

ARE LESS-EDUCATED WOMEN IN THE BLIND SPOT OF PAY EQUITY?

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ABSTRACT

In this article I will show two things: first, that the labour market is still very divided with respect to gender; and second, that the material impact of this division differs sharply by level of education. Among occupations that require the least education, women pay a very high price for this gender-based division of employment. In contrast to occupations where more education is needed, occupations requiring the least education show a huge difference in wages according to whether they are predominantly male or predominantly female. This difference is a widespread phenomenon that favours so-called male occupations. The corresponding pay gap, in men's favour, in occupations requiring a high school diploma (Secondary V in Quebec) or less, is shrinking only slightly, whereas the gaps between men and women in occupations requiring more education are clearly closing. The article then demonstrates that three often-mentioned options for action at present offer little hope of countering this particular phenomenon: these options are the application of Quebec's Pay Equity Act, collective bargaining, and internal promotion. The problem still affects approximately 500,000 women, after 25 years of equal access programs and close to 15 years of implementation of the Pay Equity Act. Employment equity programs are the most promising initiatives, provided that they can find their way into the affected employment sectors.

INTRODUCTION

While women have made a number of gains in terms of labour force participation, the division of labour is still largely gender based. A gendered concentration

of workers still exists in certain occupations and certain jobs, even though other occupations have a more mixed workforce. After 25 years of employment equity policy in Quebec, some jobs still have such a high concentration of women or men that they can be called predominantly female or predominantly male.

To determine whether an occupation is predominantly female or male, the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ) uses a diversity index that can be expressed as the difference between the proportion of men or women in the overall labour force and their proportion in a specific occupation.

In 2006, for instance, the proportion of women in the labour force was 47%, while that of men was 53%. An occupation is considered “female“ if the proportion of women in that occupation is equal to or greater than the 47% in the labour force, and “predominantly female” if the proportion of women is equal to or greater than 73.5%. Conversely, if women account for less than 47% of persons in an occupation, down to 23%, the occupation is termed “male”; if the proportion of women is less than 23%, the occupation is termed “predominantly male.”

Of the 520 occupations listed in Canada’s National Occupational Classification (NOC), in 2006, 347 were deemed male or predominantly male and 174 were deemed female or predominantly female (see Table 1). There were, therefore, almost twice as many male or predominantly male occupations as there were female or predominantly female occupations, and so men had more diverse options available to them. Approximately three-quarters of workers are employed in male/predominantly male or female/predominantly female occupations (78.7% of working women, 73.3% of working men).

In 2006, women were working in 221 occupations in which there was a very high concentration of men. Conversely, men were to be found in 71 occupations with a very high proportion of women, stretching over all sectors of the economy.

In this article, I will show two things: first, that the labour market is still very divided with respect to gender and, second, that the material impact of this division on the pay gap differs sharply by level of education. Among occupations that require the least education, women pay a very high price for the gender-based division of employment. In contrast to occupations where more education is needed, occupations requiring the least education show a huge difference in wages according to whether they are male/predominantly male or female/predominantly female. This difference is a widespread phenomenon that favours so-called male occupations. In Quebec, high school education ends at the completion of Secondary V (the equivalent of Grade 11 in the rest of Canada). The corresponding pay gap in men’s favour in occupations requiring the completion of Secondary V or less is shrinking only slightly, whereas the pay gaps between men and women in occupations requiring more education are clearly closing. I will examine three options for action that, at present, offer little hope for improvement. The problem still affects approximately 500,000 women, after 25 years of equal access programs and close to 15 years of implementation of the Pay Equity

Table 1. Breakdown of Labour Force by Degree to Which Occupations Are Female or Male, Quebec, 1991-2006

	2006		2001		1991	
	Number of occupations	% of Labour Force	Number of occupations	% of Labour Force	Number of occupations	% of Labour Force
Women						
In female or predominantly female occupations	174	78.7	170	77.7	152	79.2
In male occupations	125	15.4	115	16.6	109	14.8
In predominantly male occupations	221	6	221	5.7	245	6
Total	520	100	506	100	506	100
Men						
In male or predominantly male occupations	347	73.3	337	75.5	353	77.3
In female occupations	102	20.3	103	18.2	92	16.5
In predominantly female occupations	71	6.4	66	6.3	61	6.2
Total	520	100	506	100	506	100

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

Act, which is supposed to be an international model of its type (Chicha, 2006). Most studies of the factors leading to the success/failure of pay equity programs focus on unionization and organization size (England & Gad, 2002) but not on the effect of job segregation combined with the level of education of workers. This article shows that we should pay attention to these latter factors.

PAY AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY LEGISLATION IN QUEBEC AND IN CANADA

Employment Equity

The government of Quebec has never adopted proactive legislation regarding employment equity in the private sector, aside from requiring organizations that solicit contracts and subsidies from the government to hire women, under a “contractual obligation.”

It is only the Canadian government that has followed a proactive approach to the private sector, since 1985, in the case of organizations that employ 100 employees or more, under the Employment Equity Act. This law is covering 1.1 million employees in 2008, that is, a very small proportion (7%) of the 14.4 million Canadian workers. The federal government also imposes a “contractual obligation.”

Systemic discrimination is the fundamental concept behind the entire Quebec legal apparatus in the area of equity. Systemic discrimination is neither explicit nor voluntary, neither conscious nor intentional. It is often the result of a management system that is based on a certain number of presuppositions, most often implicit, with respect to various groups, a system including practices and traditions that perpetuate a situation of inequality with respect to the members of specified target groups. Systemic discrimination involves discrimination that is built into employment systems, often unintentionally. Such systems always have an adverse impact on one group (e.g., women) compared to another (e.g., men); they may reflect old social values (e.g., men are breadwinners and should be paid more).

To establish the existence of systemic discrimination, it is necessary to demonstrate the “under-use” of the members of the four specified target groups: women, members of cultural communities, people with disabilities, and Native People (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse du Québec [CDPDJQ], 2003a, 2003b; Legault, 2002). The members of the target groups are underused when their numbers in a given job in a given organization are less than their availability rate on the job market. When this threshold for underuse is established, the employer may practice preferential hiring or promotion for the members of the target groups *when they have the same qualifications as the other candidates*, until the group has the same representation rate in the organization as this availability rate on the job market. Affirmative action programs aim

essentially at increasing the representation of the members of the target groups and at breaking down the sexual segregation of jobs by providing members of the target groups with access to all types of jobs.

Pay Equity

In Canada and in the rest of North America as well, pay equity, also known as “fair wages” or “fair pay,” is a means to redress a particular kind of gender-based intraorganization wage discrimination that results from a combination of gender-based occupational segregation and the underpayment of women’s work. The need for pay equity is indeed premised on the conclusion that female jobs have been undervalued and underpaid because they have been performed primarily by women (the “overcrowding hypothesis”: see Alksnis, Desmarais, & Curtis, 2008; Bergmann, 1971, 1974; Sorensen, 1990). Unlike employment equity, pay equity focuses on gender and not on race, disability, or any other discriminating status. A key lesson learned from a complaint-based, human rights-style approach is that it is not as effective as a proactive approach for redressing discrimination built into compensation systems (Beeman, 2004). Quebec, the first jurisdiction to require pay equity in 1976, changed its initial complaint-based approach to a proactive one in 1996. This has now been in force for close to 15 years. The basic three-step pay equity process includes the following: defining female and male jobs, using a gender-neutral job evaluation system to assess the value of female and male jobs, and using a method to determine fair wages for female jobs that are of comparable value to male jobs.

Nearly all of the 14 Canadian jurisdictions are involved with pay equity: (1) the federal public service, federal Crown corporations, and private firms crossing provincial boundaries (the banking, communication, and transportation industries); (2) 9 out of 10 provincial governments, a category that covers the provincial public service, broader public sector organizations (e.g., schools, hospitals), and private firms operating within the provincial boundaries; and (3) three territories. Private sector organizations are covered by proactive legislation in two jurisdictions: Ontario since 1988 and Quebec since 1996 (Weiner, 2002).

Pay equity in Quebec is handled within a single organization under the Pay Equity Act, as compared to broader, more centralized wage-setting mechanisms in other countries (e.g., Australia). Gender-neutral job evaluation is the key to pay equity. Though they were compatible with pay equity, in reality, job-evaluation systems either incorporated gender bias or were used in a gender-biased manner. Pay (like employment) equity is aimed at redressing systemic gendered discrimination in wage setting. A job’s value is defined in terms of skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. The aggregate value of female jobs is compared to the aggregate value of a corresponding male job—or to the corresponding point on a line where the x axis represents wages and the y axis represents job evaluation scores.

Pay equity is directed at redressing the underpayment of women's work while temporarily taking occupational segregation for granted (Armstrong & Cornish, 1997). However, it is theoretically possible that over time, the higher wages that become associated with female jobs because of pay equity could attract a higher proportion of men to particular occupations:

As long as women's jobs are paid fairly given their value, pay equity is achieved even though occupational segregation continues. Employment equity, on the other hand, is designed to reduce occupational segregation among traditional male jobs by removing the barriers that have kept women (and other designated groups) out. Employment equity "accepts" the wages associated with traditionally female jobs, that is, it is unconcerned that female jobs may be underpaid relative to their value. (Weiner, 2002: S102)

Some feel that pay equity is not needed, because employment equity will remove the barriers that prevent women from moving into more highly paid male jobs. Such a view makes two inappropriate assumptions. First, it makes the assumption that all men's jobs pay more than all women's jobs; the pay of janitors compared to the pay of nurses shows that this is not true. Second, it makes the assumption that all women will move into higher-level male jobs; this denies the continuing need for what have traditionally been female jobs. Pay equity is needed because of the presence of both occupational segregation and the underpayment of women's work (Weiner, 2002: S102).

True, nurses are better paid than janitors are; but these are different-level jobs, so one could say that this argument is not conclusive. We will see here that among jobs requiring the same lower level of education, men's jobs are generally better paid than women's. That being said, there are various types of gender wage gaps, not all of which are being addressed by pay equity legislation:

- Men working in higher-valued jobs than women (segregation in employment, employment and pay inequity),
- Men and women working in substantially the same jobs, but men working in higher-wage industries (segregation in employment, employment and pay inequity),
- Men and women working in substantially the *same jobs* for the *same employer* but men having higher human capital or productivity or men being paid more (unequal pay for equal work, direct discrimination),
- Men and women working in *equally valued jobs* for the same employer but men being paid more (discrimination that pay equity is designed to redress). (Weiner, 2002, S 103)

We will focus here on the first source of pay inequity that pay equity legislation fails to address and eradicate (men working in higher-valued jobs than women). Baker and Fortin (1999) have looked at the relationship between the proportion of men and women in an occupation and their pay and shown that in the United

States, there is a negative relationship between hourly wages and the proportion of women in an occupation (this was also the conclusion of Sorensen, 1990). This is related to pay equity since the proportion of women in an occupation is expected to be related to wages at the level of the firm. Nan Weiner, a Canadian expert, asserts that this latter relationship “does not exist in Canada” (Weiner, 2002: S113). An in-depth analysis shows that things are not that simple.

LABOUR FORCE CONCENTRATION OF WOMEN AND MEN

Is the situation changing in terms of gendered workforce concentration? Some underlying trends are stable, as can be seen from a previous article (Legault, 2010). The 10 occupations with the largest number of workers in 2006 were among the top 20 in 2001 and 1991, with one exception. The top three female occupations remained the same: secretary (98% women), sales clerk (56.7%), and cashier (86.1%); sales clerk and cashier are relatively unskilled occupations.

If we broaden the scope of our study to include the top 50 occupations for women in 2006, we obtain a range that encompasses two-thirds of working women. If, from this group, we take occupations where no more than a high school diploma is required, it can be seen (see Table 2) that a third of the women in the labour force work in 20 occupations that have a very high percentage of female employees.

In 2006, women were still underrepresented in the less-skilled, predominantly male occupations: truck driver, automotive service technician, carpenter, janitor, material handler, delivery driver, and construction labourer (Legault, 2010). Construction industry occupations in general are still predominantly male (98.8% male: Legault & Danvoye, 2007).

Women have made noteworthy progress as bus drivers, subway operators, and other transit operators (proportion of jobs in these occupations held by women rising from 21.2% in 1991 to 26.1% in 2001) and among technical sales specialists (proportion rising from 21.5% in 1991 to 27.4% in 2001)—which pushed these two occupations from “predominantly male” to just “male”—and among shippers and receivers (rising from 17.6% to 22.3%), often thanks to affirmative action measures, at the very least for bus drivers and subway operators, due to city governments’ legal liabilities.

Yet overall, it can be seen that there is a higher proportion of men than women in the manufacturing industries, while there are more women than men in the service industries. Even within the service sector, there are still some gender divisions, with more men than women employed in the transportation industry, for instance.

If, as we did for women, we broaden our scope to include the top 100 occupations for men in 2006, we arrive at a range that encompasses virtually two-thirds of the men in the labour force. If, from this group, we take occupations that

Table 2. Selection of Occupations in Which No More than a High School Diploma Is Required, among Top 50 for Women in 2006, Quebec

Rank	Occupational structure NOC-S 2006	Labour force (15 and over)	% of female labour force	% women
1	Secretaries (except legal and medical)	99,105	5.4	98
3	Cashiers	70,425	3.8	86.1
5	General office clerks	55,740	3.0	87.2
8	Accounting and related clerks	45,250	2.4	84.8
9	Food and beverage servers	41,605	2.2	76.4
10	Nurse's aides, orderlies, and patient service associates	41,245	2.2	81.4
16	Receptionists and switchboard operators	24,940	1.3	87.8
17	Customer service, information, and related clerks	24,065	1.3	63.5
19	Hairstylists and barbers	22,225	1.2	85.2
20	Customer service representatives in financial services	21,300	1.2	88.3
23	Industrial sewing machine operators	16,920	0.9	89.8
24	Visiting homemakers, house-keepers, and related occupations	14,920	0.8	86.6
27	Elementary and secondary school teacher's assistants	12,985	0.7	83.2
29	Administrative clerks	12,755	0.7	74.3
31	Licensed practical nurses	11,895	0.6	91.4
32	Other occupations in support of health services	11,805	0.6	85.2

Table 2. (Cont'd.)

Rank	Occupational structure NOC-S 2006	Labour force (15 and over)	% of female labour force	% women
33	Babysitters, nannies, and parents' helpers	11,190	0.6	96.6
34	Estheticians, electrologists, and related occupations	10,895	0.6	96
37	Bookkeepers	9,765	0.5	80.4
	Total (% women: weighted average)	559,030	30.2	86.5
	Total for top 50 occupations (% women: weighted average)	1,222,945	66.1	67.7
	Total for 520 occupations	1,849,195	100	47.1

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

require no more than a high school diploma, it can be seen (Table 3) that 28.2% of working men are employed in 37 occupations in which the percentage of male workers is very high.

In other words, if, from all occupations, we first take the top ones for women and for men, so that we have around two-thirds of all male and female workers, and if we then look at occupations that (1) require no more than a high school diploma and (2) are predominantly male or female, in other words, highly gender divided, then it can be seen that a third of working women are employed in 20 occupations having a very high proportion of female workers (weighted average of 86.5%), and that 28.2% of men work in 37 occupations having a very high proportion of male workers (weighted average of 90.5%). This means that around a third of men and women work in predominantly male or predominantly female occupations requiring no more than a high school diploma.

Does gender division, or gender-based concentration of workers, affect all occupations in the economy to the same degree? Occupational sex segregation is well distributed throughout the economy and is not restricted to occupations requiring lower levels of education. If, from the top 50 occupations for women and the top 100 occupations for men, we aggregate those requiring a junior college diploma or university degree and involving managerial duties—this time without choosing those with the highest proportion of male or female workers and without excluding mixed workforce occupations—and those requiring a high

Table 3. Selection of Occupations in Which No More than a High School Diploma Is Required, among Top 100 for Men in 2006, Quebec

Rank	Occupational structure NOC-S 2006	Labour force (15 and over)	% of Male labour force	% men
2	Truck drivers	63,385	3	96.5
4	Automotive service technicians and truck and bus mechanics	37,630	1.8	98.4
5	Carpenters	34,600	1.7	98.7
6	Janitors, caretakers, and building superintendents	34,170	1.6	82.1
7	Material handlers	33,210	1.6	89.1
8	Delivery and courier service drivers	30,908	1.5	92.8
10	Construction trades helpers and labourers	27,935	1.3	94.1
15	Shippers and receivers	24,450	1.2	75.2
18	Welders and related machine operators	22,995	1.1	95.8
20	Security guards and related occupations	20,790	1	75.3
21	Construction millwrights and industrial mechanics (excluding those in the textile industry)	20,660	1	98.2
28	Heavy equipment operators (excluding crane operators)	16,120	0.8	98.7
29	Machinists and machining and tooling inspectors	16,030	0.8	94.5
30	Landscaping and grounds maintenance labourers	15,375	0.7	88.3
31	Labourers in wood, pulp, and paper processing	15,055	0.7	87.2

Table 3. (Cont'd.)

Rank	Occupational structure NOC-S 2006	Labour force (15 and over)	% of Male labour force	% men
33	General farm workers	14,570	0.7	71.4
34	Electricians (excluding those in the industrial and power systems)	14,400	0.7	98.5
40	Storekeepers and parts clerks	12,020	0.6	86.8
44	Public works and maintenance labourers	10,875	0.5	86.7
51	Taxi and limousine drivers and chauffeurs	9,555	0.5	92.9
55	Plumbers	8,765	0.4	98.3
58	Motor vehicle body repairers	8,550	0.4	97.3
67	Printing press operators	7,540	0.4	85.5
70	Furniture and fixture assemblers and inspectors	7,435	0.4	79.3
71	Heavy-duty equipment mechanics	7,415	0.4	98.4
73	Cabinetmakers	7,305	0.4	89.9
74	Residential and commercial installers and servicers	7,215	0.3	95.2
78	Butchers, meat cutters, and fishmongers—retail and wholesale	6,915	0.3	84
81	Specialized cleaners	6,495	0.3	87.8
82	Chefs	6,455	0.3	76.3
83	Residential home builders and renovators	6,220	0.3	97
90	Process control and machine operators in food and beverage processing	5,485	0.3	70.3

Table 3. (Cont'd.)

Rank	Occupational structure NOC-S 2006	Labour force (15 and over)	% of Male labour force	% men
91	Plasterers, drywall installers, and finishers and lathe operators	5,475	0.3	93.8
94	Letter carriers	5,255	0.3	68.8
98	Sawmill machine operators	4,950	0.2	94.3
99	Service station attendants	4,750	0.2	71.7
100	Bricklayers	4,730	0.2	99
	Total (% men: weighted average)	585,760	28.2	90.5
	Total for top 100 occupations (% men: weighted average)	1,415,485	68	58.1
	Total for 520 occupations	2,080,075	100	52.9

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

school diploma or less, and compute the average male/female concentration, we obtain relatively comparable weighted average proportions of women and men for the four groups seen in Table 4.

Experts tend to assert that “Gender gaps are closing in terms of education, hours and days worked” (England & Gad, 2002: 292), and this is a fact. But still, education and hours of work being equal for given social groups, there is gendered concentration in many occupations, throughout the economy. And while the concentration of one gender or the other in an occupation is not restricted to jobs requiring lower-level qualifications, the consequences of such segregation are much more serious in such jobs. According to the “crowding hypothesis,” we are supposed to observe the following sequence of events. Women are crowded into some occupations, typically referred to as “women’s work,” which reduces their wage:

For simplification, this model assumes that women and men have equal abilities and thus without discrimination they would be paid equally. Hence, it predicts that because of discrimination women and men are segregated into different occupations and that those doing “women’s work” earn less than those doing “men’s work” even though all workers are equally well qualified for both jobs. (Sorensen, 1990: 56)

Table 4. Concentration by Sex and by Level of Education
Required for Occupation, Quebec, 2006

Occupations	Top 50 among women	Top 100 among men
Requiring a junior college or university degree, and involving managerial duties	75.8%	73.4%
Requiring a high school diploma or less	72.8%	69.3%

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

A reading of contemporary data leads to slightly different conclusions; in this case, progress in women's earnings is noticeable in jobs requiring education, refuting the crowding hypothesis; however, the crowding hypothesis is still confirmed as there is far more inertia in job sectors involving less-educated workers. In other words, the effects of a lower level of education on wages are not the same for women as for men, as we shall see.

OCCUPATIONAL SEX SEGREGATION HAS A VERY SIGNIFICANT MATERIAL IMPACT ON THE LESS EDUCATED

The General Wage Gap: Comparing Hourly Rates of Pay

In industrialized societies in general, the average rates of pay—whether hourly, weekly or annual—for men are higher than those for women, the size of the gap varying with the pay period considered.

The advantage of making comparisons in terms of annual compensation is that such compensation represents the actual employment income available to workers, taking into account the actual duration of paid work, excluding periods of unemployment, time between temporary jobs, and part-time work but including overtime hours. On the other hand, it does not provide a precise indication of the value of work in the marketplace, as variations in the length of time worked confuse the picture.

Weekly compensation is closer to representing the value of work in the marketplace, as it excludes confounding factors such as periods without employment (due to temporary job status or to periods of unemployment during the year), but it is nevertheless affected by two other confounding factors: work pattern (full-time or part-time) and overtime hours.

Looking at hourly compensation gives us the advantage of not introducing any confounding factors such as work pattern (full-time, part-time), employment status (permanent, temporary), periods without employment, or overtime hours.

The gap between men's and women's hourly pay is always less than the gap between men's and women's weekly or annual pay. Weekly and annual rates offer a more accurate picture of real income, as they take into account the actual time worked. On the other hand, the hourly rate tells us more about market value, and that is why I have chosen to focus on hourly rates here. Please keep in mind that these rates represent the smallest pay gap.

A Narrowing Gender Pay Gap in General

Aggregate gaps are narrowing and the general trend is toward equity. In Quebec, men's hourly pay rate was higher than women's throughout the period 1998–2008, but the difference shrank by 3.8 percentage points during that period (see Table 5). While hourly rates rose for both sexes over that time, the increase was higher for women (33.2%) than for men (27.4%). This consistent trend can be explained by employers' propensity to invest in training and raise pay when employees are more stably employed.

But what happens to the difference between men's and women's rates of pay if the level of education required for jobs is taken into account? Extensive studies of the relationship between education and pay, both in the general population and among women in particular, have shown how the gap in pay between men and women can be reduced if the gap in education is reduced, and the same applies to skills acquired outside the educational system (Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 2002; Blau & Kahn, 2000; Drolet, 2001; Gunderson, 2006; Gunderson & Muszynski 1990; O'Neill & Polachek, 1993). According to this point of view, the specialized vocational training programs for trades are part of the problem, as they are

Table 5. Gaps in Hourly Pay between Men and Women, Quebec, 1998–2008

Hourly	1998	2003	2008	Change 1998–2008
All men	\$16.79	\$18.82	\$21.39	+ 27.4%
All women	\$14.01	\$15.93	\$18.65	+ 33.2%
Gap men–women	\$2.78	\$2.89	\$2.74	
Gap in % terms	16.6%	15.4%	12.8%	–3.8 pp

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

informally, but efficiently, closed to women. According to the theory of human capital, a worker's level of pay can be partly explained by his or her productivity factors, including education and skills. In other words, one portion of the gendered wage gap is attributable to differences in the wage-determining characteristics of women and men, such as age, education, and training (Gunderson, 1998).

I have divided the working population into four groups that remain constant throughout the study: no high school diploma (less than a high school diploma), high school diploma (completed), postsecondary study (but no university degree), and university degree. The term "least educated" refers to the no high school diploma group, while the term "less educated" refers to both the no high school diploma group and the high school diploma group. Table 6 shows that while women's hourly rates of pay are lower than men's for all levels of education, women's rates rose more than men's over the period from 1998 to 2008.

BUT THE LEAST-EDUCATED FEMALE WORKERS STILL TRAIL BEHIND

Despite the solid findings of previous studies as discussed above, they all ignore one obvious fact: there can be a huge difference between the pay levels of predominantly male and predominantly female occupations requiring the same level of education. In other words, the return on education investment can differ for men and women, and the return on lack of education can differ as well. The effect of low education on pay is not the same for women as it is for men. This runs counter to widespread myths according to which the wage gap is closing at the lower and middle salary ranges, while increasing at the higher salary ranges (Leck, St. Onge, & Lalancette, 1995). In Table 7, it can be seen that the ratio of women's average hourly rate to men's average hourly rate of pay varies with level of education. The lowest ratio for women is among the

Table 6. Hourly Pay, by Sex and Level of Education,
Quebec, 1998–2008 (in current dollars)

Year	No high school diploma		High school diploma		Postsecondary study		University degree	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
1998	\$13.08	\$9.75	\$15.22	\$12.27	\$16.15	\$13.63	\$24.04	\$20.16
2008	\$15.73	\$11.93	\$18.88	\$15.82	\$20.76	\$17.69	\$29.97	\$25.94
Change 1998–2008	+ 20.3%	+ 22.3%	+ 24%	+ 29%	+ 28.5%	+ 30%	+ 24.7%	+ 28.7%

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

Table 7. Ratio of Women's Average Hourly Rate of Pay to Men's Average Hourly Rate of Pay, by Level of Education, Quebec, 1998–2008

Level of education	1998	2008
No high school diploma	74.5	75.8
High school diploma	80.6	83.8
Postsecondary study	84.4	85.2
University degree	83.9	86.5

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

least-educated workers, where women earn just 75.8% of what is earned by men with the same level of schooling.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage differences between the hourly rates of pay of men and women (in men's favour, in all cases) by level of education (no high school diploma, high school diploma, junior college or postsecondary study, and university degree), between 1997 and 2008. Trend lines (linear regression) through the scatters of distinct points for each level of education indicate the general trend; they take into account all the points, even extreme values.

Figure 1 clearly shows a downward trend in the mean differences between men's and women's average hourly rates of pay between 1997 and 2008, for all levels of education combined (from 15.77% to 12.81%). The smallest differences were among the better educated and indicated a similar decline (from 16.12% to 14.79% for the junior college/postsecondary group, and from 13.58% to 13.45% for those with a university degree). The differences for high school graduates were greater, but they fell, too (from 18.22% to 16.21%).

A Growing Gender Pay Gap Inversely Proportional to Education

What is striking, however, is the huge distance between the gender gap of men and women having no high school diploma and that of men and women in the most highly educated group. Furthermore, the gap for the least-educated group shows only a slight downward trend (from 25.83% to 24.16%), while others show a clear downward trend.

Not Even a Downward Trend in the Weekly Gender Pay Gap among the Least-Educated Group

What happens if we examine the same differences between men and women, but this time in terms of average weekly pay? Figure 2 shows the percentage differences in weekly rates of pay between men and women, by level of education.

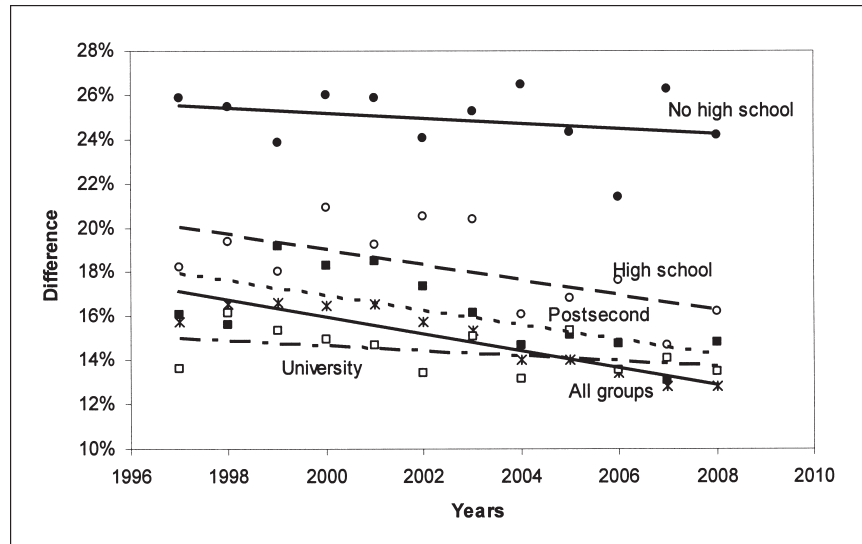


Figure 1. Percentage differences in average hourly compensation of men and women (employees) by level of education, Quebec, 1997–2008 (in current dollars).

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ). Average hourly compensation excludes the self-employed and, where a worker holds down more than one job, it reflects the worker's primary job, the one in which he or she works the greatest number of hours.

It is clear from Figure 2 that the average differences between men and women, between 1997 and 2008, for all levels of education taken together, were much higher, but were still following a downward trend (from 28.21% to 23.07%). The smallest differences were among the most highly educated and showed the same falling trend (from 29.03% to 26.06% for those with junior college/postsecondary education, and from 24.04% to 19.76% for university graduates). The differences were greater for those with only a high school diploma, but these differences were also dropping (from 29.62% to 26.81%).

Yet what is even more striking in this case is the huge distance between the gender gap of men and women having no high school diploma and that of men and women in the most highly educated category. Moreover, the gap for the least-educated group does not appear to be falling but remaining more or less stable (moving only from 39.39% to 39.16%).

In both cases, it should be noted that the pay differences in men's favour, while generally declining, are much higher and more stable among the least-educated group than among junior college graduates and university graduates.

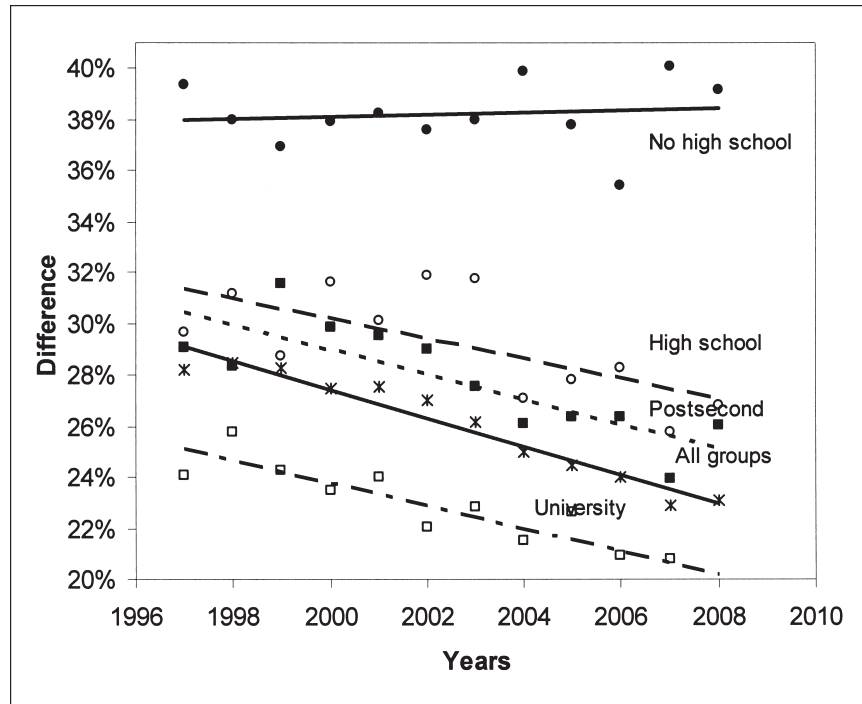


Figure 2. Percentage differences in average weekly compensation of men and women (employees) by level of education, annual mean figures, Quebec, 1997–2008 (in current dollars).

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ). Average weekly compensation is for employees only. Where a worker holds down more than one job, it reflects the worker's primary job, the one in which he or she works the greatest number of hours.

While the less-educated women predominantly hold down the lowest-paid jobs in the service sector (sales clerks, cashiers, servers, office clerks, and nurse's aides), as we saw earlier, the less-educated men occupy the better-paid jobs, being employed in the construction trades and as truck drivers, automotive service technicians, and truck and bus mechanics.

In other words, for the same level of education, the predominantly male occupations are much better paid than the predominantly female occupations. It is also in these jobs that occupational segregation by sex is the most stable and that equal access programs are the most ineffective, as we will see below.

A Total of 494,000 Working Women Affected

How many women are affected by this situation? In 2008, women who had no high school diploma made up 11.2% of the labour force, whereas those who had graduated from high school accounted for 15.4%. All in all, 494,000 working women and 682,000 men had a high school education or less. Is there a decline in the size of the aggregate group of women with a high school education or less? Yes, but it is slow, as can be seen from Figure 3, in which I have combined high school graduates and nongraduates.

Of course, pay is only one aspect of job quality, and it is not the sole criterion on which job seekers base their choice, as they must take a number of different factors into consideration. I could also discuss job quality on the basis of gender and level of education: the Institut de la statistique du Québec has developed a typology of job quality that can be used to compare all salaried jobs (self-employed workers are excluded) within a given economic territory with one another and over time, and to compare groups of workers having specific characteristics (sex, age, unionized status, ethnic origin) from the point of view of the quality of their jobs, based on the result of a combined index of four indicators: pay, qualifications, stability, and working hours (Cloutier, 2008). The results are just the same: female-dominated jobs requiring a high school diploma or less

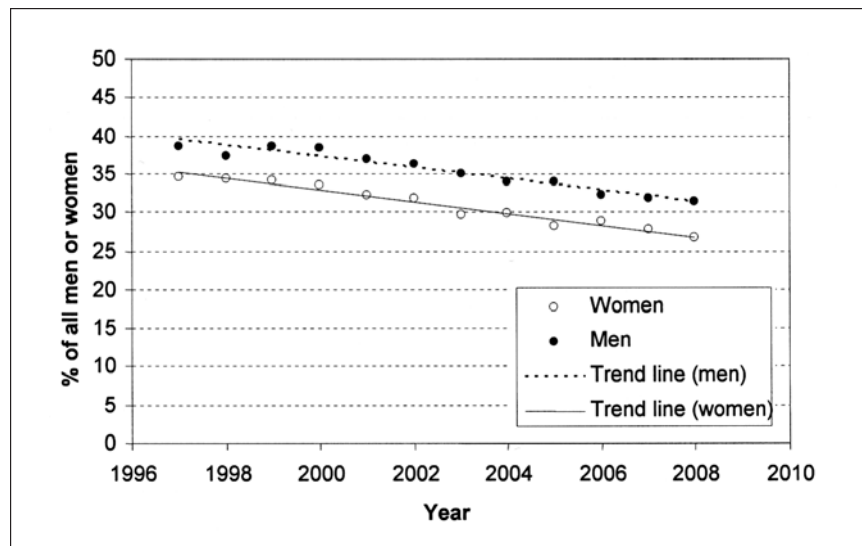


Figure 3. Percentage of men and women with high school diplomas or less, Quebec, 1997–2008.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

have low scores according to this index, while male-dominated jobs have higher scores (Legault, 2010).

To sum up, the ISQ's job quality typology shows a gap, to the disadvantage of women, in the proportions of men and women in good jobs, although the gap narrowed between 1997 and 2007. When the men's and women's groups are broken down by level of education (highest diploma/degree earned), it can be seen that the gap chiefly affects the less-educated women. In the section of the labour force that has no high school diploma, women are at the greatest disadvantage, while they are also at a distinct disadvantage among the high school diploma group. The gap between women and men has remained roughly stable, and the only consolation is to be found in the fact that the total number of men and women with a high school diploma or less has declined, although the group remains large. Finally, in the section of the labour force that has a university degree, the gap between women and men is narrowing. While the total number of men and women in this latter group is rising, the number of women is increasing more than the number of men.

WHY IS THIS INEQUITY A PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE?

The Vicious Circle of Poverty

The situation of women with little education is of particular concern, because their chances of getting ahead are minimal. It is hard for adults in low-paying jobs to move up the employment ladder. One U.S. study has shown that, over a six-year period beginning in the early 1990s that saw very strong economic growth, only 27% of these adults managed to increase their earnings and rise above, on a sustainable basis, the poverty line defined for a family of four (Holzer, 2004). Another, more recent U.S. research project, using data from the Panel Study on Income Dynamics, reached a similar conclusion. Investigating low-wage workers over the period 1995–2001, the researchers discovered that 6% of those who were employed full-time and 18% of those employed part-time, regardless of the year that was taken as the reference period, found themselves out of work in the following year. Of those who did manage to remain employed, 40% had to get by on the same or lower wages (Theodos & Bednarzik, 2006). Over a third of low-wage employees work in the retail, food and beverage, or hotel industries, where there are few employment or training programs (Osterman, 2008), although one interesting experiment in the form of a union apprenticeship program has been documented (San Francisco Multiemployer Group and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees [HERE], Local 2: see Lynch, 2004).

It can be seen that women's relative position in terms of pay has generally been improving, when all educational levels are considered together. According to an analysis that aggregated three sources of U.S. national data, at least half of the improvement in women's relative position is due to the improvement in

their educational level and qualifications and to their accumulated work experience (O'Neill & Polachek, 1993). The remainder of the advancement, say O'Neill and Polachek, is attributable to two factors. First, it can be attributed to the marginal returns on schooling and work experience (in other words, the benefits in terms of pay for each level of education completed—the “sheepskin effect”—or accumulated work experience), which, while positive for both sexes, is greater for women. Second, the decline in manufacturing jobs among men must also be considered. Returns on accumulated work experience have been improving, because as women are staying longer in the labour market, they and their employers have been investing more in on-the-job training, and employers have been less reluctant to reflect these investments by increasing women's wages accordingly. These explanations amount to very good news for women who have access to training, but they are of little comfort to women who do not (O'Neill & Polachek, 1993).

It is all the more important to increase access to non-traditionally female jobs for poor women moving from welfare to work under the new workfare regimes, because this offers an opportunity for women to support their families and move out of poverty (as is well illustrated by Bingham & Gansler, 2002).

On-the-Job Training Is Not Well Developed in Women's Occupations Requiring Little Education

Women who hold jobs requiring few skills but who would like to improve their situation through on-the-job training face a further obstacle. According to a U.S. survey of managers (Black & Lynch, 2001), in 53% of nonmanufacturing companies and 46% of manufacturing firms, the skills required for relatively unspecialized production work and for frontline service work expanded in the 1990s as a result of increased computerization and reduced supervision, in a wide range of jobs, whether principally men's or women's. This gives employees greater responsibility for problem solving and decision making. While these jobs are still among those requiring the least qualifications, the level of qualifications they do require has risen somewhat. Yet 38% of job candidates do not have sufficient command of basic reading, writing, and arithmetical skills, and 31% of employers say they cannot find enough workers with the necessary qualifications for low-skilled jobs (Lynch, 2004). A quarter of all workers also say they are not sufficiently prepared (Leuven & Oosterbeek, 1999).

Given this situation, on-the-job training could be an attractive option, since it would give workers access to better-paid jobs through internal mobility. Surveys show that on-the-job training opportunities increase with the level of qualification already attained (better-qualified workers stand a better chance of being offered further training), with unionization, and with the size of the organization (16% of small businesses offer training, compared with 80% of large companies; Lynch, 2004). An employer's interest in such training declines as

a worker's mobility in the job market increases, since the employer runs the risk of losing its investment. The least-qualified and poorest-paid employees are the most mobile, and, what is more, any training they get may add to their mobility (Lynch, 2004). The jobs held by the least-qualified women are the ones in which employers invest least in on-the-job training: the jobs of sales clerk, cashier, server, receptionist, office clerk, hairstylist, industrial sewing machine operator, visiting homemaker, teacher's assistant and school aide, babysitter, esthetician, and so forth. As a result, women have limited opportunities for on-the-job training (Consultation Group on Employment Equity for Women, 1995).

Employment Equity Programs Are Not Very Successful in These Sectors

While some employment equity programs have led to significant progress in achieving a mixed-gender workforce in certain occupations, the Quebec government's incentive-based approach has produced only limited results in terms of desegregation (Agocs, 2002; Chicha, 2001; England & Gad, 2002) especially among those with the least education. Analysts have come to the same conclusion regarding U.S. programs of the same type (Leonard, 1989, 1990).

The two most recent assessments of Quebec programs date from 1998 (Chicha, 2001; CDPDJQ, 1998), but we will have to make do with them, as the information supplied by companies under this program is not accessible to researchers. Since December 1989, 295 companies have been required to participate in the contractual obligation program (CDPDJQ, 2008), under which they must implement an equal access program before they may receive a contract or grant worth \$100,000 or more from the government of Quebec.

Few companies have fulfilled their obligations and completed the process involved in the program, but 60 are in the implementation phase. This means they have not finished carrying out their program and so have not obtained any results. Only 14 companies have been subjected to sanctions (preventing them from bidding for a contract or applying for a grant from the government until they have fulfilled the terms of their undertaking) and have therefore suffered the consequences (CDPDJQ, 2008). The same poor results, pointing toward lack of political will, poor funding, enforcement, and surveillance, insufficient stringency in the application of the program, and lack of sanctions, have been observed in the Canadian federal-level programs (Agocs, 2002) and in the U.S. programs as well (LaTour, 2008; O'Farrell, 1999).

The number of women employed in organizations subject to the contractual obligation rose by 3.4% between 1989 and 1996, while total employment in these organizations declined by 4.9%. Women made progress in particular in professional and technical positions and, though to a lesser degree, in managerial and supervisory positions. Blue-collar jobs represent the last frontier; in 1998, the CDPDJQ estimated that the number of women employed in blue-collar

occupations would have to rise by 13% in order to meet the objectives of the programs set up under the contractual obligations. The fact that men from cultural communities are making inroads into blue-collar employment indicates that the real problem here is women's access to predominantly male occupations, especially in the private sector.

On the Canadian federal level, the Employment Equity Act (EEA) applied to 1,121,770 public- and private-sector workers who came under federal jurisdiction and to 636 employers (with 100 or more employees) in 2008 (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [HRSDC], 2009). According to the annual reports on the application of the EEA, women's representation in the private sector rose from 40.9% of the total workforce in 1987 to 42.7% in 2008 (HRSDC, 2009). This very small increase did not even meet the low EEA standard, as women's availability for the jobs offered in these companies was 48.1% of the labour force.

In 2007, the highest proportions of women were still found among administrative and senior clerical personnel (75.5%), clerical personnel (66%), and intermediate sales and service personnel (64.3%). Women remain underrepresented in senior management (21.9%) and among semiprofessionals and technicians (19.4%) (HRSDC, 2009).

Among manual workers in low-wage occupations requiring few qualifications (not requiring a recognized, exclusive skill—see last column of Table 8), women's representation has been going up and down. Among semiskilled manual workers, women's representation has increased, while among skilled crafts and trades workers it has risen, though remaining extremely low (all of these three groups involve occupations requiring a high school diploma or less). The skilled crafts and trades group is very significant in assessing the progress women are making in blue-collar employment, as recognized certification is required to practise these trades and ensures exclusivity. What is more, these occupations are the best paid in relation to the level of education required and are the most often unionized.

In the workforce to which the EEA applies, the improvement in women's representation in blue-collar jobs has been small and unsteady among skilled crafts and trades workers and among other less or unskilled manual workers. In short, in purely quantitative terms, progress has been rather slim in the blue-collar occupational groups.

Equity programs, in place in Canada for the past 25 years, have failed time and again in blue-collar sectors, although they are working well in white- and pink-collar sectors. There are many factors leading to such a situation. Since the mid-1990s, Canada and its provincial governments have been retreating from policy response to systemic discrimination, under the influence of both the rise of neoconservatism and the important American backlash movement against affirmative action and its "reverse discrimination" effect of reducing the hiring and promoting of men; this backlash movement is embodied in three major ballot initiatives that have led to the banning of affirmative action following much

Table 8. Percentage of Women in Three Major Blue-collar Occupational Groups in the Federally Regulated Private Sector

Year	Skilled crafts and trades workers	Semiskilled manual workers	Other manual workers
1987	1.4	4.4	8.3
1992	2.6	6	11.7
1993	2.9	4.5	11.4
1994	2.9	6.9	8.5
1995	3.1	7.4	8.7
1996	3.2	5.7	10.2
1997	4.6	6.8	10.4
1998	2.4	6.7	16.3
1999	2.6	11.8	13.6
2000	2.8	6.7	10.4
2001	3	11.4	8.9
2002	3.3	11.4	7.3
2003	3.7	10.9	4.7
2004	3	11.6	10.7
2005	3.3	11.8	11.2
2006	3.4	11.9	11.7
2007	3.6	12.6	10.3

Source: Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), 1989–2002; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), 2003–2008.

publicised cases in: the California Civil Rights Initiative (Proposition 209), the Washington State Civil Rights Initiative (Proposition 200), and the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative (Proposal 2, Michigan 06-2). These three propositions have eliminated affirmative action altogether for women and minorities in state employment, education, and contracting. Similarly, the Civil Rights Act introduced in Congress in 1997 would have ended affirmative action for federal programs (LaTour, 2008; O'Farrell, 1999).

We must also note that the compliance review process is inadequately resourced and insufficiently stringent; significant sanctions simply do not exist for employers who fail to implement their requirements. These requirements are set very low: employers just have to hire minorities at the same rate as the market does; there are no sanctions for failing to remove job barriers identified in

the employment systems review, or for hiring members of a designated group into a ghetto of poor jobs where women, people with disabilities, or immigrant workers are over-represented. An employer who fails to implement the requirements can lose the opportunity to bid on future federal contracts as a sanction, but this is never applied. All this is no surprise, as the Human Rights Commission is underfunded and does not have the funds needed to conduct audits (Agocs, 2002).

“Good” blue-collar jobs have always been the most resistant to women’s integration; explanations for this rest heavily on case studies, among which some constant trends may be rigorously analysed. There is, for instance, a steady decline in manufacturing, which may account for a defensive reaction from blue-collar workers; but labour force projections suggest that blue-collar work will continue to be an important source of employment for women as well as men. Thus, for the foreseeable future, blue-collar work continues to offer opportunities for women; whether they will be employed in skilled trades or in sweatshops is more of a concern.

Sex stereotyping in curricula, teachers’ attitudes, and administrative practices also often deny girls the early preparation they need to enter vocational and academic programs that lead to high-paying skilled jobs (Harlan & Berheide, 1994; O’Farrell, 1999). Established human resources (HR) practices and hostility from managers and coworkers remain obstacles to women’s entry to and success in blue-collar jobs (O’Farrell, 1999).

In the building and craft trades, some other obstacles are well known: a brotherhood culture excluding women, with men resenting the loss of a monopoly on high-wage jobs and the loss of gender privilege at home, resenting the loss of masculine pride in doing a harsh, dangerous, but skilled and useful job, resenting the pressure to drop their coarse or macho customs and language, fearing a loss of prestige and lower wages, the cost of harassment and health and safety complaints, and the constraint of maternity and children among women (Eisenberg, 1998; LaTour, 2008; Moccio, 2009). In an enlightening class analysis of this situation among building trades workers, Paap (2006) offers a materialist interpretation of workers’ and unions’ labour market closure (to avoid competition over a very rewarding market given the low level of education required) and of the closed system of training and hiring, controlled by unions (for a dominated class has therefore gained the possibility to pass on a privilege to its heirs—though most often only to males). These are crown jewels of paramount importance for male workers in the field.

A further factor may involve the fact that shift work is common among both skilled and unskilled workers. This usually involves rotation between day and night shifts, which may deter women from contemplating a career in a skilled trade.

But above all, I need to stress that the very fact that equity programs have had more success in improving vertical mobility (women’s access to management and professional jobs) than in improving horizontal mobility (women moving

to men's jobs) is not a local matter but a universal one (Charles & Grusky, 2004). In industrialized developed countries, there is a widespread combination of slow-paced *desegregative* change (horizontal desegregation), which can be compared with corresponding rates of change elsewhere in the gender stratification system (vertical segregation, hierarchical gaps) and the failure of egalitarian policies to reduce gender segregation in jobs, although we can observe the good effects of these policies on women's access to higher-level jobs (vertical desegregation). According to Charles & Grusky (2004), though we can see cross-national variations in segregated and desegregated occupations, there are substantial commonalities in the underlying structure of segregation, based on quantitative analyses of standardised survey data. It is useful to distinguish between the vertical and horizontal forms of segregation, because the former is more effectively undermined by the rise of egalitarian institutional practices than the latter; as a result, there is a persistent hypersegregation of manual and nonmanual work in the lowest-level jobs (Charles & Grusky, 2004). A complete understanding of this phenomenon has not yet been achieved, because the authors put forward an essentialist explanation that fails to persuade the present author.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Pay equity legislation seems ineffective for women's jobs requiring the least education, as we can see after 15 years of implementation. It is not that we do not know better ways to proceed: for instance, the pay equity process can hardly redress inequities in organizations that are filled with female jobs, for example, primary schools, child care centers, and social service organizations, but also garment manufacturers, retail stores, big offices, personal service enterprises, and private home care and health organizations. Obviously, the women employed in such female-dominated organizations are underpaid, since similar jobs in organizations that employ both men and women (e.g., municipalities) tend to be underpaid. *Proxy comparison* allows predominantly female organizations to compare with a public sector organization such as a municipality or hospital. In Ontario, this radical approach overcame the lack of pay equity coverage for female jobs in those sectors of the economy most likely to require it. Still, proxy comparison was limited to the public sector, because it was felt to be too intrusive to require private sector organizations to share wage information with their competitors (Weiner, 2002). Proxy comparison was not considered in Quebec's Pay Equity Act. In light of the above, such a political compromise should be reconsidered.

Pay equity bargaining follows the same pattern, because blue- and white-collar workers are usually in separate bargaining units, and blue-collar unions do not want their members to be used in comparisons with clerical jobs. They feel this would violate the "fair comparison" principle. Interestingly, under Quebec's Pay equity legislation, a pay equity plan is prepared for the entire organization,

unless a union makes a request that it be allowed to prepare a separate pay equity plan for the jobs it represents! Male unions exhibit an ongoing resistance to their members' being used as a means of comparison with those performing female jobs (Forrest, 2007; Haiven, 2007); this can be easily understood—though not excused—as soon as the way wages are influenced by the gender of the workforce is understood (the crowding effect: Sorensen, 1990).

How does this issue relate to responsible employment practices? Leck and Saunders (1992) found that the presence of formalized equity programs, those characterized by goals, timetables, plans, audits, and a responsible person, was related to increases in the representation of minorities in both management and nonmanagement jobs; the same was found to be true in universities (Stewart & Drakich, 1995). Another factor leading to responsible employment practices is the implementation of actions designed to remove discriminatory barriers and systemic obstacles. Among others, such actions as an antiharassment policy (Agocs, 2002), which is very important in male-dominated blue-collar environments where sexist harassment is a powerful deterrent to women and drives/keeps many of them out of the field (Bingham & Gansler, 2002; LaTour, 2008; Moccio, 2009). This level of requirements means nothing without surveillance, which in return requires funding. There is a cruel lack of funding in employment equity policy. In general, the government of Quebec has opted for a voluntary approach with respect to private employers. As a result, most corporations do not care about equity policy or else settle for some small-scale measures when subject to “contractual obligation,” while the Human Rights Commission has no means of controlling. In fact, though organizations that do not comply with their contractual obligation may be subjected to sanctions, only 14 out of 299 participants since 1989 have been sanctioned, and only six have completed their program (CDPDJQ, 2009). Clearly, what we need is a proactive law, given the results obtained in the Canadian public sector where there is such legislation.

As a result of the lack of such a law for the private sector, there has been a general failure, since 1980, to adequately enforce the equal employment laws in the local workplace. Thus, “Supply explanations are inadequate on their own; obstacles stemming from the workplace figure heavily into the underrepresentation of women in skilled blue-collar jobs” (Padavic, 1997: 150).

Case studies, small surveys, and stories of individual blue-collar women have consistently found that within workplaces there are often a small number of very hostile men, a small number of very supportive men who help women survive, and a large group of men in the middle who may be swayed in either direction (Eisenberg, 1998; O'Farrell, 1999). Apparently, we could lean upon this larger group, if the right conditions are provided:

Attitudes of the ambivalent group . . . are likely to be affected mainly by whether or not their own jobs are threatened, and the extent to which they associate women coming into the job with their work being deskilled,

devalued, or eliminated altogether. We find less hostility towards women when men's jobs were not threatened by concerns such as lay-offs. (O'Farrell, 1999: 707)

For women with a high school diploma or less, blue-collar jobs, far better paid than these women are accustomed to, represent an attractive option, but one to which it is hard for them to gain access. That is why employment equity policies are a major issue, though we may wonder if any measure can succeed in the face of industry's reluctance, which experts can analyse thoroughly but without being able to propose many adequate solutions: "Although Moccio does indeed attempt to describe the basis of male electricians' overwhelmingly negative reactions to the entrance of women in the trade, her solutions don't seem to address those issues specifically" (Cook, 2010).

According to one recent publication (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2003), equity policies are *the* major contemporary employment issue for women in Europe and North America. Internationally, women have been making significant progress in education, and as a result they have made great strides in the professions and in managerial and white-collar occupations. But few countries have really solved the problem of poorly educated women gaining access to decent jobs. For men with the same level of schooling, the situation is very different; jobs in the skilled crafts and trades and in semiskilled manual work are much better paid than the predominantly female jobs held by women with the same education. To change this, not only do we need a far stronger commitment from the government, but we also need far more ways to control and monitor the application of equity programs on the shop floor, and particularly to apply sanctions against harassing practices, to help women stay in their jobs and attract new women to the field.

The main flaws in implementing these programs are well known, as are the ways to enhance implementation. In summary, HR practices (the formal and informal procedures that employers use to recruit, train, and promote workers) can exclude women and minorities, due to a sexist bias, even when they appear neutral on the surface. These procedures are part and parcel of maintaining a segregated workforce and culture or, conversely, of getting rid of it. An effective employment equity policy should take control of the following in order to desegregate the workplace:

- moving away from individual complaints to class action suits or proactive affirmative action legislation, which have proven effective in cases of discrimination or harassment (Bingham & Gansler, 2002; LaTour, 2008);
- enforcing goals and schedules that are subject to sanctions, first and foremost in all big state-funded infrastructure-building initiatives; there is strong evidence that affirmative action policies, coupled with strong monitoring and the threat of financial sanctions for noncompliance, have had positive results for women and minorities (Legault, 2003; Leonard, 1989, 1990; Reskin, 1998);

- ensuring strong government support of equity policy, taking the same form as the World War II campaign to attract women into the industrial workforce: posters, ads in nationwide magazines, songs displayed to large public audiences; it is in no way “normal” that the post–Civil Rights Act campaign to get women into trades and technology did not benefit from the same support as the World War II campaign did and was left only in the hands of the feminist movement (LaTour, 2008);
- introducing court-ordered affirmative action programs when discrimination in hiring is demonstrated;
- for large national initiatives, focusing on sectors where there is job growth, where workers are likely to be more hospitable to women, who will have more opportunities and will meet less resistance: for example, among data-processing equipment repairers, in the construction trades (including road construction), and among mechanics, installers, and repairers, such as auto mechanics, transportation and material-moving machine and vehicle operators, and truck drivers (O’Farrell, 1999);
- targeting outreach and recruitment practices, so that women learn about job openings and requirements (Reskin, 1998); using more advertising, for instance, instead of informal referral; promoting internal mobility for women in mostly female jobs, with bridges connecting clerical jobs to skilled job ladders; using job fairs and popular magazines and associating with trades-women recruiters;
- targeting vocational training programs, so that more women enrol in mainly male programs; such a measure must be associated with severe enforcement of antidiscrimination rules during training; training instructors must be trained not to reinforce negative stereotypes about women’s inability to do men’s work; training material has to be elaborated to include women;
- eliminating unnecessary job requirements that most of all reflect the attributes of male incumbents rather than the requirements needed to perform the job and are based on bias (Chertos & Philips, 1989);
- eliminating tests that have been invalidated by the courts for lack of job-relatedness and for having a disparate impact on women, as well as on minority men (as when both are disproportionately screened out by body-size requirements);
- making a particular effort to avoid assigning women to work sites, departments, or shifts where there are no other women; their isolation is exacerbated in a hostile work environment where the men do not talk to them or cooperate with them (Eisenberg, 1998; Legault, 2003);
- providing proper tools, protective clothing that fits and is ergonomically sound, and access to bathroom and changing facilities that are safe; when needed, providing sleeping accommodations that are safe and secure (Robbins, 1997);

- taking antiharassment measures, with consequences and sanctions for hostile work environments, including sabotage, assaults, pornography, unwelcome sexual remarks, touching or asking for sex, and so forth; providing on-the-job mentoring programs and sexual harassment prevention programs and training sessions that can help improve men's behavior, if not necessarily their attitudes and beliefs, and can help women learn how to deal effectively with offensive behavior when it occurs. (Legault, 2003)

These interventions, however, all take strong leadership, time, effort, and resources on the part of employers and unions. Few undertake efforts voluntarily, despite the potential benefits, such as solving recruitment problems for employers and getting new members for unions. Affirmative action has, as we have seen, been under attack, first in the United States, then in Canada by ricochet. The outcome of the ongoing debate about affirmative action is likely to have a considerable effect on women's inroads into blue-collar jobs.

CONCLUSION

Despite widespread popular belief, the labour market is still deeply segregated by gender, and the material consequences of this segregation are most serious in occupations that require less education, occupations in which women pay dearly for the sexual division of labour. In contrast to occupations requiring higher qualifications, there is a very significant pay gap in men's favour in occupations requiring few qualifications, in which many jobs are either predominantly male or predominantly female. This pay gap to the disadvantage of women is seen very widely in occupations requiring a high school diploma or less. It has been narrowing only very slightly, whereas the gaps between men and women in jobs requiring a higher level of education have been shrinking considerably. The pay gap in occupations requiring few qualifications affects close to 500,000 of the 1.8 million women in the Quebec labour force, in other words, between a quarter and a third. The question of equitable access to work is all too often regarded as a problem that has already been solved, but that is far from being the case. Moreover, the market rarely works in ways that help poor workers to improve their lot; and employers rarely invest in on-the-job training in the occupational groups in which poorly educated women are concentrated, although the situation is very different for men with the same level of education.

Is it not likely that there will be a heavy price to pay for losing interest in this issue now, when the most-educated and most-qualified women have made great gains, often thanks to affirmative action measures, for instance, in the public services? It looks as though we have given up too early on employment equity programs, because in the least-skilled jobs, pay inequity is still deeply rooted in employment segregation.

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