

**Statement by the
Canadian Federation of Business & Professional
Women's Clubs/ La fédération canadienne des Clubs de
femmes de carrières commerciales et professionnelles
(BPW Canada)**

**To the
House of Commons Standing Committee
Regarding the Status of Women Study on
Women in Non-traditional jobs in Canada**

March 17th, 2010





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Canadian Federation of Business & Professional Women's Clubs (BPW
Canada) to the House of Commons Standing Committee Regarding
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Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

The Canadian Federation of Business & Professional Women's Clubs (BPW Canada) has been around since 1930. Our mission is to develop the professional and leadership potential of women in Canada through education, awareness, advocacy and mentoring within a supportive network.

La fédération canadienne des Clubs de femmes de carrières commerciales et professionnelles a été fondé en 1930. Notre mission est de développer le potentiel professionnel des Canadiennes par le truchement de l'enseignement, de la conscientisation, de la plaidoirie et du mentorat à même un réseau d'entraide.

BPW Canada was a founding member of our International Federation of Business & Professional Women, which has clubs in more than 90 countries, and which has Category I Consultative Status at the United Nations.

We are a volunteer organization that receives no government money. My job as president of BPW Canada is a volunteer job. To make a living, I run my own company.

Like most organizations, BPW Canada's policies and positions are driven by the membership. We have a resolutions process, where clubs bring resolutions on particular issues to an Annual General Meeting or Biennial Convention. They are discussed, debated, and once approved, become the position of the organization.

Over the years, our members have presented several resolutions on the issue of access for women to non-traditional jobs. As an organization, we certainly support greater access for women to what are considered non-traditional jobs.



Doing a quick review of literature, in preparation for this presentation, I think it's fair to say that for many years, women have been encouraged to enter non-traditional areas of employment. During the 1970s and 1980s, Canadian women did precisely that. As women experienced higher levels of education as well as increased labour force participation rates, women also became a growing presence in a diverse range of male-dominated occupations. Veterinary practice, financial management and law were just some of the occupations that women entered.¹

In the 1990s, however, with the recession and the pressures of economic globalization, women continued to enter male-dominated occupations, although they did so more slowly than before.² I think it's fair to say that in the last couple of decades we have not seen the kinds of programs that encourage women to pursue non-traditional occupations that we had seen earlier.

Statistics Canada's *Women in Canada* report,³ for example, reported that the majority of employed women in 2004 continued to work in occupations in which women had traditionally been concentrated. In 2004, 67% of all employed women were working in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, and sales and service occupations. There had also been virtually no change in the proportion of women employed in these traditionally female-dominated occupations over the previous decade. In fact, the share of female workers employed in these areas in 2004 was almost exactly the same as that in 1996. In 2004, women were 87% of all nurses and health-related therapists; 75% of clerks and other administrators; 65% of teachers; 57% of those working in sales and service.

The 2006 StatsCan report also noted that women had increased their representation in several professional occupations in recent years, in particular doctors and dentists, business and financial professionals and managerial positions. In 2004, 55% of all doctors and dentists in Canada were female, up from 43% in 1987. In 2004, women made up over half of those employed as business and financial professionals, 51% in 2004

¹ Hughes, Karen D. *Women in non-traditional occupations*. Autumn 1995 Perspectives. Statistics Canada, Catalogue 75-001E.

² Ibid.

³ Statistics Canada. *Women in Canada (Fifth Edition): A Gender-based Statistical Report* (Catalogue no. 89-503-XIE), Statistics Canada, 2006. Minister of Industry, 2006. Available at statcan.gc.ca



compared to 38% in 1987. There had also been a long-term increase in the share of women employed in managerial positions.

I'd like to address the question of why women should be actively encouraged to go into non-traditional fields. It's more than a matter of fairness, justice or equal opportunity.

First, many researchers believe that a well-trained labour force is the only way that Canada will achieve and maintain a competitive advantage in today's global business market. Thus, providing training has been advocated as sound social policy for competitiveness.⁴

When we talk about competing globally, we inevitably talk about innovation, about developing new knowledge and new technologies, and using that new knowledge and new technologies to produce new products, services and processes for world markets. What's needed is scientists, people skilled in Information and Communications Technologies. Women are woefully under-represented in both. Even though the ITC sector is crying out for more workers, women for the most part are not going into IT.

If we look at the skilled trades, women are even more under-represented. There is already a major shortage of skilled trades workers in Canada, and with the looming demographic crunch, the situation will get worse in future.

Women are an untapped resource in many sectors. Gender limitations means that employers draw on a much smaller pool of talent. The irony is that women may offer advantages in some of these jobs. As an example, in IT, companies are starting to realize that to be successful, they need more than the techie-types. They need employees who can actually talk to the customer, to build the bridge between what the customer needs and what the technology can do for him or her. And women are very good at doing that.

Secondly, when we talk about the wage gap in Canada – and it's still around 20% – a good part of the wage gap is due to the fact that women are still largely concentrated in the so-called “female” occupations. As women move into what have traditionally been “male” occupations and assuming that they are paid the same as their male counterparts (which is not always the case), the wage gap should begin to close.

⁴ Conference Board of Canada 2008, OECD 2006



Thirdly, from the government's point of view, when women are more fully employed and better paid, they are paying more taxes. They are contributing more to the economy, which in turn means that governments can provide more social and economic benefits to all citizens.

So, what needs to be done?

- The federal government needs to be more proactive in encouraging women to pursue non-traditional jobs. I know that Canada's Economic Action Plan included an investment of \$40 million per year in a new Apprenticeship Completion Grant to encourage apprentices to complete their program. Good initiative but when I look at the video on the website, I saw almost no women. So my conclusion is either that the government isn't interested in encouraging women, in particular, to pursue the trades or it doesn't know anything about marketing.
- The federal government needs to be a model employer (recruitment and workplace support), for example, in the Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, federation institutions. It needs to implement very proactive workplace programs to prevent/punish workplace harassment. While labour and education are provincial jurisdictions, the federal government can set standards for diversity and add incentives for contractors doing business with the federal government.
- The federal government should offer and promote training in non-traditional fields through the Employment Insurance program, followed up with robust placement programs.
- The federal government should continue to support initiatives in the private and non-profit sector to encourage women to pursue non-traditional jobs. One example that was funded in the last fiscal year was a project by the Canadian Advanced Technology Alliance, Women in Technology that received \$405,000 to attract young women to consider a career in the technology sector. This kind of support needs to continue.

It's clear that there is not ONE thing that we can suggest that will result in more women going into non-traditional occupations. Rather there needs to be a multi-pronged approach where government actively encourages and puts programs and supports in place to make it happen.



On the employer side, acceptance of women in non-traditional jobs is still an issue. There can be resistance from co-workers, some bad behaviours, escalating to the point of actual harassment in some cases. That needs to be stopped. The federal government needs to take an active role in educating the workforce – especially companies wanting to do business with the federal government – that this kind of behaviour is no longer acceptable.

Employers must be encouraged to see the value of hiring more women in non-traditional jobs and maybe provided with incentives to do so. And women themselves must be encouraged, provided with incentives, have role models and see success stories.

We thank you again for the opportunity to be here today.



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