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ABSTRACT

Findings from the 1992 Generation survey carried out by C,req in 1997 among young people exiting the French school system indicates that work-related disparities encountered by young labor market entrants in France can be characterized according to the worker's gender. Obstacles facing women include the following: (1) risk of unemployment or imposed part-time work; (2) lower wages; and (3) more difficult access to managerial posts. These inequalities are often interpreted to be the result of gender segregation or unequal access in the educational process. Under certain conditions, non-traditional education and training (in programs usually reserved for men) can benefit young women in the school-to-work transition. However, in the most mixed training programs (programs traditionally chosen by men and women alike), women still face more workplace disparities than men. Gender inequities do tend to diminish as training levels increase. Gradual improvement is also happening due to labor market influences such as the 35-hour work week and other government policies and changing perceptions about gender roles and stereotypes. (AJ)

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CLOSING THE GENDER GAP?: NON-TRADITIONAL CURRICULUM CHOICES AND ENTRY INTO WORKING LIFE

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Training & Employment

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM CEREQ AND ITS ASSOCIATED CENTRES

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP?

Non-Traditional Curriculum Choices and Entry into Working Life

The litany of work-related disparities between men and women is long: risk of unemployment or imposed part-time work, lower wages, more difficult access to managerial posts. These inequalities, which manifest themselves at the time of entry into working life, are often interpreted as the result of gender segregation in the educational process. If this is the case, we may legitimately expect the gaps to be smaller for young women and men who have chosen a programme of study usually privileged by the other gender. The findings presented here indicate that under certain conditions, non-traditional education and training can benefit young women in the school-to-work transition. And that, paradoxically, the most mixed training programmes do not seem to offer protection from traditionally observed gender disparities.

Gender is generally considered to be an important factor for explaining disparities in the school-to-work transition. Indeed, gender-based differences in labour-market entry may be observed at all training levels, and almost always in favour of the young men. Even if these disparities diminish as the diploma level rises, the modes of access to employment and the different socio-economic categories, the risks of unemployment, wage levels and job status, among others, remain correlated to the gender of the individuals concerned.

At the same time, the training profiles of young people entering the labour market are known to reflect sharp gender segregation. Three-quarters of those exiting the tertiary streams at the CAP, BEP (V), *baccalauréat* (IV) or DUT (III) levels are young women.* But for industrial training programmes at the same levels, only one-sixth of the exiting population are women. At the higher levels—second or third cycle at university or the *Grandes Ecoles* (levels I-II)—the

situation improves somewhat, with young women accounting for one-third of those exiting scientific and technical streams and two-thirds in humanities, social sciences and management.

Taken together, these observations have traditionally been interpreted to suggest that the difficulties faced by young women in the school-to-work transition are inherent in the 'bad' choices made with regard to their initial training programmes. Since they do not prepare for the same jobs as their male classmates, they do not enter the same labour-market segments at the end of their schooling: the predominately female tertiary sector is characterised by greater precariousness and lack of correlation between training and jobs, leading notably to over-qualification at the time of hiring, while the manufacturing sector, by contrast, accords much more importance to both the diploma and the area of training. The gender gap observed in the transition process is thus largely attributed to structural effects.

In some instances, a non-traditional school orientation towards a field of study mainly chosen by the opposite sex (see box page 4) may turn out to be a more profitable choice at the time of labour-market entry. On the other hand, the choice of mixed streams is not necessarily a guarantee of gender equity in the youth transition.

* CAP (*certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*) = vocational aptitude certificate

BEP (*brevet d'études professionnelles*) = vocational studies certificate
Baccalauréat = secondary-education diploma giving access to university studies

DUT (*diplôme universitaire de technologie*) = polytechnic diploma

'MALE' TRAINING, 'FEMALE' TRANSITION?

The balance sheet for the labour-market entry of young women venturing into non-traditional streams—i.e., highly 'masculine' ones such as mechanics, electricity or construction work, but also computer science, math or physics—remains ambiguous. If it is encouraging relative to that of their female peers coming from other fields of study, it remains disappointing relative to the young men in their own fields. After higher education (levels I-II), however, they and their male counterparts enjoy the same likelihood of avoiding unemployment or an imposed part-time job, of entering occupations corresponding to their area of study and of gaining access to the most respected socio-economic categories (cf. tables below). At these levels, the wide range of training choices open to young women seems to work in favour of gender equity in the transition process. But there is still one catch: equal work does not guarantee equal pay, and their wages remain considerably lower than those of their male peers.

Young women with a lower training level, meanwhile, and notably those exiting CAP or BEP programmes, are faced with a more chaotic entry into working life. Overall, their transition path and hiring conditions are less favourable than those of their male classmates in the same streams. One noteworthy exception concerns 'technician and associate professional' and 'manager' positions, which they obtain at least as often as the young men. But once again, this equity in terms of job classifications is not confirmed by their wage levels, which are systematically lower. We can observe, moreover, that these young women are less often found in the occupational fields corresponding to their training, a situation suggesting that they have encountered greater difficulties in entering these job segments or preferred to reorient their career paths (cf. box page 4).

Relative to their female classmates coming from more conventional streams, young women exiting a 'male' training programme do not suffer from their non-traditional fields of study, however. Although such an orientation does not give rise to a real gain for those coming from CAP or BEP programmes, these young women are not tangibly penalised for their 'transgression', and from the *baccalauréat* level on, they even derive clear benefits from their non-traditional

curricula. They have the same likelihood of escaping unemployment or imposed part-time work as their female classmates in other streams but, above all, they attain 'manager' or 'technician and associate professional' posts more often and their wages are higher.

From the *baccalauréat* level on, this non-traditional orientation thus turns out to be a positive choice, even if the gender gap remains. The degree to which the young women profit from their training depends on the occupational field they enter. The only ones who really benefit from these non-traditional orientations are those who obtain the jobs usually associated with their training, in which case they are more often able to avoid imposed part-time work, have easier access to more respected socio-economic categories and obtain higher wages. Overall, they encounter better hiring conditions than young women entering occupational fields less related to their initial training, whose hiring conditions at the time of the school-to-work transition are in fact quite close to those of young women coming from conventional streams.

'FEMALE' TRAINING: A MAN ISN'T JUST ANOTHER WOMAN

The situation of young men choosing non-traditional orientations—towards a 'female' field such as secretarial work, textiles, psychology, literature or languages—in no way constitutes a mirror image of that of the young women coming from unconventional streams. Thus, in spite of this non-traditional orientation, the young men still occupy better positions in the labour market than those of their female classmates in the same fields (but less favourable than those of young men coming from other fields, whether 'male' or mixed).

At the beginning of working life, it is true, they do not seem to benefit from particularly favourable conditions in terms of their gender. One year after exiting the school system, they thus face the same likelihood of unemployment as their female classmates. But five years later, a comparison of unemployment rates, working hours, professional status and wages gives them a clear advantage over their female counterparts, especially up to the *baccalauréat* level. Thus, after five years of working life, the risk of unemployment is less for young men at *baccalauréat*, DUT or BTS level while it is similar for young

TRAINING FIELDS AND YOUTH TRANSITION: GENDER DISPARITIES	FEMALES EXITING 'MALE' FIELDS OF STUDY													
	Relative to males exiting same fields						Relative to females exiting other fields							
	I-II		III		IV		I-II		III		IV			
Upon entry into working life — Avoiding unemployment	[]						[]							
During first five years — Being unemployed less than one year	[]						[+]							
Five years afterwards — Avoiding unemployment	[]						[+]							
Five years afterwards — Avoiding imposed part-time work	[]						[+]							
Five years afterwards — Attaining manager or 'technician and associate professional' position	[+]						[+]							
Five years afterwards — Wage disparity	14 %		19 %		9 %		10 %		24 %		9 %		16 %	

men and young women coming from 'female' fields at university or Grandes Ecoles level, as well as CAP or BEP programmes. In addition, the young men exiting at *baccalauréat*, CAP or BEP level are less often subject to imposed part-time work than their female counterparts. And in all cases, young men coming from 'female' streams enjoy higher wages than the young women.

Notwithstanding their privileged transition profiles relative to their female counterparts in the same fields, these young men are still confronted by more difficult situations than male peers who have chosen a conventional curriculum. Their non-traditional orientation thus puts them at a considerable disadvantage. Among higher-education graduates, the young men in 'female' fields are clearly not more exposed to unemployment than those coming from other training programmes but their hiring conditions are generally less advantageous: they are more likely to face imposed part-time work, have less access to 'technician and associate professional' or management posts and above all receive lower wages. Those exiting *baccalauréat* programmes seem particularly disadvantaged by the combined risks of unemployment and less favourable hiring conditions, while CAP- and BEP-holders in non-traditional fields face greater risks of unemployment and imposed part-time jobs than young men coming from other fields.

Like the young women who have chosen non-traditional curricula, these young men are much less likely than their female classmates to enter the labour market in a field corresponding to their training. On the other hand, their hiring conditions are the same whether or not they enter the occupations associated with their initial training—as if the fact of being males gave them automatic access to alternative solutions and socially and economically respectable job opportunities.

WHEN MIXED STREAMS DON'T EQUAL EQUITY

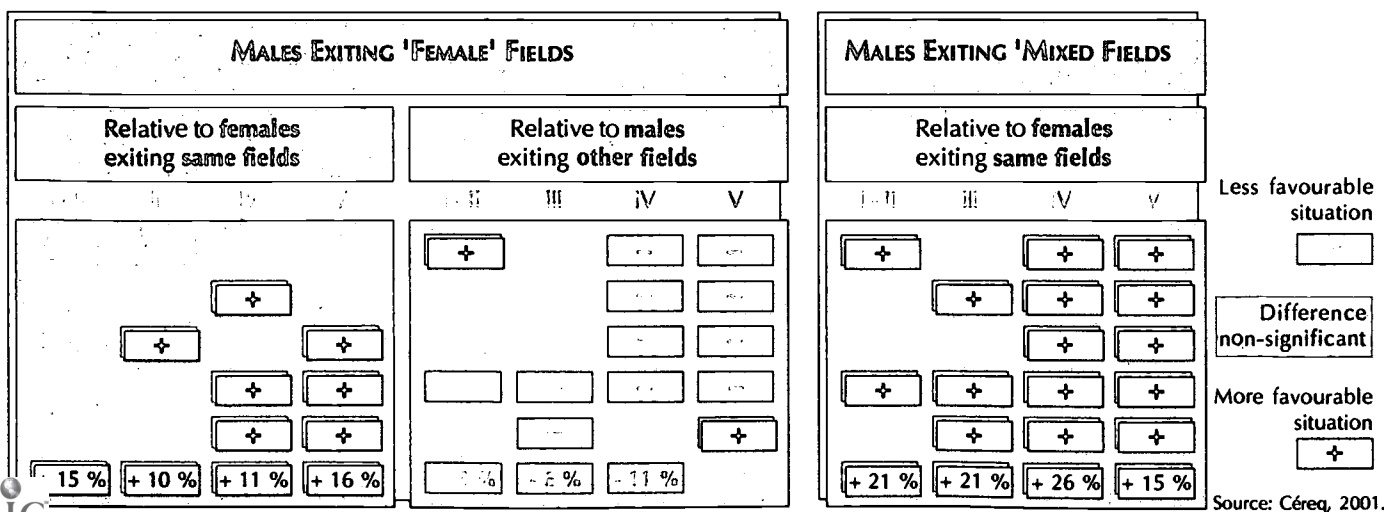
If gender disparities in the school-to-work transition persist in the wake of a non-traditional curriculum, it must be recognised that 'mixed' streams—those chosen by young women and men alike, such as law, chemistry or biology—give rise to even more disparate conditions of labour-market

entry. Following secondary education, the gender gap is systematic, whether in terms of the risks of unemployment and imposed part-time work, access to the most respected positions or wages. And the male advantages persist after higher education: even if, after the second or third cycle at university or the Grandes Ecoles, young men are not more likely to obtain a 'technical or associate profession' or managerial position, their wages are over 20 percent higher than those of their female peers.

Thus, mixed streams do not offer protection from the gender disparities traditionally observed in the school-to-work transition; in the end, they are no *less* inegalitarian than the others. The extent of the disparities—notably in terms of wages—is such that the mixed nature of the training programmes in general does not seem to constitute a sufficient condition for attaining gender equity in work. And these observations remain valid when we consider the specific occupational segments corresponding to the mixed training streams. For male and female higher-education graduates alike, hiring conditions are quite similar regardless of the occupational field. The same is true for young men with a lower training level, but their female peers, by contrast, seem to be penalised when they do not enter the occupational fields corresponding to their training, and this creates even greater wage disparities with the young men.

COME ON, GIRLS ?

These findings suggest that the gender disparities observed in the school-to-work transition cannot be interpreted solely in terms of gender segregation—young women and men do not have the same forms of labour-market entry because their educational orientation is different—but must also be understood in terms of discrimination—with the same training, young women always encounter more difficulties than their male counterparts because the opportunities awaiting them on the labour market are less favourable. This argument is all the more easily advanced because male domination remains widespread: whether in areas traditionally reserved for men, in those reserved for women or in those open to both, gender differences always go in the same direction. And as recent studies carried out by the French National Statistics Institute (INSEE) show, change is slow in coming. Thus, as Pierre Bourdieu has written,



"Whatever their position in the social space, what women have in common is the fact of being separated from men by a negative symbolic coefficient which . . . has a negative impact on everything they are and do". And for Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, "Failing to do justice to young women's educational qualifications is not simply iniquitous in moral terms. It is a source of social discontent and an anti-economic waste of competences".

Beyond such admittedly pessimistic observations, a few encouraging trends may nonetheless be brought out. For one thing, gender inequalities tend to diminish as training levels increase. Furthermore, young women who choose non-traditional training programmes and subsequently enter a corresponding occupational field do benefit from their curriculum choices. These trends coincide, moreover, with certain transformations of the labour market in France—the tertiarisation of economic activity, the introduction of the 35-hour work week, a recent economic situation favourable to employment—as well as gradual changes, reinforced by government policy, in social representations of gender stereotypes. Albeit in the long term, these developments give hope, to cite Bourdieu once again, for a "gradual decline of male domination", in the work sphere at least.

Thomas Couppié and Dominique Épiphané (Céreq)

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TRAINING FIELDS: MALE, FEMALE AND MIXED

The findings presented in this issue of *Training and Employment* are derived from the '92 Generation survey carried out by Céreq in 1997 among young people exiting the French school system in 1992, regardless of their level and field of training (cf. "Génération 92", *Céreq Bref* no. 149 [January 1999]).

For the purposes of the present study, the training fields were divided into three groups ('male', 'female', mixed') for each of the four main training levels: CAP/BEP (Level V), *baccalauréat* (IV), second or third cycle at university or *Grandes Ecoles* (I-II). The 'male' training fields include less than one-third young women while the 'female' fields include more than two-thirds. Fields falling between the two are considered to be 'mixed'. The overall number of young people exiting each of these three categories is the same, but there are considerable variations according to training level.

- 58 percent of the young people exit at Level I-II of the 'mixed specialities', as compared to 17 percent at Level V. Within this group, 48 percent are young women at Level IV and 60 percent at Level V.
- Almost half the young people at CAP/BEP level exit 'male' fields and only one-fourth at other levels. The proportion of young women in these fields, which are atypical for them, varies from 4 percent (Level V) to 21 percent (Level I-II).
- Nearly half the young people at *baccalauréat* level exit 'female' fields and only 16 percent at Level I-II. The proportion of young men with atypical training paths varies between 11 and 19 percent.

Young people following non-traditional training programmes are thus relatively rare. In the 'male' fields, moreover, the distribution of young women is very different from that of their male counterparts. At CAP/BEP level, for example, 42 percent exit food-processing training programmes as compared to 7 percent of the young men; conversely, only 15 percent come from training in mechanics as compared to 28 percent of the young men. In order to limit these structural effects, information on the training field, diploma obtained and parents' socio-economic category was systematically taken into account during statistical processing.

The wages declared at the time of the survey were analysed via an earnings function (inspired by Jacob Mincer, 1974) using as control variables the fact of working part-time, seniority in the job, the experience accumulated in prior jobs, the training field and the diploma held. The selection bias linked to the fact of being in employment at the time of the survey was also taken into account.

The findings presented distinguish between habitual and sporadic opportunities on the basis of the occupational families to which the largest number of those exiting the educational system gain access in function of their training level and field.

See *Familles professionnelles. Un classement des emplois fondé sur l'analyse des contenus d'activité* [Occupational Families. A Job Classification Based on the Analysis of Activity Content]. *Céreq Document* no. 83 (January 1993).

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