

# Gender Occupational Segregation

## It's Still Blue Collars and Pink Ghettos

Despite progress over the last several decades, the U.S. labor force remains largely segregated along gender lines. More women have entered into professional and managerial careers, but women have made relatively little progress in entering male-dominated, blue-collar jobs, such as construction and manufacturing. However, these nontraditional jobs—which often offer good wages for require less education—are an important vehicle for women to increase their incomes and obtain long-term economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families.

### **Women workers remain concentrated in traditionally female occupations, which typically pay low wages.**

- In 2000, two-thirds of all working women in the United States remained segregated in only 21 of 500 occupational categories.<sup>1</sup>
- Women represent 96.9 percent of all administrative support (including clerical) workers and roughly 86.6 percent of all service workers (i.e. child care workers, hairdressers, food preparation workers). To view the top 20 occupations for women in 2007 visit <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/20lead2006.htm>.<sup>2</sup>
- Stereotypical “women’s work” is consistently paid less than “men’s work.” For example, the median weekly wage for a child care worker (a traditionally female occupation) is \$349, while median weekly wage for a truck driver (a traditionally male occupation) is \$642.<sup>3</sup>

### **Only a small percentage of working women are in nontraditional fields.<sup>4</sup>**

- Nontraditional jobs<sup>5</sup> are defined as occupations in which 25 percent or fewer of those individuals employed in that area are women. They include: farming and ranching, computer software engineering, truck driving, fire fighting and construction.<sup>6</sup> To view a complete list of nontraditional occupations for women visit <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2006.htm>.

### **Nontraditional occupations generally offer higher wages and better benefits, allowing more women—and their families—to permanently leave poverty.**

- Women working in nontraditional fields earn on average 20-30 percent more than their counterparts in traditionally female fields.<sup>7</sup>
- Nontraditional careers for women generally offer higher entry-level wages and a career ladder with pay between \$20 and \$30 per hour.<sup>8</sup>
- A woman working in an occupation relating to installation, maintenance or repair will earn a median weekly income of \$697, in comparison to her counterpart working in healthcare support, who will earn \$417.<sup>9</sup>

# Gender Occupational Segregation, cont.

**Despite the economic advantages to nontraditional careers, barriers to women's participation in nontraditional employment remain daunting.**

- Biased career counseling and recruiting, sexual harassment and differential treatment in the classroom all act as deterrents for female students from training programs in nontraditional fields.<sup>10</sup>
- Workplace discrimination and sexual harassment—sometimes used by employers to prevent women from climbing the job ladder—prevent women from entering and staying in nontraditional occupations.<sup>11</sup>

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1. U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Based on calculations by the Wage Project <http://www.wageproject.org/content/gap/why.php>
  2. U.S. Department of Labor. Women's Bureau. Quick Facts on Employment status for Women and Men in 2006, August 2007. <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/Qf-ESWM06.htm>
  3. U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Median Weekly Earnings of Full-time Wage and Salary Workers by Detailed Occupation and Sex, 2005. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.pdf>
  4. U.S. Department of Labor. Women's Bureau. Nontraditional Jobs for Women in 2006, August 2007. <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2006.htm>
  5. U.S. Department of Labor. Women's Bureau. Nontraditional Jobs for Women in 2006, August 2007. <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2006.htm>
  6. Ibid.
  7. Wider Opportunities for Women. Women and Non-traditional Work Fact Sheet, June 2003. <http://www.wowonline.org/docs/dynamic-CTTA-73.pdf>
  8. U.S. Department of Labor. Women's Bureau. Nontraditional Jobs for Women in 2006, August 2007. <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2006.htm>
  9. U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Median Weekly Earnings of Full-time Wage and Salary Workers by Detailed Occupation and Sex, 2005. <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.pdf>
  10. Ibid.
  11. Rutgers University Center for Women and Work. Facts About Occupational Distribution by Sex, August 2002.

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Women Work! The National Network for Women's Employment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advances economic justice and equality for women through education, advocacy and organizing. Since 1978, the Network has assisted more than 10 million women to successfully enter, re-enter and advance in the workforce. Through supporting, advocating and increasing women's economic self-sufficiency, Women Work! members strengthen families and communities.