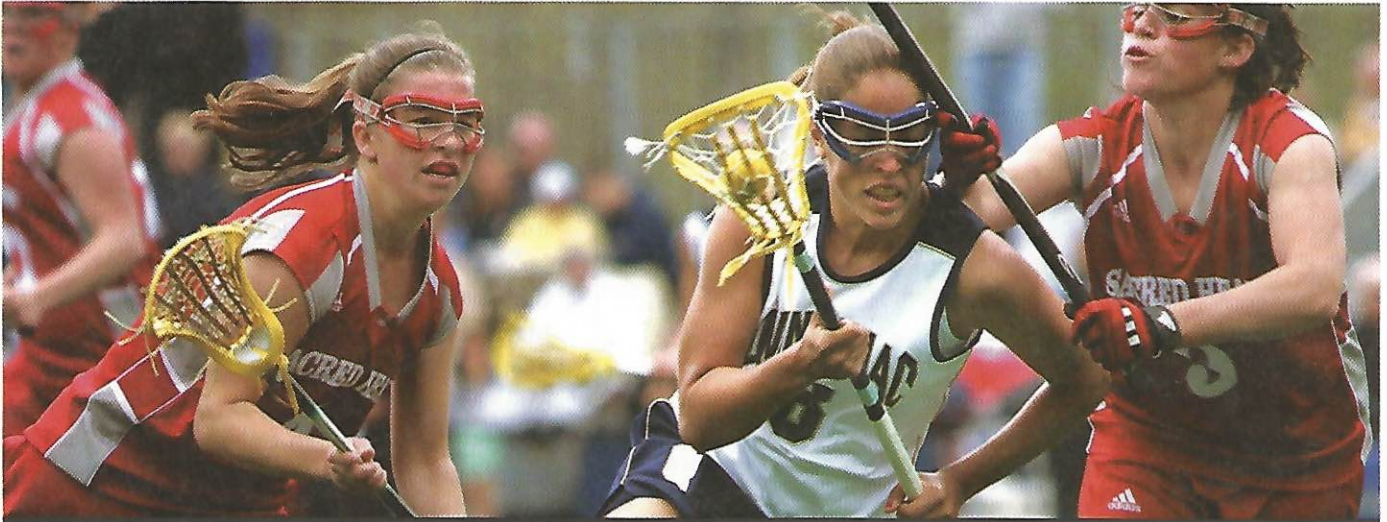




12.2 How Have the Lives of Women and Men Changed in the Last 50 Years?

THE GENDER REVOLUTION

Women's lives have changed so much in the last 50 years that we often call the changes a gender revolution. Most of the changes consist of ways in which girls and women have taken on activities and roles previously limited mostly to men. More girls than ever are playing on sports teams, more girls hold offices in student government than previously, more women than men now get college degrees, women's employment has increased, some women have moved into traditionally male professions, women hold some elected offices in state legislatures and Congress, and some women retain their birth-given last name when they marry. In this section, we look more closely at a few of these changes in women's lives as well as how these changes have affected men's lives since the 1970s.

Rising Women's Employment and Education

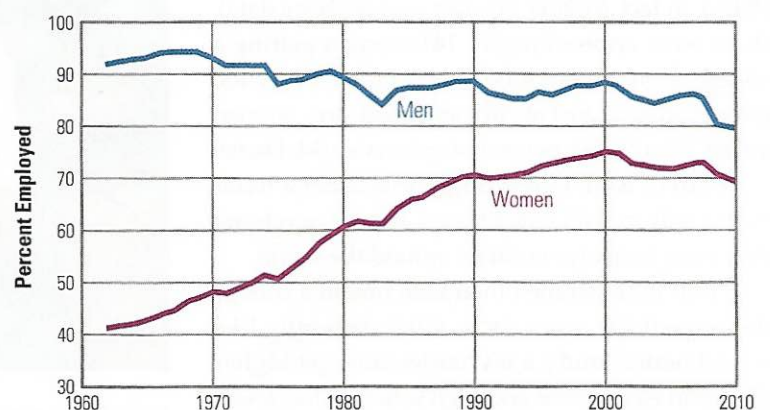
12.2.1: Discuss reasons for the dramatic increase in women's employment and education since 1960.

Of all the changes in the lives of women over the last several decades, the biggest is the increase of women in the paid workforce. Even married women with small children now hold jobs outside the home at high rates. Figure 12.4 shows the percentage of men and women in the United States who were employed from 1962 forward, among adults 25 to 54 years old. (People are counted as employed if they held a paying job any time in the last year.)

Men's employment declined slightly. Women's employment, which had been rising slowly most of the century, rose dramatically between 1962 and 1990 and then plateaued, with little increase since then. Yet it leveled off at a fairly high level, with over 70 percent of women employed. While women's employment is still lower than men's (whose rates are 80 to 90 percent), the two sexes have converged substantially.

The two main reasons that women's employment increased were economic. First, as wages increased during the 1960s and 1970s, so did the incentive for women—or couples—to decide in favor of a woman working for pay (Bergmann 1986). In addition, the economy changed to include a higher share of jobs in service work (jobs like secretary, receptionist, nurse, and store clerk), which had always employed many women. As the demand for service workers rose, more opportunities became available for women (Oppenheimer 1970). One result of this growth

Figure 12.4 Percent of Men and Women Employed, 1962–2010



SOURCE: Based on data from Current Population Survey (1960–2010).