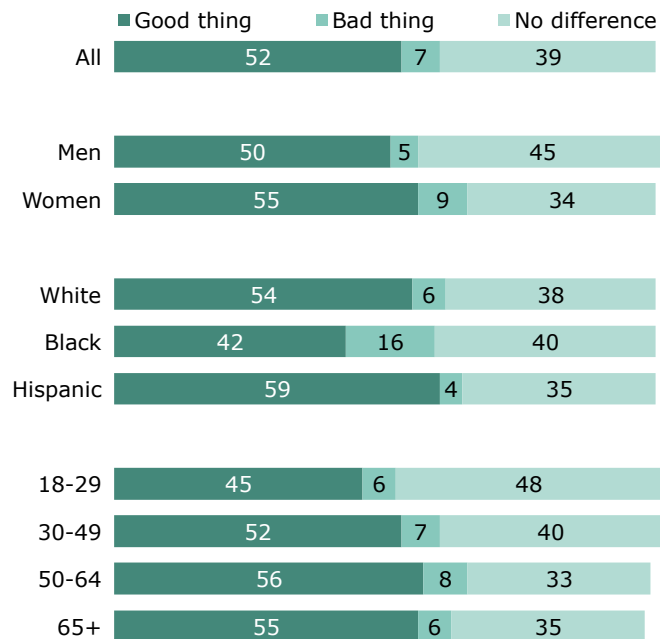
A similar share of men and women (50% and 55%, respectively) view the female advantage in college education as a good thing for society. Men are somewhat more likely than women to view this as neutral for society (45% vs. 34%), while women are nearly twice as likely as men to say it is a bad thing for society (9% vs. 5%).

Black Americans are less likely than others to say that the gender gap in college completion is a good thing for society. Only about four-in-ten blacks (42%) think the fact that more women than men are college-educated is a good thing, compared with more than half of whites (54%) and Hispanics (59%).

Blacks (16%) are much more likely than whites (6%) or Hispanics (4%) to think that this is a bad thing.

### More Women than Men Are Graduating from College—Is This a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?

% saying this is a ... for our society



Notes: Based on interviews conducted March 15-22, n=1,374. Hispanics are of any race. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

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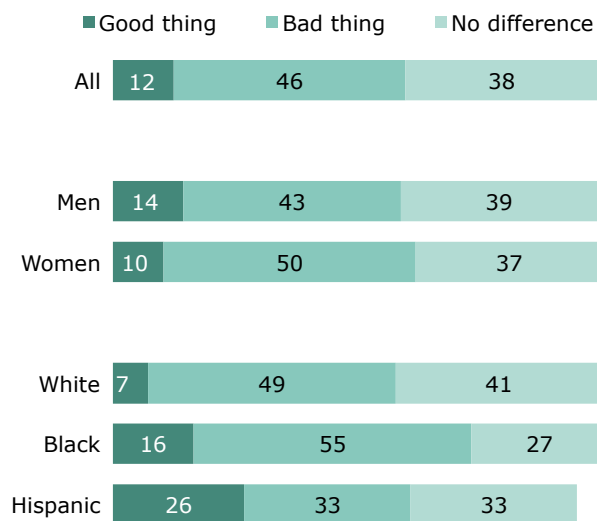
Adults under age 30, the so-called Millennial Generation, are less likely than older Americans to think that the trend toward more women than men graduating from college is a good thing. Fewer than half (45%) of adults ages 18-29 view the trend positively, compared with 56% of those ages 50 and older. The Millennial Generation is also more likely than older adults to say that the trend does not make a difference for society.

There is a flip side to this story, however. While the public likes the idea that more women than men are getting college degrees these days, when the issue is reframed to emphasize the fact that fewer men than women are completing college, the public reacts much more negatively. Some survey respondents were asked whether the fact that women are more likely than men to finish college is good or bad for society, while others were asked the following question: “As you may know, men are less likely than women these days to get a college degree. Overall, do you think this is a good thing for our society, a bad thing or doesn’t it make much difference?” Nearly half of the respondents (46%) said that this is a bad thing for society, only 12% said it is a good thing and the rest (38%) said it doesn’t make much difference.<sup>3</sup>

This disconnect may be related to the question wording and framing. Respondents may be more likely to see positive trends (i.e., women are more likely than men to get a college degree)

### Fewer Men than Women Are Graduating from College—Is This a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?

% saying this is a ... for our society



Notes: Based on interviews conducted March 23-29, n=768. Hispanics are of any race. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Don't know/Refused responses not shown.

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<sup>3</sup> All respondents interviewed March 15-22 were asked, “As you may know, women are more likely than men these days to get a college degree. Overall, do you think this is a good thing for our society, a bad thing, or doesn’t it make much difference?” (n=1,374). All respondents interviewed March 23-29 were asked, “As you may know, men are less likely than women these days to get a college degree. Overall, do you think this is a good thing for our society, a bad thing, or doesn’t it make much difference?” (n=768).

as a good thing and negative trends (i.e., men are less likely than women to get a college degree) as a bad thing, despite the fact that the two questions have the same meaning.

Men and women generally hold similar views about these gender trends, regardless of how the question is phrased. Meanwhile, blacks (55%) and whites (49%) are more likely than Hispanics (33%) to say that the trend toward fewer men than women getting college degrees is a bad thing for society.

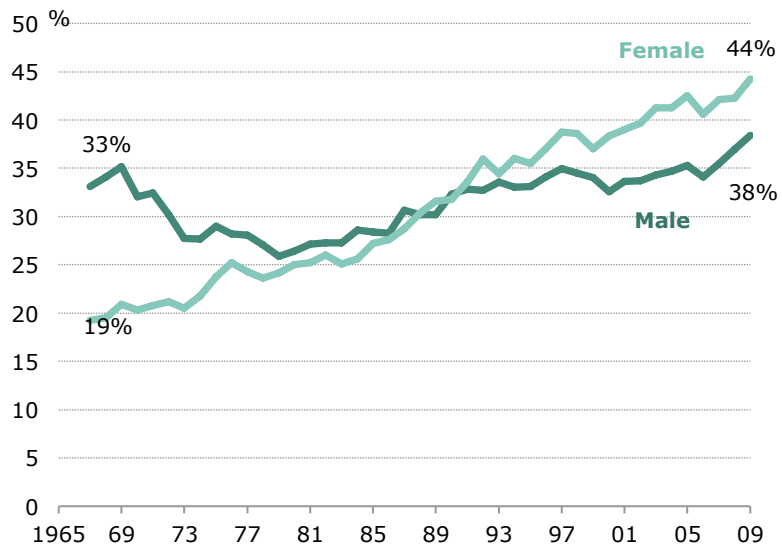
### By the Numbers: Gender, Race and Education

If you step foot on a college campus these days, you are likely to see more women than men strolling 'neath the elms. Among currently enrolled students ages 18-24, about 53% are women.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past 40 years, the share of young women enrolled in college has more than doubled, while the share of young men enrolled in college has increased much more modestly. In 1967, one-third of young men ages 18-24 were enrolled in college, compared with less than one-in-five (19%) young women in the same age range. The enrollment gap between the two genders declined steadily from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s. Men and women reached parity in the late 1980s. Since then, young women have overtaken young men in college enrollment, creating a

### The Growth in Female Enrollment Has Outpaced the Growth in Male Enrollment

Share of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college, 1967-2009



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, Table 212

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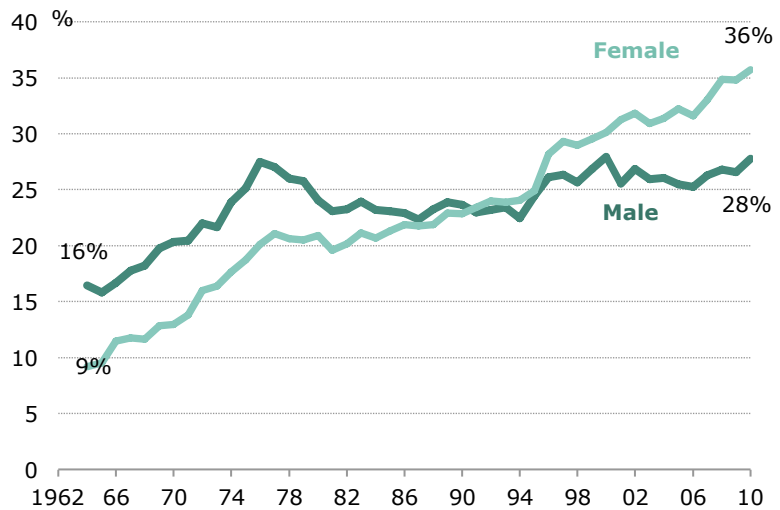
<sup>4</sup> Calculation is based on October 2009, Current Population Survey.

“reverse” gender gap where women are more likely than men to go to college. By 2009, a record 44% of young women were enrolled in college, compared with 38% of young men.

Young women are not only more likely to be enrolled in college, but are also more likely to graduate from college. In 2009, among women ages 25-29, 36% had at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 28% of men in the same age range. The college completion gap between genders is even wider than the enrollment gap: 8 percentage points vs. 6 percentage points.

### Young Female College Completion Has Outpaced Young Male College Completion, 1964-2010

*Attainment of at least a bachelor’s degree among 25- to 29-year-olds*



Note: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor’s degree refers to those with four or more years of college.

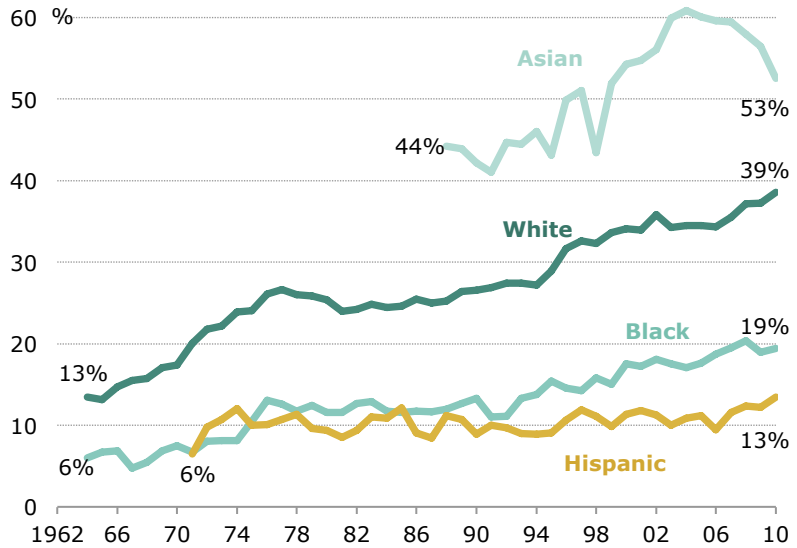
Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample  
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There are significant racial and ethnic differences in college attainment among those ages 25-29. Among the four major racial and ethnic groups, young Asians are the most likely to be college graduates. In 2010, more than half (53%) of Asians ages 25-29 had at least a bachelor's degree. Young whites have the second-highest completion rate (39%), followed by young blacks (19%) and Hispanics (13%).

These racial and ethnic patterns have remained stable since 1988 (when data for all four groups first became available), despite the steadily growing share of college graduates within most groups.

### College Completion Among Young Adults, by Race, 1964-2010

Attainment of at least a bachelor's degree among 25- to 29-year-olds



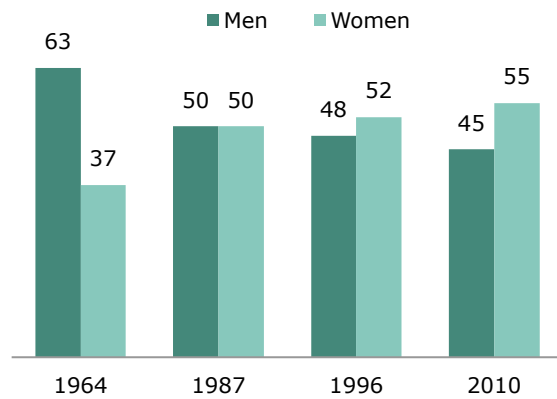
Notes: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor's degree refers to those with four or more years of college. Prior to 1971, white and black rates include persons of Hispanic origin. After 2002, white and black rates exclude persons of multiracial origin.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample  
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Another way of looking at the educational gains made by women in recent decades is to consider how the gender distribution of college graduates has changed over time. In 1964, only 37% of college graduates ages 25-29 were women and a majority (63%) were men. By 1987, women and men were on equal footing: half of all college graduates ages 25-29 were women, and half were men. The numbers fluctuated until 1996, when women clearly overtook men. By 2010, the gender split for college graduates ages 25-29 was 55% women vs. 45% men.

### Gender Split of Young College Graduates, 1964-2010

*Gender of 25- to 29-year-old four-year college graduates (%)*



Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample

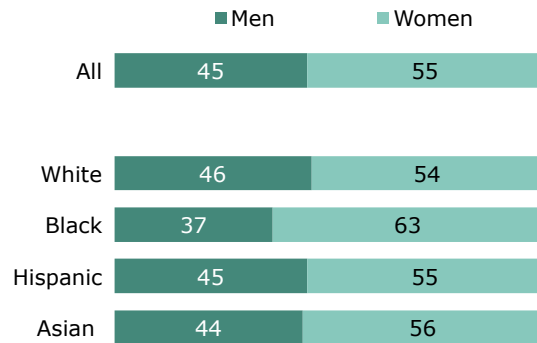
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The gender imbalance in higher education is not equal for all racial groups. Among young black college graduates, men are a relatively small minority. In 2010, only 37% of black college graduates were men and 63% were women. Among white, Hispanic and Asian college graduates, the share of men is close to the average of 45%.

The underrepresentation of black men in higher education is not a new phenomenon. In 1988, when the overall gender split was roughly even, there were more black females than black males among college graduates (53% vs. 47%). Today, the gap is much wider.

## Gender Split of Young College Graduates by Race, 2010

*Gender of 25- to 29-year-old four-year college graduates (%)*



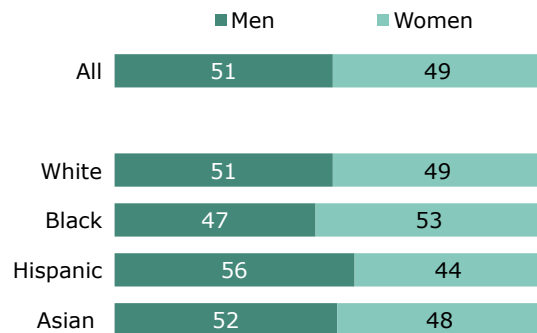
Notes: Hispanics are of any race. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample

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## Gender Split Among Young College Graduates by Race, 1988

*Gender of 25- to 29-year-old four-year college graduates (%)*



Note: Hispanics are of any race. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.

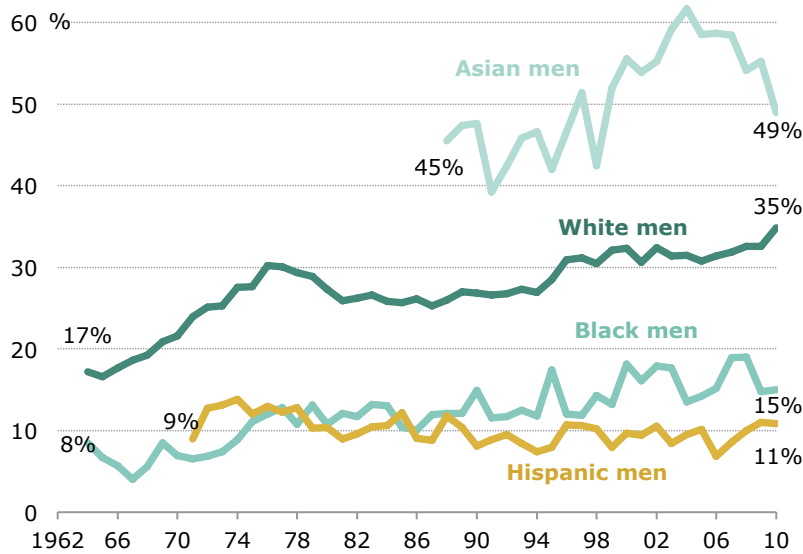
Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample

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Appendix

**Racial Differences in College Completion Among Men, 1964-2010**

*Attainment of at least a bachelor's degree among 25- to 29-year-olds*

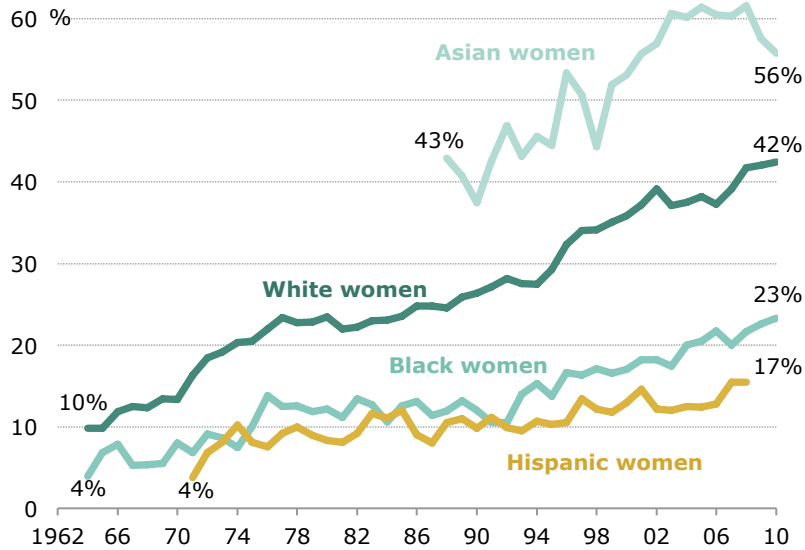


Notes: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor's degree refers to those with four or more years of college. Prior to 1971, white and black rates include persons of Hispanic origin. After 2002, white and black rates exclude persons of multiracial origin.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample  
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## Racial Differences in College Completion Among Women, 1964-2010

*Attainment of at least a bachelor's degree among 25- to 29-year-olds*



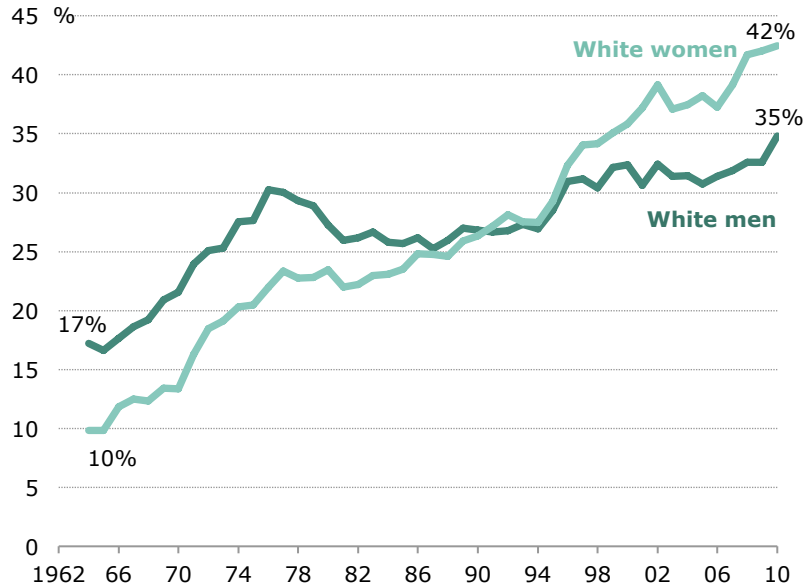
Notes: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor's degree refers to those with four or more years of college. Prior to 1971, white and black rates include persons of Hispanic origin. After 2002, white and black rates exclude persons of multiracial origin.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample  
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## Gender Gap in College Completion Among Whites, 1964-2010

*Attainment of at least a bachelor's degree among 25- to 29-year-olds*

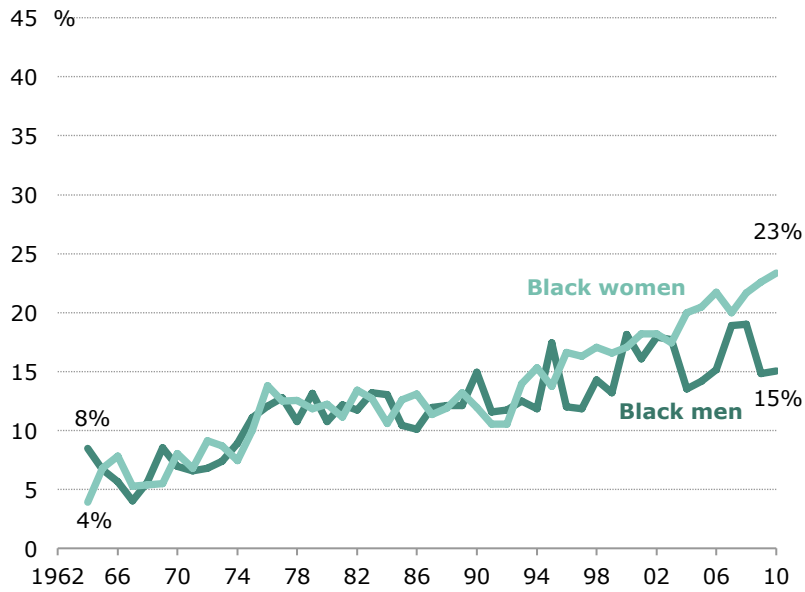


Notes: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor's degree refers to those with four or more years of college. Prior to 1971, white rates include persons of Hispanic origin. After 2002, white rates exclude persons of multiracial origin.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample  
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## Gender Gap in College Completion Among Blacks, 1964-2010

*Attainment of at least a bachelor's degree among 25- to 29-year-olds*



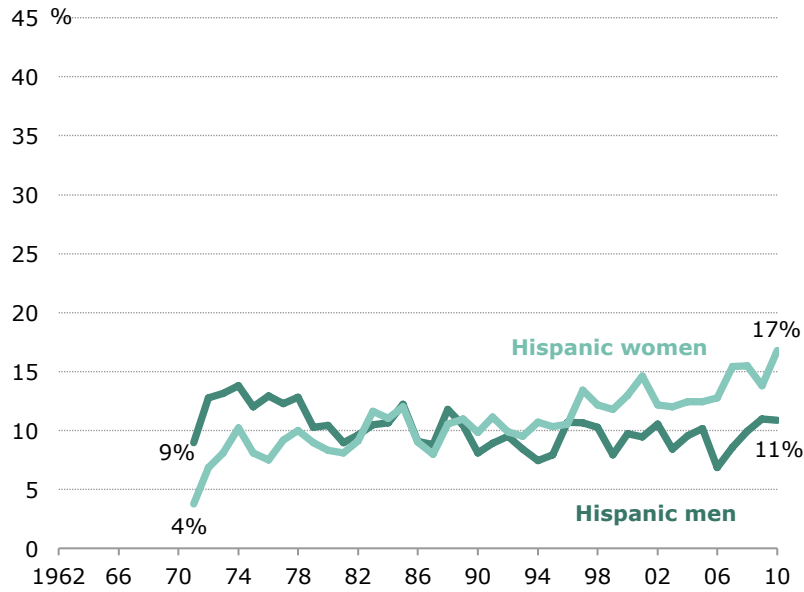
Notes: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor's degree refers to those with four or more years of college. Prior to 1971, black rates include persons of Hispanic origin. After 2002, black rates exclude persons of multiracial origin.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample

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## Gender Gap in College Completion Among Hispanics, 1971-2010

*Attainment of at least a bachelor's degree among 25- to 29-year-olds*



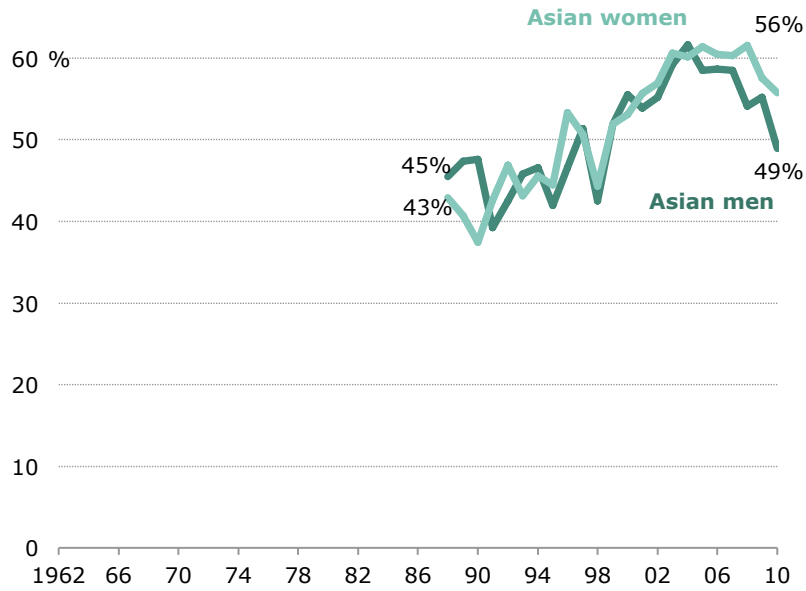
Note: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor's degree refers to those with four or more years of college.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample

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## Gender Gap in College Completion Among Asians, 1988-2010

*Attainment of at least a bachelor's degree among 25- to 29-year-olds*



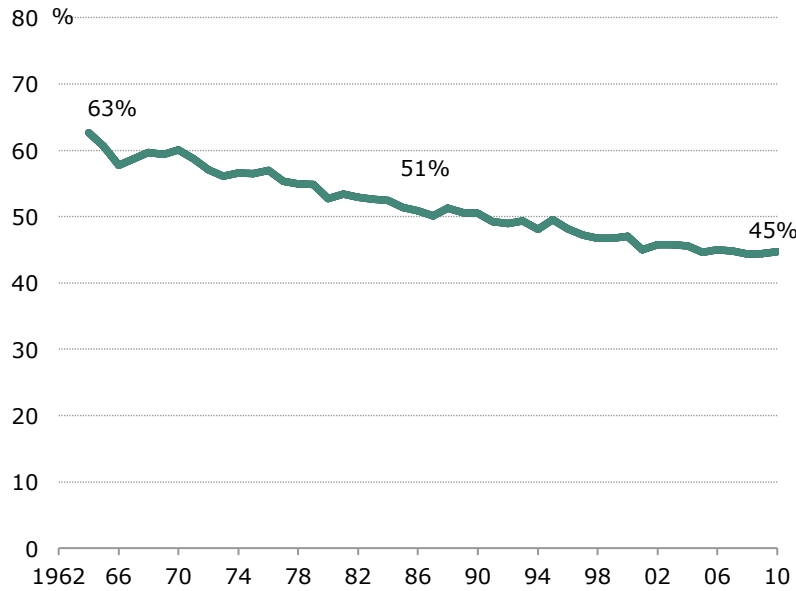
Note: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor's degree refers to those with four or more years of college.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample

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### Share of Men Among College Graduates Ages 25-29, 1964-2010



Note: Prior to 1992, persons with at least a bachelor's degree refers to those with four or more years of college.

Source: March Current Population Survey (CPS) Integrated Public Use Micro Sample  
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