

*That we have not made any respectable attempt to meet the
Special educational needs of women in the past is the clearest
Possible evidence of the fact that our educational objectives
Have been geared exclusively to the vocational patterns of men.*

Betty Friedan
The Feminine Mystique
1963

Section IV: Educational Trends

As the data in this report indicate, by the time Betty Friedan wrote her discussion of the “problem without a name” women already were moving ahead rapidly in terms of education. In the intervening years, they have taken giant steps forward, outpacing men in many categories.

High School Graduation Rates: The number of Americans graduating from high school has increased dramatically over the past 50 years. In 1940 only 26 percent of women earned a high school diploma. By 1998 the proportion had grown to nearly 83 percent. Women have long outperformed men at the high school level – in large part because the dropout rate for women is lower.

Graduate Degrees: Now, women are moving ahead of men as graduates at the college and graduate level, too. During the past 20 years, they have moved ahead of men in numbers of bachelor’s and master’s degrees earned. During that time, women have increased their number of doctoral degrees by 10 percentage points. Prior to 1970, few women earned medical and law degrees; these high prestige and high compensation professions were heavily male dominated. In the past 30 years, however, women have made major advances in the fields of medicine and law and now earn around 40 percent of the degrees in those fields. It is possible that women will reach parity with men in earning medical and law degrees within the first decade of the 21st century.

Disparities Between Men and Women: The increasing disparity between men’s and women’s educational levels brings to mind the remarks of noted psychologist Kenneth Keniston, “If we are to have new women . . . then they will require new men. If women move toward high levels of development, from which they have in the past been blocked, then men will have to change, so as to be able to love such women without threat and without fear.” Keniston’s warning seems especially appropriate because we are seeing the effects of educational and employment disparities between men and women, particularly in the Black population. Increasingly, these disparities are affecting all population groups.

Table 5.1. –High School Graduates and Earned Degrees Conferred: 1900 – 1997

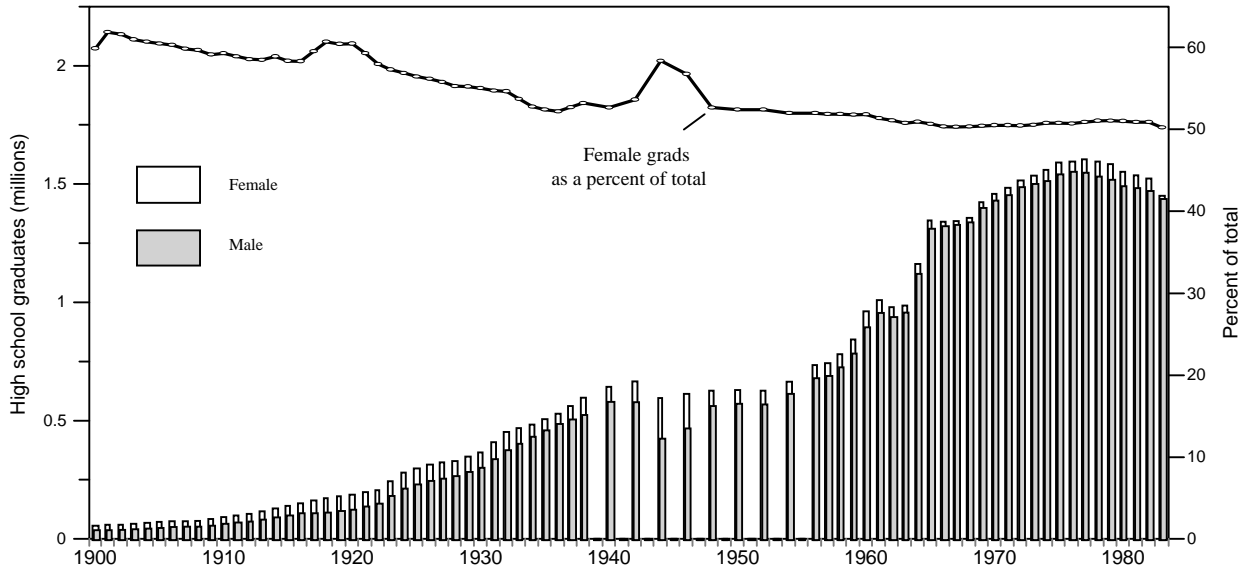
	Year of Graduation										
	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1997
High School Graduates											
	Numbers in thousands										
Total	94.9	156.4	311.3	666.9	1,221.5	1,199.7	1,858.0	2,889.0	3,043.0	2,586.3	2,608.5
Men ¹	38.1	63.7	123.7	300.4	578.7	570.7	895.0	1,430.0	1,491.0	–	–
Women ¹	56.8	92.8	187.6	366.5	642.8	629.0	963.0	1,459.0	1,552.0	–	–
percent	59.9	59.3	60.3	55.0	52.6	52.4	51.8	50.5	51.0	–	–
Bachelor's degrees conferred											
Total	27.4	37.2	48.6	122.5	186.5	432.1	392.4	792.3	929.4	1,051.3	1,172.9
Men	22.2	28.8	32.0	73.6	109.5	328.8	254.1	451.1	473.6	491.7	520.5
Women	5.2	8.4	16.6	48.9	77.0	103.2	138.4	341.2	455.8	559.6	652.4
percent	19.1	22.7	34.2	39.9	41.3	23.9	35.3	43.1	49.0	53.2	55.6
Master's degrees conferred											
Total	1.6	2.1	4.3	15.0	26.7	58.2	74.4	208.3	298.1	324.3	419.4
Men	1.3	1.6	3.0	8.9	16.5	41.2	50.9	125.6	150.7	153.7	180.9
Women	0.3	0.6	1.3	6.0	10.2	17.0	23.5	82.7	147.3	170.6	238.5
percent	19.1	26.4	30.2	40.4	38.2	29.2	31.6	39.7	49.4	52.6	56.9
Doctor's degrees conferred											
Total	0.4	0.4	0.6	2.3	3.3	6.4	9.8	29.9	32.6	38.4	45.9
Men	0.4	0.4	0.5	1.9	2.9	5.8	8.8	25.9	22.9	24.4	27.1
Women	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.4	0.6	1.0	4.0	9.7	14.0	18.7
percent	6.0	9.9	15.1	15.4	13.0	9.6	10.5	13.3	29.7	36.4	40.8
Medicine (M.D.) degrees conferred											
Total	–	–	–	–	–	5.6	7.0	8.3	14.9	15.1	15.6
Men	–	–	–	–	–	5.0	6.6	7.6	11.4	9.9	9.1
Women	–	–	–	–	–	0.6	0.4	0.7	3.5	5.2	6.5
Percent	–	–	–	–	–	10.4	5.5	8.4	23.4	34.2	41.4
Law (LL.B. or J.D.) degrees conferred											
Total	–	–	–	–	–	–	9.2	14.9	35.6	36.5	40.1
Men	–	–	–	–	–	–	9.0	14.1	24.9	21.1	22.5
Women	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.2	0.8	10.8	15.4	17.5
Percent	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.5	5.4	30.2	42.2	43.7

¹ Since 1983, the number of high school graduates has not been reported by gender.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1999.

- Women have long outperformed men at the high school level and during the last 20 years of the 20th Century have moved ahead of men in terms of the shares of Bachelor's and Master's degrees earned. Since 1980 women have increased their share of doctoral degrees earned from just under 30 percent to a little over 40 percent.
- Enormous strides have been made toward parity in both Medicine and Law. As recently as 1970, women received less than 10 percent of the degrees in both of these high-prestige, high-compensation areas. In the last 30 years women have made major advances and are now earning more than 41 percent of the degrees in Medicine and nearly 44 percent of the degrees in Law. If women advance in the next ten years as much as they did during the last ten, they will achieve parity in these two areas before the end of the current decade.

Figure 5.1. –High School Graduates, by Sex: 1900 – 1983

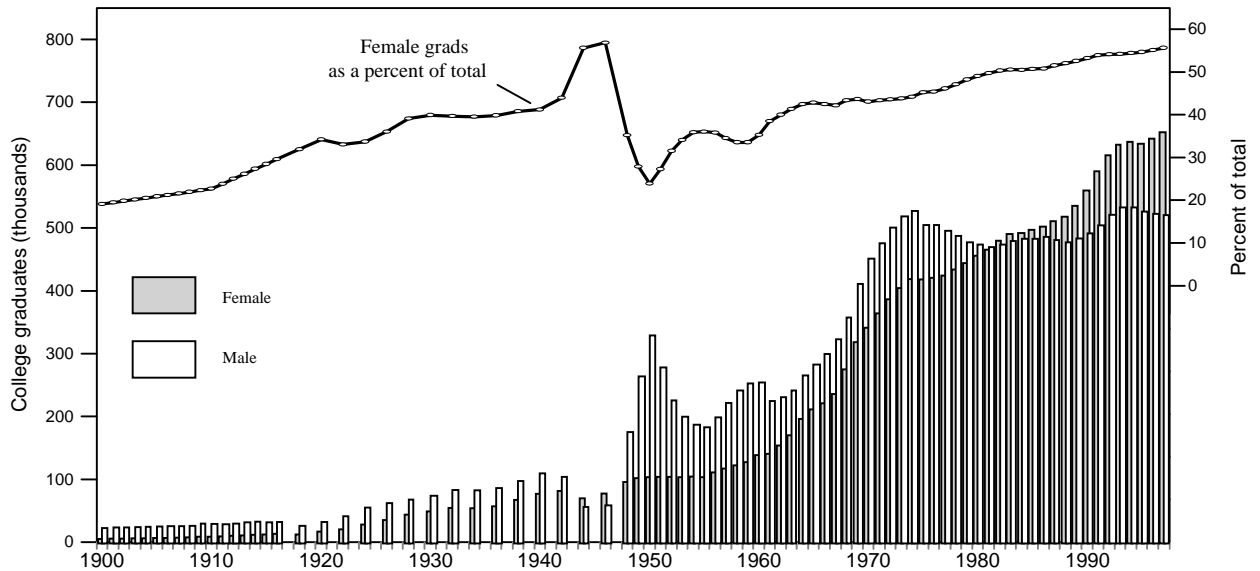


Note: Data on the number of high school graduates by sex is not reported after 1983.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1999.

- Young women have traditionally had lower high-school dropout rates than men and hence account for a larger share of graduating seniors. The up-tick in the proportion of female graduates during World War II came despite a decrease in the number of females graduating since the decline in males was more than 3.5 times as large as the decline for females.

Figure 5.2. –College Graduates, by Sex: 1900 to 1997



Source: See Figure 5.2 above.

- The drop in the proportion of female college graduates following the end of World War II did not come from a decline in the number of women but was due to the surge in male enrollment as veterans returned to complete their education financed by the G.I. bill. Since 1982 women graduates have outnumbered men.

Table 5.2. –Years of School Completed by Women 25 Years Old & Over: 1940 – 1998

Years	Total ³ Females 25 & over	Elementary school		High school		College	
		0 to 4 years	5 to 8 Years	1 to 3 years	4 years	1 to 3 years	4 years or more
Numbers in millions							
1940 ¹	37.3	4.6	16.8	5.8	6.0	2.3	1.4
1950 ¹	44.9	4.4	15.8	7.8	10.1	3.4	2.3
1960	51.5	3.8	15.7	10.2	14.3	4.6	3.0
1970	57.5	2.7	12.6	10.3	21.6	5.6	4.7
1980	69.0	2.2	9.8	10.0	27.9	9.8	9.4
1990	82.1	1.8	7.2	9.5	33.7	14.8	15.1
1998	89.8	1.4	5.2	8.8	31.6	22.7	20.1
Percent of total							
1940 ²	100.0	12.4	45.5	15.9	16.4	6.1	3.8
1950 ²	100.0	10.1	36.1	17.9	23.1	7.7	5.2
1960	100.0	7.3	30.4	19.7	27.7	9.0	5.8
1970	100.0	4.7	21.9	18.0	37.5	9.7	8.2
1980	100.0	3.2	14.2	14.5	40.4	14.2	13.6
1990	100.0	2.2	8.8	11.5	41.0	18.0	18.4
1998	100.0	1.6	5.8	9.7	35.2	25.3	22.4

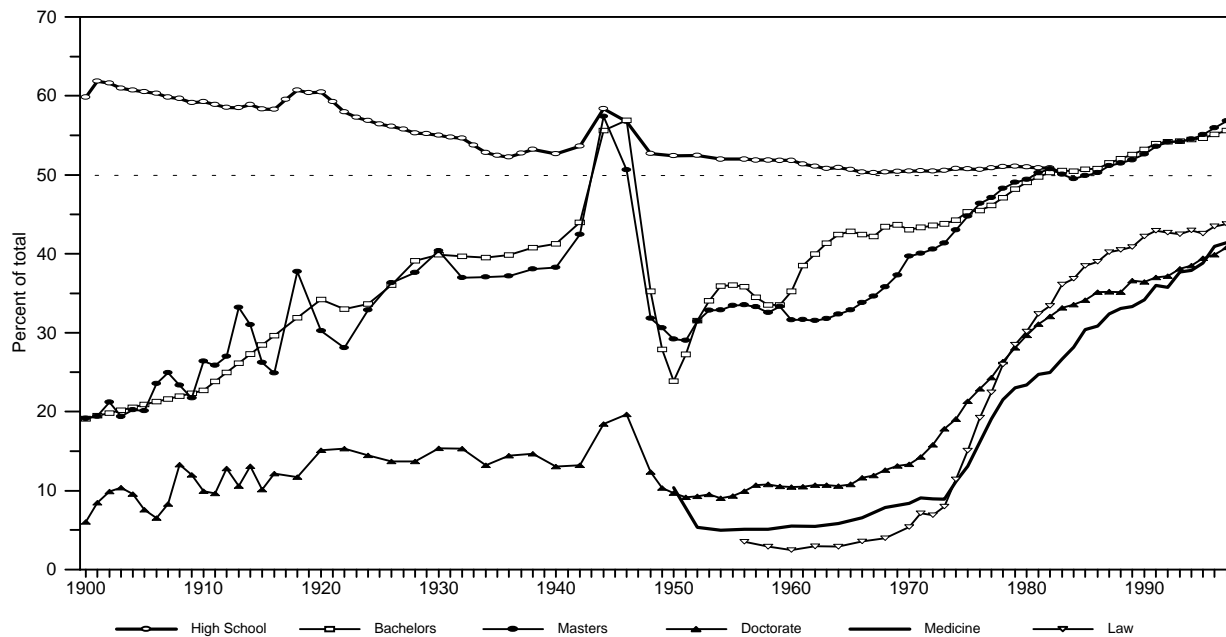
¹ Total includes persons who did not report on years of school completed.

² Percent of persons who reported on years of school completed.

³ Noninstitutional population, excluding members of the Armed Forces living in Barracks.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970 to 1998 March Current Population Survey, 1960 Census of Population, 1950 Census Population, and 1940 Census of Population (resident population). Internet Release date: December 10, 1998

Figure 5.3. –Proportion of Degrees Conferred Received by Women: 1900 – 1997



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*; National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1999*.

- In 1940 only 26 percent of women 25 years of age and over were at least high school graduates but by 1998 the proportion had risen to nearly 83 percent.