

## Men still pick “blue” jobs and women “pink” jobs

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EVERY YEAR a few women become the first of their sex to hold a particular job. The stars of 2018 include Tennessee’s first female senator and the first female head of the New York Stock Exchange. There is the occasional male first, too: in 2018 the first men graduated from Norland College, which trains nannies for rich British families. Each year also sees a few occupations abandon sex-based hiring restrictions: in October Britain’s Special Air Service decided to admit women for the first time.

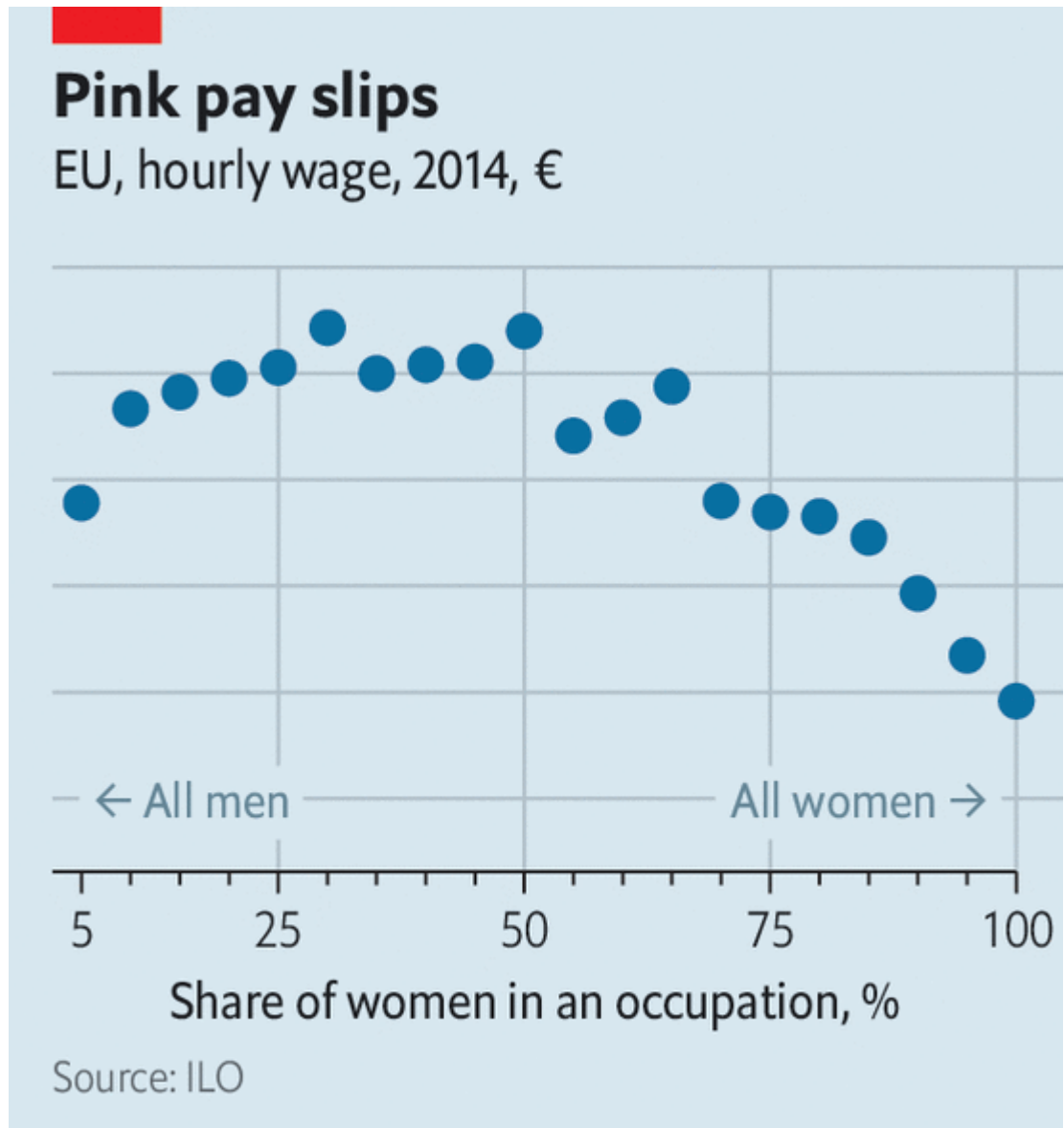
Fifty years ago this would have been unimaginable. “The hilarity of the notion that all jobs should be open to both sexes spawned a running joke,” writes Gillian Thomas in “Because of Sex”, her book on the impact of Title VII of America’s 1964 Civil Rights Act. Officials liked to quip that the law had created a “Bunny problem”: men would have to be considered for employment as scantily clad waitresses in Playboy clubs. It took court cases to end bans on male flight attendants and female railway workers.

Today, across the West, almost all jobs are open to both sexes. (Laws generally allow for exceptions, for example for actors.) That has brought economic gains: 25% of the growth in output per worker in America between 1960 and 2010 can be attributed to improved talent allocation due to integration by sex and race, according to Chang-Tai Hsieh of the University of Chicago and his colleagues. But most sex-based integration happened in the 1970s and 1980s, and mostly in white-collar jobs. It has since largely stalled.

Most men still work mostly with men, and most women with women. In the European Union 69% of women with jobs are in female-dominated occupations (ie, in which over 60% of workers are female). In Germany, 69% of working men are in jobs where at least 70% of their colleagues are male. In America some of the commonest occupations for women—primary-school teaching, nursing and secretarial work—are at least 80% female. About half of America’s workforce would need to switch professions to bring the labour market into perfect balance between the sexes.

This occupational segregation has consequences for earnings. It accounts for one-third of America’s gender pay gap, according to a paper published in 2017 by Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn of Cornell University. Together, occupational segregation and the simple scarcity of women in senior jobs explain most of Sweden’s pay gap. Female-dominated jobs are mostly lower-paid than mixed or male-dominated ones. Of the 30 highest-paying occupations in America, 26 are male-dominated; of the 30 lowest-paying ones, 23 are female-dominated. In Europe, hourly pay is 35% lower in the most feminised workplaces than in mixed

ones (see chart).



## The Economist

Though women are now as well-qualified as men, they are more likely to enter lower-paid occupations with fewer opportunities for progression. Moreover, jobs that women do may be paid less precisely because women do them. When women enter a male occupation, wages tend to fall. In her “pollution” theory of discrimination, Claudia Goldin, an economist at Harvard, posits that men in male-dominated jobs fear that, if women move in, the work will be deemed to have become easier and less worthy of decent pay and status.

What keeps women in “pink” jobs and men in “blue” ones? There is no reason to expect a 50-50 split in every occupation, says Professor Blau. “But if the question is ‘Are we there yet?’ we have enough evidence to answer with a resounding ‘no.’”

Female graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics are less

likely than their male peers to get a job in their field, and more likely to leave if they do. Women in male-dominated jobs suffer more harassment and discrimination than those in mixed occupations. Parenthood increases segregation, with mothers in flexible, lower-paying jobs and fathers in inflexible, higher-paying ones, suggesting that motherhood influences and constrains career choices.

Employers in male-dominated sectors increasingly fear that a dearth of women is bad for business. Studies have linked mixed-sex teams variously to improvements in productivity, innovation, safety and profitability.

In 2014 Nicole O’Keefe, from Perth in Australia, moved from human resources with BHP Billiton, a mining company, to train as one of its electricians. As a girl she never considered technical jobs, she says, because she never got to do woodwork or metalwork in school. Athalie Williams, the company’s head of human resources, says flexible working and creative recruiting have helped halve female turnover since 2016 and increased women’s share of the workforce by 40%.

That has brought business benefits. BHP’s most diverse teams outperform the average by around 15% on measures such as meeting production forecasts, sticking to timetables and—because female miners are gentler on gears and more likely to respond to alarm lights—cutting maintenance costs. The number of injuries is about half that in male-dominated teams doing similar work.

For women who do not want to go into traditionally male fields, what matters is an end to the long pattern of devaluing women’s work compared with men’s. Because women are over-represented in low-wage jobs, minimum wages can have a large effect. Broadly, American states with a minimum wage above the federal level have narrower gender pay gaps than those without. In Britain, says Sheila Wild, the founder of EqualPayPortal, an information resource, “the national minimum wage has made the biggest improvement to the gender pay gap since the Equal Pay Act in 1970”.

Most Western countries have had equal-pay laws since the 1970s. Over time these have gone beyond ensuring the same pay for the same job to requiring equal pay for work of equal value. Last October cleaners, caterers and nursery staff for Glasgow city council took to the streets to protest against getting up to £3 (\$3.86) less per hour than colleagues in male-dominated jobs, such as bin men and street sweepers. Tesco, a supermarket, faces claims of up to £4bn for paying (mostly male) warehouse staff more than (mostly female) shop-floor staff doing similar tasks.

Such comparisons are harder to make for white-collar jobs—between, say, human resources and information technology. The world’s most thorough effort to do so is in Iceland, where companies must prove that they pay fairly across occupations. Many have struggled. The deadline for those with over 250 employees has been extended by a year, to January 2020.

One of the first to go through the process was Arion Bank. “It was a lot of work figuring out a methodology that was fair, flexible and workable,” says Ásta Einarisdóttir, who works in its human-resources team, “but now we would never

want to go back.” Most salary corrections were upwards, but some employees’ pay was cut.

Does it matter for society at large that nearly all early-years educators are female and firefighters male? Finland used to set quotas for men in primary-school teaching. Some would like them back. The fire service of New South Wales now has quotas for female firefighters. “If more women were in traditionally ‘masculine’ jobs, then women on the whole would earn more,” says Kate Bahn of Equitable Growth, a research institute in Washington. “And if more men were in ‘feminine’ jobs, then these jobs would pay better to all.” Higher wages may mean costs for others, but society may deem that a price worth paying.