

POSITIVE TIPS FOR THE JOB MARKET

1. XX vs. XY

Gender Inequalities in the Workplace

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In the past 50 years or so, an enormous portion of women have joined the Canadian workforce. Unfortunately, women's work has often been disrespected and grossly devalued. Although these attitudes are changing, there are unmistakable trends which point to continued gender inequality in the workplace. Public awareness is the first step towards an equal and fair work environment; therefore, I would like to use this article as a soap box to convey some statistical facts and sociological theories about this gender inequality. Please keep in mind that Sociology is an observational subject, therefore many theories may seem as generalizations. These statements are not meant to offend anyone, however, they are true and simply serve to inform and enlighten:

The Male Work Role Model declares that a man's job is the most important role in his life- it defines who he is and how he will be seen and judged by others. Absenteeism due to family commitments among men is usually frowned upon within a company and has a negative stigma associated with it. Even when men want to be absent, they often have to endure ridicule from co-workers. Women, on the other hand, are absent from work twice as much as men in order to attend to family commitments, without having to endure negative criticism.

The Women Work Role Model illustrates that women in the workforce are often seen as "helping out" their husbands. They are portrayed as employed homemakers whose income is used to buy the fun little extras. As a result, their jobs are devalued and much less importance is placed on their role in the workforce. Instead, women should be seen as co-breadwinners who are equally contributing to the family's financial well-being.

Next, there are serious participation and earning differentials which need to be addressed. Women are exceedingly over-represented in the lowest paying 25% of occupations, while men are over-represented in the top 25% (Statistics Canada, 1998). This participatory differential has become so blatant that one of the biggest predictors of an occupation's expected wage rate is the percentage of females working in the field. Moreover, within these positions, women can expect to earn, on average, 80% of their male counterpart's salary...for the exact same work performed (Statistics Canada, 1999). On the positive side, the higher a woman's education, the lower the wage gap becomes. In addition, the wage gap increases or decreases depending on the field of work. Then again, women have (on average) six years less work experience than men do which can be attributed to the commitments of raising a family. These six years usually take place when the woman is between the ages of 25 to 35- a critical time for family as well as career building. It is typically during this time that employees prove themselves, gaining advancements and promotions which are reflected in their salaries.

The last base I wanted to touch upon is the idea of Glass Ceilings versus Glass Escalators. When women do participate in male dominated fields, they often hit a "top bar" which they cannot overcome. For example, women hold less than 11% on all seats of Fortune 500 company boards (American Demographics, 1998). When reaching the glass ceiling, they are likely to encounter an inhospitable work environment known as a "chilly climate", loaded with concealed negative chitchat, subliminal disrespect and even sexual harassment. Conversely, what happens to men when they find themselves in traditionally female-dominated occupations? They are more likely to receive special treatment from their co-workers and bosses which, in turn, leads them to excel!

Knowledge (and awareness) is power and although the workplace is still not an equal playing field for men and women, huge advancements have been made towards solving this inequality and we are surely on the right track!

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