

Qualified Equal Opportunity and Conditional Mobility: The Example of Gender Equity and Educational Attainment in Canada.

**Gordon Anderson
Teng Wah Leo
Robert Muelhaupt**

**Economics Department
University of Toronto**

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Abstract.

Interest in Economic and Social Mobility is rooted in an equal opportunity imperative born of an Egalitarian Political Philosophy approving of differential outcomes when they are the consequence of differential effort, disapproving of differential outcomes when they are the consequence of differential circumstance and advocating policies which “level the playing field”. In essence equal opportunity policy interventions attempt to make outcomes independent of circumstance. This paper demonstrates that, in the absence of any other imperative for the policy maker, such policies would result in increased upward mobility for the poorly endowed and increased downward mobility for the richly endowed. Adding a pseudo Paretian imperative (no inheritance class should be made worse off) to the policy makers list of objectives results in a “Qualified Equal Opportunity or Conditional Mobility” policy which calls for a new approach to mobility measurement. Techniques for evaluating the success of such policies (both in terms of generational regressions and transition matrices) are proposed and the issue of Gender Equity in educational attainment in Canada over the last 20 years is considered. The evidence is that women have more than caught up with men and that, in closing the gap, it is the poorly endowed women who have made the most progress in terms of mobility whilst the mobility of males has remained relatively constant across the endowment spectrum.