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# The Present Challenges of Canadian Economic Diplomacy and the Feminization of poverty with its Impact on Equality of Opportunity for Education in North America

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**Abstract:** *Historically, the economic diplomacy was managed by men and many women were discriminated against if they tried to get a job in an area traditionally male-dominated. Nowadays in Canada more women have the chance to get a job in areas, like business or economic diplomacy, previously dominated by men. Having many women living in poor conditions, gave birth, in 1978, to the term “feminization of poverty”. This paper gives a short description of economic diplomacy and evaluates some strategies used in Canada to include more women in the global promotion of trade. The paper also describes what the “feminization of poverty” is and presents its impact on equality of opportunity for education based on gender, race, ethnicity or social status. The paper also evaluates the cycle of poverty and the discrimination that women, especially from different minorities, have had to face in North America concerning their rights for education. The paper also shows how women have had to deal with oppression concerning education and job opportunities and evaluates how this situation has changed in Canada. The interest of this research is to evaluate the conditions that created the lack of political tools to efficiently address the “feminization of poverty” in Canada, giving the example of many young female graduates who cannot find a job in their field. The last part of the paper briefly describes the feminist movement, its approaches and the historical legacy of the “feminization of teaching” in Nova Scotia.*

**Key words:** *economic diplomacy, feminization of poverty, feminization of teaching, Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (TCS).*

## 1. ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY- GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

**A**ccording to Bayne and Woolcock (2007) economic diplomacy “is mainly concerned with what governments do” but also represents the interests of the countries at the global level, being in the same time deeply involved “into domestic decisions -making”(p. 3).

Canadian economic diplomacy is promoted at the global level. One way of fostering Canadian economic diplomacy is The Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) with its motto “*Take your business to the world!*” Canadian trade commissioners work in 160 cities around the world, providing information about trade missions and events, Canada’s trade agreements, and supporting international businesses that are interested to invest in Canada and Canadian businesses that are willing to invest in other countries. One initiative created to include more women in the international business is Business Women in International Trade (BWIT) that provides women with assistance and advice concerning the achievement of success in the international markets. Women also can receive information about how to adapt their firm when investing in another country, how to connect with colleagues and customers in the host country, how to set appropriate objectives, how to find different business development events ([https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/trade\\_commissioners-delegates\\_commerciaux\\_index.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/trade_commissioners-delegates_commerciaux_index.aspx?lang=eng)).

From 2016, all these events helped several women in Canada to be more confident and to apply for different international opportunities, that can help them to develop new business connections around the world. Many women from Canadian minorities have few opportunities to

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access funds and develop connections. The inequalities in Canadian society mainly affect Native, Black, and immigrant women.

## 2. THE “FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY” AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN CANADIAN EDUCATION

Historically the position of women in society has had many interpretations and continues to affect the way in which women are treated. In 1978 for the first time the concept of “feminization of poverty” was defined by the number of women living on the edge of poverty. This concept is related to how traditional societies see women as being made especially for domestic activities and as being inferior to their husbands.

Taking Canadian society as an example, even if the modern approach gives more rights to women, there are social inequalities in Canadian society and gender issues continue to represent an area for research and reflection. Canadian society and the Canadian government have had different approaches on how to help women escape poverty. Although women are in general discriminated against regarding educational and employment opportunities, ethnic and “color” differences add extra layers of discrimination for First Nations, black and immigrant women. The problem for First Nations, black and immigrant women who live in higher levels of poverty levels does not seem to be recognized by many official policies and has affected the development of Canadian society.

Concerning social inequality, the focus on inequality in Canada has been based on ethnic origin, especially for First Nations. From its inception in 1845, the Canadian educational system has been seen as being open to all social classes. Later, radical theorists blamed the failure of students from lower social classes on capitalism.

Wotherspoon (2014) presented several types of gender inequality, showing different examples of the evidence of racial and ethnic inequality in Canada and presented arguments why First Nations are the most disadvantaged people in Canada. In this sense the author shows the stratification of Canadian society based on inequalities of “gender, race and ethnicity, class, region, age” (p.241). The author presents other research that shows how women in Canadian society earn lower incomes and how they face discrimination at work and at home. The examples given regarding gender inequality differ at different levels of education. For example, at the elementary and secondary level of education there is not a visible gender differentiation, but “women’s participation rate have remained somewhat lower in graduate studies” (p. 250). The problem presented here is the process of gender segmentation inserted directly or indirectly into educational programs. The problem of classroom practices with different gender expectations creates a distinct way in which female and male students choose courses for their studies or future jobs. At the post-secondary level, women have increased their overall educational participation by “growing proportions of women in nearly every field of study” (p. 251). But the central focus of the women’s increased university participation remains in fields that are traditionally dominated by women, like education, arts, languages, nursing and social work as opposed to male-dominated fields like IT, engineering or applied sciences.

Wotherspoon also described how different educational approaches and experiences of male and female students contribute to the creation of a *social reproduction* beyond what they are studying in at school. The example given is the gap in income between women and man in the labor market. Another discrimination that women face because of gender segregation in education is the time they have to dedicate for the traditional role they are expected to take for doing domestic work or being forced to interrupt their career or education because of pregnancy.

Concerning women’s income in Canada, Drolet (2011) argues that after the 1980s women’s wages have increased more than men’s, showing that younger women have better choices for studies

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and work. This is important, especially for young “white” Canadian women, but there are still many First Nations or immigrant women living at the edges of poverty. For instance, Wotherspoon shows that in Canada a large number of federal, provincial or municipal policies discriminate against access to services based on “race, gender and other social characteristics” (p.246). The problem is that compared with other Canadians, persons of Aboriginal ancestry have lower rates of pursuing education or completing post-secondary studies (p.206). An important step made by First Nations is based on *reasonable accommodation* which requires that Canadian legal systems meet the needs of a minority if their needs do not impede others. An example of this is the case of Sandra Lovelace Nicholas who fought for the rights of First Nations women. She married outside her reserve and when she divorced her husband and returned to her reserve she was not recognized as having same rights as before she left her reserve. Sandra Lovelace Nicholas petitioned the United Nations Human Rights Commission that the Canadian government was not respecting the right for equal protection before the law for both men and women in Canada. This compelled the government to change the Indian Act in 1985, helping over 16,000 First Nations women to have their rights respected. The significance of this case is that it represents an important step concerning the elimination of gender discrimination in Canadian law and challenged traditional gender hierarchy in the Maliseet First Nations group in which she was born (Sandra Lovelace v. Canada, Communication No. 24/1977: Canada 30/07/81, UN Doc. CCPR/C/13/D/24/1977).

### 3. THE CYCLE OF POVERTY, CULTURAL CAPITAL AND WOMEN DISCRIMINATION IN CANADIAN EDUCATION

To describe the differences in students achievements at school, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu created the term of “cultural capital”. In 1979 Bourdieu described three forms of “cultural capital” as being *embodied*, *objectified* and *institutionalized* (p.3). Embodied cultural capital includes the accumulation of personal characteristics such as language, accent, the impact of family, cultural attributes and the economic advantages that the members of different families can have. The objectified form of cultural capital is a product of historical projection transferred from one generation to another by its material forms, like written lines, paintings or monuments (p.5). In its institutionalized form, cultural capital refers to school credentials and qualifications that give the values of a group when compared with another group and that finally are connected with the “economic capital” that can guarantee the future monetary value of the investment in any institutionalized form of cultural capital (pp.5-6). Therefore, the discrimination between different students and their achievements is based on the chances they have in the family to find better schools based on passing the selection and evaluation processes that can be disadvantageous for various ethnic groups who have been historically marginalized such as First Nations people.

In analyzing equality of opportunity in Canadian education, Young (1990) presents the contradictions of an open Canadian society. The author shows two points of view concerning inequalities in Canadian society. The side that accepts the inequalities argues that the inequalities are necessary because they provide motivation for people to receive a reward in gaining economic benefits later. However, the opposing view assumes that is better to eliminate the inequalities because they are against justice and humanity and produce future bad elements for society such as increasing criminality. These two points of view have created theories of stratification that try to explain or justify inequalities within Canadian society.

When arguing why “talent wastage” should be avoided, Young claims that this can negatively affect all citizens because it is impossible to benefit from the “effective utilization of the talent of the largest amount of people” without taking into consideration social stratification or occupational

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structure (p.162). The key factor identified in the stratification of society is education. The factors associated by Young with the type and length of education a child can receive are “class, region, race and ethnicity, religion and gender” (p.162). A child from a rich family is more likely to receive future advantages compared with its peers from a poor background because the rich parents transfer their material and educational benefits to their children.

Concerning poverty in Canada, based on the National Council of Welfare research results of 1988, in the mid-1980s Canadians most likely to live in poverty were mostly female, First Nations, single parents, from rural areas and poorly educated (p.78). With so many females living in poverty, the “feminization of poverty” started to expand in Canadian society. For example, when a mother lives in poverty, this situation affects her children because a child born poor is more likely to get sick and not be able to study in as comfortable conditions as a child from a higher social class. Another factor is the importance of role-models that children see in their family. A child that is born to a family with enough resources can be taught to learn important skills. For example, that child can have piano lessons and therefore be able to understand classical music later. However, a child forced to help its mother with domestic work likely sees from a young age, from not having its needs met, a motivation for a better life or a motivation to leave the family and experience life on the streets. Schools provide children in Canada equality of opportunity to follow and exploit their talents. The important aspect here is in which measure can schools and the investment in education help to challenge social inequalities and give opportunities to more children a dream for a better life.

Porter (1979) presents the differences between equality of condition and equality of opportunity. Concerning equality of condition everything with value for the society, like “material resources, health, personal development, leisure should be distributed among all the members of society in relatively the same amounts regardless of the social position which one occupies” (p.244). Equality of opportunity is presented by Porter as being connected with the unequal distribution of resources that can be openly accessed by each individual without any discrimination concerning religion, family status, ethnicity or gender.

The Canadian policies of the 1960s naively created more programs and schools to include more poor students from poorer rural areas with the hope all students would have the chance to achieve the highest results in their schooling. The results showed that not all students had the ability to finish their studies or to succeed. At the same time, the occupation of the students’ parents influenced the results of their children at school. Additionally, there was still gender discrimination because more male than female students could benefit from the educational system to enter into the higher classes of society.

During the 1960s and 1970s Canada increased its expenditure on education with the hope to increase equality of opportunity. The problem was that the increase in expenditure failed to increase equality of educational opportunity. With more governmental expenditure used for public education an inflation of credentials arose that led to a requirement for more qualifications for the same jobs that could be done with less credentials. In this sense, Young argues that “after increasingly longer periods spent in schools, the credential that a student receives at the end is that which will give entrance to the occupational structure” (p.167) and this corresponds to the social status of their parents. Young considers that early social reformers were “more honest or realistic in their goals for education” because they concentrated on integrating the learners into society by “giving them attitudes, knowledge and motivation to be good citizens” (p.167).

Young considers that the best way to bring a change and to improve the opportunity of education in Canada is to focus on cultural factors rather than material factors that were previously the priority of education providers and politicians.

Women are still more vulnerable to live in poverty because they are forced into different types of education than males based on the expectations of the market and domestic responsibilities.

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Schools can change curricula and adapt them to the needs of society but by working isolated the educational system cannot function properly. A recent documentary called *Generation Jobless: Canada's Youth are Unemployed and in Debt* shows the problems that the young generation faces after leaving university. The majority of graduates presented in the documentary are females that are forced to work as servers in restaurants and are not able to find a job in the field they graduated from. A solution to this problem is presented by the University of Regina which calls for more collaboration with the labor market to make sure that graduates get a job in their chosen field of studies. This program has helped over 90 percent of graduates find a job in their field of studies. Another example presented by this documentary shows the collaboration between the Ministry of Education in Switzerland and the labor market with students being able to work and study from high school. The problem presented in the documentary is that Canada does not have a national Ministry of Education. By allowing each province to take separate decisions and not having a national survey of the number of graduates in different sectors and their future opportunities in the labor market, it is difficult to create such opportunities for Canadian youth.

The cycle of poverty is similar to the business cycle with a wave structure that increases, arrives at a maximum and decreases. However, the difference here is that the cycle of poverty never arrives at a minimum point that can be totally controlled by the modern political approach.

When describing the fight of feminists for equal education for girls and women, Gaskell (1993) presents different feminist positions from the past and the present such as: “eliminate the difference gender makes”; “value the difference women make” and “learn to respect and work across difference” (pp.146-147). The key points in Gaskell’s conclusions refer to the many aspects of education addressed by the women’s movement in demanding equal representation for female students and teachers, the need to reshape institutions and to reorganize standards of excellence and government policies (p.158).

The impact of gender on professionalism is presented by Perry (2003) who analyzed the number of female teachers in Nova Scotia between 1870 and 1960. The author evaluated how the employment of many less-qualified female teachers led to female teachers in Nova Scotia between 1870 and 1960 to have the lowest Canadian salaries.

In Nova Scotia in 1870 the majority of common-school teachers were women because they received less education than men who could apply for better jobs. This created a misconception about the “feminization of teaching” which places women in a position to accept any payment for their work. Furthermore, at that time school teaching in Nova Scotia was not seen as a career, but as how Perry shows “it was a temporary job for both men and women” (p.333). The option of teaching was always available and the interest of the government was to always have a surplus of teachers. The problem between 1855 and 1950 was that teaching required “no training at all until 1930” and “only brief periods of compulsory training, often less than a year as late as the 1950s” (p.338). This challenged the profession of teaching and its role in the province’s development during the interwar period and World War II. This situation created a legacy of the “feminization of teaching” in the province because later female teachers were affected by the legacy of low salaries.

## CONCLUSIONS

The gender segregation at the political and business peaks gave women few chances to advance at the same step with their men colleagues in areas like economic diplomacy. Nowadays Canadian society is inclusive, trying to develop more programs that help women to succeed in different businesses that promote economic diplomacy around the world. The Business Women in

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International Trade is just one successful example of new opportunities that women can take when deciding to invest in other countries.

Gender discrimination in Canada and throughout the world has not helped the plight of women living in poverty. The cycle of poverty is difficult to escape because of the inefficiency of policies supposed to help people stuck in this cycle. Recent generations also have significant numbers of females unable to find a full-time job.

Increasing the expenditure in education without connecting it to the market's needs is a waste of time and resources. Canada needs a Ministry of Education to create overriding national policies focusing on opportunities for education and gender inclusion regardless of the constitution complications this would entail. Canada also needs to allocate cultural values in the process of education and address the situation of the increasing number of victims of the "feminization of poverty".

The employment of large numbers of female teachers without qualification led to the concept of the "feminization of teaching" in Nova Scotia and created difficulties for later female teachers in negotiating for better salaries. The impact of the "feminization of poverty" for educational opportunities strongly shows that females in Canada need to be treated on an equal basis as their males classmates or colleagues and that without eliminating discrimination there will be a continuous cycle of poverty.

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