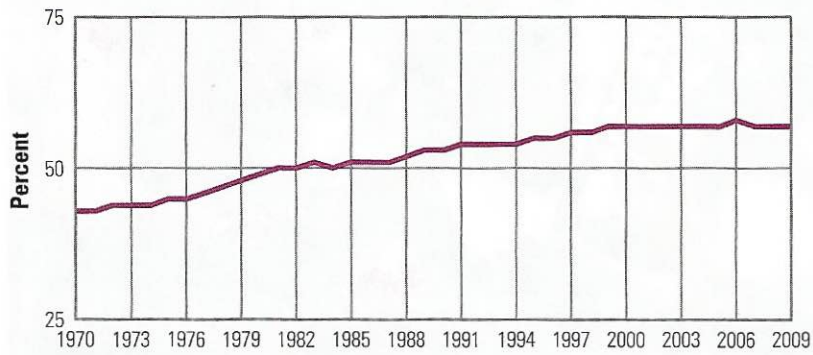


Figure 12.5 Percent of U.S. Bachelor's Degrees Going to Women, 1970–2011



SOURCE: Based on Paula England's calculations from *Digest of Education Statistics* (2009).

of women's employment is that many families that include a husband and wife are now dual-earner families.

Since 1973, men's wages have not increased (if adjusted for changes in the cost of living). In fact, the earnings of men who have no more than a high school education—who often work in factories, as drivers, or in construction—have decreased, which has encouraged employment of their wives. But men in managerial and professional jobs (like lawyer and engineer) have seen their pay increase more than the cost of living, yet the typically well-educated wives of these men have increased their employment dramatically as well (Juhn and Murphy 1997). Laws against sex discrimination made it more possible for well-educated women to achieve high-level careers. The **feminist movement** encouraged these laws and their enforcement, which encouraged many women to have a career as well as a family.

Which sex obtains more college degrees has changed dramatically. If we go back to 1950, women received only 24 percent of the bachelor's degrees granted (*Digest of Education Statistics* 2001: Table 247). As Figure 12.5 shows, women steadily increased their share of degrees over time, passing men in number of degrees by 1985. In 2011, over 57 percent of bachelor's degrees went to women (as well as 62 percent of AA degrees, 60 percent of MA degrees, and 52 percent of PhDs). In fact, by 2011 (the last year we have data), there were approximately 141 women getting a college degree of one kind or another for every 100 men. If we look just at African Americans, women are an even higher percent of graduates (McDaniel et al. 2011). And, interestingly, this is not a trend found only in the United States; similar trends are occurring in many countries around the world.

That more women than men obtain a college degree reflects a few facts. Girls generally like school better, study a bit harder, and get higher grades in elementary and high school. Also, fewer of them have discipline problems in school, and fewer are involved in crime (Steffensmeier and

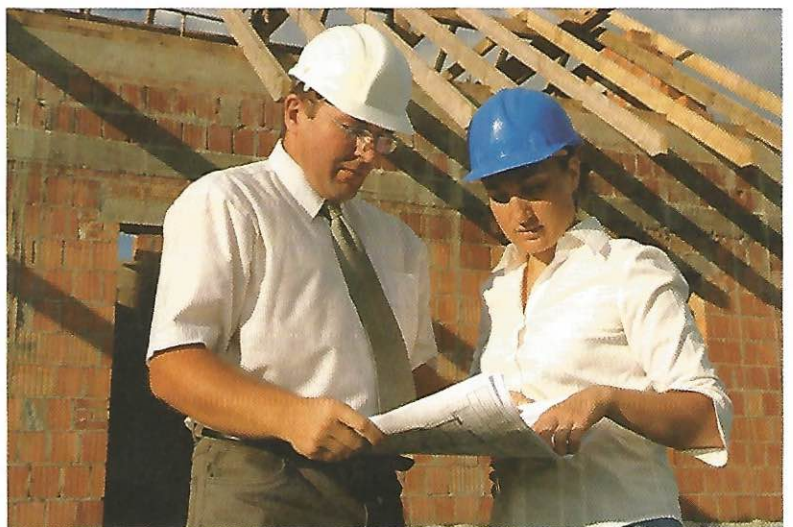
Allan 1996; DiPrete and Buchmann 2013). But, on average, boys have been more involved in crime and have received slightly lower grades than girls for decades, so these facts cannot explain the dramatic shift. Researchers are still trying to figure out why the gender gap favoring college degrees for men has reversed to one favoring college degrees for women. They suspect that one reason is that, even when girls were performing better in high school, parents prioritized paying for sons to attend college in the era when most women became full-time homemakers. Today both young men and women plan to work for pay during much of their future lives, so now girls doing as well as their brothers are just as likely to go to

college, and if they are doing better, they are more likely to complete college (DiPrete and Buchmann 2013).

Change in Women's Jobs and in the Pay Gap

12.2.2: Describe occupational sex segregation and explain the gender pay gap.

In the past, many women worked in traditionally female occupations such as maid, secretary, nurse, or teacher. But since about 1970 an increased number of women have entered traditionally male fields, becoming managers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, or professors, and more women have enlisted in the military. Sociologists measure **occupational sex segregation** with an index that ranges from 100 for complete segregation (all occupations are either 100 percent male or 100 percent female) to 0 for complete integration (each occupation has the same percentage of females as the paid workforce as a whole). Using this measure, occupational sex segregation declined substantially in the



In the last 40 years, occupational segregation has declined significantly. One example of this is that more women have entered into engineering, still a largely male-dominated field.