The Female Job Ghetto: Women’s Voices on Occupational Gender Segregation in Unionized Ontario Grocery Stores

by

Claire Davies

A thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

Guelph, Ontario, Canada
© Claire Davies, December, 2014
This thesis adopts a socialist feminist perspective to explore women’s experiences with occupational gender segregation in unionized grocery stores across Southwestern Ontario. The thesis draws conclusions about the devaluation of women’s labour and how this devaluation impacts their economic and social status. Socialization theory and human capital theory, as well as explanations based on biology, are critiqued in this thesis, as these explanations do not fully account for occupational gender segregation. The results of this study suggest that occupational gender segregation is deeply entrenched in unionized grocery stores and the trend towards increasing profit by replacing full-time labourers with part-time labourers is further exacerbating the marginalization of women in paid labour. It is concluded that women’s labour has been steadily devalued and that class and patriarchy severally limit women’s overall upward mobility by concentrating women in highly gendered part-time low skilled jobs in grocery stores.
This thesis is dedicated to the women who participated in this study. Without their participation and willingness to share their personal experiences with me, this thesis would not have been possible.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Vivian Shalla, for her dedication, continued support and countless hours of work that she put into this thesis. I would like to thank Dr. Belinda Leach for her critical feedback on my thesis drafts and hours of dedication that she showed this project. Lastly, Shelagh Daly, our grad mother, her helpful words of encouragement and support throughout the Masters program is irreplaceable.

I would also like to thank my mother. She has encouraged me in everyway to pursue my academic dreams and has always supported me through every hurdle. And of course, I wish to thank the participants of this study, without them this thesis would not have been possible.
## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
   The Rise of the Supermarket and Work Transformation ......................................................... 3
   Chapter Outline .................................................................................................................. 6

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review .................................................... 10
   Theoretical Framework ........................................................................................................ 10
   A Brief Historical Overview of Women in the Canadian Labour Market ............................. 16
   Understanding Occupational Gender Segregation .............................................................. 17
   Other Dimensions of Inequality .......................................................................................... 26
   The Social Construction of Skill ......................................................................................... 32
   Women’s Part-Time Work and Domestic Responsibilities .................................................. 34
   Women in Management ...................................................................................................... 36
   Governmental Policy and Occupational Gender Segregation ............................................. 38
   Unions and Occupational Gender Segregation .................................................................... 40

Chapter 3: Methodology ....................................................................................................... 43
   Standpoint Feminism .......................................................................................................... 43
   Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 44
   Background and Positionality ............................................................................................ 44
   Recruitment and Participants ............................................................................................. 45
   Research Methods.............................................................................................................. 48
   Data Analysis ..................................................................................................................... 50

Chapter 4: Inequality in the Grocery Retail Industry .............................................................. 53
   The Gendered Grocery Store ............................................................................................... 53
   Class, Age and Race: Other Dimensions of Inequality ......................................................... 63
   Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 66

Chapter 5: Women’s Experiences of Occupational Gender Segregation ............................ 74
   Advancement Opportunities for Women in Grocery Stores ............................................... 74
   Barriers to Progression ....................................................................................................... 78
   Pay Scale and Benefits ..................................................................................................... 86
   Women’s Lived Experiences of Abuse and Harassment ..................................................... 89
   Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 95

Chapter 6: The Persistence of Occupational Gender Segregation – Ideologies and Structures ................................................................................................................................. 96
   Women’s Perceptions of Occupational Gender Segregation ............................................. 96
   Impediments to the Elimination of Gender Segregation ................................................... 103
   Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 108

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions ............................................................................... 110

References ............................................................................................................................. 121

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter ............................................................................................ 130

Appendix B: Consent Forms ................................................................................................. 131

Appendix C: Interview Guides .............................................................................................. 140
Chapter 1: Introduction

A gendered division of labour in paid and unpaid work has been present throughout human history in most societies and cultures (Reskin 1993). This does not necessarily equate to inequality if women and men are provided with equal opportunities (Blackburn, Brooks and Jarman 2001). Human capital theorists tend to argue that the gendered division of labour is natural and the result of free choice. Others argue that the gendered division of labour is the result of early socialization or biology. To a large extent, feminists have been critical of these explanations, arguing instead that structural factors and discrimination based on gender, class, race or age have been instrumental in creating a gendered labour market, thereby limiting women’s occupational attainment (Jackson 2004; Blackwell 2001; Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Krahn, Lowe and Hughes 2008; Adams and Welsh 2008; Lester 2008). Gender segregation in the labour market has traditionally disadvantaged women. For decades, men were heavily concentrated in blue-collar industrial occupations, skilled trades and white-collar professions while women were largely locked out of many male-dominated occupations and professions. Instead, women were concentrated in low-level pink-collar occupations (Jackson 2004; Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Dex 1985; Krahn et al. 2008; Reskin 1993). Even though occupational segregation rates steadily fell during the last half of the previous century, the concentration of women in low paid and precarious work in the retail sector persists (Lillevik, Zeytinoglu, Seaton and Morux 2004; Krahn, Lowe and Hughes 2008; Moller and Li 2009).

Unskilled part-time work has been a feature of the retail trade job market with many of these jobs going to women (Lillevik et al. 2004). The concentration of women in low-paid precarious work in the grocery industry has resulted in this industry being classified as a job-ghetto for women. Most of the jobs available to women in the grocery store industry offer little
economic security and opportunity for promotion, and are built around repetitive, menial tasks (Krahn, Lowe and Hughes 2008; Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Woodfield 2007). As workers in the retail sector, women have become expendable and are a constant source of surplus labour to fill part-time precarious jobs (Muszynski 1996; Lillevik et al. 2004; Lightman and Gingrich 2012).

The goal of this study is to shed light on the issue of occupational gender segregation in the grocery store industry in Southwestern Ontario, an industry with which I am familiar because I have been working in a grocery store for the past ten years. The study will adopt a socialist feminist perspective to analyze women’s experiences of occupational gender segregation in unionized grocery stores in Ontario. As such, the study will seek to draw conclusions about the impact of segregation on women’s occupational advancement, economic prosperity and social standing. The three following research questions guide the analysis:

1. What is the nature of gender segregation in unionized grocery stores?
2. Has occupational gender segregation impacted women’s socio-economic status and opportunities?
3. Have the union’s and management’s policies been effective in addressing occupational gender segregation and consequent inequalities?

The study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with twelve women who all work in the grocery store industry in Southwestern Ontario. In order to develop a better understanding of the issue of occupational gender segregation, I recruited both full- and part-time workers as well as union representatives. I recruited the women from six unionized grocery stores using snowball sampling, a strategy that ensured the collection of rich data and provided a more accurate portrayal of an industry-wide issue. I conducted the interviews using a standpoint
feminist perspective, which gives a voice to marginalized individuals and seeks to empower disenfranchised women. In adopting this framework, I provided women with the ability to discuss their unique experience within a grocery store, which allowed for the development of a detailed study on the inequality that women face in a job ghetto. I analyzed the data from a socialist feminist perspective, challenging the male dominance and class exploitation that women face in job ghettos. My position as an insider provided me with first-hand knowledge of some of the issues that women face in the grocery store job ghetto. The devaluation of my own labour and the subordinate position I hold in a grocery store motivated me to explore occupational gender segregation and how this has affected the lives of many of my co-workers. Before outlining the chapters in this thesis, I will provide a brief history of the grocery store industry, with a particular focus on the Canadian context.

**The Rise of the Supermarket and Work Transformation**

Information on the rise of supermarkets in Canada is limited. Boothman (2011) undertook a large-scale study to document the mass supermarket trend that began after WWI. He noted that, during the 20th century, food retailers began to expand at a rate similar to large manufacturing companies. At the end of the WWI, favourable economic conditions and the rise of major corporations, which used new marketing techniques to shift consumer ideology towards bulk buying, provided the incentives for the rise of chain supermarkets in Canada, resulting in a proliferation of large scale, one-stop shop stores (Boothman 2011). This was a major innovation for the grocery store industry, allowing for lower operating costs because of the increase in self-service and cash and carry (Winson 1993). In addition, grocery store chains benefited from new technologies on the home front, for example, refrigeration, as well as the increased ownership of automobiles by the general public (Winson 1993).
Before the 1920s, food retailers tended to be limited to specializing in one type of consumer goods such as dry goods, fresh fruit or meat (Boothman 2011). Other grocery retailers specialized in semi-processed or unprocessed agricultural products such as cheese, butter, sugar, fruits and vegetables (Winson 1993). The emergence of the chain concept of the grocery store led to greater buying power for a few select companies that were able to increase their efficiency and lower their costs when compared to smaller retailers. This allowed for larger companies, most notably Dominion Stores and Loblaws, to outcompete small independent grocers, which resulted in the latter either going out of business or being purchased by the larger chains. Ultimately, a few giant corporations monopolized the grocery store industry (Winson 1993). Indeed, by 1987, there was such a high level of concentration in the Canadian grocery store industry that five of the largest grocery store chains accounted for 70 percent of all grocery sales (Winson 1993:165). Today, food retailers are further concentrated, with large-scale supermarkets accounting for 80 percent of all food sales in Canada. This consolidation trend is expected to continue with large superstores dominating the food retail industry (Zafiriou 2005: 2).

With the rise of large grocery store chains, unionization began taking hold in the grocery retail sector. The Canadian local of Retail Clerks was founded in 1899 and the Canadian local of Amalgamated Meat Cutters was founded in 1901. Both union locals began to spread across the country, unionizing retail clerks and meat cutters from the early 1900s to the 1970s when the unions had become considerably consolidated (UFCW 2014). As the grocery retail trade grew with the establishment of larger stores, workers continued to unionize to the point where retail workers were united under the umbrella of the Canadian Region of Retail Clerks in 1970 (UFCW 2014). The Canadian Region of Retail Clerks consolidated under the umbrella of United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW) in 1988. This allowed the union to become a
much stronger organization that had more power to challenge large grocery retailers and fight for improved working conditions and benefits for its members (UFCW 2014).

The rise of large-scale grocery store companies corresponded with the decline in skilled labour in the grocery industry. Indeed, as stores grew and introduced more departments, companies increasingly sought to increase labour efficiency and productivity and to make the stores as profitable as possible (Boothman 2011). Grocery stores were thus reorganized so that the work process was broken down into more simple tasks and the work was de-skilled, which allowed companies to hire a greater proportion of less-skilled workers. However, the stores still remained very labour intensive, which was a major expense for Canadian retailers. In order to keep labour costs down, retailers began hiring more young part-time low-skilled staff that would complement the older full-time employees whose work was also being de-skilled (Boothman 2011; Lillevik et al. 2004). With the growth of supermarkets in grocery retail, the tasks of workers have become more limited, often resulting in workers being relegated to a single task, for example, stocking shelves or being a cashier (Webster 2004). What is more, there are not many opportunities for upward mobility for most workers, particularly part-time staff.

Unequal practices based on gender have always been a common occurrence in the grocery retail sector. Disparities in pay and promotion, hiring practices and overall gender inequality are all characteristics of the grocery retail sector because of the historical male domination of, and the overt gender discrimination practices in, this service sector industry (Skaggs 2008). Occupations in the retail grocery industry are highly gendered, with women typically relegated to low-skilled jobs. This gendered segregation has negatively impacted women’s economic opportunities (Krahn, Lowe and Hughes 2008; Lillevik et al. 2004).
The organization of work in grocery stores has undergone significant transformations. Indeed, the increasing trend towards capitalization, the push to enhance productivity, and the lowering of wages (Jackson 2010) have contributed to the precariousness of grocery store employment. These types of changes have had significant impacts on the gendered division in other sectors such as manufacturing (Jackson 2010). This study will demonstrate, however, that such transformations have had little impact on occupational gender segregation in unionized grocery stores. Work transformations have occurred in grocery stores; for example, workers are required to be cross-trained among departments, and higher productivity and increased flexibility in terms of working hours are expected of them. These changes have negatively impacted women’s lives, but have not significantly changed the gendered division in departments and jobs given the already high level of gender segregation. Thus, to understand the nature and scope of gender segregation in unionized grocery stores, this study will focus on the different occupations in a grocery store and the tendency to hire either women or men to perform specific tasks.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter 2 will begin by outlining the theoretical framework that will guide this study. This section will provide a discussion of feminism more generally, then will highlight how socialist feminism sees women as being oppressed by male dominance and capitalism. This will be followed by a review of relevant literature on occupational gender segregation, which provides the necessary background to help understand occupational gender segregation in the grocery store industry. The literature review will outline the historical place of women in the Canadian labour market followed by an in-depth analysis of occupational gender segregation theories that explain the persistence of segregation. Other dimensions of inequality – on class, age and race – will also be explored. This chapter will then explain the social construction of
skill and how women’s work has been devalued through part-time work and domestic duties. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the impact of women in management, gender solidarity, government employment equity policies, and the role of unions on the attainment of equality for women in the workplace.

In Chapter 3, the methodology of the study will be outlined, focusing on standpoint feminism and the need to empower marginalized individuals. This chapter will introduce the research questions that guide this study, as well as discuss the researcher’s background and positionality. This chapter will disclose that the researcher has insider status into the grocery store industry and what impact insider status had on the study. The chapter will provide a detailed explanation of the recruitment of participants through snowball sampling, the qualitative research methods that were used for the study, and how the data were analyzed using Nvivo. Lastly, this chapter will detail steps taken to adhere to the ethical standards of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board.

The three findings chapters that follow offer an in-depth discussion of occupational gender segregation in the grocery store industry. Chapter 4 will provide a detailed discussion of the gendered grocery store. The gendered division of work in grocery stores is illustrated by outlining the gendered breakdown of occupations and tasks between departments and within departments. This will be followed by a discussion of the hierarchy of authority among unionized staff members in the grocery store. Much attention will be given to the way in which women explained this hierarchy and disempowered themselves. In addition, this chapter will discuss in-store mobility, focusing on how the prevalence of in-store mobility without a reclassification of jobs negatively impacts women’s position in grocery stores as well as their skill set. Lastly, this chapter will explore the reasons women still enter into precarious work and
seeks to draw attention to the impact that class, age and race has on women’s occupational attainment.

Chapter 5 will focus on women’s lived experiences of working in a job ghetto and a segregated work environment. Different dimensions of occupational gender segregation will be discussed, including women’s lack of upward mobility both into full-time positions and managerial roles. This chapter will outline the various barriers to progression that were identified by the participants, including the lack of opportunity for women, the persistence of the “old boys club”, the stress of the job, different family obligations, favouritism, and the impact of seniority. Next, this chapter will focus on how the women believed that their pay scale and benefits compared to other service sector industries. Lastly, this chapter will explore women’s lived experiences with abuse and harassment, focusing on reported cases, unreported cases, and the failure of harassment and abuse policies.

The last findings chapter, Chapter 6, will explore women’s own perceptions of occupational gender segregation, showing that they internalize and accept, but also question and challenge, dominant ideologies and assumptions about women’s proper place in society. This chapter will also examine impediments to the elimination of gender segregation, including the lack of gender solidarity, and the actions, or lack thereof, of the union and management in eliminating inequality in the workplace. This chapter will document which barriers the participants believe need to be challenged in order to make the workplace a more equal environment for women.

Chapter 7 will reflect on the findings of the study, which point to a persistent and very entrenched occupational gender segregation within the grocery store industry. The chapter will highlight the overt and covert gender bias policies and practices that hinder women’s upward
mobility and have a negative impact on their social standing. This chapter will also address how this research has contributed to the literature on occupational gender segregation, talk about the limitations of this study, and conclude with examples of further research that needs to be conducted in order to analyze and challenge occupational gender segregation.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides the analysis in this thesis and also explores different literatures on occupational gender segregation. The first section of the chapter discusses the theoretical approach of this study, focusing on socialist feminism and the two main assertions that will guide the analysis: women are oppressed by patriarchy and women are oppressed by capitalism. The chapter will then shift to a discussion of occupational gender segregation, highlighting three theories that are used to explain this phenomenon: human capital theory, socialization theory, and feminism. This will be followed by a brief outline of other dimensions of inequality, including class, age and race that have a negative impact on women’s participation in the labour market. The chapter will then discuss how the social construction of skill devalues women’s work in the labour market. This will be followed by a discussion on the nature of part-time work and domestic responsibilities that disadvantage women. The chapter will also focus on women in management given the importance of gender solidarity in mitigating occupational segregation. Lastly, the chapter will discuss the impact of government and union policies on occupational gender segregation.

Theoretical Framework

This study will adopt a feminist perspective, more particularly socialist feminism, focusing primarily on analytical dimensions such as women’s oppression, gender segregation, and the link between class and gender. While socialist feminism is the theoretical approach being used in this study, it is important to understand the central goals of feminist theory more generally. Feminist theory has a long history of understanding and challenging women’s unequal position in society (Weedon 1987). Feminist analyses have critiqued and challenged traditional norms, structures, relations and ideologies that have disadvantaged women over time (Chafetz
Chafetz (1997) argued that there are four main points to feminist theory, which will be used to guide my analysis of occupational gender segregation in grocery stores in Canada. First, feminist theory uses gender as its central focus. Second, gender relations are considered to be a central problem, and gender is the basis of social inequalities. Third, gender relations are not considered to be unchallengeable. And fourth, feminist theory can be used to challenge the dominant hegemony that disadvantages or devalues women.

Feminist theory is useful for studying occupational gender segregation because, with its focus on gendered structures, relations and ideologies, it helps frame the analysis of women’s inequality in relation to the division of labour in society (Chafetz 1997). Feminist theory provides the tools to develop an in-depth analysis of patriarchal structures and relations in the realm of work; these structures and relations are a reflection of, and contribute to, the subordination of women in wider society (Andes 1992). The goal of my research – and of all feminist research – is to document, analyze and challenge dominant ideologies and patriarchal structures and relations that constrict women from reaching equality in the workforce and in society more generally (Gorelick 1991).

**Socialist Feminism**

The socialist feminist perspective is adopted for this study because of its focus on capitalist society and social organizations being structured by gender, class and race/ethnicity (Andes 1992; McCall 2001). Socialist feminism is built upon anti-sexist, anti-capitalistic and anti-racist principles (Gardiner 2008). Historically, socialist feminism sought to analyze the power structures of society, seeking the bases of inequality in both the capitalist class structure and the patriarchal order (Eisenstein 1977; Andersen 2005). However, the framework was challenged by groups of women who felt excluded by the focus on only class and gender.
Subsequently, many who adopted this framework began developing analyses that examined how structures of inequality based on gender, class, race/ethnicity and age were interconnected and served to produce and reproduce relations of oppression and subordination (McCall 2001; Hoggart 2000). While socialist feminism argues that capitalism and patriarchy are intrinsically linked and reinforce each other, resulting in a system that facilitates the establishment of a gendered division of labour (Eisenstein 1977; Andes 1992), the framework also acknowledges that not all women have the same experience of inequality, and that inequality will be different for women who are being marginalized by more than one prism of inequality (Andersen 2005). Socialist feminism thus offers a strong theoretical framework to analyze occupational gender segregation because it provides tools to understand how structures of inequality intersect. While my study is limited in its ability to include race as a dimension of inequality, my overall analysis nonetheless benefits from socialist feminism, which is a powerful framework to understand women’s experience in the retail grocery sector.

Though I will discuss some issues pertaining to race and age, my study will largely focus on gender and class, and will rely on two socialist feminist principles as the analytical framework for deconstructing occupational gender segregation. The first principle is that the oppression of women is rooted in capitalism and women’s liberation must include freedom from patriarchy and alienation (Friedman, Meterlerkamp and Posel 1987; Muszynski 1996). The second principle is that class and gender oppression are intrinsically linked and women’s liberation is dependent on the emancipation of the working class (Boxer 2007). In order to provide a deeper understanding of the analytical framework used in this thesis, the remainder of this section will further develop these two principles.

Oppression of Women
The oppression of women is linked to male dominance in society, which can be seen in the realms of both unpaid and paid labour. Male dominance, also referred to as patriarchy by some scholars, is the control of women’s bodies, labour and procreation abilities by men (Weedon 1999). Historically, the oppression of women was established with the rule of man over man and the rule of man over nature, and there has been a tendency to categorize elements of nature and individuals into groups that could be dominated and controlled. Women have been and continue to be seen as closer to nature and as belonging in the household; they have systematically faced patriarchal structures in the household realm. However, as women increasingly entered the labour market, they continued to face patriarchal domination and subordination in that realm (Muszynski 1996). Male dominance is reflected in oppressive and exploitative practices that are reinforced by individuals and institutions (Mies 1998). Patriarchy, which is understood to be a system of power and disempowerment, creates women as a subordinate class of people who are controlled by men because men “naturally” have power over women and nature (Muszynski 1996). Socialist feminists believe that the liberation of women is inherently linked to the end of male domination, but also, as we shall see below, to the end of class exploitation (Kennedy 2008).

In a capitalist patriarchal system, male dominance results in the undervaluing of women’s domestic labour and the discounting of women’s integral role in a capitalist system of producing and reproducing labour power (Muszynski 1996). In such a system, unpaid domestic labour has no value, and those who perform unpaid labour are not considered to be of much value (Muszynski 1996). What is more, male dominance gives men the right to govern women and children, resulting in women having less status and rights than men (Muszynski 1996). The devaluing of women’s unpaid labour power in a capitalist system has a bearing on women’s
subordinate role in paid labour because they are seen as having limited skills or skills that are considered inherent to women’s nature and therefore not having much market value (Fine 2002). Men’s dominance and power have contributed to gender segregation in the labour market, thus allowing men to fill the more prestigious and well paying occupations (Fine 2002).

Class and Oppression

Patriarchy and capitalism work together to reinforce women’s inequality and subordination. Under capitalism, workers are divided against each other, and men have historically played a role in subordinating women in the labour market (Mies 1998). Women’s labour power has been devalued, which is reflected in the labour market where women are often surplus and contingent labourers (Luxton 2004). A surplus of labourers is necessary for capitalists to maintain lower wages and poor working conditions. The surplus of labour is partly attributable to increased capitalization in the workplace where workers are being displaced by machinery, and partly the result of capitalists’ need of a surplus of labour in order to ensure profits (Fine 2002). At certain historical periods, women have made up the majority of this reserve army, for example, when they were drawn into the labour market during WWII and the post-war period due to significant labour shortages (Fine 2002). In addition, throughout most of the period since WWII, women have served as a reserve army of labour through their extensive use as part-time workers. The fundamental principle of the surplus of labour is that labourers must compete with each other to find employment. This can be understood in terms of class struggle as the working class is internally divided by such competition and is at the mercy of capitalist organizations (Muszynski 1996). As capitalist organizations continue to strive to extract the maximum surplus from their workers, we see a shift away from the standard employment relationship – full-time work with benefits and standard work weeks – to precarious
employment defined by part-time, casual or temporary work with little or no benefits or job security (Lillevik et al. 2004; Fine 2002). Precarious employment became more common in the 1990s, a situation that contributed to insecurity amongst workers because of limited access to regulatory protections – which are usually afforded by a standard employment relationship, and an increasing loss of control by workers (Vosko 2006). Lillevik et al. (2004), among many others, have argued that part-time, casual, temporary and other forms of precarious employment are gendered because organizations are targeting women as a reserve army to fill such positions (Vosko 2006). In addition, these jobs are largely front-line positions in the retail and customer service sectors. Consequently, women are more likely to be engaged in precarious employment with substantially lower career expectations than men (Jackson 2003; Lillevik et al. 2004; Vosko 2006; Vosko and Clark 2009).

Being heavily concentrated in precarious work, especially part-time employment, has kept many women in the working class (Lightman and Gingrich 2012). However, as Jackson (2003) noted, one in four women working in part-time positions are doing so involuntarily because of other barriers, such as inadequate childcare, lack of opportunity for full-time positions, and inadequate elder care (2003). The domestic responsibilities hinder women’s ability to engage in the ideal standard employment relationship because their family roles take up a significant amount of time and do not mesh particularly well with the fairly strict time schedule of paid employment (Vosko 2006). Consequently, it can be argued that low occupational attainment for women is also influenced by early and ongoing socialization into domestic roles as it has an impact on their life choices and opportunities (Moore 1995; Boxer 2007; Friedman et al. 1987). Before discussing occupational gender segregation more at length, the next section will provide a brief historical overview of women’s position in the labour market in Canada.
A Brief Historical Overview of Women in the Canadian Labour Market

Women began entering the labour market in large numbers in WWII as a response to the labour shortage resulting from men fighting in the war (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994). Women undertook various types of work in varying fields to fill the void left by men’s engagement in wartime activities. At the close of WWII, women were expected to re-enter the home, taking up their domestic duties and becoming once again unpaid domestic workers. In order to achieve this objective, the Canadian government created the Advisory Committee on Reconstruction, which introduced the family allowance to encourage women to return to their domestic duties full time (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994). Despite the best efforts of the Canadian government, many women were unwilling to leave their paid employment and continued to be a feature of the labour market. While women undertook various types of work to fill the void left by men’s engagement in wartime activities, their post-war employment became highly concentrated. Indeed, during the 1950’s, women tended to be concentrated in four fields: trade and finance, community and social services, public administration and defense (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994).

In the 1960 and 1970s, with second wave feminism, women’s demands and issues became the focal point of a rights movement pertaining to employment. The Canadian government formed the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which encouraged a public dialogue on the unequal work environment for women, with feminists calling for more and better opportunities for women in paid employment (Sangster 2010). It is also during this period that feminists began demanding more from the labour movement, and formed women’s union committees to address specific grievances such as equal pay, maternity leave and seniority. In addition, women began challenging the tradition that they should leave the workforce after...
marriage in order to take up domestic responsibilities (Sangster 2010; England 2010). During this time, women’s labour market participation rate rose substantially, including that of women with young children. In addition, as women’s levels of education increased, they made important gains in the labour market in terms of enhanced employment opportunities and benefits.

During the 1980s and 1990s, neo-liberal policies created difficult conditions for workers. Transformations in Canada’s economy resulted in a widening in the gap between the rich and the poor. The trend towards precarious low-wage jobs has been steadily increasing and wages have not kept up with inflation, which has resulted in the growth in the ranks of the working poor (Lightman and Gingrich 2012). This has impacted women tremendously because even though their participation in the workforce has increased dramatically and the dual family income is now the norm in Canada, women are still largely concentrated in certain sectors and occupations, with many being employed precariously, especially in part-time jobs (Bernstein, Dupuis and Vallee 2009; Jackson 2003; Lillevik et al. 2004).

**Understanding Occupational Gender Segregation**

Occupational gender segregation refers to the concentration of men and women into different occupations based on entrenched gender roles, education and cultural bias (Krahn, Lowe and Hughes 2008; Reskin 1993). Notwithstanding that today, women are employed in all industrial sectors, they are nonetheless less likely to be found in certain sectors such as mining, construction, transportation and manufacturing, and more likely to be found in other sectors such as education and health services, financial and business services, and leisure and hospitality. In addition, women tend to be hired on a part-time basis, typically in certain types of jobs, such as clerical, sales and services jobs (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Dex 1985; Lillevik et al. 2005; Jackson 2003; Bernstein et al. 2009; Vosko and Clark 2009). While the percentage of women
working is at an all time high at 58 percent (Bernstein et al. 2009:496) and 1 in 4 women earn more than their partners, segregation persists with women still being highly concentrated in certain occupations and industrial sectors. What is more, women continue to be overrepresented in precarious employment, particularly part-time work (Jackson 2003; Bernstein et al 2009; Lillevik et al. 2004).

To understand the full extent of occupational gender segregation, theorists have categorized segregation into vertical and horizontal dimensions. Vertical segregation refers to gender hierarchy within occupations, with men holding the top jobs in both traditionally male and female occupations. This type of segregation can occur even when men have not acquired the necessary skills, education and experience when compared to women (Fortin and Huberman 2002; Adams and Welsh 2008). Vertical segregation is considered to be a good measure of gender inequality because of the concentration of men in the most senior and lucrative positions (Fortin and Huberman 2002; Blackburn et al. 2002). The term ‘glass ceiling’ is often used in discussions of vertical segregation, and it refers to women being overlooked for promotions in favour of men despite their skills and qualifications (Guy and Newman 2004; Dex 1985; Woodfield 2007). Women are less likely to occupy high levels within an organization, even when women make up the majority of the workforce in a sector. In addition, women are likely to have lower value to an employer than their male counterparts, even when both groups have the same level of education and qualifications. This directly influences women’s upward mobility and conditions of work including pay, hours and benefits (Woodfield 2007).

In contrast, horizontal segregation is characterized by an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of men and women in different kinds of jobs (Adams and Welsh 2008; Fortin and Huberman 2002). This form of segregation is often nicknamed ‘glass walls’ because
of the distribution of men and women across occupations (Guy and Newman 2004). A consequence of horizontal segregation is that women are concentrated in some occupations while remaining largely absent from others. The standard ratio of an occupation being classified as gendered is that either men or women hold 75 percent or more of available jobs in a particular occupation or sector. (Woodfield 2007:6). Historically, and continuing today, women are least likely to occupy roles in agriculture, industry, financial services, science, engineering and technology (Woodfield 2007). Consequently, horizontal segregation manifests itself in pay and prestige, often damaging women’s advancement prospects across fields and consistently undervaluing women’s skills (Woodfield 2007).

**Human Capital Theory, Gender Socialization and Occupational Gender Segregation**

While my study will critically assess occupational gender segregation from a feminist perspective, it is important to discuss human capital theory – which supports and rationalizes gender segregation – and socialization theory – which does not challenge the persistence of occupational gender segregation – because both of these theories have been very influential in understanding women’s position in society.

Human capital theory argues that men and women will specialize in certain roles that they are naturally inclined towards to further benefit themselves and their families. Those who adopt the human capital perspective argue that men undertake paid labour because of the social pressures to be the breadwinner while women perform domestic duties because of their biological ability to bear children and also because of their nurturing skills (Blackwell 2001; Reskin 1993; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002; Anker 1997). In addition, according to human capital theory, women are more inclined to obtain employment in jobs that complement their stereotypical skill set (Blackwell 2001; Anker 1997). Human capital theory argues that
women choose low skilled employment because their main focus is on biological reproduction and child rearing. Consequently, this justifies women receiving lower pay in the labour market because of their commitment to domestic duties, which is classified as unpaid labour in a capitalist economy (Anker 1997; Blackwell 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002).

One of the many criticisms of human capital theory is that measuring a person’s value in terms of educational attainment and length of employment does not necessarily reflect their skills and ability to perform the job. This is problematic for women because it automatically devalues their skills and education, and puts into question their commitment to the labour market due to their likelihood of being out of employment for longer periods than men as a result of leaves of absences for pregnancy, childrearing and other family obligations (Dex 1985). Marini and Brinton (1984) argue that the devaluation of women’s skills over time due to absences partly explains their likelihood to enter into low-skilled employment. It is argued that women may have no option but to accept low wage jobs because of their prolonged absences from the labour force and the continued devaluation of their skills (Marini and Brinton 1984). Additionally, human capital theory largely ignores class and the various barriers that may exist due to class, focusing instead on the individual’s education and time spent in paid employment. Highlighting the relevance of class background to decision-making, Dex found that working class women may perceive their overall earning potential to be low and therefore do not invest the time and energy into improving their qualifications through formal education (1985). Lastly, human capital theory’s focus on individual productivity, which is enhanced through training and education, significantly devalues women’s contribution to the labour force. Indeed, productivity only refers to the paid labour of a person, which completely disregards the unpaid labour in which women
engage inside the home (Dex 1985). Human capital theory therefore significantly undervalues women’s contributions to society in terms of both paid and unpaid work.

Socialization theory is often used to rationalize occupational gender segregation. According to this theory, women are socialized to be more social and nurturing than men and, consequently, more suited for certain types of employment, for example, front-line service work (Adams and Welsh 2008; Reskin 1993; Blackwell 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002; Anker 1997; Lester 2008). The tradition of socializing children to adopt specific roles is well documented and widely practiced. Socialization starts in infancy with children learning stereotypical roles often as a result of parents and others controlling access to gender specific toys, language and clothes (Adams and Welsh 2008; Lester 2008; Reskin 1993; Marini and Brinton 1984). Reskin outlined four ways that early socialization contributes to occupational gender segregation. First, socialization develops gendered ideas, thereby ensuring the reproduction of the stereotypical picture of occupations. Second, gender socialization through toys, such as a toy vacuum for girls, develops the necessary skills required for specific gendered occupations. Third, because children learn a gendered skill set fairly early in life, there is a high likelihood that they will take on a gendered occupation in adulthood. Lastly, the education of children is highly gendered with girls and boys being socialized into specific roles that reflect the expected gendered occupations in adulthood (Reskin 1993:260). Consequently, the socialization of children reinforces culturally appropriate behaviour, which has a direct impact on their future occupational choices (Marini and Brinton 1984; Adams an Welsh 2008; Meyer 2003; Reskin 1993).

The occupational gender labeling that is reinforced by cultural norms influences employers’ hiring practices, leading them to often hire either women or men for a specific job,
which further contributes to gender segregation in organizations (Reskin 1993). It is often rationalized by human capital theorists that women have a perceived lack of aptitude and abilities for certain types of employment (Woodfield 2000), which could be argued, is reflective of their early childhood socialization. What is more, women tend to be encouraged to take on certain occupations that are characterized as repetitive and tedious because they are seen as being more docile than men, which makes them better suited for such occupations (Meyer 2003).

Socialization theory rests largely on the premise that the individual still has agency and it is personal preferences influenced by earlier socialization that affects the person’s occupational choice (Reskin 1993). In the instance of retail, for example, women are relied upon to occupy front-line jobs because of their perceived ‘feminine and caring’ personality and qualities that are in demand in the industry, despite not commanding financial rewards (Webster 2004). The literature clearly shows that organizations and employers play a key role in perpetuating the segregation of jobs based on gender (Andes 1992), usually by keeping women clustered in certain occupations and largely absent from more lucrative male dominated occupations (Moore 1995). What is sometimes not as readily understood is that employees also contribute to maintaining gender segregation in the workplace by, for example, training new employees to perform specific tasks and filtering them into gender specific roles (Jenkins et al. 2002).

While socialization remains a dominant argument to explain occupational gender segregation, there is a not-insignificant body of literature that cites biology as a possible reason for the persistence of this segregation. Indeed, some researchers argue that men prefer certain occupations because they are biologically designed for these occupations, such as manual labour, whereas women prefer occupations that are more suited to their purportedly nurturing capabilities (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994). Men and women do have different chromosomes
and hormone levels, but the actual muscle mass of men and women as well as their physical
strength differ across class, culture and time. What is more, there are significant variations
among women and among men in terms of physical strength and other characteristics. Given this
variability, particular physical characteristics cannot be cited as the main reason for a gendered
division of labour (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994). In addition, the number of jobs requiring
great physical strength has diminished considerably, putting biology even more into question as
an explanation for the continuing occupational gender segregation. Consequently, gender
socialization remains an important influence on women’s agency (Friedman et al. 1987). Women
are socialized to be domesticated housewives and caregivers from an early age, with their toys,
language and clothing being deeply imbued with gendered meanings (Lester 2008), which
consequently encourages them to take on more subordinate roles in the workplace (Muszynski
1996). Male dominance did not become prevalent because of biological differences; rather, it is
reinforced through socialization and heavily influenced by the way in which each culture
understands and defines gender norms (Freidman et al. 1987).

The major criticism of socialization theory is that, if gendered occupational choices are
influenced by socialization, we should be able to challenge and change gender norms by altering
our socialization practices (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994). Socialization theory offers a
descriptive analysis of society but does not challenge gender roles, thereby serving to reinforce
rather than critically analyze and transform such roles (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Lester
2008). Consequently, socialization not only reinforces occupational gender segregation, but also
serves to perpetuate gender norms that limit women’s occupational roles (Mason and Murdrack
1996; Lester 2008).
Human capital theory and socialization theory try to rationalize the occurrence and persistence of occupational gender segregation over time. A social feminist perspective is a stronger framework to analyze women’s position in society. It helps us understand that women are, to a large extent, a surplus of cheap labour for the bourgeoisie, often competing with one another for a limited number of flexible employment opportunities (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Jackson 2003; Lillevik et al. 2004; Lightman and Gingrich 2010). Women’s domestic responsibilities limit their full participation in the labour market, creating an army of part-time, part-year workers (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994). Organizations have continued to use women’s part-time and intermittent full-time participation in the workforce as justification for upholding occupational gender segregation, which impacts women by keeping their wages lower, limiting their job mobility and disqualifying them from many workplace benefits (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Jackson 2004; Reskin 1993: Blackburn et al. 2001). The upholding and reinforcement of current gender norms is prevalent in the retail sector where there is a divide between full-time and part-time occupations. Management positions, shelving stock jobs and meat cutting jobs are generally full-time and largely occupied by men. In contrast, women are concentrated in highly visible front-line staff positions that are usually part-time or casual and low paid (Lillevik et al. 2004).

The socialist feminist analysis of occupational gender segregation highlights that human capital theory and socialization theory do not discuss the process by which jobs become gendered (Jenkins et al. 2002). Organizations and workplaces are gendered as a result of decisions and actions of managers and employees, which are influenced by wider social norms. The gendered interactions between employees and managers as well as among employees serve to reinforce common gender stereotypes of occupational roles, which perpetuate the gender
division of labour (Jenkins et al. 2002; Tomaskovic et al. 2002; Lester 2008). Organizations contribute to establishing specific gender roles in the labour market by capitalizing on women’s socialized nurturing characterizes and specifying that these traits are preferable for front-line service work (Guy and Newman 2004; Lester 2008). Women, in need of work, agree to participate in gendered occupations, unwittingly reinforcing the continuation of occupational gender segregation (Lester 2008). Gendered organizations constrain women from reaching their full potential, placing women in a subordinate role by emphasizing traits and skills that are considered inferior (Britton 2000). These organizations conceal their gendered structure (Britton 2000) by creating gender-neutral hiring practices that contribute to segregation because of women’s overall underrepresentation in occupations that would provide upward mobility (Reskin 1993). What is more, women who challenge the gendered structure of organizations face significant social consequences, often being ostracized by coworkers (Lester 2008; Sangster 2010).

In addition to understanding how occupational gender segregation is reinforced through organizations and workers, feminists have noted that often women’s work is generally devalued in the labour market (Reskin 1993, Blackburn et al. 2001, Jackson 2004). The continuation of a pay gap is a symptom of the continued devaluation of women’s labour market contributions (Jackson 2004). Women, a surplus of labour, are a cheap part-time workforce, which provides organizations with the ability to capitalize on profit making (Muszynski 1996; Lightman and Gingrich 2012). Women’s domestic duties are still cited as the main reason that some do not enter full-time employment, but it must be noted that Canadian families now largely survive on a dual income (Jackson 2003). Despite the importance of women’s income to their own and their family’s well-being, they are still more likely to hold part-time precarious employment even
though 25 percent of part-time workers would prefer full-time positions (Jackson 2003). The competitive nature of the labour market ensures that employers are able to hire women in jobs that offer minimal pay, limited benefits and constantly changing working hours (Zeytinoglu et al. 2004; Lightman and Gingrich 2012; Armstrong and Armstrong 1994). Women’s continued status as a large surplus of labour limits their full participation in the labour market (Muszynski 1996; Fine 2002). Women’s participation in the labour market has diversified over the years, but as Bernstein et al. (2009) noted, occupational gender segregation persists, much to women’s detriment (2009).

Other Dimensions of Inequality

Class

Social class as defined by Krahn et al. (2008) refers to an individual’s position and power within a stratified society. Social class heavily influences an individual’s life opportunities including their living standards, occupational attainment and education (Krahn et al. 2008). In Marxist terms, class is defined by one’s ownership of the means of production and control over the labour power of others. Using this definition, we can identify three main classes in Canada: large scale employers who hire a great number of employees, small business owners who have little to no employees, and the workers (Krahn et al. 2008). The large scale employers and small business owners are considered to be the bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie respectively, while the workers are the proletariat or working class (Fine 2002). Neo-Marxian class analysts have also defined intermediate classes that would include categories such as managers, supervisors and professionals (Wright 2000), though some continue to include managers and supervisors in the working class (Krahn et al. 2008). In addition, the working class is not homogeneous as certain groups are better positioned than others despite not owning the means of production. This
distinction had led many analysts, even those adopting a Marxist approach, to identify a middle
class (Krahn et al. 2008; Wright 2000). While class affects all individuals, it substantially limits
opportunities for those at the bottom of the social class structure, especially minorities and
women who often are forced to engage in part-time precarious work (Lightman and Gingrich

As previously discussed, class affects women’s participation in the labour force because
their labour tends to be devalued, though this varies for different groups of women (Luxton
2004). For example, women who are from more economically prosperous households have more
choice about the kind of work they perform and whether or not they participate in the labour
market (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; England 2010). For their part, women living in
households with more modest incomes or who live in poverty have limited choices regarding
their employment and are more likely to be in low paying precarious work (Armstrong and
Armstrong 1994; Lightman and Gingrich 2012). For many working-class women, access to
adequate childcare is another major issue that limits their employment opportunities. Working-
class women are thus targeted by employers as a surplus of labour that will perform menial tasks
with little benefits and low pay because they are constrained by their domestic duties, their
devalued skill set, and their lack of access to other means of financial support (Woodfield 2007).

The segregation of jobs is also highly related to class. While middle-class women have
benefitted from desegregation, working-class women have seen little improvements in their
employment opportunities. The literature shows that, over the past few decades, women were
able to make considerable gains in the areas of management, law, medicine and academia
(England 2010). Working-class women, however, are still highly segregated with levels
remaining constant since the 1950s. As England described,” “women have hardly gained a
foothold in blue-collar, male dominated jobs such as plumbing, construction, truck driving, welding and assembly in durable manufacturing industries” (England: 2010:157). Clearly, then, class has a significant impact on the nature of women’s labour force participation, and working-class women continue to face difficult conditions in the labour market.

Age

Discrimination on the basis of age is another important dimension of inequality that affects both older and younger workers (Krahn et al. 2008). This type of discrimination, which is often hidden and overlooked, has devastating impacts on the economic livelihoods of individuals and families. For example, when older workers are made redundant from a company, they are often unemployed for longer periods of time than younger workers. Additionally, if older workers are successful in gaining employment, they are more likely to engage in non-standard work in a more precarious sector (Alon-Shenker 2012; Krahn et al. 2008). This form of discrimination is hidden by the “complete lives approach”, which attempts to assess inequality over the course of an individual’s life rather than a specific time period. The approach is used by organizations in their hiring, promotion, benefit allotment and other conditions of employment, which often leads to discrimination against workers and prospective employees based on age (Alon-Shenker 2012).

Two decades ago, Armstrong and Armstrong (1994) noted that age discrimination becomes apparent with older workers being relegated to the back stage and younger workers occupying the front stage. This practice, which aims to give the appearance of a youthful, attractive workforce that is considered to be more pleasing for the customer, has continued over the years (Krahn et al 2008). In addition, employers discriminate against older workers for promotions and other benefits by using stereotypes that older workers are slow and less
productive. Studies have concluded, however, that differences in productivity levels between older and younger workers are generally due to a lack of access to proper training and inadequate time to gain a new skill (Alon-Shenker 2012). The stereotypes nonetheless trap senior workers in certain positions and hinder their upward mobility. Likewise, stereotypes of younger workers – for example, that they lack skills and experience – impede their upward mobility even when the individual has the necessary skills to perform the job (Alon-Shenker 2012).

Women, who are often a reserve of surplus labour, already enter into precarious working conditions because of occupational gender segregation, and ageism serves to further exacerbate their perilous positions. Over the course of the past few decades, a growing number of older women have entered the workforce. Participation rates for older women aged 55-59 has increased steadily from one third to more than half since the 1970s (Jackson 2009:170). The increase in older women’s participation rates is attributable to women’s growing work history and their choice to enter the workforce. However, the participation rates for women between the ages of 60-64 and 65-69 have been largely stable over the same time period. This is explained because many women retire at the same time as their partners and married women are generally younger than their spouse (Jackson 2009). In addition, women often have the responsibilities of care for other elderly family members, which heavily influences the employment-related decisions of older women (Jackson 2008). Women’s participation in the workforce may have increased steadily but the persistence of the gender wage gap continues. For example, the Pay Equity Commission of Ontario (2014) found that the gender wage gap is the highest for women over the age of 55, with women earning only 81 percent of what men earn (7). While gender and race discrimination plays a significant role in labour market inequality, it is clear that ageism also negatively affects women’s economic status.
**Race**

Racialization has been socially constructed with the dominant group assigning arbitrary stereotypes pertaining to skin colour, hair texture to define a minority (Creese 2007; Galabuzi 2001). Today, racialization has expanded beyond physical traits to include ethnicity, culture, place of birth and other social characteristics that become the basis for differential treatment (Galabuzi 2001). Dividing a population based on racial stereotypes allows for the creation of a racial hierarchy that exploits groups by ranking attributes as desirable or undesirable (Galabuzi 2001). Therefore, racialization can be understood to be a process that is socially constructed to disadvantaged a population in the social, economic and political realms (Galabuzi 2001; Creese 2007).

In economic terms, racialization has been key in keeping individuals trapped in low-skill occupations with little security or benefits (Galabuzi 2001). Racialized individuals, which include certain immigrant groups, aboriginals and Canadian born minorities, often have trouble finding a comparable job to their white counterparts and fare poorly overall in the Canadian job market (Creese 2007; Das Gupta 1996). The racial segregation that is present in the Canadian labour market has been steadily increasing with the adoption of neo-liberalism that emphasizes profit accumulation over decent working conditions. This is most notable in the growth of non-standard work, which has created more entrenched disparities between good and bad jobs that are highly racialized (Creese 2007). Workers have become segregated in various sectors depending on their gender and race. Racialized individuals are often in a subordinate role in the occupational hierarchy and form a source of cheap labour (Creese 2007; Das Gupta 1996; Galabuzi 2001). In the food retail industry, systemic discrimination is present in the hiring process, which negatively affects racialized individuals through exclusion, marginalization and
infantalization. Research has demonstrated that, in the food retail industry, hiring managers demonstrate systemic discrimination by hiring individuals they racially identified with on a ratio of three to one (Das Gupta 1996). This suggests an inherent structural barrier in employment, with hiring managers still favouring white, English native speakers over racialized individuals (Creese and Wiebe 2009).

Immigrant women from the third world, who are likely to be concentrated in the retail industry, are especially marginalized because they often lack the education, training, language skills and economic and social support from the government (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Fearon and Wald 2011; Creese 2007; Galabuzi 2001). It has been well documented that minority women are more likely to be concentrated in low-skilled occupations such as janitorial, sales, and private homes (Vosko and Clark 2006). What is more, racialized women often receive less rewards for the education they have achieved and are locked into the most precarious jobs in the labour market (Creese 2007). Racialized women often face the double negative, race and gender, placing them in a further subordinate role than racialized men (Galabuzi 2001; Creese 2007). For example, as Block and Galabuzi (2011) found, “racialized men are 24 percent more likely to be unemployed than non-racialized men. Racialized women have it worse: They’re 48 percent more likely to be unemployed than non-racialized men” (4). Despite these unemployment statistics, the wage gap between minority women and white women is considerably smaller than the wage gap between minority men and white men. Minority women can often earn similar incomes to white women largely because of the concentration of all women in precarious sectors such as clerical and sales (Fearon and Wald 2011; Block and Galabuzi 2011).

Labour market segregation based on race results in a higher incidence of poverty and a lower level of educational attainment for racialized workers (Fearon and Wald 2011; Block and
The racialization of poverty has become linked with the emergence of precarious work in Canada, with racialized groups being disproportionately represented in low-skill and low paying occupations (Block and Galabuzi 2011). This is largely because the labour of racialized individuals is devalued, partly because of the assumption that racialized individuals have fewer skills and are inferior to white workers. This is similar to the devaluation of women’s work in the labour market and thus places both women and racialized individuals into subordinate roles in society (Das Gupta 1996).

**The Social Construction of Skill**

There is much debate in the literature as to how to define and conceptualize skills. Feminists have pointed out that women have historically been disadvantaged not only in terms of their acquisition of different types of skills either through training and education or in the workplace itself, but also in terms of not having their skills defined as such. The skills that women tend to develop resulting from unpaid domestic labour are often regarded as part of their nature and therefore not seen as skills that should be rewarded in the labour market (Dex 1985; Armstrong and Laxer 2006). The social evaluation of skill is highly gendered, and the skills that men tend to develop and the type of work they perform are typically seen as more valuable than the skills that women tend develop and the work they undertake (Gaskell 1991; Dex 1985; Armstrong and Laxer 2006; Crowley 2013). What is more, often, time in training is directly reflected in an individual’s formal skill ranking, underscoring the assumption that the length of training is a direct reflection of the difficulty of the job, which justifies a higher wage. This measurement of skill disproportionately affects women partly because the stereotypical role of women as caregivers has served to limit their full participation in the labour market by labeling them as uncommitted to the job and thus filters women into part-time precarious employment.
(Dex 1985; Gaskell 1991; Crowley 2013; Fine 2002). Therefore, the social construction of skill is part of the gendered power dynamic that perpetuates existing hierarchies in the labour market (Gaskell 1991; Crowley 2013).

The construction of skill is historically linked to sexual bias and discrimination (Gaskell 1991). One of the main consequences of industrialization was the rise of large factories that destroyed craft trades and drew men into these workplaces while women were relegated to the home and constricted by their domestic responsibilities (Krahn et al. 2008). Women’s household labour, which was ignored in economic terms, focused on two main tasks: producing agricultural goods to supplement the family wage and performing household duties. Women, mostly single women and those who were sole supports of families, were often in light industry such as textiles, which aligned with women’s domestic roles (Krahn et al. 2008). The devaluation of women’s paid and unpaid labour continued well after the early phase of industrialization. For example, in 1968, British unions fought to have women working at the Ford factory reclassified from un-skilled to semi-skilled. Their argument rested on the fact that the skills required of men working as material cutters were comparable to the skills required of women working as seamstresses. Men were classified as semi-skilled labourers and therefore received a higher rate of pay. For their part, women were classified as unskilled despite the considerable amount of skill needed to be a seamstress (Dex 1985:101). The social construction of skills continues to this day as we see that certain occupations where men predominate, such as doctors and engineers, are defined as highly skilled, whereas occupations where women predominate, such as child-care provider and nursing, are defined as unskilled or semi-skilled. The social construction of skills has resulted in the creation of an entire sub-category of occupations that require skills, sometimes quite substantial, but are not classified as skilled. Consequently, these positions do
not receive the same recognition in terms of economic benefits or social prestige (Gaskell 1991; Armstrong and Laxer 2006; England 2010).

Another issue that is highly problematic for women is that, while much of the work they undertake for pay requires emotional labour, the skills involved in such work tend to not be formally recognized or valued. Emotional labour is defined as the ‘softer’ emotions such as nurturing and caring that women often use in both their paid and unpaid work (Guy and Newman 2004; Lester 2008). Social services and public education occupations that often require considerable emotional labour, are not seen as highly skilled and are therefore not economically rewarded despite the wide variety and high level of skills that are vital in the performance of these jobs. More often than not, such skills are seen as inherent to women and not the result of long periods in training (Guy and Newman 2004). What is more, the discounting of a large portion of women’s skills greatly contributes to gendered pay disparity (Gaskell 1991; Guy and Newman 2004). Consequently, the stereotypical domestic role of women has negatively affected women’s social prestige as well as undervalued their skills, thereby contributing to the gender pay gap.

**Women’s Part-Time Work and Domestic Responsibilities**

Female job ghettos are typically characterized by little economic security, little opportunity for promotion and repetitive menial tasks (Krahn, Lowe and Hughes 2008; Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Woodfield 2007). The female job ghetto exists where occupational gender segregation is particularly present and damaging to women’s social and economic advancement. Women’s part-time work is highly segregated and can be seen, to a certain extent, to form a female job ghetto (Blackwell 2001; Reskin 1993; England 2010). Part-time work is typically classified as non-standard work, and is often precarious (Armstrong and
Making use, sometimes quite extensively, of part-time workers, allows employers to maximize profits as they can call upon a reserve army of labour to meet variable scheduling needs. In addition, part-time workers often receive lower pay rates and fewer, if any benefits, and are therefore second class workers (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Jain et al. 2010). Retail trade is ranked amongst the highest for the use of part-time unskilled labour with most of the available jobs going to women (Lillevik et al. 2004; Vosko 2006). Retail trade tends to offer limited training, which impinges on workers’ ability to develop their skills thereby limiting their overall opportunities for advancement (Webster 2004; Skaggs 2008).

Despite the fact that women, and even women with young children, have entered the labour market, the assumption and reality is that they are usually responsible for the primary care of their children and for the majority of household duties. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the dominant gender socialization places emphasis on women’s roles as child bearers and primary caregivers as taking priority over their role as paid workers (Jackson 2010; Cranford and Vosko 2006). This socialization is reinforced by the structural realities of both the labour market and household division of labour. When women engage in paid labour, they are confronted by the lack of affordable child care, and, consequently, often opt for part-time work to balance their domestic and paid work responsibilities, which has a major impact on their employment outcomes (Jackson 2010; Cranford and Vosko 2006). Indeed, Moller and Li (2009) found that women’s mobility in their occupations is directly linked to child rearing responsibilities. Women often have downward occupational mobility because of the switch to part-time employment after pregnancy and the continued demand on their time for child rearing. This negatively affects women’s status and economic prosperity, and can result in an outdated skill set that is no longer
marketable (Blackwell 2001; Anker 1997; Moller and Li 2009). In addition, downward occupational mobility may have a negative affect on women’s health because of a loss of earnings that can lead to poverty, increased stress and higher mortality and morbidity rates (Anker 1997; Lillevik et al. 2004). Interestingly, women are also likely to turn down advancement opportunities because of the perceived long hours and higher stress levels associated with advancement. Studies have shown that women often refuse promotions because they could not reconcile the added responsibility and longer working hours with their domestic responsibilities. The burden of domestic responsibilities can hinder women’s advancement in the workforce and forces women to choose between their family and a career (Webster 2004; Jackson 2010). Employers have argued that child rearing and family responsibilities result in higher absenteeism amongst women workers and hinder production and productivity. However, most employers do not create a family-friendly work environment and still demand long hours and heavy workloads, forcing women with domestic responsibilities to often take on part-time instead of full-time employment, thereby limiting their advancement opportunities (Krahn et al. 2008; Webster 2004).

**Women in Management**

Women who enter into management positions have the potential to have a profound impact on other women in the workplace. The concept of gender solidarity has been called upon to highlight the strong influence that women in positions of power could yield to improve women’s situation in work organizations. The concept of gender solidarity is defined by Fajak and Haslam as “an identification and unity amongst members of the same sex, expressed in a sense of community and mutual support regarding interests, feelings and actions” (1998:73). Gender solidarity is often displayed among inter-group members such as, for example, members
of the working class. However, as a study by Fajak and Haslam (1998) concluded, women are not likely to display gender solidarity where promotions are concerned. This supports the argument that women in positions of power will act no differently than men in such positions, and workplace inequality will not be changed significantly (Penner et al. 2012). Consequently, the contributions of low status workers are undervalued by both men and women in positions of power, resulting in the perpetuation of inequality (Penner et al. 2012). Women in management have the ability to challenge occupational gender segregation and promote more equitable hiring practices. Despite this ability, women managers are considered to be affected by the ‘queen bee’ syndrome, which means that they are likely to not only uphold traditional gender inequality, but also support and promote the same norms as men (Penner et al. 2012).

In the grocery store environment, it has been documented that women managers have little impact on gender inequality (Penner et al. 2012). While the study by Fajak and Haslam (1998) supported the view that women managers are not likely to embrace gender solidarity, Penner et al. (2012) argued that this is not necessarily because of a lack of gender awareness, but is based on the deeper societal norms that govern our everyday actions and occupational choices. Identifying as a group, such as a management team, may well be more important for women managers than gender solidarity, which perpetuates the devaluation of women’s work and upholding their low status. Women who join the ranks of management are considered to be “team players” who will support the traditional norms and not upset the status quo (Penner et al. 2012). Consequently, women managers’ potential role in helping to dismantle occupational gender segregation is diminished because of the structural barriers that exist, as well as the organizational hierarchy and norms that make change more difficult.
Another perspective suggests that as more women enter into positions of power, gender inequality in the workplace will be lessened because of more gender balanced management practices (Penner et al. 2012). Kurtulus and Tomaskovic-Devey (2012) identified that women are more likely to be promoted into management positions if there is already a higher concentration of women in management. Also, women managers may serve to help the retention rates of other women managers by giving them more favorable reviews and educating them on industry specific skills needed to advance (Kurtulus and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012). However, the inroads that women managers are making to foster gender solidarity is industry specific (Kurtulus and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012) and, as already noted, in the grocery store environment, women are more likely to take on the ‘queen bee syndrome’ than display gender solidarity (Penner et al. 2012).

**Governmental Policy and Occupational Gender Segregation**

Occupational gender segregation is not only influenced by decisions made by employers and workers. Indeed, the state has also played a role in shaping workplace structures. While state policies have historically reinforced gendered labour market segregation, governments in many countries have been pressured over the past few decades to introduce employment equity policies and legislation that are designed to remove barriers that have disadvantaged women in occupational settings. For instance, some have argued that family paid leaves have had a positive impact on women’s labour market position, and that improving the terms of such leaves would encourage women to return to paid employment after the birth of their child because this would provide them with ample time to recover and adjust. Offering generous maternity leave packages that guarantee a woman’s job for a longer length of time would allow women to reenter the workforce after a longer absence without a loss of status. This would decrease occupational
gender segregation overall because women are more likely to pursue highly skilled work without fear of compromising their domestic responsibilities (Moller and Li 2009). However, women would still be disadvantaged overall when leaving the workforce for any length of time because men would continue to gain experience and develop job-specific skills that would garner them faster upward mobility. Family leave policies help to decrease occupational gender segregation, but do not eliminate the persistence of it over time (Moller and Li 2009).

Another significant employment equity policy that has targeted gender segregation revolves around eliminating the gender pay gap by either encouraging or forcing employers to address this dimension of labour market inequality (Fortin and Huberman 2002). Pay equity was included in the Canadian Human Rights Act, 1977 and 1978 due to complaints from women workers that they were receiving less pay for work of equal value (Baker and Fortin 2000). Pay equity has been established to correct the wage gap that existed between men and women in similar occupations. Pay equity policies are also designed to reduce the impact of occupational segregation by raising the pay of female-dominated jobs that are comparable across industries to male-dominated jobs (Fortin and Huberman 2002; Fudge and McDermott 1991; Jackson 2003). However, as Fortin and Huberman (2002) argued, pay equity policies only address horizontal segregation and completely ignore occupational gender segregation practices that keep women trapped in low-skilled part-time occupations with little or no prospects of advancement (2002; Fudge and McDermott 1991; Baker and Fortin 2000). In a study conducted on the effectiveness of pay equity policies, researchers found that, while the policies had a positive effect on women’s pay initially, the overall effectiveness leveled off after a few years and remained largely static thereafter (Jain et al. 2010). Consequently, pay equity has diminished but not eliminated the gender pay gap, which has led many to conclude that occupational gender
segregation is a leading explanation of the persistence of the gender wage gap (Baker and Fortin 2000; Jackson 2004). In addition, some have argued that the reduction in the wage gap over time in North American can be largely attributed to a limited number of women entering male-dominated fields rather than an equalization of status in the workplace (England 2010).

As was previously discussed, in the grocery retail sector, segregation based on gender is still very prevalent with a clear gender distinction between full-time and part-time workers. Front-line positions are still dominated by women and tend to be part-time and casual, whereas the full-time jobs—including in the warehouse, management, the meat cutting department and the grocery department—are still male-dominated (Lillevik et al. 2004). In unionized stores, the minimum wage for all part-time workers is the same. However, men still often work more hours than women, leading to a wage discrepancy that is rarely regarded as discrimination in policies (Penner et al. 2012). Additionally, wage hierarchies that are based on progression within a company negatively affect pay equity. These hierarchies are based on performance evaluation by management and jobs are ranked based on their status with pay reflecting their overall ranking. As already discussed, the notion of skill is highly gendered and negatively affects women’s potential to progress in a company because of a devaluation of women’s work, which limits their ability to climb an employment hierarchy (Fudge and McDermott 1991). Therefore, while legislation mandates that equality should be present in the workforce, the failure to address the root cause of occupational gender segregation results in laws and policies being ineffective in producing a truly equal work setting.

**Unions and Occupational Gender Segregation**

Unions play a vital role in fighting for the rights of workers, and they have struggled to improve workplace conditions for their memberships and for workers more generally. Though
unions have historically played, and continue to play, a role in reinforcing workplace hierarchies, they have been key in challenging and minimizing discrimination in the workplace. For example, unions have fought for the implementation of formalized equitable pay and promotion policies that have been agreed upon by the employer and employees through collective bargaining (Jackson 2004; Jackson 2010). What is more, they have managed to have workplace rights reinforced through grievance and arbitration processes, which represent one of the most important benefits of unionization (Jackson 2004; Vosko and Clark 2009; Jackson 2010). Women have often been compelled to fight union leadership, policies and processes to have their voice heard to ensure that their needs and concerns were met. Despite the numerous gains registered by unionized women over the years, many barriers for women still exist both within unionized workplaces and inside the union organization itself. Men heavily dominate in union leadership positions partly because of the long hours demanded by this type of work; women often find it difficult to run for these positions because of the difficulty in balancing the schedules and work hours with their domestic responsibilities. Women are also often locked out of senior roles in unions because of stereotypes that they place their family above their paid work or union involvement (Adams and Welsh 2008; Anderson, Beaton and Laxer 2006). In addition, unions continue to play a part in the gendering process of jobs, often upholding societal norms that make it more difficult for women to take advantage of certain job opportunities (Jenkins et al. 2002; Jackson 2004). Moller and Li (2009) argued that unionization was linked positively to women’s representation in occupations that require little training but negatively related in other more highly trained positions. This is largely attributable to the emphasis on seniority and longevity of employment, which hinder progression into more senior positions. Unions have been able to raise the wages of the lowest paid workers (Anderson et al. 2006), but they have not
addressed the distribution of wages over similar occupations that have become gendered (Jackson 2004). As unions fight for the rights of women, their policies fail to address the root cause of occupational gender segregation and, often, they are a contributor in the gendering of occupations.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Standpoint Feminism

This research was conducted using the principles of feminist standpoint methodology. In order to understand the struggles of women, standpoint methodology asserts that research should be conducted from the bottom up, giving voice to marginalized individuals (Harding 2004; Smith 1997). Standpoint feminism focuses on challenging different power dimension in women’s daily lives by critically analyzing male dominance, patriarchy and exploitation (Smith 1997; Harding 2004). Giving voice to women’s lived experiences allows women to become politically empowered and enables them to have an open dialogue. As Smith (1997:393) noted, it also allows women to discover new “dimensions of our experience[s] that [has] no prior discursive definition”. By giving a voice to marginalized individuals, standpoint feminism challenges the ‘oppressors’ institutionalized vision’ of society that is steeped in inequality based on class, gender, race and religion (Harding 2004:68). Standpoint feminism creates a space for the critique of society by pursuing knowledge from the point of view of marginalized populations, which is crucial for their liberation from oppressive forces (Harding 2004).

In order to understand women’s experiences with occupational gender segregation, more particularly the experience of women working in pink-collar jobs in grocery stores, I used “strong objectivity” and “strong reflexivity” (Harding 2004), which are key aspects of standpoint feminism. Strong objectivity critically analyses class and gender by exploring the power dimension that is created by the phenomenon of “othering” (Harding 2004). In order to ensure that my research study was as objective as possible, I used strong reflexivity to critically assess my position as both an insider and outsider to minimize possible power dynamics that may arise.
Socialist feminism, which is the overarching theoretical perspective used in this study, is well aligned with standpoint feminist methodology. The socialism feminist framework allows for a greater understanding of occupational gender segregation because my analysis focuses on the role of both patriarchy and capitalism. In addition, a socialist feminist framework will not only facilitate the documentation and analysis of the inequality that women continue to face, but will also provide the basis to challenge this inequality.

**Research Questions**

To guide my research process, I developed three research questions that linked my three main themes. The three research questions are as follows:

1. What is the nature of gender segregation in unionized grocery stores?
2. Has occupational gender segregation impacted women’s socio-economic status and opportunities?
3. Have the union’s and management’s policies been effective in addressing occupational gender segregation and consequent inequalities?

**Background and Positionality**

I worked for eight years in a grocery store in southern Ontario as a cashier supervisor. I first became interested in this topic while I was at work and felt powerless in a particular situation. A customer refused to listen to me, opting to listen to the younger male grocery clerk who had less seniority but nevertheless was in charge of the store that night. My decision was overruled and even though I complied with the junior employee’s instruction, I felt very strongly that I had been disempowered and silenced. This instance led me to begin to understand the struggles that women face in the work environment and, after much discussion with some women colleagues about their experiences, I began to search for information on occupational
gender segregation. As I progressed through my research, I learned that my experience was
typical and rooted in several factors that contribute to the devaluation of women’s skill and
experience in the workforce.

When I began this study, I was able to gain access to women in the grocery stores and
build rapport quickly, largely because of my positionality as an insider in the industry. I was
viewed by the women as a co-worker asking questions rather than as a researcher, which resulted
in a more relaxed interview for both the participant and myself. While there were clearly benefits
to being an insider, I also encountered some difficulties. Indeed, my insider position consistently
gave rise to challenges of staying on topic during the interviews. Also, the participants regularly
made the assumption that I had a great deal of background knowledge. I had to use reflexivity to
keep my own personal biases in check and to conduct interviews without discussing my own
experiences at too great length. I was careful to not lead the discussion by opening with a
personal situation and rather asked questions about their own experience. In some instances, my
background knowledge of a situation resulted in respondents only providing limited
explanations, and it took further probing to get them to reveal more details about their
circumstances. In addition, my insider status became problematic in some cases where the
women did not want to discuss uncomfortable situations with me because of a prior working
relationship. The participant was not pressed to answer the question and I instead asked if they
knew of similar situations that involved other individuals. Using this approach, I was able to gain
the trust of participant, which enabled the interview to move forward.

**Recruitment and Participants**

One of the goals of feminist research is to learn about women’s lived experiences, and to
understand how their lives have been shaped by capitalism and patriarchy as well as other
structures of inequality (McCall 2001). The focus of this research is to explore women’s lived experiences, and how occupational gender segregation has affected their work, social status and economic prosperity. Men have been excluded from this study because this research is based on women’s lived experiences and aims to give a voice to an otherwise silent population. While men face other challenges at work, they cannot contribute to the unique position of a woman’s narrative about the occupational gender segregation that she faces and its wider impact on a woman’s life.

Using the researcher’s insider status as a grocery store employee, snowball sampling was the technique adopted to recruit participants. Interview participants were recruited from southern and central Ontario from six unionized grocery stores within the same company. All participants were recruited outside working hours and without company knowledge. I contacted each potential participant via email and used a set letter of introduction to acquaint the participants with the study. This method was useful in gaining a number of responses on the first attempt. However, several individuals ignored the first email and several follow-up attempts. Despite some recruitment difficulties, I managed to secure 12 interviews out of a total of 17 contacts. The semi-structured interviews were conducted from May 2013 to July 2013. The breakdown of participants is as follows: two union representatives, one manager, three full-time employees and six part-time employees. Two additional interviews were confirmed, but both individuals withdrew from the study before the meeting could take place because of personal reasons unrelated to the study.

The participants’ profiles, which are summarized in the table below, include age categories, length of service, job classification and full-time / part-time status. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 65 with the largest category being 35 to 44, which included a total of
five participants. The next largest category was 25 to 34, which included three participants. The last two age categories were 45 to 54 and 55 to 64, with two participants in each category. Length of service was categorized in five-year increments with the largest category being 16 to 20, which included four participants. Two participants had 6 to 10 years of service, and the remaining categories had one participant each. The largest numbers of participants (five) were classified as cashiers, one of which also identified as a grocery clerk. Two participants were from the seafood department, with one of them also working in the meat department. Two participants were department heads, one in the deli department and one in the bakery department. One participant was recruited from the cut fruit department and she also identified as a union representative. A UFCW business representative and a middle manager were also recruited, but they are not unionized staff from within the grocery store. Recruited for this study were seven part-time unionized employees, three full-time unionized employees, two of which are unionized full-time department managers, one non-unionized manager and one UFCW business representative. Each participant was assigned an identification number. The table below provides a summary of this information on participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (P)</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Length of Service (Years)</th>
<th>Job Classification</th>
<th>Full-time or Part-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P. 1</td>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>16 - 20</td>
<td>Cashier/Grocery Clerk</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 2</td>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>16 - 20</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 3</td>
<td>55 - 64</td>
<td>26 - 30</td>
<td>Bakery Manager</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 4</td>
<td>25 - 34</td>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>Cut Fruit / Union Steward</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 5</td>
<td>45 - 54</td>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>UFCW Representative</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 6</td>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. 7</td>
<td>35 - 44</td>
<td>21 - 25</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I had initially attempted to organize two focus groups, but several women raised concerns about confidentiality and feeling uncomfortable about discussing this topic in front of others. Following a discussion with my advisor, I decided not to follow through with the focus group aspect of the research design and instead conducted only private semi-structured interviews with all the women.

**Research Methods**

As previously mentioned, I had initially designed my research to include two focus groups before I selected candidates for in-depth interviews. I had decided to use focus groups to get a better understanding of the key issues, themes and concerns of the women and their perceptions of occupational gender segregation. My intention was to revise my in-depth interview guides to reflect the themes brought up by focus group participants. Once the decision was made to not proceed with the focus groups, I concentrated on developing a very detailed interview guide, which was revised after the first two interviews. After the completion of the interviews, I realized that I was able to gather a huge amount of rich data, and I therefore believe that eliminating the focus group method did not have a negative impact on my research project.

The in-depth semi-structured interview was selected as an appropriate method that would uphold the principles of feminist research because it “uses individuals as the point of
departure for the research process and assumes that individuals have unique and important knowledge about the social world that is ascertainable through verbal communication” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006:119). The data that were collected aligned with the goal of interviews to extract exploratory, descriptive and explanatory data (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately one hour and followed an interview guide. In order to understand the varying experiences of women and how deeply occupational gender segregation is entrenched, four different interview guides were created that corresponded with the participant’s position within company: union representative, manager, full-time employee, and part-time employee. The interviews produced a large quantity of descriptive data (Harding 2004), thereby ensuring credibility and validity of the research. In addition, interviewing four separate groups of women holding different positions in the company created the triangulation necessary to increase the validity of this study. Each interview was conducted in a public setting in a location of the participant’s choosing. Allowing the participant to select the location created an open and comfortable atmosphere that made it easier for the participants to feel at ease discussing potentially difficult and emotional subject matter.

I ensured that participants had informed consent by reading them the consent form and giving them an opportunity to ask questions about the study and the use of their information, and to raise any concerns about being audiotaped before they signed the consent form. I reminded participants that they could refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the questions. Only one participant was unwilling to discuss questions associated with harassment and verbal abuse, and I informed her once again of her right to not answer any questions that made her uncomfortable. This allowed me to gain the trust of this participant, but she nonetheless opted to not discuss many of the questions in the
interview guide pertaining to harassment and abuse. The remaining eleven women were very forthcoming with information and discussed in great detail their varied experiences with occupational gender segregation. As already mentioned, the goal of this study is to allow women to discuss their lived experiences and possibly become more aware of their own situation. In several interviews, the women displayed raised consciousness and resolved to challenge themselves to create change in their own life circumstances.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed into a word document using ExpressScribe. The transcription process allowed me to engage in deep listening, analysis and interpretation of my data, which ensured that I understood what the women were discussing and also provided me with the opportunity to use objectivity (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006). Each transcription was imported into Nvivo qualitative data analysis software for coding. Using the Nvivo program, a coding matrix was created with the broad themes of the study. Each line of the interviews was coded and placed into different nodes under the broader themes. These nodes are based on themes and sub-themes that relate to economic inclusion/exclusion, social status, and experiences of occupational gender segregation. For many of the answers given by participants, several themes overlapped; in such cases, one line of text was coded several times. To complement the interview data, I was able to obtain copies of the collective agreement, which helped to clarify points that the women were discussing. These clarifying points were written in italics and added to the coded text with a reference. Once all the interviews had been coded, I was able to begin drafting my chapter outlines based on these initial analyses of the findings.

Ethical Considerations
Every step was taken to ensure that this study met with the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board institutional ethics guidelines. The interview guides, consent forms and letter of introduction were approved by the ethics board before I began contacting participants. The University Ethics Board highlighted that I would not be able to guarantee anonymity and, consequently, I verbally discussed this with each participant during the informed consent process. Participants were aware that I would guarantee them confidentiality by storing their information on a password-protected computer and removing all identifiers from my research. In one case, I was unable to use an example of gender discrimination because it would have been a clear identifier of the company and the individual. In the interest of privacy and confidentiality, each participant was asked to not discuss the study or interview with outsiders.

There was some psychological risk when conducting the interviews because the women were asked to discuss some difficult experiences in an in-depth one-on-one setting. For all participants, there is the risk of losing anonymity because of the small sample size and the risk of participants discussing their interview experience with others. The psychological risks for unionized employees, managers and union representatives were managed by discussing participants’ right to refuse to answer any question that made them feel uncomfortable and their right to leave the study at any time. This was discussed in the consent form and the women were reminded of their rights at the beginning of the interview.

In addition to the institutional ethics board review, this research was conducted using a pro-active approach to ethics. As Blee and Currier (2011) discuss, a moral approach to research will help create an ethical research project. Therefore, complete disclosure about the project was given to each participant to ensure that no deception was used. Consequently, this research not only abided by the ethical research requirements set out by the University of Guelph, but also
followed a moral approach to research to be as ethical and objective as possible (Blee and Currier 2011).
Chapter 4: Inequality in the Grocery Retail Industry

This chapter focuses on women’s segregation within a unionized grocery chain. As discussed in the literature review, grocery stores have become a job ghetto, with limited opportunities for advancement, limited ability to gain skills and knowledge, and an overall trend towards perpetuating a de-skilled labour force (Boothman 2011). In order to explore the job ghetto of grocery stores, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the typical gendered makeup of the different departments within such stores. The first section of this chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the gendered division of work by department within one grocery chain, highlighting why one gender is seen as more desirable than the other in each department and describing the process of in-store mobility. The chapter will then discuss the reasons why women enter and remain in precarious employment in grocery stores as well as the barriers to women either advancing in or leaving their job. Lastly, this chapter will discuss other dimensions of inequality based on class, age and race, focusing on how these dimensions impact women in a grocery store setting.

The Gendered Grocery Store

The grocery store is a clear example of the deeply entrenched occupational gender segregation that is prevalent in the service sector. As will be demonstrated in this section, the gendered division by occupations reveals a vertical segregation with women holding lower positions in the store and often having limited authority and decision-making power. A horizontal segregation is also prevalent with women often being concentrated in certain occupations while remaining largely absent from others.
Gendered Division of Work between Departments

When examining the gendered breakdown of departments in the grocery chain that was the focus of this study, it became apparent that each department was gender-typed. What I also uncovered while conducting interviews is that both management and employees played a role in perpetuating these divisions, and they were deeply influenced by social norms and beliefs about women’s and men’s proper place in the workplace.

All the women interviewed discussed the gendered division of work by department, which they believed to be similar in all grocery stores. For example, one participant, who has over 20 years of management experience, noted that in the grocery store industry:

Cut fruit is women, deli is mostly women unless the department managers, who very often hire their own staff, choose to hire a guy. Meat department, you would have a meat cutter and a wrapper and guys usually do that. Bakery is almost all the time women, they do all that kind of stuff, cake decorator, wrapping, all that stuff is no skill. The real skill, a baker, would be a guy (P 9).

Another participant who has worked in four stores discussed how the gendered makeup is deeply entrenched into the occupations of a grocery store.

Definitely front-end [is all female]. It used to be 100 percent women at my old store. The new store I work at has a little bit more of both genders, but it is definitely more women in the front-end. Cut fruit, even though we are classified as produce clerks, we are all women and we have our own schedule. Our produce department is exclusively male with the exception of when they need someone to fill in and then we will hop over. The bakery is almost exclusively women. I think there is one part-time male in that department. Seafood is 50/50 right now because there are only two people working in it. Meat department is exclusively male and grocery is all male but the scanning [coordinator] is always female. Every store I have worked in, which has been four stores, every scan coordinator is female. I don’t know if that’s because a lot came out of the front-end, but it’s definitely a female role. The deli has been predominately female as well and right now there are a lot of full-time females in the deli. There are only a couple part-time males that work in the deli. It’s almost all women (P 4).

All of the women tended to agree with these descriptions of the gendered division within a grocery store with only limited variations. Some variations exist in grocery stores, with
departments sometimes having a more mixed gendered makeup. For example, several of the women explained that in the particular store where they currently work, there are a few male cashiers and deli clerks, and a few female produce clerks and meat wrappers. However, the men working in historically female departments are generally young students, and this is a phenomenon of the past decade. Despite the fact that men have begun to work in female-dominated jobs, women have been less successful in integrating into the male-dominated departments, and especially into full-time positions. Participants indicated that many stores now have a few young male cashiers and deli clerks, but they all stated that the grocery department and meat department are almost always exclusively male. As one participant noted, “I think that’s just the way it is, I have never seen a full-time meat cutter that is female… Even in the grocery department, I don’t think I have ever seen a female department head”.

From the interviewees’ descriptions of occupational gender segregation in a grocery store, it is clear that women dominate in only certain jobs: the front-end, which is comprised of cashiers, service desk clerks and office staff; deli clerks; bakery clerks; cut fruit clerks; and in the floral department. When a store has a seafood department, it is either male or female-dominated depending on whether the meat or deli department is responsible for the seafood department. The grocery, meat and produce departments are male-dominated, with women either occupying specific roles in these departments or being entirely excluded. This type of gendered division of labour is consistent with the findings of studies conducted in other service sector industries that reveal a clear gender distinction between jobs that are defined as more skilled and those that are seen as less skilled (Skaggs 2008; Lillivek et al. 2004).

**Interdepartmental Gendered Division of Work**
According to Woodfield (2007), jobs can be considered gendered when 75 percent or more of the workforce is either male or female. Based on the literature as well as on my participants’ description of the division of labour in their workplace, it is clear that the grocery store industry is highly gendered. What this study also shows is that even when women occupy positions within departments that are male-dominated, their jobs are still highly gendered. For example, when women hold positions in the grocery department, their work is highly segregated. More specifically, participants remarked that the position of scan coordinator, which is part of the grocery department, tends to be held by women. In addition, the grocery department often assigns responsibility for bulk food and body hygiene products to women. According to one participant, “the boxes are [not] as heavy and there is more little fiddly things. The guys don’t want to do it, you know, and putting up more of the women’s stuff, guys just don’t want to do that” (P 7). Another participant, who has worked in the grocery department to maintain her guaranteed number of weekly hours, agreed, stating, “it is always a female that does bulk food. Even the HBA [health and beauty aids] is usually taken care of by a female. It’s just that they are assigned the little things” (P 6). Women’s segregated jobs in male-dominated departments focus on tasks that require light lifting and dealing with ‘fiddly’ merchandise, which tends to reinforce the assumption that women lack upper body strength and have a greater ability to handle detailed work.

The meat department is another male-dominated department that is also highly segregated. As one participant said, “I have wrapped in meat and I have been doing that for two months now every Saturday” (P 11). It became clear during the interviews that, when women are given positions in the meat department, they almost always take on the role of meat wrapper or they are “basically just putting stuff out” (P 10). One participant believed that the meat
department “favours men because it’s a heavy job. You are lifting how many pounds of product. Constantly lifting. Those guys get probably five or six skids of heavy product a week. That’s thousand and thousands of pounds. It’s really heavy lifting” (P 11). However, one woman argued that the meat department is a more hostile environment for women, and that women tend to shy away from this department because of the conduct of the male employees. She stated that “the “meat department, I think, is mostly a boys club anyway. Some people can slide in and just give as good as they take. But, some women will find that intimidating. Some of the meat guys are less couth than others” (P 1). This would suggest that, while women might find the demands of the job difficult, it is the men’s club mentality and the intimidating environment of the meat department that have continued to ensure that this department remain a male-dominated space.

The produce department also has a very visible gendered division of labour with women being responsible for cut fruit and men being in charge of the entire department. One participant described the situation as follows: “There are women in the produce department, but they are usually part-time and do cut fruit. They don’t slug the bags of potatoes or anything” (P 3). Several of the participants have never seen a woman working in the produce department except in the cut fruit section, and only one participant was able to name a woman currently working in the produce department. However, as she noted this woman is classified as a produce clerk, but she ‘does the light load’, meaning that she handles the smaller lighter boxes such as raspberries (P 11).

This is similar to the bakery department where a male baker may be present, but only if it is a ‘scratch bakery’. The bakery department has two classifications of workers, skilled and unskilled, depending on whether it is ‘scratch’ or ‘bake-off’ bakery. In a scratch bakery, items are made from raw ingredients, which requires a skilled baker, whereas in a bake-off bakery,
premade frozen goods are simply baked, which requires an unskilled worker. One participant elaborated, “[in the] bakery, we have lots of males and they all work together really well but they are not a bake-off. I don’t know any bake-off department that has a male, we don’t even have a designated baker” (P 3). Another participant clarified that, “they had the guys doing the scratch bakery because of the big mixer bowls are so heavy. They are so big you can’t pick it up even when it’s empty. There is no way. They were 50 pounds to begin with, you put a mix in there and there is no way you can lift it” (P 3). However, as she points out, with more stores renovating the bakery department to bake-offs because they are more economical, this department is seeing a decline in men as staff members because heavy lifting is no longer required: “There is not a lot of males out there doing the bakery anymore because it’s not stable anymore because they want to change to a bake-off. It’s cheaper to bring it in frozen” (P 3). This is a clear example of the gendered division of labour within a department that classifies men as higher skilled than women. If the department is a scratch bakery, it needs a skilled baker, which tends to be a man. Women, who are classified as low skilled, dominate the bake-off bakeries and consequently earn a lower wage. While both women and men work in the bakery, produce and grocery departments, we see that there is still a high degree of gender segregation within and between these departments.

Women still largely dominate the front-end positions and deli department. However, as young men begin to integrate into these departments, the division of labour is becoming gendered. In the deli department, for example, both women and men take on the task of cleaning. As one participant noted, “everybody cleans, everyone has to” (P 12). While all workers take on cleaning work, other tasks have become highly gendered. For example, female deli clerks prepare gourmet cheese trays and platters while male deli clerks are responsible for tasks that
involve heavy lifting such as organizing the incoming stock. A similar pattern is developing amongst cashiers. As young men integrate into cashier positions, normal responsibilities of running a cash desk and serving customers is equally distributed between women and men. However, customer service desk and office duties still remain highly gendered with women handling customer complaints and administrative work. The interdepartmental division of labour is further demonstrated when a cashier is needed to collect and return buggies. As one participated stated: “If they need a cashier to bring in buggies, they tend to choose the guy. If there happens to be a guy cashier, they would get him to do it because it’s a stereotype again, lifting and pushing. It’s the upper body strength and they assume that guys can do it better than girls can” (P 1). Therefore, when young men integrate into female-dominated departments, gendered norms still persist, with men being expected to do the heavy lifting when it is required.

Hierarchical Authority among Unionized Staff

A better knowledge of how authority is distributed in the workplace is important in understanding the disempowerment of women. In grocery stores, if the key positions that are invested with the most authority are held by men, then we can see that women lack authority and power in the workplace and are locked out of roles that may allow them to gain further upward mobility. For this study, all the women were asked who they felt had the most authority in the store other than the manager. Two women stated that the most senior person would have the most authority and one woman indicated that it depended on the situation. The nine other women all said that the grocery department manager would be the in-charge person following the manager because, as one noted, “for a store the grocery department has the bulk of the money so it has a bigger pool to pull from and thinking back, if you know grocery you could run a store but not everyone gets the opportunity to work in grocery” (P 9). The grocery department manager is
viewed as having the most skills and knowledge, and is given the most authority by the other unionized staff members.

All the women interviewed agreed that, following the manager, it is the other department heads that would have the most power. However, the three department heads who were interviewed from the deli, seafood and bakery departments all believed that they had the least authority amongst the department heads. One department head pointed out that, it is not that they have less skills than other department heads, but rather that they are rarely put in charge of the store, limiting their ability to demonstrate their management skills. Another department head explained that she, “can count on one hand since I have been made full-time how many times I have been asked to be in charge of the store. Never mind that if I did, it would be kinda nice. Just being offered would be nice. It’s an extra two bucks an hour but also, just to see what you are capable of” (P 12). The limited opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities to manage the store has contributed to women’s lack of power and authority, and has impeded their ability to move into more senior roles. All the participants stated that the grocery department managers in their stores were men, and that this position had always been filled by men, which shows that there is a ‘glass ceiling’ and that women’s upward mobility is hampered by those who make decisions as to which employees are asked to take on in-charge positions and be promoted to more senior positions.

Another practice that those interviewed found disturbing was that women who were full-time department heads were overlooked in favour of a part-time staff member to be in charge of the store. The part-time staff members who are given this opportunity are, for example, grocery clerks and front-end clerks, and there is little consistency in terms of the level of seniority of these employees when they are in charge of the store. One interviewee said that she, “would
assume it would be the one with the most seniority, but that doesn’t always happen. We have two part-timers with minimal seniority that are left in charge of closing the store or being the in charge manager” (P 10). Another interviewee noted that, “in the evening shift, it is the grocery part-time that are left to lock the doors even when there is a full-time in the store. In the perishable departments we go home before the store closes and they don’t want the responsibility. So a lot of the times it is a part-timer” (P 8). However, this is not the practice adopted by all stores. Indeed, according to a few participants who had worked in different stores, there is a hierarchy and only certain individuals who hold a specific job would ever be left in charge, namely, the part-time grocery clerk, the part-time scanning coordinator and, lastly, the part-time office staff. Though there was no consistency in terms of which staff members were given opportunities to be in charge, it is clear that most of the women feel disempowered believing that other individuals, sometimes with less experience or seniority, are given opportunities to take on more responsibilities and wield more power and authority in the workplace. Not one of the women believed that they were in a position of authority and could make managerial decisions when no manager was present.

In-Store Mobility

In-store mobility could be advantageous if it allowed women to gain more skills and experience or be offered better hours of work. However, many of the women noted that, while they are sometimes allowed to perform duties in other departments because of a lack of staff, their training in these departments is limited, thereby making it less likely that they will be considered for promotion in another department. As one interviewee noted, even an employee who has high seniority and is crossed-trained is not necessarily able to gain more hours in another department:
Even if you have high seniority over someone and you cross-train, if you were hired for cashier you cannot take hours away from somebody in another department. I have a situation now where I have a girl who is cashier crossed-trained into seafood, however, the girl who was actually hired for seafood, she would get seafood hours before the front-end girl even though she has more seniority (P 8).

While many of the women have been crossed-trained in other departments and performed other duties, unless their actual job classification changes, they are still restricted to their initial hiring department and used only occasionally in other departments. This seems to be particularly prevalent in the grocery department, where cashiers are often used when there is insufficient staff, but they are rarely, if ever, reclassified as employees of the grocery department. One woman in particular was negatively affected by this practice. She was classified as a cashier, but worked in the grocery department in one store for several months. When she transferred to another store, her classification was still as cashier, and she was forced back onto the front-end and therefore no longer works in the grocery department.

Part-time staff members often perform other duties outside of their original job classification, making it appear that there is a high degree of in-store mobility. Without a job reclassification, part-time employees are not given the recognition for the training they received and skills they developed, and it is deemed that they lack the depth of knowledge to be considered for promotion into another department. In addition, in-store mobility can be detrimental to having a consistent work schedule. One participant talked about how her work schedule is very irregular as she fills various positions in the grocery store. She described floating from department to department as a bad thing because this has not provided her with the opportunity to gain the in-depth knowledge of any one department. She stated, “my current position depends on the day. I am doing about 50 percent front-end, 25 percent scan and 25 percent other. I do bulk food, I do dairy occasionally, just whatever they feel is necessary I do”.
While this employee demonstrates general knowledge of many different departments, without reclassification she does not receive the necessary training to be fully qualified in another department. What is more, in order to obtain full-time employment in a certain department, an employee must already hold a job classification in that department. As one participant noted, “you have to go basically into the job you are in. If you are a cashier you have to go for full-time cashier. You can’t cross-transfer because you are not technically under that department” (P 6). Therefore, the high level of in-store mobility and cross-training do not equate to further advancement opportunities. Rather, these practices allow for an employee to be used when a specific department is lacking staff and there is no recognition that the employee has gained another skill set.

**Women’s Reasons for Entering Precarious Employment**

Women enter employment for a variety of reasons including financial responsibility for their family, a desire to participate in the labour market, advancement opportunities, the possibility of developing skills and qualifications, and in response to social pressures and norms. These driving factors do not fully explain, however, why women enter into job ghettos. Indeed, the high proportion of women working in service sector job ghettos has been largely attributed to their domestic responsibilities, the part-time nature of many of the available jobs, and women’s lack of desire to have a full-time career (Webster 2004). Socialization theory, which argues that women are socialized into dominant gender roles that emphasize their duty to place child rearing before a career, has been a dominant framework used to explain women’s labour market position (Blackwell 2001). While socialization plays a part in women’s choice of jobs, this argument downplays an individual’s agency and the skills and qualifications that women may or may not have gained through formal education and on-the-job experience and training. Ten out of the
twelve women interviewed stated that they sought employment at a grocery store as a part-time job while they were in school. Two women applied for a position with the grocery store further into their career after they were laid off from a previous job. Grocery store workers have been classified as unskilled by dominant society (Skaggs 2008), but four out of the twelve women interviewed have either a college diploma or certificate and three women attended university, but never obtained a degree. One participant noted that the grocery industry was offering full-time jobs thirty years ago and it was more lucrative to pursue full-time employment than finish her degree at that time:

I started when I was 16, part-time at a store. I was 16 and I was going to go to university. I went for a year and it wasn’t the right choice for me. It was an Art and Science course and then I decided, there was an opening at work for a full-time position. I got hired full-time. I was the second girl on the front-end. Then I moved to the snack bar at another store. From there I moved to another store when I was 21. I was not working full-time in the deli department. A position became available at another store and my boss at the time asked me if I wanted to go there. It was a deli manager position and I accepted it because it was more money even though it was farther away (P 9).

Thirty years later, women are no longer being hired as full-time clerks, yet women continue to enter into this job field. With ten out of twelve women interviewed entering employment while in high school, they were not looking for a full-time wage at that time. What is more, of the six women who gained additional educational qualifications, five have continued to work in the grocery store sector over the years because they encountered difficulties entering other fields of employment. As one woman with a computer science diploma described, “it was supposed to be a high school and college job, then I lost my full-time job after my first child and I just fell back on what I knew” (P 6). Many of the women talked about losing another job they held or being unable to find work in the field in which they were trained before they began considering grocery store work as a long-term career. Since the majority of these women sought employment before they had children and domestic responsibilities and six out of twelve attempted to obtain other
qualifications, we cannot assume that these women made the decision to pursue precarious part-time employment because of their future child rearing responsibilities. These women have now become part of the surplus of labour or the reserve army of labour, a situation that provides corporations with the ability to hire several expendable part-time employees rather than giving these women opportunities to advance to full-time careers.

The persistence of women being hired into certain highly gendered positions and departments can be partly attributed to social norms and socialization that influence the applicants’ preference. One participant rationalized the situation as follows:

A lot of people, because the applicant says specifically what department do you want to be hired for, I noticed looking at applications that a lot of girls write cashiers or deli and boys write meat department or grocery. I think bakery is about 50/50 and whether you want to work there or not is usually interest based. Produce tends to be predominately men, but again I think that’s because of who applies for the job. When you are hiring, you look at who’s applying as opposed to gender. When I was hiring, gender was not the issue for me. It was just what department do you want to work in and where you would be the best fit as opposed to you’re a girl so you are automatically a cashier or deli (P 1).

While this participant stated that, when she does the hiring, she tries to be more gender neutral, she did acknowledge that most jobs in the grocery store are gendered partly due to societal norms and that applicants often request to work in departments based on these gendered norms. Participants also recounted situations where they had applied to a grocery store without indicating any preference for specific jobs, but were nonetheless given positions in a female-dominated department. For example, when one participant applied to the store, she indicated that she would work in any position, but found that “management decided to put me in the deli ‘cause that’s where they said there was an opening” (P 11). We can therefore see that the distribution of work is influenced not only by preferences of the applicant, but also by decisions made by the hiring manager. In both cases, it is clear that gendered expectations play an important role in how
work is divided between women and men in the grocery store industry. The end result is that women remain in a subordinate role in the workplace, and their upward mobility and opportunities for advancement are deeply affected by hierarchal structures and gendered ideologies.

Class, Age and Race: Other Dimensions of Inequality

Other dimensions of inequality have also contributed significantly to occupational gender segregation. An analysis that focuses on intersectionality allows for a more rigorous critique of occupational gender segregation by acknowledging that other social categories structure the gendered division of labour. For the purpose of this study, class, age and race are analyzed as other dimensions of inequality that have affected women’s lives. Class and age were more dominant themes of inequality for the women who were interviewed. Issues pertaining to race were not predominant likely because of the small sample size and the fact that all participants identified as Caucasians.

Class

The retail sector is highly segregated by gender, with women holding jobs that are low skilled and poorly paid, and offer little benefits. These jobs tend also to have low levels of prestige and status (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Bernstein, Dupuis and Vallee 2009; Jackson 2003; Lightman and Gingrich 2012; Lillevik et al. 2004). For this study, participants were asked whether they had ever been treated with prejudice by members of their family or the wider community because of the type of job they hold given that it is often perceived as a low-level working class occupation. Several of the women stated that their family is thankful that they have a job and that it did not matter which occupation they filled. As one stated: “My family was always happy that I was doing something I enjoyed doing…They actually always thought of
me of doing a great job, getting to bake and design cakes and everyone was so happy with it because they saw it as a talent” (P 3). Another participant talked about how she is continuing a tradition as different generations of her family have worked in the grocery industry, “I don’t think they think of it in any way. It’s something that that’s all they have ever known what I do. It’s all I’ve ever known because that’s what my mom did. All my siblings worked in grocery stores till they moved on” (P 8). However, two women said that their family believes that they do not hold a prestigious occupation and that they should strive for more. One participant pointed out that, “my family views it as I’m working under my potential” (P 1) and another participant believed that her family, “think(s) it’s not a great job” (P 12). There is evidence that class background influenced how the women viewed themselves as working in a grocery store and also what their families felt about their occupational status. The participant who mentioned that working in a grocery store was a family tradition came from a working class background and did not believe that she was not living up to her potential and felt no stigma from her family. The two other participants who felt stigmatized by family members who considered them to be working below their potential both came from a middle class background and had some college or university education. It would thus seem that the class background of the employee has an impact on whether they feel stigma or prejudice because they are working in a low level occupation.

For many of the women, the wider social community demonstrated more prejudice and discrimination than members of their family. One participant elaborated that “it’s societal because people tend to view people that work in the service industry as lesser educated or less intelligent and just incapable of doing something else” (P1). Several women experienced social stigma when other people found out about their occupation. As one participant described:
It’s a grocery store. Really? There is no role in the grocery store. At one time, I was out and this guy came up, the first thing that people ask is what you do. So he asked what I do for a living. I told him I go to Western and work in a grocery store and the guy stopped talking right away. Working in a grocery store is not considered acceptable. People look down on you because you are wearing this uniform. Never mind the fact that I make more money per hour than they do, I get better benefits so I WILL wear this uniform. Grocery store, whatever. We are the service industry so nobody cares, just tell them to have a nice day and they will be on their way (P 11).

In discussions with women grocery store workers, it became abundantly clear that some in the wider community feel that service sector workers in low skilled occupations deserve scorn. What also was revealed during interviews is that many have suffered intimidation and abuse at the hands of customers. One participant talked about the anxiety and stress she experienced when confronted by a customer:

I have only felt stress and anxiety from customers. Just from customers feeling that I was acting as a manager, but I wasn’t doing my job to my full ability. I felt discriminated against. A customer said I was discriminating against him because I wouldn’t give his children who were under 15 rain checks, but legally we are not supposed too. I felt pretty threatened by him, he verbally threatened and abused me. And he was very aggressive. I gave him what he wanted just to get him out of the store (P 6).

Many of the women believed that the wider community views them as unskilled and just “there to serve them” (P 8). One participant highlighted how workers in other service sector jobs faced similar prejudicial behaviour: “It’s all the same. Even the Tim Horton’s girl working gets treated the same. Any kind of skill, there is always the notion that we are not educated and must be a stupid female working in a grocery store. It’s been there for years, it will always be there” (P 11). Four of the interviewees believed that, if they were full-time or held a department head position, they would be treated in the same negative manner and would not be perceived as having more authority or prestige by the wider community. Conversely, three women believed that management and department head positions have more authority and are regarded as more skilled by the wider community. As one participant explained, “if I was a department head or
manager I would probably be treated different because it is viewed or tends to be viewed as less menial” (P 1). The women self-identified that they are at the bottom of the hierarchal structure of a grocery store and hold low-level occupations, which all felt is viewed negatively by the wider community, and some felt is viewed negatively by their families. Classism plays a role in devaluing women’s labour in society; it stigmatizes retail service workers, categorizing them as low skilled and poorly educated. Women who hold part-time positions in precarious work in the retail sector are considered to be an expendable surplus labour force and members of the working class who can be exploited for capitalist profit.

Age

While seniority often mitigates against discrimination on the basis of age, it does not eliminate it completely. Unionization does offer some protection for employees against ageism. As one participant discussed, obtaining a full-time position is “just based on seniority as far as I know. They can’t really discriminate by age. Not if they don’t want to get sued” (P 1). Several women believed that hiring managers would hire whomever they needed regardless of age, noting that availability and willingness to work certain hours, rather than age, were key to being hired. As one participant noted, “I don’t think that is really an issue as far as departments go. In our department they would hire whoever was qualified. I don’t see any age issues” (P 11). However, some felt that age could be a barrier for gaining access to additional training. As one participant described, “I am sure young people who worked on customer service got passed over for training at times based on their age because they wanted someone a little bit older to be in charge” (P 4). Older people can also be discriminated against because “the older you get, they are not apt to want you as a full-time employee” (P 10). These narratives underscore that being
too young or too old can negatively affect an individual’s desirability as an upwardly mobile employee despite the protection of seniority.

The literature indicates that age plays an important role in the assignment of work in the retail sector, with employers tending to place older workers backstage and younger workers in visible and high profile service areas (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Krahn et al. 2008). This gives the appearance of a youthful workforce that is more pleasing for customers (Krahn et al 2008). Only one participant discussed this issue stating that, “I see that on the front-end it is mainly younger girls. They don’t seem to hire older people as much. When the store first opened, it was a wide range of people but now it’s more younger than older staff” (P 10). She noted that, for the front-end cashiers, a hiring manager will often hire younger good-looking women to interact with customers. She maintained that physical attractiveness was often a deciding factor of employment dependent on the hiring manager at the time. This would suggest that young women are hired for certain visible roles and that their physical traits play a key role in their suitability for employment in grocery stores, depending, of course, on the hiring manager.

The unionized women indicated that the occurrence of ageism with respect to a unionized workforce varies, but one manager pointed out that it does impede women’s upward mobility into management. Upper management has the ability to discriminate against individuals who strive to become managers because of their age. As one participant explains:

When you are young, you are too young, and when you are old, you are too old. For myself, now as smart as I think I could be, I could never be a store manager. It’s too late for me. And I think there comes a point in your career when this is all you have done and this is as far as you can go. There are lots of lateral moves but you can’t go up (P 9).

This would suggest that there is a glass ceiling for older and younger employees, and that age is a barrier for advancement into non-unionized managerial position.
Race

Racism, both overt and covert, has a profound impact on the occupational attainment of racialized women. Racialized women are often overrepresented in low wage, low skill occupations because of a lack of recognition of their skills if they are immigrants, and an overall tendency of Canadian employers to hire Canadian educated and experienced individuals, often excluding women with foreign accents or credentials (Creese and Wiebe 2009). A limitation of this study is the lack of racialized women due to the small sample size. None of the unionized employees interviewed had ever experienced or witnessed racism from other staff members. However, some had witnessed racism towards an employee from customers:

We actually have a girl who is Muslim. And, there was so much controversy nowadays because of the Boston Marathon and, you know, September 11th, I am sure she faces racism. But it’s putting everyone in a box and that’s not true. You have people who say, “why do you have a Muslim working here?” She is just one of the workers, she’s not doing anything. So that’s hard (P 3).

Others spoke about racism in hiring practices. As one participant stated, “we hire, but I still don’t see a lot of black people compared to the black people that live in Toronto. We don’t have a lot of Indian people either, I don’t know why” (P 9). Another participant reflected on the limited hiring of racialized groups over the years:

I remember when there was no African Americans working in the stores anywhere and that’s back in the 80s. There was no African American in the store until I came to my new store and I have worked in seven stores! And now I have an African American cake decorator in my store, but back then you just didn’t have any. The most I have ever worked with is Canadians or Italians, that was it” (P 3).

The predominance of a white work force and the underrepresentation of racialized groups is a clear sign that racism still exists in grocery stores. One participant, who is part of the management team, discussed an incident of racism that she had witnessed. She described the scenario where “they interviewed three people, me, a different deli manager and a Jamaican deli
manager. I heard from a pretty good source that I got the job even though I had only been doing it for a few years and the other girl was more qualified, because she was black. The higher manager didn’t want to work with her because she was black, so I got it and moved into management” (P 9). While this case of racism happened thirty years ago, the participant explained that managers still exercise racism “because for the longest time. We didn’t have anybody of colour at all, very rare in management, even today, we have how many stores and I think we have one DM [District Manager] who is ethnic and one ethnic merchandiser” (P 9). The underrepresentation of racialized groups in unionized positions directly impacts their underrepresentation in management positions because of the tendency to promote from within the ranks of unionized employees. Racialized persons are at a disadvantage in the hiring process in the grocery store industry and therefore are even further marginalized in higher levels of management.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the gendered makeup of occupations in a grocery chain and has highlighted how the gendered division of labour in the grocery store industry creates a job ghetto for women. Occupational gender segregation is present both between and within departments in grocery stores. Women who perform duties in male-dominated departments are typically given specific tasks that correlate with feminine qualities. Often, women are not recognized for the skills they have gained while working in other departments and are not reclassified to reflect their experience. This is detrimental to women’s upward mobility because it consistently devalues women’s skills and abilities. In addition, class, age and race can negatively impact women, and are further bases of discrimination that impede their upward mobility. To understand how this job ghetto has truly impacted women’s position in the
workplace and their socioeconomic status, a more in-depth study of women’s lived experiences in the grocery store industry will be undertaken in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Women’s Experiences of Occupational Gender Segregation

Occupational gender segregation affects women on a variety of levels including job attainment, advancement and socioeconomic status. Occupations where women are typically found that offer few economic gains, poor advancement opportunities and repetitive menial tasks are referred to as job ghettos (Krahn, Lowe and Hughes 2008; Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Woodfield 2007). Such occupations not only provide few economic or other job advantages, such as skills development and career progression, but working in a job ghetto can also negatively affect women’s life span, quality of life and health (Anker 1997; Lillevik et al. 2004). In the grocery store industry, many of the occupations that are held disproportionately by women are considered to be low skilled service sector jobs and represent little more than a female job ghetto (Skaggs 2008).

This chapter will discuss various issues pertaining to women’s experience of segregation in the grocery store industry. The first section will focus on women’s advancement opportunities into unionized full-time positions and non-union store management positions. The second section will highlight the many barriers that women face, demonstrating how these barriers have contributed to women’s subordinate role within the grocery store. The third section will focus on the pay scale and benefits of a unionized grocery store. Lastly, the fourth section will examine women’s experiences of abuse and harassment, and the failure of both management and union policies to deal with these problems in the workplace.

Advancement Opportunities for Women in Grocery Stores

Advancement into Full-Time Unionized Positions

For many of the women interviewed for this study, the process that dictated the advancement from part-time into full-time unionized jobs remained unclear. Also, because there
was no guidance for advancement, many of the women felt confused and seemed to believe that the task was a near impossibility. One participant described being reclassified to full-time status in a unionized position in the following way:

There has to be a posting, there has to be an opening. Then that person has to have a full-time request form in. For the most part, our full-time is hired from the part-time staff. It’s rare that a full-time is hired right off the street. When they are, it’s when they are a butcher or a cake decorator, something with a specific skill or certificate...If a part-time has their full-time request in and they have the skill, the company can’t hire off the street if there is someone else available. You would respond to the posting or you would grieve someone else’s posting who has less seniority (P4).

To clarify the participant’s points, an individual who is interested in pursuing full-time work must have submitted a form to the administration requesting a full-time job. When a full-time position becomes available, the human resources department reviews the list of employees requesting full-time work and offers the most senior and qualified individual the position. At this stage, all stores in the grocery chain are formally notified of the successful candidate and this notification is posted for all unionized employees to review.

For many women, there is confusion about the number of times they must submit the form requesting full-time work, what information is required, and what positions the employee is eligible to apply for. One participant noted that “they have changed the rules, so you have to reapply for full-time every year, which I didn’t find out till this year” (P 1). Some participants believed that they were required to submit the application form only once, with the document being kept on file by head office, while others believed that this needed to be done on a yearly basis. Another participant also displayed confusion surrounding the process of applying for a full-time position once it is posted:

You have to put a letter in requesting a full-time position. When a position is posted, you have to apply for it or you call your district, whoever is in charge, contact them and tell them you are interested in applying for that. And if that doesn’t work, go to
the union representative. I don’t know the process or the ‘short process’ but that’s what I hear they are supposed to do. Initially, you have to have a letter in suggesting you want full-time and that you want to transfer (P 11).

This individual has been working in grocery stores for many years, which suggests that even long-standing employees lack the necessary knowledge to apply for full-time positions. This confusion surrounding the actual process of obtaining full-time work hinders women’s chances of gaining greater economic security from their jobs in the form of increased pay and benefits, and more consistent hours of work. Indeed, because there is little communication from the company or the union, women seem to be very unclear about how to proceed, thereby making the task of obtaining a full-time position seem impossible.

Some women commented that they have no realistic expectation of gaining full-time employment because of the lengthy process and the long list of part-time workers with higher seniority who hope to move into full-time positions. One participant lamented that the list of requests to move into full-time positions is over forty pages long and after fifteen years of service she is only on page eighteen (P1). Consequently, the reality of obtaining full-time work in a unionized position seems to be nothing more than a remote possibility for most.

**Promotion into Full-Time Non-Union Store Management Positions**

A second option for women to move into full-time work in the grocery store industry is to progress into management positions such as assistant store manager and store manager. However, the process of progressing into management seems to be even more convoluted than that of moving into full-time unionized positions, as the women did not seem to be aware of clear guidelines or all of the required qualifications. According to one participant “to become a store manager or assistant store manager, you need to have skills, as far as I know, they want you to be in the store and have multiple departmental experience. I don’t know about anything else” (P 1).
This individual had made efforts to become an assistant manager, but was blocked from progressing because she lacked the necessary departmental and extra project experience that was required. Some of the participants were aware that interpersonal skills and the ability to deal with stressful situations were skills required to become assistant store managers. Interestingly, interpersonal skills and the emotional labour involved in managing stressful situations are often associated with women and are seen as part of their natural abilities. Since many women develop these skills and abilities throughout their lives, it would seem that at least some, if not most, of the women working in grocery stores are equipped to advance into management positions. Given that this is not occurring, there are clearly other barriers that hinder women’s mobility in this sector of the economy.

The unionized women identified having experience in different departments as a prerequisite for advancing into management positions. However, participants who were management indicated that knowledge and experience in the grocery department were key for advancement. As one participant elaborated, “in this industry, grocery has been the primary breeding ground for store managers because we didn’t have all the specialty departments that we have now” (P 9). This highlights the confusion about progression because the unionized women believed that experience in various departments was essential, while management considered experience in the grocery department of paramount importance.

Some women were very clear about the gendered realities of promotion into management positions in grocery stores. One aptly commented that, “you would need to have male anatomy for starters. And apparently you have to go through a bunch of stuff, it’s such a “boys’ club”, it’s not even funny” (P 12). This participant argued that progression is more contingent on the gender of employees than their actual skills and ability. When discussing the number of women in
management, she noted that, “it’s an “old boys’ club”. If you look at the ratio between assistant store managers and managers, what is the ratio? A billion to one? Like I said, I have worked in a lot of stores and there were males here and males there, but where are the women?” (P 12). The grocery department provides most of the opportunities for upward mobility out of the unionized positions and men continue to dominate this department, which places women at a significant disadvantage for progression.

**Barriers to Progression**

To understand the scope of occupational gender segregation, I have identified six factors that impact women’s upward mobility: lack of opportunities, the persistence of the “old boys’ club”, family obligations, stress of the job, favouritism, and seniority. Each one of these areas impact women’s ability to advance and has become a contributing factor in classifying the retail sector as a job ghetto.

**Lack of Opportunities**

The lack of opportunities on a variety of fronts is a significant barrier for women’s advancement. Many of the women told stories of being locked out of a position because they were not provided with the necessary training. According to one participant, to move further into the grocery department, you would need to have a power jack license to move heavy skids:

> It’s not like anything in the department is heavier than I can possibly lift. If necessary, I could lift entire skids by myself. Once you get to a certain point, you get a power jack license, which I still do not have. I have had multiple managers promise it to me but they need to make it worth their while to send the instructor. They don’t send an instructor for one or two people. There are just never enough people. At the old store, everybody, not everybody, but most people who needed it had it and had it for years. And by the time it got to the point where I was working grocery exclusively and needed it, there just weren’t enough people to bring in power jack training (P 1).
This participant was unable to progress further in the grocery department because she lacked the necessary skills and could not obtain the training that the full-time position required. Another participant made similar comments. She noted that a large barrier for women is, “the departments they work in and how many full-time positions are within that department. Another [barrier] is that they don’t get the training so they don’t have the skills and ability when a position comes up” (P 7). Another participant commented that “once you are in the store you are in the store. There is no advancing unless you take the initiative and do it yourself. No one is going to offer you anything” (P 11). Clearly, the limited number of full-time positions and poor training prospects directly contribute to the lack of opportunities for advancement in the store and consistently keep women in a lower position (Webster 2004).

In addition, many women complained that they blocked from moving into certain departments because the work was deemed to be too heavy for them. One participant explained:

When I was at one store, I applied for a position in the produce department and they wouldn’t give it to me because they said there was no way I could lift the big boxes or whatever. The manager, he said there is no way you can lift the stuff and I thought, how do you know? You didn’t even test me! You could go into the bakery because it was cake decorating. Back then, you couldn’t consider to be a meat manager or anything in the meat department except wrapper. Produce, forget it. That was male (P 9).

Another participant had a similar experience when she asked to be transferred to the meat department:

My meat manager was the second man, a butcher’s second man. I said to the meat specialist and his boss, I said he needs a second man and I’m going to do it. I was trained at my old store in meat but they looked at me like I had 19 heads. What does that mean? You know, I was serious! I was going to be his second man, a man can still be in charge because that’s what they want and I will go into meat because I love it. And they looked at me like I had 19 heads, different colours and everything. They don’t want me to do it. They just gave me the look like you are special and stupid. And I just said thank you for having faith in me (P 12).
The persistent gender stereotype that women are too weak to ‘slug it’ in certain departments has been a main contributing factor to the lack of opportunity for women at the store level. As one participant noted, “if a meat department job came open as a butcher, I don’t think they will ask any women. I don’t know why, but I don’t think so. It’s gender specific roles” (P 11). The gendered role expectations coupled with the lack of training significantly disadvantage women’s upward mobility and their ability to gain a more skilled and less precarious position.

It has been well discussed in the literature that gender stereotyping hinders women’s advancement, but the lack of full-time jobs is also a considerable barrier. The trend of hiring on a part-time instead of a full-time basis has been steadily increasing, creating a surplus of workers who work for minimum pay and receive minimum benefits (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Fine 2002; Vosko 2006; Lightman and Gingrich 2012). This reality is clearly reflected in my study as succinctly stated by one participant, “the company simply isn’t hiring or promoting to full-time unless they absolutely have to. They only absolutely have to [when] a department head quits or dies, only if there is an opening” (P 8). Another participant blamed her lack of opportunity on the trend to replace full-time staff with part-time staff, “I don’t think it is realistic [to get full-time] because they are replacing full-time workers that retire with part-time workers unless they are department heads” (P 1). Consequently, in the grocery store sector, the trend towards deskillling and part-time employment have had a significant negative impact on women’s job attainment and opportunities, and has trapped many in a career that has become more precarious over time.

Persistence of the “Old Boys’ Club”

Lack of opportunity and the persistence of the “old boys’ club” are very much connected. Many women cited the “old boys’ club” as a barrier to integrate into other departments, which
limited their overall opportunities. During interviews, store managers as well as workers in unionized positions spoke about this barrier being prevalent in the grocery store industry. One manager discussed how succession planning is inherently gendered:

I would say it greatly limits our opportunities because there are a lot of talented women, but it is very much an “old boys’ club”. All of my managers now are men except for one woman in a different area. With those guys, it’s cronies, it’s who you golf with. Sometimes at succession planning, they would ask “who do you know of that would fit this or that department?” You would put forward women’s names and they would say, “Oh thanks but what about Chuck etc.” It didn’t matter that the talent of the women names you had put forward far outweighed the men that they wanted. When I talked to other people and ask who do they think will make a good assistant, we were all naming the same people, most of them women (P 9).

The “old boys’ club” is a central dimension of the grocery store industry with women constantly being passed over for promotion because of their gender. As the above participant noted, even when names are submitted for advancement, those responsible for promotions are more likely to select a man, even one with less training, into a management position. The stereotype behind this decision-making permeates all levels of the industry and contributes to women not being represented in management positions. One participant pointed out that, “there is a notion that management should be male. It’s almost ingrained in you. Males are the dominant force, males are the dominant figures. In the grocery industry, I find men are the ones who are on top, always” (P 11). The “old boys’ club” mentality becomes very apparent when there are opportunities for promotion to a more advanced role. A participant, who is a department manager, discussed how she applied for assistant management training and the position went to someone who had four years less seniority and a lack of department head skills. The persistence of the “old boys’ club” is a barrier to women’s advancement and limits their opportunities within grocery stores as well as their progression into all levels of management.
The “old boys’ club” mentality is also present in departments within grocery stores. For example, in the meat department, “the first rule is that there are no tears in the meat department” (P 11). This participant inferred that the conduct of men employed in the meat department was likely to cause women to be emotional and cry. Another participant commented that the male employees from all departments went for coffee breaks with the managers and received special treatment: “The guys at my old store would have coffee with the boss and have a way longer break than anyone else. They would sit there and drink coffee for 45 minutes and talk about baseball and golf” (P 4). This suggests that men receive additional break time beyond that provided by the collective agreement because they are men and are comfortable discussing sports with the male managers.

**Stress of the Job**

A few of the women expressed a lack of motivation to advance into managerial or full-time unionized positions because of the perceived amount of stress and hours that such jobs demand. One participant explained that, “they asked me to be a key holder and close, and I just don’t want to do it. It’s too big of a store, too much responsibility and too many employees”. Becoming a key holder is a management responsibility and many of the women feel intimidated by the responsibilities and stress associated with management roles, which is succinctly stated by one participant: “They put way too much stress on assistant managers” (P 3). In addition to the stress of the job, one participant identified the high number of hours as a disincentive to advance: “Management, we are talking outside the union, people are always applying because they move around so much. Some people can’t handle the hours because they are not treated well, their hours are sometimes 50 or 60 hours a week!” (P 8). While stress of the job and the number of hours are perceived by some women as a barrier, it is important to note that only three women
out of twelve actually cited this issue, and two of them were over the age of 50. Many of the younger participants did not identify stress of job and long work hours as a significant barrier to advancement.

**Family Obligations**

There is much evidence in the academic literature that women’s domestic roles and responsibilities are a barrier for advancement in the workplace. Often, women’s primary caregiver roles limit their ability to gain or keep full-time employment, which in an impediment to advancing into management positions (Blackwell 2001; Webster 2004; Jackson 2010; Cranford and Vosko 2006). As one participant described, she was not able to hold a more senior position because the manager required that she work Saturday and Sunday evenings:

I don’t think there is any department that I can go in to for advancement. Like I tried to get into the office, I was in another store and the manager wouldn’t allow me in because I won’t work Saturday and Sunday nights. That’s family time. I work Monday to Friday till 11pm at night. There are enough high school students and university students that can do those shifts. I’ve closed, how many years, on Sunday nights. I just want family time (P 6).

Another participant discussed how her weekly hours often did not reflect her availability because she might have to leave should her son become ill: “Well, I got a call at work and had to leave because my son was sick. So, the hours that I want to work, they won’t schedule me because I get calls” (P 7). These examples show that it is not that women do not seek advancement, but rather that employers are less inclined to train women and accommodate their domestic responsibilities.

Advancement for some participants directly interfered with their domestic duties and was therefore not possible. As one participant described, she does not want to advance because she has young children at home: “I wouldn’t want to do another department. I am comfortable where I am. I don’t want to work directly with food like in the deli or become full-time. I have the boys
at home right now” (P 2). Another participant also talked about pursuing part-time employment at the grocery store because part-time hours fit with her domestic responsibilities:

> When I got married and started having children [the job I had] became obsolete so I would have had to go back to school to learn another job. When I was off, I started making birthday cakes at home, did a lot of home sewing and making costumes. Not a lot of money, but any money I made, it was from those activities. So when I applied for the job, it was part-time, something that I would enjoy doing when my girls were in school (P 3).

We can see that women are constrained by their domestic duties in two different ways in regards to advancement. Some women would like to advance, but employers use women’s domestic responsibilities as a reason to limit their advancement. Others choose not to pursue full-time careers because they do not believe that they can reconcile full-time hours with their domestic duties. Regardless of the reasons that women do not pursue advancement opportunities, it is clear that they are forced into precarious work with low rates of pay and unstable hours (Blackwell 2001).

**Favouritism**

Favouritism was discussed as a barrier for women to advance, with some managers favouring certain employees over others. However, favouritism seems to affect both women and men, with managers favouring an employee for personal reasons rather than because of their gender. As one participant described, “I don’t think it matters for male or female, I don’t think it was because they are female. They are just trying to get away with their favourites” (P 12). Another argued that she was not provided with sufficient hours in certain departments because of favouritism. She noted: “Management has favourites and they have an extra full-time grocery clerk, which they are not supposed to have but they do. So, I work, you know, here there and everywhere. I am a backup scanner, but I don’t get back up scanning hours. Again, favourites” (P 1). One participant even talked about one manager not disciplining certain employees that he
favoured while all the other employees were disciplined. She also noted that the manager “had his favourites. If you weren’t his favourite, he would let you know” (P 11). While favouritism seems to affect both women and men, it remains a problem in the workplace and inevitably affects women’s training and mobility opportunities as well as their overall experience of work.

**Seniority**

Seniority clauses in collective agreements are intended to be a protection measure against favouritism. Some of the women interviewed for this study felt that such clauses are important, as highlighted by one participant, “the collective agreement has specific seniority points so that you are given a job based on your seniority as well as your skills and ability. You have to be able to do the job and have the training to do the job, but then, seniority makes sure that it is fair so that no matter who it is, they will get the job if they are qualified” (P 4). However, while seniority is supposed to protect against favouritism, many of the women believed that it actually hindered their ability to obtain full-time positions because of the length of the seniority list. One participant argued that the, “barrier to getting full-time right now would be the length of the list”. Another participant was not optimistic about the possibility of moving into full-time employment stating that, “because it’s unionized and based on seniority, the likelihood of me ever getting full-time is pretty much slim to none” (P 11).

While seniority rules are intended to be gender neutral, advancement still requires certain skills and ability. Because women encounter barriers integrating into departments that have a higher proportion of full-time positions, namely the meat, produce and grocery departments, they are faced with severely limitations in developing the required skills. As one participant explained: “Everything is based on your hire date, so it is supposed to be gender neutral. Supposed to be. However, I think every time we hire, it is, you’re a guy you go to grocery or
produce. If you’re a girl, you go to bakery or cut fruit or cash” (P 4). While the actual policies pertaining to seniority are gender neutral, it is clear that occupational gender segregation has an impact on seniority, which severely affects women’s upward mobility and integration into other departments.

**Pay Scale and Benefits**

Over the past few decades, in Canada and beyond, pay equity policies have been introduced to eliminate the gender wage gap that persisted long after women were a crucial part of the workforce. Pay equity was introduced to combat the gender wage gap by raising the wage of female workers to make it comparable to the wage of male workers when both groups are doing work of equal value (Fudge and McDermott 1991; Fortin and Huberman 2002). While pay equity has minimized horizontal segregation, it has been largely unsuccessful at reducing vertical segregation (Fudge and McDermott 1991; Fortin and Huberman 2002; Baker and Fortin 2000). It seems that this situation exists in the grocery retail trade. While the rate of pay has been standardized so that part-time clerks in each department receive the same rate of pay, there are some discrepancies amongst the unionized full-time department managers. The union has agreed to a two-tier wage scale for unionized department managers. Some department managers’ pay scales are based on length of service while the pay scales of other department managers are based on sales per volume of the store, with the latter group receiving a higher rate of pay. A union representative who participated in this study believed that department managers in “produce, meat and grocery [are paid on] volume. Front-end does not and I don’t believe bakery is either. I don’t think deli or seafood is. Definitely produce, meat and grocery” (P 4). This would suggest that there is a gender bias in pay scales with managers in male-dominated departments receiving a higher wage scale based on volume rather than length of service. One participant
believed that rewarding volume over length of service is wrong and disadvantages some department managers who are doing the same job as other department managers:

It doesn’t matter what your sales are, you are doing the job. You are in that position doing the job, why should you be paid less? We are not talking about the wage tiers that we have, that’s another stupid issue. But when it comes to department heads, it shouldn’t be based on volume. For many years there have been departments paid according to volume (P 8).

Creating a two-tiered pay scale with some department managers being paid according to volume and others according to length of service explicitly shows that pay equity has not been achieved and that the discriminatory policies are more covert and still deeply entrenched.

Pay equity has also not been achieved in management positions in the grocery store industry. As one participant noted:

Every year, we would have succession planning, I was noticing there was a big discrepancy between my pay and everyone else’s pay. I said, “why is that”? They said, “well you know, they were store managers or assistant store managers and you never were”. I said “that was never offered to me”. Nobody asked me if I would like to be an assistant. I remember asking my old boss when I was going to make as much money as the guy who is making 10k more than me. He said he’s got a family and he has been here a long time. I said I have been here longer than anybody, so there must be some point where if I am not doing the job to your specifications tell me so, so that I can do that and make more money. He said, “that’s not how it works; he’s always going to make more than you” (P 9).

The female manager was being paid less than the male manager because it was assumed that he was the main breadwinner and needed to earn a decent income to support his family. However, in this case, the female manager was the family breadwinner. If the assumption is that main breadwinners should be earning higher wages than those who do not have this responsibility, then clearly this woman should have been earning the same amount as her male counterparts. Thus, while pay equity policies have benefitted part-time workers in the grocery store setting, they do not seem to have had much impact on those in higher-level positions.
For many women seeking part-time employment, the unionized grocery store industry offers both pay equity and benefits. The benefits in unionized grocery stores are considerably better than in non-unionized stores. One participant highlighted that the benefits she receives are better than the benefits her husband, who works full time, receives in a non-unionized workplace in another industry: “Dental is better, prescription is better and I have eyeglass coverage. He doesn’t have eye glass coverage at all which is beneficial to me because I wear glasses and two of my children do” (P 6). In order to be eligible for benefits, employees must work a certain number of hours, as described in detail by one participant:

Medical and vision is now under a company-provided benefit. For vision, you have to work three years. Full-time are covered, but part-time have to work 600 hours in a calendar year. So, if you work two days a week, you will be covered. For prescription, you have to work for the company for five years and then work the 600 hours to qualify. The dental is a dental trust and it’s still company-provided, but the union sits on the board. There is multiple employers involved and you only have to work for one year to be covered for dental, there is no hourly qualifier (P 4).

This participant expanded on her discussion of benefits saying that, “for retail, having benefits is almost unheard of! Some unionized places do, but most retail jobs don’t have benefits at all” (P 4). For women, having benefits makes it easier to manage household finances and allows them to take better care of themselves. One participant keeps her part-time job despite also having a full-time job because the latter does not provide benefits. She noted that: “I do have a lot of friends that are in different industries and from what I understand, our benefits are quite good. We pay for it though; they are not given to us for free. With [my other job] I don’t get benefits…that’s why I hang onto my part-time job” (P 11). Consequently, while some policies – for example, seniority – that have been put in place due to the insistence of the union have not benefitted women, all of those interviewed preferred to work in a unionized environment because of the benefits they receive.
Women’s Lived Experiences of Abuse and Harassment

A unionized environment typically offers several attractive conditions of work for women, and unionized grocery stores are no exception. However, widespread harassment and abuse still persist in the grocery store industry, and there appears to be little protection for women. In this section, women’s experience or knowledge of abuse or harassment, both documented and undocumented, will be discussed, followed by an assessment of the effectiveness of harassment and discrimination policies.

Reported Instances of Harassment or Abuse

The grocery store industry has been classified by many of the women as a male-dominated industry, and they discussed how women often must become accustomed to being spoken to in a derogatory manner. Some cases have been reported to management and dealt with effectively. For instance, one participant discussed a case in which one woman reported that the male employees who were posting the ‘Sunshine Girl’ from the Toronto Sun offended her:

I know there were a couple of incidences a few years ago where somebody said something to someone and they went to the union. The guys used to take the Sunshine Girl pictures and tape them all on the compactor; she was offended by it. She found it offensive and she went to the union and management. It was addressed and they told them they had to take it down, the guys grunted and groaned about it. It was dealt with, but some managers wouldn’t have done anything (P 3).

In this case, the management team acted promptly and had the posters removed, but the participant believed that this decision was specific to a particular manager rather than a general rule that pictures of half-nude women should not be posted in a visible location at work. Another participant described her experience with harassment and how management addressed the issue:

Years ago, I was in the meat room and the meat manager and I didn’t get along. It was something about the schedule and we were arguing over my schedule that needed to be changed. He was getting tired of hearing me, but he wasn’t going to change it. I kept bringing the subject up. He turned around and yelled, hollered at me and he had the knife in his hand. He slammed the knife down onto the cutting board,
which scared me. I wasn’t a kid; I was in my early 40s. I was in tears and I left because it scared me… I went to the union and I went to management and probably within two weeks he was moved to another store (P 8).

In this case, management responded by moving the individual to another store, which seems to be an on-going practice when women experience harassment or abuse from men. Another participant described a more recent incident of abuse as follows, “this manager told one woman to do something. She said, “I think we should do something else”, and he said she wasn’t paid to think. She had him removed from our store” (P 2). Instead of disciplining the male employees and potentially firing them as the company’s Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy states, most are moved to another store or another department away from the women who complained. This action tends to appease the women, but not deal with the wider social issue that workplace violence and harassment are still impacting women in the retail industry.

In the examples of harassment discussed above, the men who had harassed or abused women co-workers were moved to another position, but this is not always the case. Indeed, the situation highlighted in the quote below is more worrisome because the male employee faced little discipline and continued to be employed in the same store as a woman that he had harassed:

There is this guy who got me in the cooler and rubbed up against me. He is still there; he has been written up and sent home. He was even caught making out in the backroom with a 17-year-old girl. And the store manager sent him home. He has been reported twice and he was just written up and sent home. That’s it. Sexual harassment and he was written up and sent home! See, the “good old boys’ club”, they still have that mentality (P 11).

In this case, the participant felt that the manager failed to do due diligence because he did not discipline the employee to the full extent that was required by the Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy. She reasoned that this was because he was a man and part of the “good old boys’ club”. Moving male employees who harass their female co-workers to another store did not resolve the problem and simply allowed them to continue the cycle of abusive behaviour.
Unreported Instances of Harassment and Abuse

Many women did not feel that reporting instances of harassment and abuse would address these issues, especially when the offending party was the male store manager. Several women indicated that they feared reprisals should they complain, and thus kept silent in the hope that the problem would disappear. One participant elaborated that one male manager, “liked to make the front-end cry. He wasn’t happy till he had someone crying which was usually a female…[No one complained] because they were scared of him. They thought they would lose their job or the manager would make it harder for them to work until they eventually quit” (P 2). Several women reported instances where they ignored the offensive comments by a male employee until he gave up. As one explained:

He would just make comments to us when we did tickets at night. Saying that women are useless and that how he wished we were a dog so we could lick him. Just derogatory things. I just stopped listening and ignored him. When he said something really inappropriate, I would just say I am done now The grocery industry is a male-dominated industry, hands down. I try and make light of it and sometimes making light of it makes your work environment better (P 6).

Another participant gave a similar account of harassment at work, mentioning that when she discussed her experience with another male employee that she trusted, he did not provide much support:

There have been plenty of times that the store manager, who is higher up in the company now, years ago we wore ties. I remember having my tie down a bit. I was talking on my phone on my break, and he came up to me and my tie was close to my cleavage and he came up to me and rubbed my tie just to rub my breast. I took steps back from him and said don’t touch me again. He was the store manager at that time and I never said anything because it was him and me alone. I confided in a guy I really respect and he told me just to be careful. Don’t put yourself in that situation. But another time, I was sitting on the phone just nonchalantly twirling my pony tale. And the store manager came by and twirled my hair with me, touched my hair and that was after the tie incident. I felt extremely uncomfortable (P 11).
One participant talked about how she and many of her co-workers were concerned that they would face negative repercussions if they did not visit the manager in his office when he so requested:

This was only as recent as 10 years ago or less. The manager was just a pig. He had his office upstairs. I would be working in the deli and he would call down to the deli and ask somebody to go upstairs and see him. I used to think it was really weird that nobody wanted to go. I am not saying that there were any shenanigans or sex or whatever, but it was clear that he was wielding power over these women and that they felt threatened if they didn’t go up and see him. I remember my girlfriend coming to me and crying because she didn’t go up. I remember saying to her “don’t let it bother you, he’s just an idiot and that’s the way it is”. I did what you have to do to survive and I said you just have to make it so that you are not hurting his ego because when you refuse, his ego is going to be impacted and he is going to make it rough on you (P 9).

Many of the women recounted having their appearance or that of other female employees commented on by male employees. One participant recalled that “one comment was made to a female about having her makeup put on with a putty knife…It’s an old expression, she wore so much makeup she looked like a hooker” (P 3).

Many of the women recognized that this behaviour was unacceptable, but most felt that this behaviour was commonplace and some even suggested that it was harmless, as is clear from the following quote: “A lot of stuff goes unreported. People just grin and bare it or deal with it on their own terms. They just think it’s useless and don’t do anything” (P 12). One participant even suggested that male managers intimidate women, “only because they allowed themselves to be intimidated. The women allowed themselves to be intimidated, but men would just tell him he was being an asshole” (P 8). Many women felt that this behaviour “comes with the territory” of working in a grocery store. The participants argued that women should have “thick skins” to deal with men’s comments and behaviour because “it’s better [than] breaking down and crying over little issues. If it’s a major issue then yeah, but you don’t want to cry at the drop of a hat” (P 10).
Many participants remarked that sexual innuendo is commonplace and expected in the grocery store industry. As one participant noted: “That’s the hard point, guys joke around all the time, you have to know when to let it go in one ear and out the other. You have to know they are trying to get you going. If they know they can get you, they will do it all the time” (P 3). According to another participant, “you have to know the person you are talking with, when it comes to sexual jokes or stuff like that. You have to know that it’s a joke and the guy doesn’t really feel that way” (P 8). While these participants believe that sexual innuendo is a form of joking-around, these comments can quickly become offensive to women. Allowing the ‘good natured ribbing’ to continue may signal to men that women are open to sexual relations and lead to more serious situations of harassment or abuse. For example, one participant discussed how she did not enjoy the sexual innuendos from one male employee, and her resistance to such behaviour led to negative consequences for her:

With me, he has tried to be funny and use sexual innuendo, but I wouldn’t give him the time of day because I couldn’t stand him. When he realized I wasn’t playing his game, he would bark orders at me. When I expressed to him that he is barking at me, he said something like “how would you know what a dog would feel like”. Something stupid or whatever. When he realized I wasn’t playing his game, he went all tyrant. Stupid stuff, I got written up for not cleaning the garbage can (P 12).

When women normalize ‘good natured ribbing’ there is a chance that they will become victims of harassment or abuse because the male employees believe it is all in good fun. The women of this study failed to see that allowing this behaviour of harassment and abuse to continue reinforces the hostile environment for women in the grocery store industry.

**Harassment and Abuse Policies**

The company’s workplace violence and harassment policies are posted throughout grocery stores. One participant described that, “when you go upstairs in the lunch room there is a hallway, all of the harassment posters are posted there, 8 by 11 feet of policies” (P 11). However,
many of the women were unfamiliar with these policies and how to actually report an instance of harassment or abuse. A participant stated that:

I think there is a 1-800 number when someone is harassing you. I don’t know anyone who knows that number. This is highly embarrassing. I don’t think you would go to your boss because nobody does that. Wow. I don’t really know, I am sure there is something because it’s 2013, there has to be something on paper. But, I don’t have a clue and there are people out there who are abusing the system. There is one individual, and I know people under his regime who have gone off sick. That have gone off crazy, that have quit. It’s a war zone after him. All these people falling off the map and he’s still there and he’s still allowed to do it and there has been no recourse for any of those people, no one wants to help them (P 9).

Many women believed that, while the policies existed, they were rarely enforced, “I doubt they address that very often, they have policies. They have policies on everything, it all falls down to enforcement” (P 1). Another participant discussed this lack of enforcement in her own situation of harassment by a male co-worker:

If they enforced it, why did that guy who was harassing women still have a job? Why wasn’t he charged with sexual harassment? Even when I, myself, told him specifically not to talk to me like that. He doesn’t talk to me anymore, he has moved on to someone else. It’s still going on. He is preying on different women. The company can lay out all this constant mumbo-jumbo, but they are not going to enforce it. Write him up, send him home. Big deal! He has been doing this for years and nothing is getting done because he’s pretty slick about it. It’s always one on one. Then the company just doesn’t want to ruffle anybody or have any problems with discrimination, or all this other crap. So, they will just let it happen and then tuck it away (P 11).

For many of the women, the failure of the company’s workplace violence and harassment policies coincides with the failure of the union to ensure that the company follows through on complaints. As one participant pointed out, the union is ineffective when a co-worker and not management perpetrate the harassment: “Well they are ineffective when it’s a co-worker. You cannot report another co-worker to the union, you have to report it to management and then they don’t do anything because they have their pets” (P 6). Another participant elaborated further that she does not think the union is effective in stopping workplace violence and harassment because
this is not its role: “I don’t even see that was ever their role, or if it was, nobody knew about it. I
don’t think that ever comes up. They will deal with, in my career, will deal with other stuff, but
nothing to do with sexism or nothing for women” (P 9). This would suggest that, while
management has implemented workplace violence and harassment polices, the union fails to
ensure that management follows through on maintaining a safe work environment for all
employees. Many women do not believe that the union has the power to change the hostile
working environment in which they find themselves, and feel that management often does not
enforce the policies to the fullest extent.

**Conclusion**

The process of promotion for women in the grocery store industry is riddled with unclear
guidelines and hidden barriers. Throughout this chapter, many of the women discussed the lack
of opportunity, persistence of the “old boys’ club”, stress of the job, family obligations,
favouritism, and seniority as significant barriers to progression. It is clear that women are still
hindered by numerous inequalities in the workplace, all of which limit their upward mobility.
However, the benefits that women receive in a unionized grocery store are markedly better than
those in many low-paying occupations and are a significant reason that women still pursue jobs
in this particular grocery chain. Despite the attractiveness of benefits, the women identified many
instances of workplace violence and harassment, which are not being addressed. Women’s
reluctance to report instances of harassment or abuse allows both management and the union to
be neglectful in enforcing policies to eliminate such behaviours, and contributes to the cycle of
abuse that women often suffer in the grocery store industry.
Chapter 6: The Persistence of Occupational Gender Segregation – Ideologies and Structures

Occupational gender segregation has continued to persist in unionized grocery stores. In the literature review, it was demonstrated that socialization theory, human capital theory and stereotypical biological differences are often used to explain the persistence of occupational gender segregation. In this chapter, I will discuss how the assumptions behind these explanations form the basis, to a certain extent, of women’s perceptions of occupational gender segregation. There is also evidence, however, of women’s rejection of these dominant understandings of segregation.

This chapter will then examine impediments to the elimination of occupational gendered segregation. I will first focus on the lack of gender solidarity between women unionized staff and managers and the impact of this reality on occupational gender segregation and women’s ability to challenge inequality in the workplace. I then examine whether women believe it is the union’s or management’s responsibility to challenge occupational gender segregation and the gendered social norms that are reinforced in grocery stores. Participants’ suggestions as to which barriers need to be removed to make the grocery industry a more fair and equal working environment for women are then discussed.

Women’s Perceptions of Occupational Gender Segregation

Since the industrial revolution, women’s work has consistently been devalued in economic terms, and, as was discussed in Chapter 2, socialization theory, human capital theory, and explanations based on biology have been predominant in describing, understanding and justifying this reality. Socialization theory argues that, through different stages of socialization, women have internalized social norms; this has influenced their occupational choices and placed
them in domesticated roles (Lester 2008). For its part, human capital theory argues that women will naturally take on the caring roles that benefit their family and thus tend not to invest in gaining higher education, training and employment experience to the extent that men do (Blackwell 2001; Reskin 1993). In addition, biological differences are often used to justify occupational segregation where men are seen as more adept at performing manual labour and more inclined to take on leadership roles, and women are seen as more adept at performing caring labour and more inclined to take on subordinate roles (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994).

As was evident in the previous two chapters and will become even more so in this section of the chapter, the women who participated in this study have, to a large extent, internalized and accepted these ideologies and assumptions about women’s proper place in society. They did, however, question and resist these ideologies and assumptions, pointing out instead how structural barriers continue to keep women in subordinate roles in the grocery store industry and in society more generally.

**Socialization**

Early and ongoing socialization influences women into following certain career paths over others, and, as a result, they often end up in subordinate positions in the workplace (Adams and Welsh 2008; Reskin 1993; Blackwell 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002; Anker 1997; Lester 2008). The women in this study consistently argued that applicants’ preference of department is a main reason for the ongoing occupational gender segregation. As one participant noted, “I think it’s just who applies for those positions. It’s mostly females who apply for front-end positions and mostly males who do grocery. It’s just who applies” (P 2). Another participant linked gender stereotyping of occupations to societal norms, stating, “That’s as much society as the company because girls automatically work as a cashier. It is more cultural based because I’ve
hired many guys as cashiers and they are good, if not better. It just depends on the personal applicant; it has nothing to do with your gender” (P 1). This would suggest that while socialization plays a large part in an applicant’s preference for a particular job in the grocery store, individual agency could still override earlier socialization.

The gender stereotypes that persist in wider society are reflected in the grocery store industry. Men are considered more desirable than women in some departments because the latter have been typically male-dominated in the past or because men have the upper body strength required to work in these departments. During interviews, it became clear that how women understand gender roles is not straightforward, and that they waiver between stereotypes and structural barriers when explaining gender segregation in the workplace. As one participant highlighted, there is a significant amount of heavy lifting in other areas of a grocery store where women predominate, and the women are performing tasks requiring strength on a daily basis, “It’s all stereotypes because produce is heavy lifting and all that stuff. Grocery is heavy lifting and receiving. But in the deli, there is heavy lifting! Let’s not forget about the chickens! God forbid we have to cook and lift them” (P 12). Some of the women see heavy lifting as a man’s role and tend to discount the amount of heavy lifting done by women in other departments. One participant indicated that a, “woman is not built the same as a guy and you’re not going to pick stuff like that up. You can’t lift 50 pounds up and keep putting them over your shoulder. We understood that and never wanted that job because you wouldn’t want to hurt yourself” (P 3). This suggests that women are socialized to believe that they cannot lift over 50 pounds because the exercise would be too strenuous for them, but they disregard the fact that some women lift over 50 pounds on a regular basis while working in a grocery store.
As previously stated, women’s early socialization affects their attitudes towards gender roles, sometimes limiting their career aspirations to fit prescribed gendered norms. Women in positions of power are largely only present in departments that are already female-dominated. As one participant describes, the company “had a deli specialist who left to go work for another company and they needed to fill that role. They didn’t want to fill it with a man because it had always been a girl’s job” (P 9). Another participant elaborated that women in these positions are meant to keep the status quo and not challenge existing power structures:

I can count on one hand the number of women that are in positions of power. We have a director of human resources that is a woman. We had another woman, she was a manager of an area in the city. They made more money in her little group of stores than all the other stores downtown. She was let go. I just saw this systematic thing where some of these women were in power [and] could stay in power if everything was status quo, they didn’t rock the boat. So they could say, we have a woman here or a woman there in this position, but they were only doing what everyone else wanted them to do. They were not like a trailblazer. You see, some of the male counterparts, we used to have a guy in charge of bakery that ran the show and they did all kinds of avant-garde stuff. That was ok for them, but not for a woman (P 9).

This demonstrates that while some women have been able to vertically integrate into positions of power, they must not become a ‘trailblazer’ for women’s rights or outshine their male counterparts. In addition, the positions of power are limited, with many unionized staff members believing that upward mobility is impossible without other women leaving their current positions. A participant explains, “if you were to ask [women], ‘what would they like to do in the company’, they say, ‘well I would like to be a merchandiser, but you have that job. So, I will have to wait until you are not here’. They would not think that there is any other job that they could do” (P 9).

Clearly, how women are socialized has a negative effect on their occupational attainment. The stereotypical gender norms that have been reinforced from childhood into adulthood consistently serve to limit women. Furthermore, the women who do challenge the ‘glass ceiling’
and progress within the grocery industry are often made to uphold the status quo, ensuring that women believe progression is a near impossibility. This therefore demonstrates that, while gender stereotypes play a role in women’s decisions about employment, they also face structural barriers in the workplace that are very difficult to overcome.

**Human Capital**

As noted in the literature review, human capital theory argues that women are naturally inclined to gravitate towards roles that benefit the family rather than develop their human capital to make themselves more employable and ensure higher rewards in the labour market (Blackwell 2001; Reskin 1993). According to human capital theory, women will often choose low skilled precarious employment with flexible hours because their main focus is child rearing rather than career building. What is more, women’s commitment to domestic duties and the likelihood of frequent absences justifies employers keeping them in low paying precarious jobs (Anker 1997; Blackwell 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002). While this explanation of women’s position in the labour market is predominant in the literature and is often cited by employers as one of the main reasons for women’s lack of progress, it was not a dominant explanation for participants in this study. Only two of the women interviewed for this study discussed pursuing employment in the grocery store as a good choice because it fit with their domestic duties. However, one of these two women eventually progressed to a full-time department manager position when she no longer had child rearing duties, and this move provided her with the opportunity to increase her skills and qualifications.

As previously stated, women, according to human capital theory, make a rational choice to enter into part-time employment and not invest in their education and skill development. This study found, however, that several of the women did invest in their human capital by pursuing
other skills and qualifications. For example, as one participant remarked, “I used to work in data processing for a drug company” (P 3). Similarly, another participant was made redundant in a job that required higher skills and found employment in the grocery industry out of economic need. Several of the women noted that they had invested in their human capital, but did not reap the benefits once their education was complete. Clearly, human capital theory does not reflect women’s reality and fails to recognize that women’s skills and qualifications are devalued, and that women are used as a source of cheap labour.

**Biology**

Another dominant explanation for the persistence of occupational gender segregation is rooted in biological differences between women and men. It has been argued that men often prefer manual labour because they are physically designed for occupations that require such labour (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994). However, physical attributes of an individual are different across time, cultures and class and cannot be solely relied upon to explain occupational gender segregation (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994).

Biology was a recurring theme during interviews with women who participated in this study, with many arguing that some jobs are performed by men because they have more upper body strength and muscle mass as was briefly mentioned in the above section on socialization. As one participant explained, “for myself, I don’t really work grocery because it’s heavy lifting. It’s more physical. I have done grocery before and I’ve been so exhausted by the time I am done the shift. I would just rather be on cash. I think when they apply for positions for grocery they look for the guys for that reason. For the heavy lifting” (P 2). This was echoed by many of the participants who argued that women are not found in certain departments because of the heavy lifting. As one noted, “More or less, I guess the physical aspect. The physical lifting, the moving
around and pushing of carts. I guess that’s why they are not in grocery because it’s a strenuous job and you can get very sore” (P 6). One participant discussed how she overheard comments made by the male grocery department head that he did not want women in his department: “He was always like, ‘I don’t mean any offence, they are good at their jobs, but I have a hard time giving them full-time in my department. You are not strong or fast’. But the one lady was like, ‘I work on a farm and lift hay bales” (P 4). The notion that certain jobs are too physically demanding for women is reinforced through socialization and gender stereotyping. One participant discussed how the latter stop women from advancing into physically demanding roles in the grocery store:

Just because you’re a girl, you need to be a cashier and just because you’re a girl, you can’t do heavy lifting. I can do that! I mean, there’s some pretty wimpy guys and some pretty strong girls. I mean, you can’t just assume that because of your gender, your societal assumptions and individual assumptions, most girls assume that they can’t do it, especially when they’re teenagers. Part of it is because it’s been sort of drilled into their skulls through the media, their parents and society that women don’t have the upper body strength so, therefore, cannot do it. If they don’t have the upper body strength now it doesn’t mean they can’t develop that, it’s something you work towards (P 1).

Socialization and biology become linked in this analysis because it is women’s early socialization and perceived limitations that stop them from performing strenuous physical activity and from building the muscle mass necessary to advance into more physically demanding occupations.

Despite participants’ systematic reference to biology as a main barrier for progression, many women perform the physically demanding jobs in the grocery store industry on a daily and weekly basis. As one participant discusses, “when I worked in the deli department for 13 years, you had to do the stock. I was the one that had to put it away because I was the one who did it right. But, I was also the one who could do it physically. I would put a thousand pounds worth of
food away in two hours” (P 11). Biology does not, therefore, limit women because they have the ability to build sufficient muscle mass and become accustomed to the physical demands of the job. One participant, who worked in the grocery department, argued that, “you get used to it and I was fine after a few weeks. When you start doing it for a while you get used to it. When I went back to being a cashier when I changed stores, the first three days I was in agony” (P 6). Each job in the grocery store industry is physically demanding in different ways and workers become accustomed to the various tasks if they are given the opportunity. The prevalence of gender stereotypes about physical strength throughout this study suggests that these women have been socialized to believe that they cannot perform the same work as a man. At the same time, however, the participants were keenly aware that many women in the grocery store industry engage in heavy lifting as part of their daily and weekly duties. What became clear in listening to these women is that they saw this contradiction and thus the weakness of an argument that focuses on biological differences to explain women’s location in the labour market.

**Impediments to the Elimination of Gender Segregation**

*Gender Solidarity*

Gender solidarity, as discussed in the literature review, is often displayed between women of similar status and class and usually weakens beyond class lines (Fajak and Haslam 1998). The literature reveals that women in lower positions view women in power more negatively than men who hold power. This is reflected in my findings. For example, one unionized employee remarked, “I think women that are promoted to assistants, I have met some that are real power trippers and they are crazy mean” (P 8). Another participant felt that women in power are often stigmatized and suffer more scrutiny from other employees: “I think if a female was a manager they are talked about more. I don’t know if it’s discrimination or just
talking. Like saying she is tough or a bitch, but if you went to see George, there is nothing wrong with him and yet he is worse than her!” (P 12). This demonstrates that women in the grocery store industry who become managers act no differently than men in such positions, and are subsequently stigmatized by other women for this behaviour.

One participant argued that women should ‘drag’ each other along into higher positions of authority, thereby displaying gender solidarity. However, as she notes, this is not often practiced because of the individualistic mentality of the women in power, which is a clear reflection of gender solidarity being weak across class lines:

I was always of the mentality that women need to, if I’m advancing, I’m going to put my hand on a woman here and she is going to put her hand on a woman there, and if I’m advancing I’m going to drag you. Even if you don’t think you’re qualified, because if we don’t do it, nobody’s going to do it. And I think with this mentality, one person has it and is not willing to give up any of that and will do whatever it takes to guard her territory. So, nobody else gets a chance to do anything (P 9).

Women helping other women reach positions of power and authority has been weakened by the fierce competition and the lack of upward mobility opportunities for the majority of women in grocery stores. As noted in the literature review, women in power have the ability to have a profound impact on occupational gender segregation by changing the hiring practices (Penner et al. 2012). However, in the grocery store industry, the fierce competition for limited positions results in women in power upholding traditional gendered segregation.

**Gender Segregation and the Union**

Working in a unionized environment affords employees a collective agreement that defines many of the conditions of employment. A participant pointed out that the collective agreement serves to protect the rights of unionized employees:

The first is that you have a collective agreement, so your working conditions are spelled out; your wages are spelled out. If you don’t have a collective agreement, the employer never has to give you a raise. The collective agreement allows you to
negotiate your working conditions with your employer and you get to have a say in that. Employees can run to be on the bargaining committee and get elected, so you can become really involved. If you don’t have the union, you could just get fired and have no recourse to get your job back (P 4).

The collective agreement is an invaluable bargaining tool for employees and offers them some measure of protection from employers’ unilateral decision-making. Despite these benefits, the union has little authority over hiring practices, the number of full-time employees in each department, and in ensuring equal opportunity in the grocery stores. The union has not developed any policies that address gendered hiring practices because arguably, the “union doesn’t have any control of who the company hires off the street. Nothing is jumping out at me other than the general discrimination policy” (P 4). According to another participant, the “union doesn’t have any policies that I know of. I can tell you that we don’t have anything written that I know of, I really don’t think there is any policy” (P 5). The failure of the union to even address this issue is problematic in and of itself. This lack of union policy also makes it more difficult to challenge management practices that foster occupational gender segregation. As one participant remarked, “the hiring practices are highly gendered, but the union has a hard time having any control in those situations. But, I don’t know if it has been brought up as an issue on a company wide basis” (P 4). This would suggest that the union is reinforcing women’s subordinate position in grocery stores. The union often reacts after the workers demand action on a particular issue instead of preventing unequal practices in workplaces. One of the main barriers to challenging occupational gender segregation is that the workers believe gender roles are firmly entrenched and unchanging. Consequently, the workers are not likely to bring this issue of inequality to the union’s attention.

As previously discussed, many of the women believed that the union has been ineffective in stopping gender discrimination in the grocery store, but only two out of the twelve women
believed that the union should even be involved in removing the barriers to facilitate women’s advancement. One of those women explained that, “I think it should be a joint effort. Why should the union and management be against each other? We are all here for the same goal, for people to do their job. To do it well and get treated fairly, why can’t we all just get along?” (P 12). The union has placed so much emphasis on seniority that it has failed to address the overt and covert gender discrimination that is systemic in grocery stores. Perhaps the small number of women who believe that the union, which should protect the rights of all workers, has the power to remove barriers shows a marked failure of the union to defend women’s rights resulting in them losing faith in its rhetoric of ‘equality for all’.

**Gender Segregation and Management**

Overwhelmingly, the women in this study believed that management should be responsible for removing the barriers that hinder women’s upward mobility. Despite this belief, many had little hope that the situation would change in the near future. As one participant noted:

I think its management. I mean, I could say its management. I don’t know what the union could do about it because it’s so prevalent and so ingrained. I don’t know how or when or if they could change it, but I don’t see it changing for a long time. It’s a machine and that’s the way it’s been set to run, so it’s going to take some catastrophic thing to change it, and I don’t see that happening (P 9).

Many of the women felt that change has to come from the top, with higher management addressing the issue on a company wide basis instead of managers in individual stores taking on this responsibility. As one participant remarked, “I think it’s the company. It would have to be company wide because it’s probably something that is a problem throughout” (P 6). Another participant agreed, stating that, “it needs to be higher up. The company needs to change the policies to get more women into the higher roles of the grocery store chain” (P 10). While senior management should be held accountable for major changes within grocery stores, it also appears
that the issue of occupational gender segregation has not been raised as a major concern by the union, by the employees or by women managers. One participant made the following comment, “I don’t think it crosses their mind to make that an issue. And it hasn’t come up in any way that management has had to deal with it” (P 8). Despite the fact that the women in this study systematically discussed the gendered division of work within and between departments, most seem to feel powerless to change the traditional gendered roles and policies that hinder women’s progression. Without any pressure to address the issue of occupational gender segregation, management has no reason to make any changes in the workplace, especially given that, on the surface, they adhere to the equal opportunity employment standard.

**Challenging Barriers**

The women in this study were asked what barriers must be removed to make the grocery industry a better environment for women. Many discussed the lack of opportunity and that women need be given a chance. As one participant noted, “Just give women a chance to do what they want to do. If they want to change departments to try a different department, let them” (P 6). Another believed that qualifications should trump seniority, “I just think everyone should be looked at equally. It should be qualifications trump all” (P 12). The women want opportunities to demonstrate the skills and abilities they have gained throughout their careers in the grocery store, but occupational gender segregation prevents them from doing so.

In order for there to be more opportunity in grocery stores, one of the participants felt strongly that women themselves needed to change, “What has to change are women. We have to help each other. I think it has to change in the home, in schools. Traditional gender roles will not change unless it starts with you. It’s not just in grocery stores; it has to change at home too” (P 11). Clearly, some of the participants believed that women have to stop engaging in a
socialization process that upholds and instills the traditional gendered roles in childhood. And, as this participant adeptly observed, it is wider socialization processes that need to change and not just the practices of one industry, though change in individual workplaces and industries also needs to occur. Indeed, if the grocery store industry provided significant opportunities for more women to fill traditionally male-dominated occupations, the women who benefit from these new possibilities might socialize their children in ways that would help break down traditional gendered norms and expectations.

**Conclusion**

Many of the women in this study adhere to socially prescribed gender roles. For example, several women indicated that heavy lifting was a man’s job, which justifies them holding certain positions in grocery stores; they completely discounted the amount of heavy lifting that women do on a daily basis in female-dominated jobs in grocery stores. The arguments put forth by human capital theory are also similar to those used by women to justify their lack of pursuit of full-time employment. However, contrary to what human capital theory argues, several of the women in this study did invest a significant amount of time in skill development through educational programs, but they did not receive adequate recognition or compensation for their investment. While many of the women felt strongly that the gendered occupational roles are unfair, we nonetheless see a decline in gender solidarity once women progress into management. This is consistent with the literature, which shows that gender solidarity weakens beyond class lines.

This chapter also explored possible avenues that could diminish occupational gender solidarity. The women were asked if they believe the union or management should be responsible for addressing this issue. Most of the women, including the manager and union
representatives, concluded that eliminating barriers to segregation must be a top down approach, and that management is therefore most responsible for ensuring greater opportunities for women in the workplace. However, the likelihood that management will address workplace inequality is slim and, consequently, the cycle of devaluing women’s work continues.
Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions

This research was guided by a socialist feminist perspective that seeks to give a voice to marginalized individuals. The analysis that was undertaken allowed for an in-depth understanding of the persistence of occupational gender segregation under contemporary capitalism. This thesis argues that many women are employed in non-standard work arrangements as surplus labourers by capitalist organizations to provide cheap, expendable labour (Fine 2002; Luxton 2001; Zeytinoglu et al. 2004). A standard employment relationship can be understood to mean full-time work with standard hours, benefits and job security, whereas a non-standard work relationship is characterized by part-time, casual or temporary work with limited benefits and little to no job security (Vosko 2006; Fine 2002; Zeytinoglu et al. 2004).

Women in the retail sector, and specifically the grocery store industry, are typically hired in non-standard work arrangements, a situation that affects both their economic and social status (Jackson 2003; Vosko 2006; Vosko and Clark 2009). This thesis has shown that women are still negatively affected by occupational gender segregation and that the devaluation of women’s work still places them in a subordinate role, often forcing them to engage in non-standard precarious work.

Historically, the grocery store industry was labour intensive, requiring a substantial number of workers to maintain store operations. As the grocery store industry became more consolidated, larger capitalist organizations began to deskill grocery store work and introduce non-standard work arrangements (Boothman 2011; Zeytinoglu et al. 2004). The work became more restricted to simple tasks (Webster 2004) and the gendering of jobs became more entrenched. The women who participated in this study discussed the gendering of tasks and departments and pointed out that, throughout the grocery chain for which they work, most
departments are either female or male-dominated. Specifically, the women noted that the front-end, cut fruit, deli, bakery and floral departments are female dominated, and the grocery, meat and produce departments are male dominated. They also pointed out that interdepartmental segregation was often present, with women being required to do the “fiddly” tasks and front-line service work while men are given tasks that require more skill and physical labour. This is consistent with the literature on socialization theory, which highlights that women are socialized to be more nurturing than men and are consequently more suited for front-line service work (Adams and Welsh 2008; Reskin 1993; Blackwell 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002; Anker 1997; Lester 2008). While socialization has played a role in keeping women clustered in some occupations and largely absent from male-dominated jobs (Moore 1995), socialization alone cannot account for ongoing gender segregation in the workplace and labour market.

Participants’ acceptance of this state of affairs appears to be reinforced by a belief in biological determinism, with many alluding to biological differences to explain why women were not represented in some departments. Biological determinism plays a significant role in how occupational gender segregation is rationalized. For example, as Armstrong and Armstrong (1994) explain, some proponents of this perspective argue that men prefer physical tasks whereas women prefer to perform tasks that are more nurturing and caring. This rhetoric was used by many of the participants to explain why women are under-represented in certain departments and why they are not given certain tasks. However, as several of the participants discussed during the interviews, women are required to perform tasks on a daily and weekly basis in the grocery stores that require a substantial amount of physical labour. These contradictory explanations given by participants are consistent with findings from other studies that conclude that physical
characteristics cannot be used as the main reason for upholding occupational gender segregation (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994).

Many of the women moved back and forth between biology and socialization to explain the persistence of occupational gender segregation. It is argued in the literature that socialization in early childhood and ongoing socialization by the educational system and within the workplace can have a significant impact on women’s occupational attainment (Adams and Welsh 2008; Lester 2008; Reskin 1993; Marini and Brinton 1984) and also serves to reinforce entrenched gender roles instead of fostering a questioning and a challenging of these roles as a step toward improving women’s economic position (Armstrong and Armstrong 1994; Lester 2008; Mason and Murdrack 1996). This is demonstrated throughout this study with women often stating that other women do not want to work in the grocery, meat or produce departments because of the heavy lifting. Also, when the women pointed to socialization as a significant reason for not integrating into other departments, they failed to recognize how their belief itself also perpetuated the gendered norms and unwittingly influenced other women employees as to what tasks they should perform. While many of the women cited biology or socialization as a reason for the persistence of occupational gender segregation, five women discussed family obligations as a significant barrier to occupational progression.

According to human capital theory, women are more likely to engage in work that complements their stereotypical skill set and allows them to fulfill their domestic duties (Blackwell 2001; Reskin 1993; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002; Anker 1997; Corcoran et al. 1984). This study has found that women are constrained by their domestic responsibilities in two ways. First, women who would like to advance are constrained by their employers using domestic responsibilities as a reason to limit their advancement. Second, other women choose
not to advance because they feel that they cannot reconcile the increased or variable hours of work with their domestic responsibilities. This finding is consistent with the literature on non-standard work which demonstrates that women are often forced into part-time work to accommodate their family responsibilities, which hinder their ability to work full-time (Jackson 2010; Cranford et al. 2006).

Forcing women into part-time labour also devalues their skills (Blackwell 2001; Anker 1997; Moller and Li 2009). Several of the women in this study who have been forced to take part-time employment to fulfill their domestic responsibilities have education and skills that are now outdated and unmarketable. For example, four out of the twelve women interviewed had a college education and three women attended university but did not graduate. Many of the women mentioned that they had lost their previous full-time jobs or were unable to find employment within their field and consequently were forced to keep the job they had held in high school or find a similar type of position out of economic necessity. According to human capital theory, women’s leaves of absence from work and their more limited educational attainment and skills explain why they make a rational choice to pursue part-time work (Anker 1997; Blackwell 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2002). However, as shown in this study, women rarely made the rational choice to enter into a precarious work situation because of their domestic responsibilities. Rather, women become expendable once their skills have been devalued, a situation that forces them to accept precarious employment.

Occupational gender segregation has had a significant impact on women’s socioeconomic status. A lack of opportunity, the persistence of an old boys club, family obligations, the stress of the job, favouritism and seniority impede women’s upward mobility. The lack of opportunity for women to gain experience in other unionized positions can be partially attributable to gendered
norms. The undervaluing of women’s labour power because of the perception that women have limited skills or have skills that are considered feminine and not particularly marketable have severely impeded women’s ability to gain further opportunities (Muszyanky 1996). While two of the women interviewed expressed a desire to enter management, they soon realized that the path to promotion was unclear. They were not given specific instructions on how to become qualified to be a manager and indicated that they were passed over in favour of male counterparts with comparable qualifications. A similar situation existed in the case of unionized positions, with participants citing cases where they were not provided with the opportunity to progress into full-time male-dominated positions despite their qualifications. These findings are consistent with the literature on vertical segregation which demonstrates that, simply because of their gender, women are often overlooked for positions for which they are qualified (Guy and Newman 2004; Dex 1985; Woodfield 2007). This segregation is further entrenched because women are typically not as highly valued as their male coworkers, which hinders women’s upward mobility (Woodfield 2007)

The persistence of the “old boys club” is well documented in this study, with participants often stating that men display high gender solidarity, another factor that hinders women’s progression. This is in contrast to female gender solidarity, which the literature argues diminishes between women of different classes (Penner et al. 2012). Indeed, women in positions of power in the grocery store industry do not demonstrate gender solidarity; rather they uphold the unequal distribution of rewards and the devaluation of women’s work (Penner et al. 2012; Fajak and Haslam 1998). As participants in this study indicated, women who make it into management often adopt the ‘queen bee syndrome’ and do not demonstrate gender solidarity towards part-time women workers.
According to the literature, family obligations and domestic roles also limit women’s ability to gain full-time employment (Blackwell 2001; Webster 2004; Jackson 2010; Cranford 2006 et al. 2006; Vosko 2006). Two of women interviewed discussed family obligations as a specific barrier to obtaining full guaranteed hours. It can be argued that low occupational attainment and the lack of motivation of many of these women to pursue less precarious employment are influenced by their early and ongoing socialization that serves to legitimate women’s proper place. Perhaps more important though, is the persistence of societal structures that keep women in subordinate roles (Moore 1995; Boxer 2000; Friedman et al. 1987).

The stress of the job was also documented in this study as a barrier to promotion. However, it was not a significant theme with only three participants indicating that more responsibility and the increased number of hours deterred them from applying for more advanced positions. In addition, it should be noted that the two participants who discussed the stress of the job as a deterrent for advancement were both over the age of 50. Consequently, this study suggests that the perceived stress of the job is not a strong explanation for women choosing not to pursue advancement opportunities.

Favouritism was cited by the participants as another barrier to women’s progression in the workplace, although this issue affected both women and men. Several women mentioned that managers favoured some employees over others for personal reasons rather than because of their qualifications. Therefore, it appears that while favouritism does play a role in hindering an employee’s upward mobility, it does so for both women and men.

Seniority is designed to protect against favouritism and unequal progression within a company (Moller and Li 2009). However, seniority often has the opposite effect on women’s upward mobility because women are over-represented in occupations that require little training.
and have limited opportunities for advancement (Moller and Li 2009). My study revealed that seniority is a significant barrier for women, with many pointing to the exceptionally long period of time it took to process requests for transfer to full-time employment. In addition, in order to advance into unionized positions, workers must also demonstrate skills and ability, and be high on the seniority list. Participants felt that women were disadvantaged when trying to move into full-time positions. As the literature reveals, occupational gender segregation has impacted women’s ability to gain recognized skills (Gaskell 1991; Armstrong and Laxar 2006; England 2010) and consequently undermines the gender neutrality of seniority policies.

The impediments to women's advancement are further exacerbated by the failure of both the union and management to recognize and address structural barriers as well as overt harassment and abuse towards women. A key structural problem is the gender pay gap that persists despite the introduction of pay equity policies (Fortin and Huberman 2002). As the literature argues, pay equity policies that have been adopted by management only address horizontal segregation and have little, if any, impact on occupational gender segregation, which traps women in low-skilled part-time occupations (Fortin and Huberman 2002; Fudge and McDermott 1991; Baker and Fortin 2000). In addition, unions play a significant part in the gendering of jobs, often collectively bargaining in ways that reinforce gendered societal norms that make it difficult for women to take advantage of progression opportunities and also make it difficult to decrease the gender pay gap (Jenkins et al. 2002; Jackson 2004). Findings from this study are consistent with the literature that points to gender segregation as a leading cause of the gender pay gap (Baker and Fortin 2000; Jackson 2004). Several participants mentioned the unequal pay structure among full-time department heads and indicated that male-dominated department head positions get paid based on volume of sales compared to female-dominated
department heads who get paid according to length of service. This situation resulted in men being paid at a higher rate than women.

Not only must women in grocery stores deal with unequal workplace structures, but they must also encounter a hostile work environment. In this study, many women reported both documented and undocumented instances of harassment and abuse, and cited the failure of management and the union to effectively address workplace violence and harassment. Women have suffered from male domination, which subordinates and disempowers them, and also leaves them open to greater exploitation (Muszynski 1996). It is clear that women in this study felt disempowered given that many did not report instances of abuse or harassment because of a strong belief that neither management nor the union would address the issue. As discussed in Chapter 5, one participant who talked about a situation where a complaint was filed expressed disgust that the guilty individual was only moved to another store instead of being fired under the workplace violence and harassment policy. Indeed, the inconsistent reporting of workplace violence and harassment cases and the failed attempts to discipline an individual when a woman has reported a case of violence and harassment has left many of the participants feeling disempowered. The disempowerment of women, which is understood to be attributable to a complex interplay of male domination and capitalist exploitation, has made it difficult for women to challenge occupational gender segregation through collective action.

This study demonstrates that despite the continued change in the organization of work, occupational gender segregation still persists in unionized grocery stores. According to the literature on work, increased productivity, expansion of duties within a specific job and more flexible hours have been key features in the changing organization of work (Jackson, 2010). While each of these factors has had an impact in unionized grocery stores to some extent, this
study demonstrates that they have had little impact on occupational gender segregation. These changes have been pervasive in the grocery stores and have served to uphold the gendered division of work in the different departments. For example, the literature highlights that shifts in the employment relationship have led to a decrease in full-time jobs and an increase in part-time work (Vosko 20016). In grocery stores, the distribution of full-time and part-time work is highly gendered, as demonstrated throughout this study. As discussed in Chapter 4, most of the full-time positions are held by men with many female-dominated departments having only two or less full-time positions. This emphasizes that women have a devalued status in the labour market and that they are used as part-time expendable labour (Muszynski 1996; Lillevik et al. 2004; Lightman and Gingrich 2012). Women thus encounter more difficulty finding full-time positions that provide stable income and regular hours of work. Workplace changes need to be understood within the broader context of increased competition on a global scale, higher levels of capitalization and productivity, and ongoing deskilling (Jackson 2010). These trends have had a significant impact on men’s work (Jackson 2010), but women, the reserve labourers, are being further marginalized and pushed into more precarious work relationships. Thus, occupational gender segregation is still persisting in grocery stores and the increased competition in the labour market is only serving to further entrench this practice, pushing women into even more precarious forms work.

**Contributions to the Literature**

This study contributes to the literature on occupational gender segregation. Studies that have been conducted on this topic have covered a range of industries and businesses, but none, to this researcher’s knowledge, focused on unionized grocery stores in southwestern Ontario. This study also adds to the broader literature on the persistence of occupational gender segregation by
discussing the failure of management and union policies surrounding discrimination. In addition, this research draws attention to women’s lack of knowledge about policies pertaining to discrimination and workplace violence and harassment. The study provided space for women in unionized grocery stores to discuss their unique narrative of occupational gender segregation, thereby playing a role, however, small in empowering women, which is consistent with standpoint feminism. Overall, the study makes an important contribution to the literature because it demonstrates that occupational gender segregation is still entrenched in some workplaces and that women’s unequal status in the labour market negatively impacts their overall socioeconomic status.

**Limitations of this Study**

Because this study is based on a small sample that included only women who identified as being white, it understates the high incidence of racism that is generally associated with precarious work, as documented in the broader literature. Additionally, the small number of union representatives interviewed, mainly due to the unwillingness of the UFCW business representative to discuss occupational gender segregation, impeded a greater discussion of union policies. Similarly, the small number of managers interviewed made it difficult to develop a fuller understanding of women’s experiences in managerial positions as well as issues such as gender solidarity. The focus of this study was on part-time precarious work, but the researcher acknowledges that occupational gender segregation is present in full-time work and in high status occupations. In addition, this study was limited to one grocery store chain due to the snowball sampling technique that was utilized. It is recognized that the experiences of workers in other grocery store chains may be somewhat different.

**Further Research**
Future research in this field should focus on the various forms of gender discrimination that are still present in the grocery store industry. The hidden gendered pay gap and the lack of opportunity for women to gain more recognizable skills severely limit women’s socioeconomic status, and these dimensions of women’s experiences in grocery stores need to receive further attention. In addition, the concentration of women in certain departments and the many incidences of harassment and abuse are exceedingly troubling, and this reality should be further researched. Research in the grocery store setting should focus on creating a safe environment for women to talk about their experiences and become empowered through collective sharing, as well as developing policies to ensure that women have greater opportunities for advancement and that their workplace is free of harassment.

Further research in a wider range of industries where occupational gender segregation is persistent would create a larger body of knowledge that could serve to influence policy. In Canada, research on the grocery store industry is limited and it would be advantageous to have more research on occupational gender segregation. More research on this topic would ensure further knowledge and analysis to help challenge and change entrenched gendered norms and decrease occupational gender segregation.
References


Crowley, Martha. 2013. "Gender, the Labour Process and Dignity at Work." *Social Forces* 91(4):1209-1238.


*Relations Industrielles* 59(3):516-543.


Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear [participant],

I am conducting a study for my Master’s thesis requirement at the University of Guelph. I am looking at occupational gender segregation in the workplace and I am hoping that you will want to participate in this study. The main focus of this research is to examine the extent to which gender segregation has persisted in unionized grocery stores, whether gender segregation has impacted women’s socio-economic status and opportunities, and whether union and management policies have been effective in addressing these inequalities. The study will give women a chance to discuss their lived experiences, which will help to better understand various issues surrounding occupational gender segregation.

If you choose to participate in this study, I would ask that you be available for an interview/focus group that will take approximately one to two hours of your time. The location of the interview/focus group is yet to be determined. This study is entirely voluntary and you do not need to participate if you feel uncomfortable discussing this subject.

If you have any questions please feel free to ask.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Claire Davies
MA Candidate
University of Guelph
Appendix B: Consent Forms

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Female Job Ghetto: Women’s Voices on Occupational Gender Segregation in Unionized Ontario Grocery Stores
Unionized Women
(Interview)

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Claire Davies, from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph. This research is part of Claire’s MA thesis. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Claire at cdavie01@uoguelph.ca or 519-473-3212. In addition, you may contact Dr. Vivian Shalla, her thesis advisor, at vshalla@uoguelph.ca or 519-824-4120 ext. 52195.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this research is to examine the extent to which gender segregation has persisted in unionized grocery stores, whether this has impacted women’s socio-economic status and opportunities, and whether union and management policies have been effective in addressing these inequalities. The study will give women a chance to discuss their lived experiences and shed light on issues surrounding occupational gender segregation.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Interview
Participate in a face-to-face interview. A set of questions will guide the interview, but you will be provided with the opportunity to describe in detail your experience. The interview will last approximately one hour and be voice recorded for transcription purposes and to ensure accuracy.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

You may feel some level of discomfort or embarrassment discussing situations that you have experienced in the workplace. We will strive to create a non-judgemental atmosphere to minimize this risk. In addition, you are not required to answer any questions or talk about any particular experience that makes you feel uncomfortable. You were recruited outside of working
hours and without the knowledge of management. In the interest of privacy and confidentiality, you are asked not to divulge any information about any other participant in this study.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

By participating in this study, you will help develop a greater understanding of the nature of inequality in grocery stores in Ontario. This study will also contribute to the growing academic literature on occupational gender segregation experienced by women in service-sector jobs. This study will also draw attention to the role of unions and management in the grocery-store setting, and highlight areas that need further attention to create equal opportunity for women.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will not receive any monetary payment for this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

The interview recordings will be transferred to a password-protected computer the same day they are recorded. After transferring the data to a computer, the researcher will permanently delete the audio file from the voice recorder. All data stored on the computer will be secured by storing the information in a password-protected file. Once the transcription of the audio files has been completed, the researcher will delete the audio files from her computer. The names appearing in the transcription will have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator
University of Guelph
437 University Centre
Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Fax: (519) 821-5236
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “The Female Job Ghetto: Women’s Voices on Occupational Gender Segregation in Unionized Ontario Grocery Stores” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

____________________________________
Signature of Participant ___________________ Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

____________________________________
Name of Witness (please print)

____________________________________
Signature of Witness ___________________ Date
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Female Job Ghetto: Women’s Voices on Occupational Gender Segregation in Unionized Ontario Grocery Stores

Union Representative

(Interview)

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Claire Davies, from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph. This research is part of Claire’s MA thesis. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Claire at cdavie01@uoguelph.ca or 519-473-3212. In addition, you may contact Dr. Vivian Shalla, her thesis advisor, at vshalla@uoguelph.ca or 519-824-4120 ext. 52195.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this research is to examine the extent to which gender segregation has persisted in unionized grocery stores, whether this has impacted women’s socio-economic status and opportunities, and whether union and management policies have been effective in addressing these inequalities. The study will give women a chance to discuss their lived experiences and shed light on issues surrounding occupational gender segregation.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Interviews
Participate in a face-to-face interview. A set of questions will guide the interview, but you will be provided with the opportunity to discuss issues that you consider relevant pertaining to occupational gender segregation in grocery stores. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your knowledge of how the Union has dealt with occupational gender segregation. The interviews will last approximately one hour and be voice recorded for transcription purposes.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

A potential risk with this study is the loss of privacy. In order to maximize privacy, the audio file will be deleted after the interview is transcribed onto a password-protected computer and all signifying details will be deleted from the transcription. In addition, you can refuse to answer any of the questions asked and the study is entirely voluntary. You were recruited outside of working hours and without the knowledge of management. In the interest of privacy and
confidentiality, you are asked not to divulge any information about any other participant in this study.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

By participating in this study, you will help develop a greater understanding of the nature of inequality in grocery stores in Ontario. This study will also contribute to the growing academic literature on occupational gender segregation experienced by women in service-sector jobs. This study will also draw attention to the role of unions and management in the grocery-store setting, and highlight areas that need further attention to create equal opportunity for women.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will not receive any monetary payment for this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Due to the small sample size for union representatives, there is the potential for confidentiality to be diminished. However, every effort will be made to erase all identifying data to maximize confidentiality.

The interview recordings will be transferred to a password-protected computer the same day they are recorded. After transferring the data to a computer, the researcher will permanently delete the audio file from the voice recorder. All data stored on the computer will be secured by storing the information in a password-protected file. Once the transcription of the audio files has been completed, the researcher will delete the audio files from her computer. The names appearing in the transcription will have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

**Research Ethics Coordinator**  **Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606**
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “The Female Job Ghetto: Women’s Voices on Occupational Gender Segregation in Unionized Ontario Grocery Stores” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

____________________________________
Signature of Participant

____________________________________
Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

____________________________________
Name of Witness (please print)

____________________________________
Signature of Witness

____________________________________
Date
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Female Job Ghetto: Women’s Voices on Occupational Gender Segregation in Unionized Ontario Grocery Stores
Managers
(Interview)

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Claire Davies, from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph. This research is part of Claire’s MA thesis. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Claire at cdavie01@uoguelph.ca or 519-473-3212. In addition, you may contact Dr. Vivian Shalla, her thesis advisor, at vshalla@uoguelph.ca or 519-824-4120 ext. 52195.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this research is to examine the extent to which occupational gender segregation has persisted in unionized grocery stores, whether this has impacted women’s socio-economic status and opportunities, and whether union and management policies have been effective in addressing these inequalities. The study will give women a chance to discuss their lived experiences and shed light on issues surrounding occupational gender segregation.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Interviews
Participate in a face-to-face interview. A set of questions will guide the interview, but you will be provided with the opportunity to discuss issues that you consider relevant pertaining to occupational gender segregation in grocery stores. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your experience with occupational gender segregation and whether management policies have been effective in addressing this issue. The interviews will last approximately one hour and be voice recorded for transcription purposes.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
You may feel some level of discomfort or embarrassment discussing situations that you have experienced in the workplace. A potential risk with this study is the loss of privacy. In order to maximize privacy, the audio file will be deleted after the interview is transcribed onto a password-protected computer and all signifying details will be deleted from the transcription. In addition, you are not obligated to answer any questions or talk about any particular experience.
that makes you feel uncomfortable. You were recruited outside of working hours and without the knowledge of other managers. In the interest of privacy and confidentiality, you are asked not to divulge any information about any other participant in this study.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

By participating in this study, you will help develop a greater understanding of the nature of inequality in grocery stores in Ontario. This study will also contribute to the growing academic literature on occupational gender segregation experienced by women in service-sector jobs. This study will also draw attention to the role of unions and management in the grocery-store setting, and highlight areas that need further attention to create equal opportunity for women.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will not receive any monetary payment for this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Due to the small sample size for managers, there is the potential for confidentiality to be diminished. However, every effort will be made to erase all identifying data to maximize confidentiality.

The interview recordings will be transferred to a password-protected computer the same day they are recorded. After transferring the data to a computer, the researcher will permanently delete the audio file from the voice recorder. All data stored on the computer will be secured by storing the information in a password-protected file. Once the transcription of the audio files has been completed, the researcher will delete the audio files from her computer. The names appearing in the transcription will have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study “The Female Job Ghetto: Women’s Voices on Occupational Gender Segregation in Unionized Ontario Grocery Stores” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

____________________________________
Signature of Participant

_______________________________
Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

____________________________________
Name of Witness (please print)

____________________________________
Signature of Witness

_______________________________
Date
Appendix C: Interview Guides

Interview Guide for Unionized Women

In this interview, I would like to discuss in greater depth the inequality you face in the workplace. Please feel free to speak openly and candidly about your experiences and to elaborate on any points you feel are important. As with the focus group, your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Today is [date] and I am sitting with [name] at [location].

Initial Identifying Questions

What is your current position at your work and did you apply for that position?

How long have you worked at your current position?

Economic Opportunity

Why did you choose to seek employment at a grocery store?

[Prompt] If you are working part-time, why did you choose to do so?

Do you have any reasonable expectation to gain fulltime with your current employer? If not, why?

Can you discuss any barriers that exist for you to gain fulltime employment or to advance to a managerial role?

[Prompt] What qualifications or skills do you need to become a manager? Would you be able to obtain those skills and qualifications in your current position?

In your opinion, are women at a disadvantage to progressing up the corporate ladder in the grocery store? If so, why?

Status in the Workplace

Can you discuss if there is a hierarchy of jobs in the store and which gender generally occupies those positions?

[Prompt] Which unionized job do you think has the most authority in the store and who has the least?

In your experience have you noticed that departments favour a particular gender over another? If yes, can you discuss why one gender would be desirable over another in certain departments?
Have you ever experienced any anxiety or stress relating to a situation of perceived discrimination in the workplace?

[Prompt] Have you been a victim of workplace bullying or workplace harassment from coworkers or supervisory staff? Did you report this to management or the Union and what was your experience?

Social Status

How do you think the community views your role as a worker in a grocery store?

[Prompt] Do you think they would treat you differently if you had a different role in the grocery store?

Do you have any skills or qualifications that would enable you to gain employment in another sector but are currently restricted from this employment because of family commitments?

[Prompt] In what ways, if any, do you think your family and other members of the community would treat you differently if you were employed in the field you have skills and qualifications for?

Role of the Union

Can you describe the role of Union Stewards in your store?

In what ways has the Union been effective in stopping discrimination in the workplace?

Can you discuss any situations in which the union was ineffective in stopping discrimination in the workplace?

[Prompt] You described earlier the gendered makeup of a grocery store, in what ways, if any, has the union tried to stop this gendered division?

Role of Management

Have you every reported a case of gender discrimination to management? If yes, what were the circumstances and outcome?

In your opinion, does management hire certain genders for certain departments? If yes, to the best of your knowledge is this common practice?

Do you believe that management effectively addresses the issue of specific jobs for specific genders?

Future Recommendations
Can you discuss what barriers need to be removed for women to be integrated into higher unionized position within the company or management roles.

Should the Union or Management team be responsible for ensuring the removal of these barriers?
Interview Guide for Union Representatives

In this interview, I would like to discuss the Union’s position on occupational gender segregation and how the Union addresses this issue. Please feel free to speak openly and candidly about the subject and elaborate on any points you feel are important. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Today is [date] and I am sitting with [name] at [location].

Initial Identifying Questions

What is your position with the company and how long have you been in that position?

How long have you been a union steward?

Are you a fulltime or part-time employee and union steward?

Unions Understanding of Economic Opportunity

Can you please discuss how the collective agreement and seniority ensures that there is equal opportunity for employees?

[Prompt] Does the collective agreement state how many fulltime employees should be in each store? If so, can you discuss where you would typically find the most fulltime employees?

Does the collective agreement outline how many female to male fulltime employees there should be in one store?

[Prompt] If it is found that this ratio is unequal, are there any policies to address this?

Does the Union have any policies that specifically address occupational gender segregation? If yes, can you please describe them? If no, why do you think the Union does not look at this issue?

Women’s Status in the Workplace

Have you, as a Union Steward, had to file a compliant on behalf of a female employee who did not get full time work, temporary or otherwise, when she was entitled to it? Can you discuss the cases in general terms and without giving names?

Can you describe the gendered makeup of a store? In which departments are men typically found and in which departments are women typically found?

Role of the Union

Can you describe the role of Union Stewards in your store?
In what ways has the Union been effective in eliminating gender discrimination in the workplace?

[Prompt] Can you discuss the success of employment equity policies?

Can you discuss any situations in which the union was ineffective in eliminating gender discrimination in the workplace?

[Prompt] We discussed earlier the gendered division within a grocery store by department, how has the union addressed this?

Does the Union have any policies that directly discuss gendered hiring practices by management?

[Prompt] Can you discuss any changes to the collective agreement that the Union has made or argued for in order to address this issue?

Why are some departmental head positions paid on volume, while other positions are paid on length of service only?

[Prompt] Why is there not a standard pay scale for fulltime department heads?

**Role of Managers**

Have you ever been present when an Unionized employee was reporting a case of gender discrimination to management? If yes, what were the circumstances and outcome?

In your opinion, does management hire certain genders for certain departments? If yes, to the best of your knowledge is this common practice?

Do you believe that management effectively addresses the issue of specific jobs for specific genders?

**Future Recommendations**

Can you discuss what barriers, if any, prevent the union from addressing these gender inequalities and gender segmentation in the workplace.

Can you discuss what barriers need to be removed for women to be integrated into higher unionized position within the company or management roles.

Should the Union or Management team be responsible for ensuring the removal of these barriers?
Interview Guide for Managers

In this interview, I would like to discuss your experience in becoming a manager and also corporate policies that address gender discrimination. Please feel free to speak openly and candidly about your experiences and to elaborate on any points you feel are important. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Today is [date] and I am sitting with [name] at [location].

Initial Identifying Questions

What is your position with the company and how long have you been in that position?

Economic Opportunity

Can you discuss how you advanced in your career and if you encountered any barriers along the way?

[Prompt] What policies have to be followed in order for an employee to gain fulltime?

[Prompt] Did you have to gain any additional skills or qualification in order to advance? Do your male counterparts have the same skills and qualifications?

What are the future opportunities for career advancement? What further skills and qualifications are required?

Within your experience, which department would foster the most amount of successful management candidates and why?

[Prompt] Can you discuss if there is a hierarchal structure in the store among unionized employees?

[Prompt] Can you elaborate on why certain departments lead to more management positions while others do not?

Can you describe the gendered makeup of a store? In which departments are men typically found and in which departments are women typically found?

[Prompt] Which departments typically have the most part-time employees and which departments typically have the least?

[Prompt] Which department heads are usually male and which are female?

When managers begin the hiring process, can you discuss how managers decide to put certain individuals in certain departments?
[Prompt] We discussed which department heads are usually specific genders, to the best of your knowledge is this company wide?

[Prompt] Are there any management policies in place to address this issue?

**Status within the Workplace**

Can you talk about any experiences you have had involving discrimination in the workplace based on gender?

[Prompt] Have any other managers or senior management said anything demeaning or derogatory towards you?

[Prompt] Have there been any situations in which you felt singled out based on your gender?

Have you witnessed or heard of any situations where a manager was harassing a unionized employee?

[Prompt] What was the circumstances and outcome of that situation?

In what ways if any, do you think you are treated differently from your male coworkers?

[Prompt] Do unionized employees get treated differently based on their gender?

[Prompt] In departments with a mixture of genders do you generally see a certain task assigned to men or women?

Are you aware of any situations of racism in the workplace?

[Prompt] Does race stop an individual from progressing in the company?

Is age a barrier to progressing in the company?

[Prompt] Do you think age discrimination exists when hiring unionized employees?

**Role of Unions**

Can you describe the role of Union Stewards in your store?

Can you please discuss how the collective agreement and seniority ensures that there is equal opportunity for employees?

[Prompt] Does the collective agreement state how many fulltime employees should be in each store?
[Prompt] Can you discuss where you would typically find the most fulltime employees?

In what ways has the Union been effective in stopping discrimination in the workplace?

[Prompt] Can you discuss the success of employment equity policies?

Can you discuss any situations in which the union was ineffective in stopping discrimination in the workplace?

[Prompt] We discussed earlier the gendered division within a grocery store by department, to the best of your knowledge, how has the union addressed this?

**Role of Management**

What policies are in place to stop workplace discrimination and harassment?

[Prompt] Does management have any specific policies that address occupational gender segregation?

Can you discuss any instances that female employees reported to you or other members of the management team about gender discrimination?

[Prompt] What policies are in place to mitigate gender discrimination amongst unionized staff?

Can you discuss how these policies, if any, address the issue of occupational gender segregation?

[Prompt] We discussed earlier the gendered hiring practices of managers, can you explain why this does this not fall under gender discrimination?

**Future Recommendations**

Can you discuss what barriers need to be removed for women to be integrated into higher unionized position within the company or management roles?

Should the Union or Management team be responsible for ensuring the removal of these barriers?

Is there anything else you would like to discuss?