

Fact Sheet

IWPR #C350

Updated March 2012

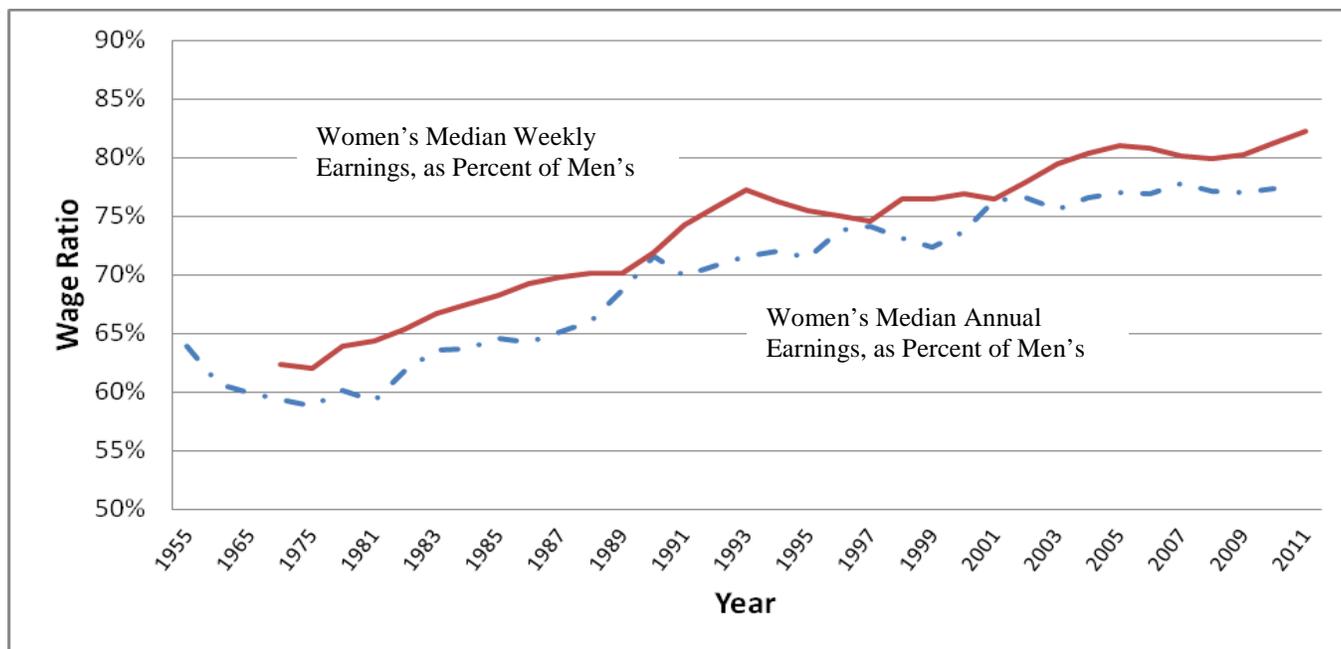
The Gender Wage Gap: 2011

The ratio of women's to men's median weekly full-time earnings rose by one percentage point since 2010 and reached a historical high of 82.2 percent. The narrowing of the weekly gender earnings gap from 18.8% to 17.8%, however, is solely due to real wages falling further for men than for women. Both men and women's real earnings have declined since 2010; men's real earnings declined by 2.1 percent (from \$850 to \$832 in 2011 dollars), women's by 0.9 percent (from \$690 to \$684 in 2011 dollars).

Another measure of the earnings gap, the ratio of women's and men's median annual earnings for full-time year-round workers, was 77.4 in 2010 (data for 2011 are not yet available), less than half of a percentage point higher than that in 2009. (This means the annual gender wage gap for full-time year-round workers is a little under 23 percent.)

The annual gender earnings ratio for full-time year-round workers, which includes self-employed workers, tends to be slightly lower than the ratio for weekly earnings (which excludes the self-employed and includes full-time workers who work only part of the year). The two series exhibit the same general trend over the long term (even though they often move in different directions in the short-term).

Figure 1: The Gender Earnings Ratio, 1955-2011, Full-Time Workers



Notes: See Table 2

Progress in closing the gender earnings gap has slowed considerably since the early 1990s, as measured by both data series. Since 2001 the annual gender earnings gap narrowed by only about one percentage point. In the previous decade, from 1991 to 2000, it closed by almost four, and in the decade prior to that, 1981 to 1990, by over ten percentage points. The weekly gender earnings gap has narrowed at a more steady pace, at 7.6 percentage points during the 1980s, 2.7 percentage

points during the 1990s, and by 5.8 percentage points since 2001 (Table 2). If the pace of change in the annual earnings ratio continued at the same rate as it has since 1960, it will take another 45 years, until 2056, for men and women to reach parity.²

Both earnings ratios (for weekly full-time workers and for year-round full-time workers) reflect gender differences in both hourly wages and the number of hours worked each year (among full-time workers). If part-time and part-year workers were included, the ratios of women's to men's earnings would be much lower, as women are more likely than men to work reduced schedules, often in order to manage childrearing and other caregiving work.

As illustrated by Table 1, women of all race and ethnic groups earn less than men of the same group. Asian American workers as a group have the highest median weekly earnings, primarily because of historically higher rates of educational attainment for both genders; relative to Asian American men, Asian American women earn only 77.4 percent. Asian American women experienced the biggest decline in real earnings in 2011, of 5.8 percent. African American women earn 91.1 percent of median weekly earnings of African American men; Hispanic women earn 90.7 percent of median weekly earnings of Hispanic men.

African American and Hispanic workers of both sexes earn considerably less than white workers, and the gender wage gap when measured using white men's earnings as the comparison is particularly marked for women of color (except for Asian American women). African American women on average only earned 69.5 percent for every dollar earned by a white male per week, and Hispanic/ Latina women only 60.5 cents (Table 1). Median weekly earnings for African American and Hispanic women are well below 150 percent of the 2011 federal poverty threshold for a family of four.¹

Table 1: Median Weekly Earnings (Annual Average) and Gender Earnings Ratio for Full-Time Workers, 16 Years and Older by Race/Ethnic Background, 2010 and 2011

Race/ Ethnic Background	2011				2010 (in 2011 dollars)**	
	Women (\$)	Men (\$)	Female Earnings as % of Male Earnings (%)	Female Earnings as % of White Male Earnings (%)	Women (\$)	Men (\$)
All Races/ Ethnicities	684	832	82.2		690	850
White	703	856	82.1	82.1	706	877
African-American	595	653	91.1	69.5	611	653
Hispanic or Latino	518	571	90.7	60.5	524	578
Asian American	751	970	77.4	87.7	797	966

Notes: *These categories are not exclusive because workers who identified themselves as Hispanic/Latina/o are classified by both ethnicity and race and may be of any race. ** Adjustments for data from earlier years to 2011 dollars are computed on the basis of the Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers (CPI-U) that is published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpiiai.txt> (retrieved February 2012).

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers by selected characteristics, annual averages* <<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/wkyeng.t07.htm>> (retrieved February 2012).

Closing the wage gap is not a zero-sum game – gains for one gender do not require losses for the other. For the gender wage gap to close, women's real wages must rise faster than men's, and as the economy becomes more productive, one would expect real wages to rise for both men and women. Yet, as can be seen from Table 2, since 1980 real wages for men have remained virtually unchanged, while women's real earnings have increased across the same time period. Women's earnings have become increasingly important to family incomes.

Table 2: The Gender Wage Ratio and Real Earnings, 1955-2011, Full-Time Workers

Year	Median Annual Earnings, adjusted to 2011 dollars Full-time, Year-Round Workers			Median Usual Weekly Earnings, adjusted to 2011 dollars Full-time, Wage and Salary Workers		
	Women (\$)	Men (\$)	Female to Male Earnings Ratio (%)	Women (\$)	Men (\$)	Female to Male Earnings Ratio (%)
1955			63.9			
1960	21,646	35,676	60.7			
1965	23,902	39,887	59.9			
1970	27,515	46,346	59.4			62.3
1975	28,523	48,493	58.8			62.0
1980	29,098	48,369	60.2	546	854	63.9
1981	28,477	48,075	59.2	539	839	64.3
1982	29,123	47,167	61.7	555	848	65.4
1983	29,865	46,962	63.6	569	854	66.7
1984	30,475	47,872	63.7	572	846	67.5
1985	31,145	48,231	64.6	579	849	68.2
1986	31,781	49,450	64.3	595	860	69.2
1987	32,029	49,141	65.2	600	859	69.8
1988	32,165	48,698	66.1	599	854	70.2
1989	32,872	47,867	68.7	597	851	70.1
1990	33,068	46,173	71.6	595	828	71.9
1991	33,100	47,382	69.9	604	814	74.2
1992	33,572	47,429	70.8	609	803	75.8
1993	33,333	46,606	71.5	613	794	77.3
1994	33,324	46,303	72.0	606	794	76.3
1995	32,968	46,155	71.4	599	794	75.5
1996	33,845	45,883	73.8	599	799	75.0
1997	34,894	47,051	74.2	604	810	74.6
1998	35,637	48,705	73.2	631	825	76.4
1999	35,523	49,122	72.3	639	836	76.4
2000	35,868	48,654	73.7	644	837	76.9
2001	37,115	48,625	76.3	650	851	76.4
2002	37,760	49,294	76.6	661	849	77.9
2003	37,573	49,733	75.5	675	850	79.4
2004	37,198	48,576	76.6	682	849	80.4
2005	36,704	47,681	77.0	674	832	81.0
2006	36,271	47,144	76.9	669	829	80.8
2007	38,077	48,936	77.8	666	831	80.2
2008	37,340	48,436	77.1	667	834	79.9
2009	38,041	49,417	77.0	689	859	80.2
2010	38,097	49,221	77.4	690	850	81.2
2011				684	832	82.2

Notes for Figure 1 and Table 2: Annual earnings data include self-employed workers; weekly data are for wage and salary workers only. Annual earnings are for people 15 years old and older beginning in 1980 and people 14 years old and older as of the following year for previous years. Before 1989 annual earnings are for civilian workers only. Weekly earnings are for full-time workers aged 16 and older and are not restricted to full-year workers. The annual average of weekly median earnings is usually released in January by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Annual median earnings data are typically released in late summer or early fall by the U.S. Census Bureau. Both data series are derived from the Current Population Survey. Adjustments for data from earlier years to 2011 dollars are computed on the basis of the Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers (CPI-U) that is published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpi.txt> (retrieved February 2012)).

Source: Annual data: 1955: Francine D. Blau and Marianne A. Ferber, *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992) ; U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010*, Table A-5, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf> (accessed March 2012) Weekly data: 1970 and 1975: Blau and Ferber (1992); 1980-2011: Weekly and Hourly Earnings Data from the Current Population Survey <http://data.bls.gov/pdq/querytool.jsp?survey=le> (retrieved March 2012)

Notes

1. The preliminary federal poverty threshold for a household of four in 2011 is \$23,018; the final level will be set in September 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau.2012. 'Poverty.' On the web at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/>)
2. Hayes, Jeffrey. 2011. "Women's Median Earnings as a Percent of Men's Median Earnings, 1960-2009 (Full-Time, Year-Round Workers) with Projection for Pay Equity in 2056." IWPR Publication #Q004. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/women2019s-median-earnings-as-a-percent-of-men2019s-median-earnings-1969-2009-full-time-year-round-workers-with-projection-for-pay-equity-in-2056/at_download/file> (accessed March 7, 2012).

This fact sheet was prepared by Ariane Hegewisch, Claudia Williams, and Anlan Zhang at the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Financial support was provided by the Annie. E. Casey Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

For more information on IWPR reports or membership, please call (202) 785-5100, email iwpr@iwpr.org, or visit www.iwpr.org.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy programs at The George Washington University.