

# Research frontiers in comparative gender equality policy: contributions from the study of equal employment policy practice in France and Canada

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**Abstract** The first goal of this special issue is to showcase francophone cutting-edge research on the implementation and practice of gender equality policy that uses qualitative tools of comparison in the analysis of equal employment policy implementation in France and Canada, including Quebec. Its second goal is to highlight the methodological and theoretical contributions the articles in the special issue make to research and theory-building on gender equality policy inside and outside of France. Ultimately, therefore, the special issue aims to advance the larger scholarly agenda of Comparative Gender Equality Policy Studies, a new international field of study within the purview of policy studies and political science.

**Keywords** Gender equality policy · Equal employment policy · Comparative public policy · Comparative Gender Equality Policy · French gender policy · Canadian gender policy · Quebec gender policy · Intersectionality · Policy implementation · Comparable worth · Equal pay

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This special issue is the result of the convergence of two developments in the study of gender equality policy in postindustrial democracies. In the summer of 2016, the Institut Emilie du Châtelet held a two-day international conference on discrimination, equality and policy action in a multidisciplinary perspective, “Agir pour l’égalité”, with 25 research papers presented in French.<sup>1</sup> The team that put together the conference sought to hold an international meeting that brought together franco-phone and non-French researchers to discuss their work on public action designed to eliminate gender and non-gender-based-discrimination, e.g., discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, both feminist and non feminist historical studies in France had highlighted how dominated groups, like women, sexual, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, were excluded from the political process of framing equality. Social movements, scientific research and public policy inside and outside of France have all contributed to the theorization of notions of equal opportunity, parity, discrimination and the development of diverse strategies of action that promote a passage to real equality.

In this perspective, the Paris conference sought to attract scholars who focused on policies and strategies that promoted equality and non discrimination through gender equality alone, or in tandem with other vectors of inequalities, and included a full range of policy tools— incentives, sanctions, equal treatment or positive/affirmative action—as a product of different cultural and/or institutional settings. The four research articles on Canada and France that follow were originally presented at this conference. Thus, these papers were delivered in the context of an effort to build a bridge between the often-separate worlds of feminist and non-feminist studies to tackle the thorny issues of persistent social inequalities and deep-seated discriminations in an intersectional perspective.<sup>3</sup>

Around the same time Paris conference, scholars working in the area of Comparative Gender Equality Policy Studies inside and outside of France increasingly called for more studies that focused on the stages of policy process that follow-on after a policy decision is taken—implementation, evaluation and policy impact (Mazur 2017; Blofield and Haas 2013; Engeli and Mazur 2018). They argued that a systematic comparative approach to the study of the crucial processes of “post adoption” was necessary to develop sound theory and understanding about the dynamics and

<sup>1</sup> For more on the Institute and the 2016 Conference go to <http://www.institutemilieduchatelet.org/colloques-2?y=2016>. Many thanks are due to the IEC for providing the funding for the translation of the four articles as well as to Sylvie Blumenkrantz, the General Secretary of the Institut Emilie du Châtelet, for the precious help she has given us all along in producing this special issue.

<sup>2</sup> The team included Jacqueline Laufer, a sociologist, Yannick L’Horty, an economist, Catherine Louveau, a sociologist from STAPS, Frédérique Pigeure, a specialist in management science, Florence Rochefort, a historian, Daniel Sabbagh, a political scientist, Patrick Simon, a sociologist and demographer.

<sup>3</sup> The relatively new concept of intersectionality, also referred to as gender equality+, contains the notion that systems of gender discrimination are interwoven with other systems of discrimination and inequality based on ethnicity, race, class, culture, religion and sexual orientation. It has increasingly become an essential analytical tool in gender studies. For the most recent comparative work on policy and intersectionality see the special issue edited by Lombardo et al. (2017).



determinants of the full range of gender equality policies across all sectors, in their full intersectional complexity in post industrial democracies.

The editors of this special issue, two French gender and policy scholars—Jacqueline Laufer and Frédérique Pigeyre and one US-based comparative gender policy scholar who also works on French policy—Amy Mazur—selected four papers from the 2016 Conference that conducted detailed analyses, over-time of the implementation and practice of a key sector of gender equality policy—equal employment—with multi-level and comparative perspectives in France and Canada (Quebec).

All four papers, translated from French into English for the special issue, represent cutting-edge research on gender, discrimination, intersectionality and public policy from the francophone scholarly world—both French and Canadian; research which is often not translated into English for an international audience. As Mazur and Revillard (2015) recently articulated, more French-language research needs to be translated in order to promote a better integration between francophone and non-francophone scholars and to better advance the international agenda for comparative gender equality policy studies. At the same time, an important internationalizing trend has already been on the rise among many francophone scholars who work on France in gender policy studies through their participation in international conferences and publication in English-language venues (Ibid). This special issue, therefore, also provides an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the dialog between French and English-language research on gender equality policy, particularly given that the lingua franca for Comparative Gender Equality Policy Studies is predominantly English. Thus, the Francophone gender policy analyses that follow have much to offer Comparative Gender Policy Studies in the context of the new field's turn toward implementation studies, and, these articles are no exception.

The first article, by Amy Mazur, Jacqueline Laufer and Frédérique Pigeyre, discusses the scientific opportunities for comparison the four research articles offer, identifies the three pathways to achieving gender equality in equal employment policy implementation from the study of equal employment implementation in Canada and France, and raises key research issues that come out of the comparative analysis of the six cases of policy implementation in the two countries. The next two articles focus on France at both the national and sub-national levels. Jacqueline Laufer examines the implementation of French national policy on equal employment or “égalité professionnelle”—equal pay, equal opportunity and positive action—since the first piece of legislation was adopted in 1972 to the present. Cécile Talbot then moves to the sub-national level by making a detailed analysis of the implementation of regional gender equality policy in paid employment from 2010 to 2015. Given France's membership in the European Union and the highly active EU policy on equal employment (Jacquot 2015), the EU supranational level and actors are necessarily included in both France-based analyses. Next, Louise Boivin assesses equal employment policy implementation at the sub-national level; this time in the context of Canada's federal system in the province of Quebec, from the adoption of the pay equity act in 1996 to the present. In the last article, Chantal Maillé conducts a multi-level analysis in Canada to determine to what degree intersectionality has been taken into account in gender-based policy analysis in the arena of employment by the federal government and in Quebec.



It is important to note that Comparative Public Policy and Politics research treats adjacent topics of policy change and implementation in democracies with typically no reference to this emerging feminist field of study despite the clear commonalities and overlaps (Mazur 2017; Mazur and Hoard 2014). Thus, this special issue also contributes to the better integration of gender-specific and gender-blind studies.

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