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JOURNALS

IS THERE SUCH THING AS EMPLOYMENT AND
PAY EQUITY FOR THE LESS EDUCATED IN
QUÉBEC?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper 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 with occupations where more education is needed, those 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 favour of men, in occupations requiring a high school diploma (Secondary 5 in Quebec) or less, is shrinking only slightly, whereas the gaps between men and women in occupations requiring more education are clearly closing. Given that pay is not the only factor in determining the quality of a job, nor even the only criterion job seekers base their decisions on, the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* (ISQ) has developed a typology of job quality that has the advantage of allowing comparisons of all salaried or wage-earning jobs (self-employed workers are excluded) in a given economic territory, between them and over time, as well as comparisons of groups of workers having specific characteristics (sex, age, union status, ethnic origin). In short, the ISQ's job quality typology indicates a gap to the detriment of women in good-quality jobs, although the gap narrowed between 1997 and 2007. A breakdown of the men's and women's groups by level of education (highest diploma/degree earned) shows that the gap really affects the women in the least-educated group. The article then demonstrates that three often mentioned options for action, at present, offer little hope to counter that particular phenomenon: Quebec's *Pay equity act* application, collective bargaining and internal promotion. Yet, this 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, given that they find their way into the affected employment sectors.

Keywords

Labour market segregation; gender bias; gendered wage gaps; unskilled labour force; employment equity; pay equity

INTRODUCTION

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

workers 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 defined 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%.

If women account for less than 47%, the occupation is termed male, down to a female proportion of 23%, and predominantly male if the proportion of women is less than 23%.

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

Table 1
Breakdown of labour force by degree to which occupations are female or male, Quebec, 1991–2006

Women	2006		2001		1991	
	Number of occupations	% of labour force	Number of occupations	% of labour force	Number of occupations	% of labour force
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: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census (97F0012XCB01022). Compilations by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march_travl_remnr/cat_prof_ssectr_activ/professions/rece ns2001/tabwebprof_juin03-4.htm

In 2006, women were working in 221 occupations where there was a very high concentration of men. Conversely, men were to be found in 71 occupations with a very high proportion of women. Are we to conclude from this that men are at a disadvantage in this situation? Not necessarily. To answer that question, we must first determine what the advantage might be to working in an occupation predominantly performed by people of the opposite sex: Is it the same for men and for women? To find out, we would have to take a look at the quality of the very female or very male occupations, as we will do later in this paper.

In this paper 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 pay gap 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 with occupations where more education is needed, those 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 favour of men, in occupations requiring a high school diploma (Secondary V in Quebec)¹ or less, is shrinking only slightly, whereas the gaps between men and women in occupations requiring more education are clearly closing. Given that pay is not the only factor in determining the quality of a job, nor even the only criterion job seekers base their decisions on, the *Institut de la statistique du Québec* (ISQ) has developed a typology of job quality that has the advantage of allowing comparisons of all salaried or wage-earning jobs (self-employed workers are excluded) in a given economic

1. In Quebec, high school finishes upon completion of Secondary V (the equivalent of Grade 11 in the rest of Canada).

territory, between them and over time, as well as comparisons of groups of workers having specific characteristics (sex, age, union status, ethnic origin). In short, the ISQ's job quality typology indicates a gap to the detriment of women in good-quality jobs, although the gap narrowed between 1997 and 2007. A breakdown of the men's and women's groups by level of education (highest diploma/degree earned) shows that the gap really affects the women in the least-educated group. I will examine three options for action that, at present, offer little hope for improvement, despite the fact that this 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, that is supposed to be an international model of the type... (Chicha, 2006). In fact, most studies of the factors of success / failure of pay equity programs focus on unionization and organization size (England & Gad, 2002) but not on the effect of job segregation combined to level of education of workers. The following demonstration shows that we should pay attention to that latter factor.

PAY AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY LEGISLATION IN QUÉBEC AND CANADA

Employment equity

Under the Canadian federation, most of the workers are subject to provincial laws, as labor and commerce as well are under provincial jurisdiction, and provincial public sector as well. It should be noted that the Government of Quebec has never adopted a proactive legislation regarding employment equity in the private sector, aside from requiring organizations that solicit contracts and subsidies from them to hire women, under "contractual obligation". In general, however, the Government of Quebec has opted for a voluntary approach with respect to private employers, and a proactive one with the public sector (*Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies*, RSQ, ch. A-2.01).

Only the Canadian government has enacted a proactive approach in the private sector, since 1985, in the case of organizations that employ 100 employees or more, under the *Employment Equity Act* (RSC (1995) c. 44.) This law applies only to organizations that come under federal jurisdiction in keeping with the Canadian Constitution: federal public service, federal Crown corporations, private firms crossing provincial boundaries (banking, (tele)communications, international and national transportation industries). It was covering 1,1 million employees in 2008, that means a very small proportion (7%) of the 14,4 millions Canadian workers. Moreover, the federal government imposes a "contractual obligation" as well.

Systemic discrimination is the fundamental concept behind the entire Quebec legal

apparatus in terms of equity. It is based on leaving out of account the intent to discriminate in the process for evaluating a discriminatory situation by the commission or the court, and replacing it with the notion of the detrimental effect on the members of the target groups. 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 and includes practices and traditions that perpetuate a situation of inequality with respect to the members of the target groups. There is no guilt in the fact that the court decides that systemic discrimination exists, only an obligation to eliminate the detrimental effects specifically by implementing an affirmative access program. But still, it is the essential notion that triggers the equity policy.

There is a necessary distinction between direct and systemic discrimination. Direct or individual discrimination is promulgated by prejudiced individuals and can be penalized after an individual complaint has been filed. Systemic discrimination involves discrimination that is built into employment systems, often unintentionally. Such systems always have an adverse impact on one group (i.e., women) compared to another (men); they may reflect old social values (e.g., men are breadwinners and should be paid more).

The necessary criterion to establish for systemic discrimination refers to the “under-use” of the members of the four target groups: women, members of cultural communities, people with disabilities, and Native People (CDPDJQ, 2003a, p. 9; CDPDJQ, 2003b, p. 10; Legault, 2002, p. 76). It should be noted that this criteria does not result in a verdict of guilt under the Quebec charter. It is merely a threshold under which it is possible to implement preferential criteria for selecting personnel without being accused of discrimination under the charter. The members of the target groups are under used when their numbers in a given job, in a given organization are less than their availability rate on the job market.

When this threshold 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 these objectives are attained. Numerical objectives are not hiring *quotas* in the sense that they are not based on the obligatory and automatic hiring of individuals based on the sole fact that they belong to the designated group. The implementation of quantitative objectives is recommended by both the Canadian and the Quebec governments following a decision issued by the Supreme Court of Canada that concluded that preferential hiring was the only way in which to overcome the effects of the systemic discrimination inherent in current human resources management procedures².

Affirmative action programs aim essentially at increasing the representation of the members

² *Action travail des femmes (ATF) vs. Canadian National Railway Company (CN)* (1987) 1 SCR 1114.

of the target groups and at breaking down the sexual segregation of jobs by providing access to all types of jobs. The Human Rights Commission (HRC) provides a framework for establishing quantitative objectives and attributing advantages so as to determine a level beyond which the advantages are no longer legitimate and can result in complaints from the members of the groups that do not enjoy such advantages, as lawsuits for “reverse discrimination”.

The employer must also analyze its employment practices in order to eliminate any trace of systemic discrimination and make long-term changes in its practices.

Pay equity

In Canada and in North America as well, pay equity, also known as “fair wages” or “fair pay,” is a means to redress a particular kind of intra-organization gender-based 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 hypothesis that female jobs have been undervalued and underpaid because they have been performed primarily by women (or the overcrowding hypothesis, Alksnis, Desmarais & Curtis, 2008; Bergmann, 1971,1974; Sorensen, 1990). It means that they have not been paid fairly in terms of their intrinsic value to the organization. Unlike employment equity, pay equity focuses on gender and not on race, disability or any other discriminating status.

Initially, pay equity was incorporated into Canadian human rights legislation with a complaint-based, human rights- style approach. Such pay equity legislation was first passed in Quebec (effective in 1976) and then in the federal sector (effective in 1978). A key lesson learned from learned from complaint-based, human rights- style approach is that they are not as effective for redressing discrimination built into compensation systems as a proactive approach (Beeman, 2004). Quebec, the first jurisdiction to require pay equity (1976), changed its initial complaint based approach to a proactive one in 1996 (Pay equity act, RSQ, ch. E-12.001). It has now been in force for close to 15 years.

A proactive approach does not assume guilt of those involved in setting salaries/wages. It recognizes the systemic nature of the problem and requires organizations to examine their wage-determination systems and, if any inequities are found, to redress them. The basic three-step pay equity process includes: 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; the pay for the male job cannot be lowered.

Nearly all of the 14 Canadian jurisdictions are involved with pay equity: (1) federal public service, federal Crown corporations, private firms crossing provincial boundaries (banking,

communication, and transportation industries); 2) nine of ten provincial governments, which covers provincial public service, broader public sector organizations (e.g., schools, hospitals), and private firms operating within their provincial boundaries; 3) three territories. Only in Alberta is there no pay equity activity at the provincial level. All pay equity remedies since 1985 have been proactive except for the one in the Yukon, which included pay equity in its human rights legislation. Private sector organizations are covered in six jurisdictions: two with proactive legislation (Ontario since 1988 and Quebec since 1996), and four jurisdictions where pay equity is covered by human rights legislation (federally regulated industries and territories covered by the Canadian Human Rights Act: Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon) (Weiner, 2002, p. S 104-5).

Pay equity is concerned with the wage determination aspect of compensation — the establishment of a salary, or a salary range, for female dominated and male-dominated jobs within an organization. Pay equity in Canada indeed takes place within a single organization (*Quebec's Pay Equity Act*, LRQ, ch. E-12.001, section 1), as compared to countries with broader, more centralized wage-setting mechanisms (e.g., Australia).

Job-evaluation systems are the mechanism used to assess the value of job content. Job-evaluation systems include the factors on which jobs are assessed, the weightings of these factors, the way in which job information is collected, and the application of the factors to the job information. Gender-neutral job evaluation is the key to pay equity. Job evaluation, which has been used since the 1930s, was always intended to achieve internal equity: a fair comparison of the value of work within an organization. Though compatible with pay equity, in reality, job-evaluation systems either incorporated gender bias or were used in a gender biased manner. Pay (and employment) equity are aimed at redressing systemic gendered discrimination in wage setting.

Pay equity defines fairness in terms of a reasonable job content/wage ratio: jobs of equal value to the organization should be assigned the same salary or salary range. 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 jobs line. If the value of the work is comparable, then “equal pay” is needed, though the actual duties and responsibilities of the female and male jobs can be very different.

As a result, both men and women in female jobs benefit if their job is found to be under-paid relative to its value, while neither men nor women in male-dominated jobs benefit from pay equity, as can be the case after an internal equity operation.

Pay equity is directed at redressing underpayment of women's work while temporarily taking

occupational segregation for granted (Armstrong and Cornish 1997, p. 71). However, it is theoretically possible – and politically wished - that over time, the higher wages that become associated with female jobs because of pay equity could attract a higher proportion of men to the occupation:

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, p. S 102)

Some feel that pay equity is not needed because employment equity will remove the barriers that prevent women from moving into higher paid male jobs. Such a view makes two inappropriate assumptions:

First, that all men's jobs pay more than all women's jobs; janitors compared to nurses show that this is not true. Second, 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, p. S 102).

True, nurses are better paid than janitors are; but they are different level jobs, so one could say that this argument is not conclusive. We will see here that among jobs requiring a 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 those being addressed by pay equity legislations:

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

We will here focus 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 US, there is a negative relationship between hourly wages and the proportion of women in an occupation (so concluded Sorensen, 1990). This is related to pay equity since the proportion of women in an occupation is expected to be related to female-dominated jobs at the level of the firm. Nan Weiner, a Canadian expert, asserts that "this same relationship does not exist in Canada" (Weiner, 2002, p. S 113). An

in-depth analysis of less qualified jobs 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 paper (Legault, 2009). The top 10 occupations 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.

Table 2
Top 10 female occupations, Quebec, 1991, 2001, 2006

Rank in 2006	Occupational structure NOC-S 2006, women	% women in 2006	Rank in 2001	% women in 2001	Rank in 1991	% women in 1991
1	Secretaries (except legal and medical)	98	1	97.7	1	98.3
2	Retail salespersons and sales clerks	56.7	2	58.7	2	58.7
3	Cashiers	86.1	3	86.5	3	88
4	Early childhood educators and assistants	95.9	7	95.7	20	95.9
5	General office clerks	87.2	8	83.2	4	79.1
6	Registered nurses	91	5	91	6	91.4
7	Elementary school and kindergarten teachers	87.1	6	86	8	85.8
8	Accounting and related clerks	84.8	4	87.8	5	81.6
9	Food and beverage servers	76.4	9	79.1	7	80.9
10	Nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates	81.4	11	79.6	10	74.7
	% women in top 10 occupations	81.3		74.8		
	% women in labour force	47.1		46.2		

Source: 2006: Special compilation by the ISQ; 2001 and 1991: Les 20 principales professions **féminines** et masculines, Québec, 1991 et 2001, Statistics Canada, 2001 Census (97F0012XCB01022). Compilations by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).

http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march_travl_remnr/cat_prof_sctr_activ/professions/rece/ns2001/tabwebprof_juin03-1.htm

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 (Table 3) that a third of the women in the labour force work in 20 occupations that have a very high percentage of female employees.

Table 3
Selection of occupations where 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 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 – Financial services	21,300	1.2	88.3
23	Industrial sewing machine operators	16,920	0.9	89.8
24	Visiting homemakers, housekeepers and related occupations	14,920	0.8	86.6
27	Elementary and secondary school teacher 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 assisting occupations in support of health services	11,805	0.6	85.2
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
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Source: *Special compilation by the ISQ*

In 2006, women were still underrepresented in the less-skilled, predominantly male occupations, as Table 4 shows: truck driver, automotive service technician, carpenter, janitor, material handler, delivery driver and construction labourer. Construction industry occupations in general are still predominantly male (98.8% men; Legault & Danvoye, 2007, p. 64).

Women have made noteworthy progress among bus drivers, subway operators and other transit operators (proportion of jobs rising from 21.2% in 1991 to 26.1% in 2001) and among technical sales specialists (proportion up 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 (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 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.

Table 4
Top 10 male occupations, Quebec, 1991, 2001, 2006

Rank in 2006	Occupational structure NOC-S 2006, men	% men in 2006	Rank in 2001	% men in 2001	Rank in 1991	% men in 1991
1	Retail salespersons and sales clerks	43.3	3	41.3	1	41.3
2	Truck drivers	96.5	2	97.7	3	98.6
3	Retail trade managers	57.8	4	63.3	2	65.8
4	Automotive service technicians, truck and bus mechanics and mechanical repairers	98.4	6	99.1	5	99.1
5	Carpenters	98.8	11	99.1	6	99
6	Janitors, caretakers and building superintendents	82.1	5	79.2	4	81.3
7	Material handlers	89.1	7	90.6	11	91.9
8	Delivery and courier service drivers	92.8	8		9	
9	Cooks	52.3	14	46.9	13	51.6
10	Construction trades helpers and labourers	94.1	23	95.8	10	96.9

	% men in top 10 occupations	70.2		67.3	
	% men in 520 occupations	52.9		53.8	

Source: 2006: *Special compilation by the ISQ; 2001 and 1991: Les 20 principales professions féminines et masculines, Québec, 1991 et 2001, Statistics Canada, 2001 Census (97F0012XCB01022). Compilations by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ).*

http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/donstat/societe/march_travl_remnr/cat_prof_sctr_activ/professions/rece/ns2001/tabwebprof_juin03-1.htm.

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 require no more than a high school diploma, it can be seen (Table 5) that 28.2% of working men are employed in 37 occupations where the percentage of male workers is very high.

Table 5

Selection of occupations Where 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, truck and bus mechanics and mechanical repairers	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	30,980	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 (except textile)	20,660	1	98.2
28	Heavy equipment operators (except crane)	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
33	General farm workers	14,570	0.7	71.4
34	Electricians (except industrial and power system)	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, food and beverage processing	5,485	0.3	70.3
91	Plasterers, drywall installers and finishers and lathers	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: Special compilation by the ISQ

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 male and female workers, and if we then look at occupations that

- require no more than a high school diploma and
- 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 high 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 (Table 6).

Table 6
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 high school diploma or less	72.8%	69.3%

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ.

Experts tend to assert that “Gender gaps are closing in terms of education, hours and days worked” (England & Gad, 2002, p. 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, all over the economy. And while the concentration of one gender or the other in an occupation is not restricted to jobs requiring fewer qualifications, the consequences of such segregation are much more serious in these jobs. According to the “crowding hypothesis”, we’re supposed to observe the following sequence of facts: Given that women

are crowded into some occupations, typically referred to as "women's work", it in turn 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, p. 56)

In other words, we are supposed to find that the proportion of women in a worker's occupation has a significantly negative effect on his/her earnings.

Reading contemporary data leads to slightly different conclusions; in that matter, 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 less-educated job sectors. In other words, the consequences of a lower level of education on wages are not the same for women and men, as we shall see.

OCCUPATIONAL SEX SEGREGATION HAS A VERY SIGNIFICANT MATERIAL IMPACT ON THE LESS EDUCATED³

The General Wage Gap

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

The advantage of comparing annual compensation is that it represents 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 is nevertheless affected by two other confounding factors: work pattern (full time or part time) and overtime hours.

Looking at hourly compensation has the advantage of not introducing any confounding

³ We have divided the working population in 4 groups that are the same throughout the study: No high school diploma (less than high school diploma), High school diploma (completed), Postsecondary (but no university degree), University degree. The *least educated* refer to the No high school diploma group, while the *less educated* refer to both No high school diploma and High school diploma.

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 their 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. So please keep in mind that this represents the smallest pay gap.

A narrowing gender pay gap in general...

In Quebec, men's hourly pay rate was greater than women's throughout the period 1998–2008, but the difference shrank by 3.8 percentage points (Table 7). 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 the propensity of employers to invest in training and raise pay when employees are more stably employed.

Table 7

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 %	16.6%	15.4%	12.8%	- 3.8 pp

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ

The gaps are narrowing and the general trend is toward equity, but here we're talking about an aggregate gap.

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 for skills acquired outside of the educational system (Blau, Ferber & Winkler, 2002; Blau & Kahn, 2000; Drolet, 2001; Gunderson, 2006; Gunderson & Muszynski 1990; O'Neill & Polachek, 1993). The specialized vocational training programs for trades are part of the

problem in that point of view, as they are informally, but no less 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 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 8 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.

Table 8
Hourly pay, by sex and level of education, Quebec, 1998–2008 (current dollars)

Year	No high school diploma		High school diploma		Postsecondary		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: Special compilation by the ISQ.

... But the Least Educated Female Workers still trail behind

Despite the solid findings of these studies, 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 as well. The effect of low education on pay is not the same for women and men.

In Table 9, it can be seen that the ratio of women's average hourly rate to men's average hourly rate varies with level of education. The lowest ratio for women is among the least-educated workers, where women earn just 75.8% of what men with the same level of schooling earn.

Table 9
Women's/Men's ratio of 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	84.4	85.2
University degree	83.9	86.5

Source: Special compilation by the ISQ.

Chart 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, and university degree) between 1997 and 2008. In other words, each point on the chart represents a percentage difference between an average rate of pay for men and a corresponding rate for women, for a given year and a given level of education, like the following:

Average hourly rate of pay	2008
No high school diploma – Men	\$15.73
No high school diploma – Women	\$11.93
Diff. M – W	\$3.80
Diff. in %	24.16%

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.

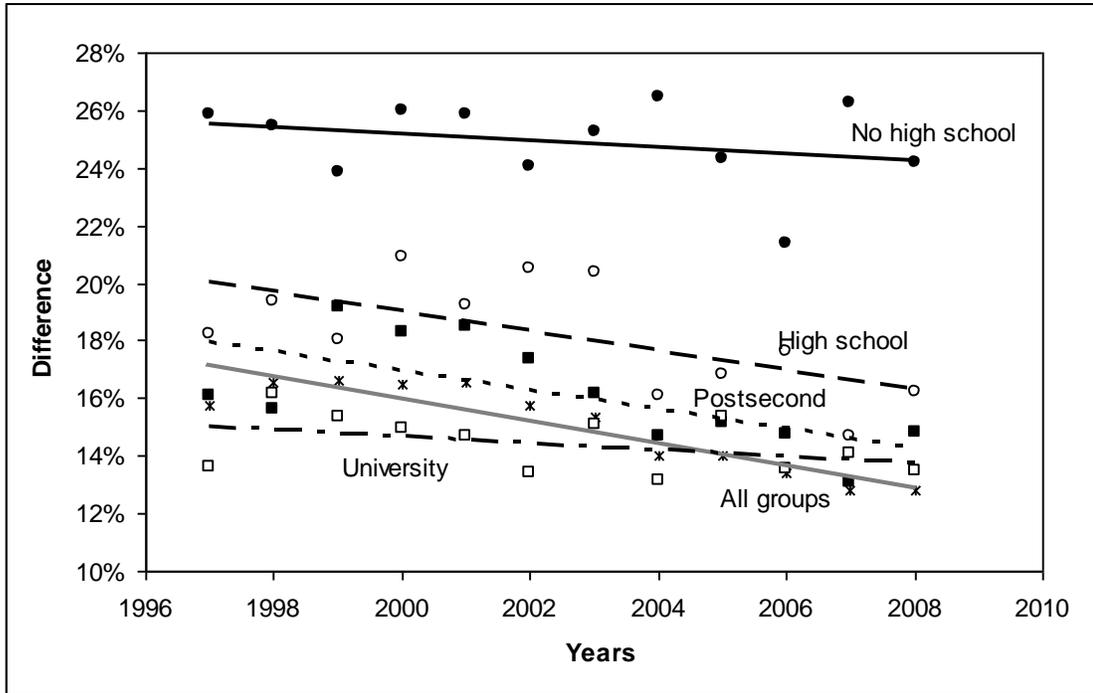
The chart clearly shows a downward trend in the mean differences between men's and women's average hourly rates of pay, between 1997 and 2008, for all levels of education combined (from 15.77% to 12.81%). The smallest differences were among the better educated and indicated a similar decline (from 16.12% to 14.79% for the junior college/postsecondary group, and from 13.58% to 13.45% for the university degree category). 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 educated group. Furthermore, the gap for the least educated shows only a slight downward trend (from 25.83% to 24.16%), while others have a clear downward trend.

Chart 1
Percentage differences in average hourly compensation of men and women (employees) by level of education, annual means, Québec, 1997–2008 (in current dollars)



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Processing: Institut de la statistique du Québec, Direction du travail et de la rémunération. February 14, 2008, and August 17, 2009. Average hourly compensation excludes the self-employed and concerns a worker's primary job, the one in which he or she works the greatest number of hours, for workers who hold down more than one job.

Not even a downward trend in weekly gender pay gap among the least educated

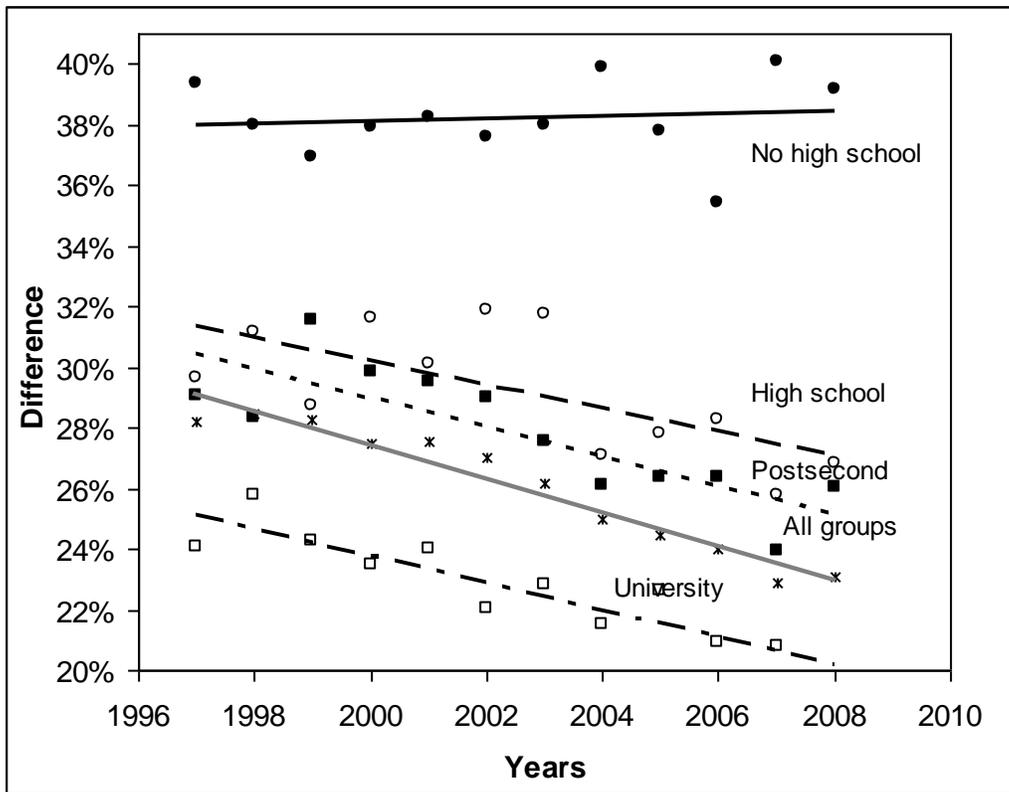
What happens if we examine the same differences between men and women, but this time in terms of average weekly pay? Chart 2 below shows the percentage differences in weekly rates of pay between men and women, by level of education.

It is clear from the chart 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 educated and showed the same falling trend (from 29.03% to 26.06% for junior

college/postsecondary education, and from 24.04% to 19.76% for university graduates). Differences were greater for those with only a high school diploma, but they too were 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 educated category. Moreover, the gap for the least educated does not appear to be falling, but rather remaining more or less stable (from 39.39% to 39.16%).

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



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Processing: Institut de la statistique du Québec, Direction du travail et de la rémunération. February 14, 2008, and August 17, 2009. Average weekly compensation is for employees only. It concerns a worker's primary job, the one in which he or she works the greatest number of hours, for workers who hold down more than one job.

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

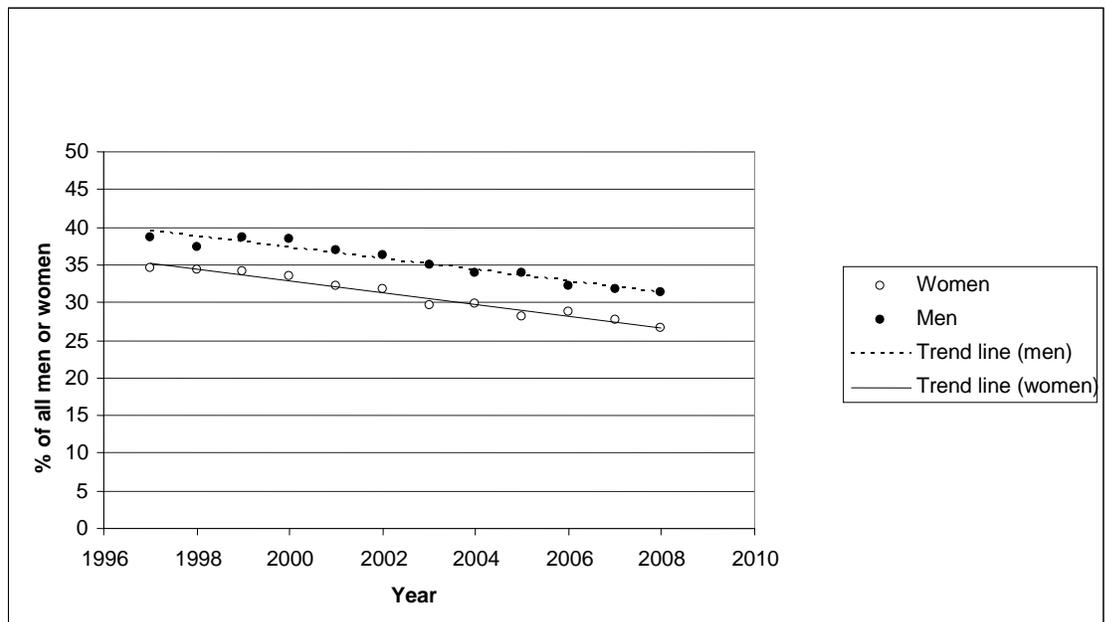
While the less educated women predominantly hold down the lowest-paid jobs in the service sector: sales clerks, cashiers, servers, office clerks and nurse aides, as we saw earlier, the less educated men occupy the better-paid jobs: construction trades, truck drivers, and automotive service technicians,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

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 where equal access programs are the most ineffective, as we will see below.

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 were in these two groups. 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 Chart 3 below, in which I have combined high school graduates and non-graduates together.

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



Source: 2006: Special compilation by the ISQ.

Of course, pay is only one aspect of job quality, nor is it the sole criterion on which job

seekers base their choice, as they must take a number of different factors into consideration. I would also like to 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 (Cloutier, 2008). The results are simply just the same: female-dominated jobs requiring high school diploma or less have low scores according to this index, while male-dominated ones have higher scores⁴.

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 labour force that has no high school diploma, women are at most disadvantage, while they are 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 this level of education has declined, although the group remains large. Lastly, in 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.

Job Quality Typology

The typology classifies all jobs into 12 categories based on observations noted in four dimensions:

- Pay (5 levels): The indicator used is the hourly rate of pay, which has the advantage of not being influenced by the duration of work (part-time or full-time, periods out of work) (Cloutier, 2008, p. 30).
- Qualifications (3 levels): A combination of the skills required by the position (management, technical or professional; semiskilled or unskilled) and the worker's competency (level of education) make up this dimension (Cloutier, 2008, p. 31).
- Stability (2 levels): The indicator used is employment status, either permanent (unspecified duration) or temporary (specified duration) (Cloutier, 2008, p. 32).
- Working hours (4 levels): Regular working hours, overtime hours (paid or not) and whether holding a part-time job (under 30 hours a week) voluntarily or not (Cloutier, 2008, p. 32).

⁴ These results are part of a preprint (Legault, 2010).

The various combinations of the dimension levels give 120 possible configurations of job quality. According to this model, the best-quality job pays \$25 or more an hour, requires a high level of qualifications, and offers good stability and regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours). At the other end of the spectrum, a job paying under \$10 an hour, held by an overqualified worker, offering little stability and involuntary short working hours (involuntary part-time) would be one with the lowest job quality rating.

Poorer-quality jobs are to be found in the following categories:

- Category 1: Involuntary part-time, stable employment, variable qualifications, under \$15 an hour. Involuntary part-time work is here put in its own separate category, as it reflects the mismatch between the worker's aspirations and the opportunities available in the job market. The fact that workers cannot work more hours may suggest precariousness; their earnings will necessarily be lower than they would like. Involuntary part-time work also hampers the integration of workers into the economy, as they cannot capitalize fully on their skills, even in cases where they hold positions commensurate with their qualifications.
- Category 2: Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; high qualifications; under \$15 an hour.
- Category 3: Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; low qualifications; under \$15 an hour.
- Category 4: Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; overqualified workers; under \$15 an hour.
- Category 8: Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; low qualifications, with jobs held by qualified or overqualified workers; \$15 an hour or more.

When there is a higher proportion of women than men working in these categories, or when the percentage gap between them is positive, it means that women are disadvantaged, because there are more of them in these kinds of jobs and, in many cases, in a larger proportion than in the labour force as a whole, men and women taken together.

Good jobs are to be found in the following categories:

- Category 5: Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; high qualifications; between \$15 and \$20 an hour.
- Category 6: Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; high qualifications; between \$20 and \$25 an hour.
- Category 7: Regular working hours (full-time: 30–40 hours) or voluntary short hours (voluntary part-time); stable; high qualifications; \$25 or more an hour.

When there is a higher proportion of women than men working in these categories, or when

the percentage gap between them is positive, it means the opposite of above: that women are advantaged, because there are more of them in these kinds of jobs and, in many cases, in a larger proportion than in the labour force as a whole, men and women taken together.

The intermediate categories, comprising a priori unclassifiable jobs, are the following:

- Category 9: Variable working hours without involuntary part-time; unstable; low qualifications and overqualified workers; under \$15 an hour.
- Category 11: Workweek of 41 hours or more; stable; variable qualifications; under \$15 an hour.
- Category 10: Variable working hours without involuntary part-time; unstable; high qualifications; \$15 or more an hour.
- Category 12: Workweek of 41 hours or more; stable; high qualifications; \$15 or more an hour.

Table 10 shows that aggregate statistics that do not make any distinctions based on factors such as level of education reveal a gap to women's disadvantage in good jobs (indicated in yellow), although the gap narrowed between 1997 and 2007. In contrast, a gap in their favour can be seen in two categories of good jobs (categories 5 and 6) as well as in one category of poorer-quality jobs (Category 8). Poorer jobs are indicated in grey.

Table 10
Breakdown of wage-earners by job quality category and by sex, Quebec,
1997–2007

Category	% of Total		% Men		% Women		Gap in percentage points (between W and M)	
	1997	2007	1997	2007	1997	2007	1997	2007
1	6.6	4.1	3.5	2.5	10.1	5.7	+ 6.6	+ 3.2
2	10.3	10.6	7.6	9.1	13.5	12.2	+ 5.9	+ 3.1
3	12.4	10.4	9.6	8.7	15.6	12.1	+ 6	+ 3.4
4	6.8	9.1	5.1	6.7	8.8	11.5	+ 3.7	+ 4.8
5	8.6	9.9	7.0	8.9	10.4	11	+ 3.4	+ 2.1
6	7.3	7.2	7.2	6.8	7.3	7.6	+ 0.1	+ 0.8
7	9.8	11.7	11.7	13.2	7.6	10.1	- 4.1	- 3.1
8	10.5	10.7	12.6	11.5	8.1	10	- 4.5	- 1.5
9	4.2	4.2	3.8	3.9	4.7	4.6	+ 0.9	
10	4	5.0	4.2	4.8	3.9	5.1	- 0.3	

11	7.9	5.3	10.7	7.3	4.6	3.3	- 6.1	
12	11.6	11.8	17	16.5	5.4	6.8	- 11.6	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100		

Source: Table 3.2, Cloutier, 2008, p. 40.

When the men's and women's groups are broken down by level of education (highest diploma/degree earned), the overall picture becomes clearer regarding the effect of education on moving up the job quality scale.

Table 11, which provides a breakdown of the labour force with no high school diploma, shows that women are at a definite disadvantage. In 1997, 80.5% of them were stuck in poor jobs, in contrast to only 52.8% of the men. Had the situation improved by 2007? No, as 81.4% of women with this level of education still had such jobs, as opposed to 56.7% of the men. 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 in this educational group has declined, although the group is still large, as we saw earlier.

Conversely, it can be seen that in 1997, 3.8% of women with this education held good jobs, whereas 11.2% of the men did. In 2007, 4.9% of the women and 12.6% of the men held such jobs. The situation of both women and men improved in this respect.

Table 11
Breakdown of wage-earners with no high school diploma,
by job quality category and sex, Quebec, 1997–2007

Category	Men (no high school diploma) (thousands)	Breakdown (%)	Women (no high school diploma) (thousands)	Breakdown (%)
Total 1997	283.5	100	185.2	100
1	10.9	3.8	21.8	11.8
2	22.2	7.8	24.1	13
3	70.6	24.9	88.6	47.9
4				
5	14.3	5.1	4.5	2.4
6	10.3	3.6	1.6	0.9
7	7.2	2.5	1.0	0.5
8	46.3	16.3	14.4	7.8

9	14.4	5.1	12.5	6.8
10	11.9	4.2	1.4	0.8
11	42.1	14.9	13.1	7
12	33.2	11.7	2.2	1.2
Total 2007	224.9	100	140.4	100
1	6.4	2.9	11.8	8.4
2	22.8	10.1	20.9	14.9
3	65.6	29.2	73.2	52.1
4				
5	13.6	6	4.2	3
6	7.4	3.3	1.7	1.2
7	7.3	3.3	1	0.7
8	32.6	14.5	8.5	6
9	13.4	6.0	8.8	6.3
10	7.7	3.4	2.4	1.7
11	24.8	11	6.1	4.4
12	23.1	10.3	1.8	1.3

Source: *Special compilation, Institut de la statistique du Québec.*

In the labour force that has a high school diploma, shown in Table 12, women are still disadvantaged, but their proportion and the gap separating them from men are less significant. In 1997, 67.4% of the women with this level of education held poor jobs, in contrast to only 48.4% of the men. Had the situation improved by 2007? No, as 69.4% of women with this level of education still had such jobs, as opposed to 51.4% of the men. The gap between women and men remained roughly stable, but while the total number of women and men with high school diplomas rose, the increase affected women and men in proportion to their representation in the group.

Conversely, in 1997, 19.2% of the women with this level of education held good jobs, as did 19.3% of the men. In 2007, 17.1% of the women and 19.3% of the men held such jobs. From being virtually non-existent, the gap grew to 2.2 percentage points, to women's disadvantage, at the same time as the total number of high school graduates increased.

Table 12

**Breakdown of wage-earners with high school diplomas,
by job quality category and sex, Quebec, 1997–2007**

Category	Men (high school diploma) (thousands)	Breakdown (%)	Women (high school diploma) (thousands)	Breakdown (%)
Total 1997	218.7	100	211.4	100
1	9.2	4.2	20.7	9.8
2	14.9	6.8	30.4	14.4
3	41.1	18.8	67.4	31.9
4				
5	18.5	8.5	25.9	12.2
6	10.8	4.9	11.2	5.3
7	14.1	6.4	3.7	1.7
8	40.8	18.6	24	11.3
9	8	3.7	8.4	4
10	4.8	2.2	3.4	1.6
11	26.5	12.1	10	4.7
12	29.9	13.7	6.4	3
Total 2007	227.4	100	244.2	100
1	6.9	3	16.9	6.9
2	19.5	8.6	31.8	13
3	47.3	20.8	83.8	34.3
4				
5	15.6	6.9	20.7	8.5
6	13.0	5.7	11.4	4.7
7	15.3	6.7	9.4	3.9
8	43.2	19	37	15.2
9	8.9	3.9	9.8	4
10	6.7	3	4.9	2

11	21.9	9.6	8.7	3.6
12	29.1	12.8	9.8	4

Source: *Special compilation, Institut de la statistique du Québec.*

In the labour force that has a university degree, shown in Table 13, women are still at a disadvantage, and the proportion of them in poor jobs is double that of men. In 1997, 25.9% of these women were employed in poor jobs, in contrast to only 14.2% of the men. Had the situation improved by 2007? Slightly, as 22% of the women with this level of education still had such jobs, as opposed to 16% of the men. The gap between the women and the men narrowed. The total number of women and men with university degrees rose, but the number of women increased more than the number of men.

Conversely, in 1997, 44.2% of women with this level of education held good jobs, as did 43.4% of the men. In 2007, 47.5% of the women and 45.2% of the men held such jobs. The gap was favourable to women, while the total number of university graduates rose.

Table 13
Breakdown of wage-earners with university degrees,
by job quality category and sex, Quebec, 1997–2007

Category	Men (university degree) (thousands)	Breakdown (%)	Women (university degree) (thousands)	Breakdown (%)
Total 1997	222.5	100	220.2	100
1	5.7	2.5	17.7	8
2	10.3	4.6	18.5	8.4
3				
4	8.4	3.8	11.9	5.4
5	10.7	4.8	22.3	10.1
6	17.8	8.0	23.8	10.8
7	68.1	30.6	51.4	23.3
8	7.3	3.3	9	4.1
9	5.9	2.6	8.9	4
10	13.9	6.2	20	9.1
11	13.7	6.2	7	3.2

12	60.8	27.3	29.7	13.5
Total 2007	301.4	100	336.8	100
1	6.1	2	11	3.3
2	16.3	5.4	26	7.7
3				
4	13.5	4.5	21.4	6.3
5	21.7	7.2	37.4	11.1
6	21.4	7.1	36.3	10.8
7	93.1	30.9	86.1	25.6
8	12.4	4.1	15.8	4.7
9	6.7	2.2	11.5	3.4
10	24	7.9	35.3	10.5
11	10.3	3.4	9.5	2.8
12	76.0	25.2	46.5	13.8

Source: *Special compilation, Institut de la statistique du Québec.*

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 least-educated women. In the labour force that has no high school diploma, women are at a distinct disadvantage. 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 this level of education has declined, although the group remains large. In the labour force that has a high school diploma, women are still disadvantaged, but their proportion and the gap separating them from men have fallen. Lastly, in 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 the 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 (Hölzer, 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 what year was taken as the reference period, found themselves out of work 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 of union apprenticeship program has been documented (San Francisco Multiemployer Group and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees [HERE], Local 2; see Lynch, 2004, p. 301).

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 the authors, 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 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 (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 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 non-manufacturing companies and 46% of manufacturing firms, the skills required for relatively unspecialized production work or for front-line service work expanded in the 1990s as a result of increased computerization and reduced supervision, whether principally men's or women's jobs. A wide range of different jobs is referred to here. This gives employees greater responsibility for problem solving and decision making. While these jobs are still among those requiring the least qualifications, the level they do require has risen somewhat. Yet 38% of job candidates do not have sufficient command of basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills, and 31% of employers say they cannot find enough workers with the necessary qualifications for low-skilled jobs (Lynch, 2004, p. 294). 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 (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, pp. 294–5). 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. But 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, p. 295). The jobs held by the least-qualified women are the ones in which employers invest the least in on-the-job training: sales clerk, cashier, server, receptionist, office clerk, hairstylist, industrial sewing machine operator, visiting homemaker, teacher's assistant and school aide, babysitter, esthetician, etc. As a result, women have limited opportunities for on-the-job training (Consultation Group on Employment Equity for Women 1995).

Unionization is not as helpful as usually known to be

It's currently read and heard that unionization is a powerful factor in reducing the gender pay gap and, thus, in enhancing pay equity:

The (average hourly) wages of unionised workers in Canada continue to be greater than those of non-unionised workers (\$19.86 per hour versus \$16.58 in 2000) and full-time unionised women workers' earnings are 90% of those of their male equivalents (Akyeampong, 2001, p. 48). That said, we acknowledge the ongoing concern that

unionization might actually impede equity because of the sanctity of 'seniority principles' and other traditions that basically favour men (White, 1993) [...]The women who do best under the legislation are more likely to be unionized and in occupations with formal accreditations. Women who are not unionized or who work in small, private sector businesses do less well. (England & Gad, 2002, p. 291-2)

That being said, the importance of seniority principles is not the only factor hindering the pay equity bargaining process in a unionized environment. Overall the labor market, but for the least educated in particular, practices of job discrimination are often intertwined with those of pay discrimination. Pay equity bargaining follows the same pattern, because blue- and white-collar workers are usually in separate bargaining units, and blue-collar unions don't want to be used as a comparator for clerical jobs. They feel this would violate the "fair comparison" principle. Interestingly, under Quebec's new legislation, pay equity is done for the entire organization... unless a union makes a request that it be able to do a separate pay equity plan for the jobs it represents! There's an ongoing resistance from male unions to be used as comparators for female jobs (Forrest, 2007; Haiven, 2007), that can be easily understood – though not excused - as soon as you know how wages are influenced by the gender of the workforce (crowding effect, Sorensen, 1990).

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 feeble 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. Moreover, as inadequate as may be such an outdated assessment, it's just a quantitative assessment of the percentage of representation (and wages, when pay equity is part of the operation) of target groups; yet, we would need to know about employment systems to assess the progressive eradication of systemic discrimination: obstacles in recruitment, selection, promotion; culture, relations among colleagues, power relations, decision making, etc. Though these are important underlying causes and factors of the quantitative results (representation, wages), they are understood but rarely assessed (Agocs, 2002, p. 289).

Between December 1989 and 2010, 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 haven't finished carrying out their program and so haven't obtained any results. Only 14 companies have been sanctioned (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, pp. 81-82). Same poor results, pointing towards lack of political will, poor funding, enforcement and surveillance, insufficient stringency in application, lack of sanctions have been observed at the Canadian level programs (Agocs, 2002; see table 8) and the US programs as well (LaTour, 2008; O'Farrell, 1999).

The number of women employed in the organizations subject to the contractual obligation rose 3.4% between 1989 and 1996, while total employment in them declined 4.9%. But 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 in 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 went 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, Table 1.3).

Among manual workers in low-wage occupations requiring few qualifications (not requiring a recognized, exclusive skill — 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 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.

Table 14
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: HRDC, 1988-2002; HRSDC, 2003-2008.

In short, in purely quantitative terms, progress has been rather slim in the blue-collar occupational groups.

Employment 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-nineties, Canada, and its provincial governments as well, are retreating from policy response to systemic discrimination, under the influence of both the rise of neo-conservative ascendant and an important American backlash movement against affirmative action and their “reverse discrimination” effect of reducing men hiring and promoting; this last movement is embodied in three major ballot initiatives that have led to the banning of affirmative action following much publicised cases in education: *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209), November 1996, followed by *Washington State Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 200), November 1998 et de *Michigan Civil Rights Initiative* (MCRI, 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 end 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. Those same requirements are set very low, given that employers just have to hire minorities as much 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 job ghetto of poor jobs where women, handicapped people 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. There is no surprise, as the Human Rights Commission is underfunded and does not have the needed budget for conducting 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 the 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 co-workers remain obstacles to women's entry and success in blue collar jobs (O'Farrell, 1999).

Furthermore, 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 as well, 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, p. 77-98). 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...). Both 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 such a career.

But above all, we need to stress that this very fact that equity programs 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, p. 3-8). 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 good effects of these policies on women's access to higher-level jobs (vertical desegregation). According to Charles & Grusky, 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 has

proven 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, p. 27). A complete understanding of that phenomenon has not yet been achieved, because the authors put forward an essentialist explanation that fails to persuade the present author.

Pay Equity Law Does No Better in These Sectors

Moreover, pay equity legislation seems ineffective for women's jobs requiring the least education, as we can here see after 15 years of implementation. Moreover, though quite effective in unionized sectors, it has remained ineffective in addressing wage disparities in many workplaces, particularly for non unionized women in small businesses and female job ghettos, who need it most (Beeman, 2004). Not the least problem is aiming at a gender-neutral, non sexist job evaluation process:

Prejudices regarding women's work still abound: that it is non productive (not generating profits for firms), that it is based on qualities that are innate for women as opposed to developed through training, that it is not physically or mentally demanding, and that it carries few responsibilities (Beeman, 2004, p. 97).

At the core of these prejudices are the definitions of effort and working conditions; strong sexist bias lead to big scores at these dimensions in male jobs, based on received ideas.

One major source of potential gender bias is the use of different job evaluation systems for female and male job families (e.g., clerical, manual). As noted in Weiner and Gunderson (1990, pp. 38-43), there are numerous ways that gender bias can enter into job evaluation factors including:

- valuing a factor when it is found in male jobs but not in female jobs (e.g., giving credit to male meter readers for danger when they go into peoples' homes, but not giving credit to female public health nurses who go into peoples' homes; give credit to mechanics and garbage collectors for having to deal with dirt but not recognize the "dirt" in nursing work, such as pus, blood, and other bodily fluids).
- confusing job content with stereotypes of inherent female attributes (e.g., assuming all women are nurturing, therefore not valuing caring skills found in many traditional female jobs, such as ranking animal shelter attendant higher than childcare workers).
- ignoring aspects of work that are typically found in women's jobs (e.g., interruptions, multi tasking, caring, responsibility for confidential information).
- insufficient range of a compensable factor (e.g., not having enough levels to adequately differentiate between jobs that are truly different).

In addition to the *criteria* (referred to as factors or sub-factors), job evaluation systems also require accurate, complete, and up-to-date job information. Job evaluation criteria can be

applied to job descriptions; however, women's jobs are often poorly described in comparison to men's jobs, and this introduced gender bias into the process.

Other problems pertain to the mechanics of the process and, ultimately, to the political compromises government managed in adopting the legislation:

[Because of the prejudices in job evaluation, the participation of women] is crucial. Unfortunately, in the Quebec Pay Equity Act, for businesses with less than 100 employees, verification of women's involvement is done through the information postings, which can scarcely be qualified as genuine participation. Further, non unionized women workers can find participation on a pay equity committee very challenging given their lack of expertise in a highly technical field and the power relations that can exist within the committee.

In Québec, a full one quarter of the female workforce is employed in businesses with less than ten employees (who are not subject to the law). Another 22 percent are in businesses with 10 to 40 workers which are required to produce results in pay equity but are not imposed any regulations on how this is to be achieved (Bienvenu, 1999) Furthermore, the act does not require employers to send the results of their process to the Pay Equity Commission, so there is no official oversight of the results or gathering of information on who has undertaken the process and what it has changed for women. [...](Beeman, 2004, p. 97)

Where no male counterparts can be found, women are not offered better than a fictional comparison with non-existing jobs:

2. The pay equity committee, or the employer in the absence of a pay equity committee, must determine the hourly rate of remuneration that would be paid for each job class identified under section 1 on the basis of the job descriptions set out in Schedules I [foreman] and II [maintenance worker] if there were such job classes in the enterprise. To that end, the pay equity committee, or the employer in the absence of a pay equity committee, must consider the following factors: the sector of activity, the size of the enterprise, and the region in which the enterprise operates. (*Regulation respecting pay equity in enterprises where there are no predominantly male job classes*, c. E-12.001, r.2, *Pay Equity Act*, (RSQ, c. E-12.001).

Not that we do not know better ways to proceed; for instance, the pay equity process can hardly redress inequities in organizations that are totally staffed with female jobs, e.g., primary schools, childcare centres, social service organizations, but also in garment industry, retail stores, big offices, personal service, private home care and health organizations. Obviously, the women employed in such female-dominated organizations are underpaid since similar jobs in organizations that employ men and women (e.g., municipalities) tend to find that the female jobs are underpaid. For that reason, proxy comparison allows predominantly female organizations to compare with a public sector organization that employs similar female jobs (and male comparators) such as a municipality or hospital. This radical approach overcame in Ontario the lack of pay equity coverage for female jobs in sectors of the economy most likely to require it. Still, proxy comparison was limited to the public sector only because it was felt to be too intrusive to require private sector

organizations to share wage information with their competitors (Weiner, 2002). It has not been considered in Quebec's pay equity act. In the light of the above findings, such a political compromise should be reconsidered.

Though it may be surprising, there is still pay inequality, although the disappearing of the slogan "Equal pay for equal work" may suggest that the only remaining problem is pay inequity:

Another major flaw in the legislation is that it does not address the problem of pay inequality, that is unequal pay between men and women occupying the same job (with the same qualifications and seniority). (Beeman, 2004, p. 98)

For the least educated manufacturing workers, practices of job discrimination are often intertwined with those of pay discrimination, whereas most of the pay equity evaluation literature focus on the effect of firm's size and unionized status on pay equity, rather than studying the effect of job segregation and workers' skills.

There is a persistent gender segregation in job titles that is used to justify higher wages for men, whereas in practice there is little difference between jobs. In these environments, women comprise the majority of workers in low level jobs, not because they want, but because they are not being offered career choices and professional training – whereas men are (Beeman, 2004, p. 99). However at the bottom of the scale, these women are the least informed about their rights:

More than half the [non unionized] women we met earned minimum wage or just slightly more[...] Wage increases were rare and for the workers who did receive them, ranged from five cents to 25 cents an hour. None of the workers were eligible for benefits such as health benefits or pensions associated with their jobs. According to the women interviewed, the situation regarding their wages is made nebulous by the fact that wage systems are not codified or transparent. The majority of the women workers had witnessed arbitrary treatment and unjustifiable differences in wages between men and women in their workplaces [...] Furthermore, many of their employers had explicitly prohibited their employees from discussing their wages with each other. (Beeman, 2004, p. 98)

And, last but not least, the Québec Pay equity commission does not verify employers to ensure that pay equity processes are carried out according to the spirit as well as the letter of the law and does not require employers whose processes are deemed inadequate to redo them according to strict criteria (Beeman, 2004, p. 103).

WHAT IS THERE TO DO?

How does this issue relate to responsible employment practices? Leck and Sanders (1996) found that the presence of formalized equity programs, those characterized by goals,

timetables, plans, audits and a responsible manager, 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 and Drakich, 1995). Another success factor is the implementation of actions designed to remove discriminatory barriers and systemic obstacles, among others an anti-harassment policy (Agocs, 2002), very important in male-dominated blue collar environments where sexist harassment is a powerful deterrent and drives/keeps many women out of the field (Bingham & Gansler, 2002; LaTour, 2008; Moccio, 2009). Such a 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, however, the Government of Quebec has opted for a voluntary approach with respect to private employers, and a proactive one with the public sector (*Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies*, RSQ, ch. A-2.01). As a result, most corporations do not care for equity policy or else settle for some timid measures when subject to “contractual obligation”, while the Human Rights Commission has no means to control. In fact, though organizations that do not comply may be sanctioned, only 14 out of 299 involved since 1989 have been so, and only six have completed their programme... (CDPDJQ, 2009, p. 83-4). What we clearly need is a proactive law, given the results obtained in the Canadian public sector where there is such legislation.

As a result, there is a general failure, since 1980, to adequately enforce the equal employment laws at the local workplace. Thus:

Supply explanations are inadequate on their own; obstacles stemming from the workplace figure heavily into the under-representation of women in skilled blue-collar jobs. (Padavic, 1997, p. 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 (O’Farrell, 1999; Eisenberg, 1998). Apparently, we could lean upon this larger group, provided the right conditions are put forward:

Attitudes of the ambivalent group, however, 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, p. 707)

For women with a high school diploma or less, blue-collar jobs, far better paid than what they are accustomed to, represent an attractive option, but one that it is hard for them to gain access to. That is why employment equity policies are a major issue, though we may wonder if any measure can succeed despite the industry’s very reluctance, that 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, pp. 103–4), these policies are even *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 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 also do we 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 more than 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 legislations, which have proven effective in case 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 does not benefit from the same support as WWII campaign did and was left only in the hands of 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 or 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 and 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 further 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, as well as 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, 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 does occur (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 above seen, been under attack, first in the US, 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

Employment equity has been cruelly dropped in the latest decades in Canada, Québec and North America both by the authorities and women's movement, in favour of balancing life and family and pay equity. Nevertheless, it has allowed interesting progress for the most qualified and educated women. Why not for the least educated?

Though employment equity is strategic, pay equity's also important to enhance less educated women's income. Some remedies to the above mentioned problems would allow meaningful progress in this direction and they are utterly and urgently needed.

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, where 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 those 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.

Will not there 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 these same 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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