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Income Gap Shifts in Urban Women's Favor

By [SAM ROBERTS](#)

Young women in New York and several of the nation's other largest cities who work full time have forged ahead of men in wages, according to an analysis of recent census data.

The shift has occurred in New York since 2000 and even earlier in Los Angeles, Dallas and a few other cities.

Economists consider it striking because the wage gap between men and women nationally has narrowed more slowly and has even widened in recent years among one part of that group: college-educated women in their 20s. But in New York, young college-educated women's wages as a percentage of men's rose slightly between 2000 and 2005.

The analysis was prepared by Andrew A. Beveridge, a demographer at [Queens College](#), who first reported his findings in Gotham Gazette, published online by the Citizens Union Foundation. It shows that women of all educational levels from 21 to 30 living in New York City and working full time made 117 percent of men's wages, and even more in Dallas, 120 percent. Nationwide, that group of women made much less: 89 percent of the average full-time pay for men.

Just why young women at all educational levels in New York and other big cities have fared better than their peers elsewhere is a matter of some debate. But a major reason, experts say, is that women have been graduating from college in larger numbers than men, and that many of those women seem to be gravitating toward major urban areas.

In 2005, 53 percent of women in their 20s working in New York were college graduates, compared with only 38 percent of men of that age. And many of those women are not marrying right after college, leaving them freer to focus on building careers, experts said.

"Citified college-women are more likely to be nonmarried and childless, compared with their suburban sisters, so they can and do devote themselves to their careers," said Andrew Hacker, a Queens College sociologist.

Kelly Kraft, 25, is one of those women. A native of Indiana, she came to New York after graduating from the University of Dayton, got a job in publishing and now works for an advertising agency. "I just felt New York had a lot more exciting opportunities in different industries than Indianapolis," she said.

"In women's-studies courses you always heard that men were making more money, and it was a disadvantage being a woman," Ms. Kraft said. "It's great that it's starting to turn around."

New York may also be more attractive to college-educated women, some experts said, because many jobs in the city pay higher salaries than similar ones elsewhere in the country. “New York is an achievement-based city, and achievement here is based on how well you use your brain, not what you do with your back,” said Mitchell L. Moss, a professor of urban policy and planning at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at [New York University](#).

In 1970, all New York women in their 20s made \$7,000 less than men, on average, adjusted for inflation. By 2000, they were about even. In 2005, according to an analysis of the latest census results they were making about \$5,000 more: a median wage of \$35,653, or 117 percent of the \$30,560 reported by men in that age group.

Women in their 20s also make more than men in Chicago, Boston, Minneapolis and a few other big cities. But only in Dallas do young women’s wages surpass men’s by a larger amount than in New York. In Dallas, women make 120 percent of what men do, although their median wage there, \$25,467, was much lower than that of women in New York.

Nationally, women in their 20s made a median income of \$25,467, compared with \$28,523 for men.

Diana Rhoten, a program director at the Social Science Research Council in New York, said well-educated women were migrating to urban centers where there are diverse professional opportunities and less gender discrimination than in smaller cities and suburbs. There may also be nonworkplace factors at play, she said.

“Previously, female migration patterns were determined primarily by their husband’s educational levels or employment needs, even if both were college-educated,” she said. “Today, highly qualified women are moving for their own professional opportunities and personal interests. It’s no longer an era of power couple migration to, but one of power couple formation in places like New York.”

Dr. Beveridge, based his findings of young women’s earning power on data from the census bureau’s 2005 American Community Survey used to analyze people working at least 35 hours a week 40 or more weeks a year.

It is not clear whether this is the front edge of a trend in which women will gradually move ahead of men in all age groups. Typically, women have fallen further behind men in earnings as they get older. That is because some women stop working altogether, work only part time or encounter a glass ceiling in promotions and raises.

But as women enrolled in college and graduate school continue to outnumber men, gender wage gaps among older workers may narrow, too, experts said. Even among New Yorkers in their 30s, women now make as much as men.

In New York, the pay gap between men and women varied by borough, profession, race and ethnicity, the analysis found.

Young women from the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens make more than young men from those boroughs. Young women from Staten Island make the same as men. Among Manhattanites, the median wage for workers in their 20s was \$46,859 for men and \$45,840 for women.

The gender wage advantage for women in their 20s was widest among whites with some college education, blacks and Asians with advanced degrees and Hispanic women who were high school or college graduates.

Young men in the city still make more than young women in a number of jobs, including psychologist, registered nurse, high school teacher, bank teller and bartender. In high-paying Wall Street jobs, men heavily outnumber women, which is one reason that Martin Kohli, a regional economist with the federal [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), described the women's wage gains as "a surprising finding."

But in jobs that were once defined as male preserves — including police officer and private investigator — where gender barriers are crumbling, young men and women in New York had the same median wages: a little more than \$40,000. And women in their 20s now make more than men in a wide variety of other jobs: as doctors, personnel managers, architects, economists, lawyers, stock clerks, customer service representatives, editors and reporters.

Melissa J. Manfro, a 24-year-old lawyer who was raised in upstate New York, offered her own theory on why younger female lawyers are outearning their male peers: a desire to begin their careers earlier to prepare for starting families.

"It seems that women tend to take less time off between college and law school, and therefore become more senior, and, hence, make more money, at a younger age," she said. "I would, of course, like to think that means that women know what they want sooner than men. But it probably has more to do with the unfortunate fact that women need to keep in mind biological time constraints and feel a great deal of pressure to build an entire career before refocusing on marriage and children."

Though Dr. Beveridge's analysis showed women making strides, it also showed that men were in some ways moving backward. Among all men — including those with college degrees — real wages, adjusted for inflation, have declined since 1970. And among full-time workers with advanced degrees, wages for men increased only marginally even as they soared for women. Nationally, men's wages in general declined while women's remained the same.

Several experts also said that rising income for women might affect marriage rates if women expect their mates to have at least equivalent salaries and education.

"When New York college women say there are few eligible men around, they're right if they mean they'll only settle for someone with an education akin to their own," Professor Hacker said.

Cristina Maldonado contributed reporting.

