

## HOW WOMEN SURVIVE IN NON-TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS

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More women in our society have forged through existing social, cultural and historical barriers to claim their place in traditionally male dominated occupations. The penetration of these barriers has not been easy even with recent legal regulations and governmental encouragement. Formal barriers may be circumvented but informal barriers are more resistant. Women working in non-traditional, male dominated occupations are still faced with maintaining their achieved positions and navigating their advancement to higher ranks.

Although the number of women in the labor force has continued to increase through the years, the majority of women workers still begin and end their work careers in the more accepted "women's occupations", like teacher, nurse, waitress, secretary, domestic and bookkeeper. Even when inroads are made into non-traditional areas of work women routinely are relegated to the lower ranks at lower pay (Ritzer, 1977).

The literature abounds with reasons why women have been restricted from the full range of work alternatives (Stromberg and Harkness, 1978). Male discrimination, differential sex role socialization, and institutionalized sexism are often mentioned reasons why women *cannot* or *will not* enter certain occupations.

Yet, we know some women do, and are successful at their work. Some women have learned to deal with work related discrimination, on the job sexual harassment, and related personal frustration and exploitation. Many of these women have gained entrance and advancement with little aid from others. Their accomplishments are largely their own, grounded in strategies learned on the job through trial and error or by integrating lessons learned from past experiences.

Our question is how can women best survive in non-traditional, male dominated occupations? What general themes emerge from research across non-traditional occupational lines that provide insight into the social circumstances and social strategies that facilitate success?

### COMMON PROBLEMS AND AMELIORATIVE STRATEGIES

Three recurring socially based problems face most women working in male dominated, non-traditional occupations bridging all levels in the occupational structure. These common troubles include: 1) continual skepticism by male workers, 2) sexual harassment by males in the workplace, and 3) feeling of personal inadequacy.

### MANAGING MALE SKEPTICISM

Women in male dominated occupations are typically treated with caution and skepticism by their male co-workers. This reluctance on the part of males is to be expected. First, many males have had only limited work contact with women. Skepticism is part of the new experience. Women in *their* workplace are a new attraction, representing unique "novelties" of questionable worth. A young woman apprentice in the building construction industry put it this way, I feel "like something to talk about". It is the older men who frequently display this feeling. A journeyman electrician close to retirement after more than 40 years at his trade expressed his uneasiness when interviewed about women entering the building trades. He has always worked in a company of men from the time he first entered a boy's technical high school. He had never worked with a woman, could not envision relying on a woman in his dangerous work, and stated quite emphatically that he was glad he would never have to!

Doubt that women can do the job is the feeling expressed by many older, established males.

The differential socialization experienced by males and females in our society encourages this male skepticism. Many males have been taught to be strong and independent protectors of females. To be an established male in a traditional male occupation and to be suddenly confronted with a female co-worker can easily generate doubt.

A second source of male skepticism emerges from the threat that women may unknowingly create for some men. Robert Bell suggests that men in general are uneasy in the

presence of highly intelligent women in a way which they would not be with very intelligent men. . . . Most men probably react to career women as potential threats to themselves, and in this sense their opposition is based not on ideology but on vested interest (Bell, 1976:409). Young male workers are particularly threatened by female co-workers. These males are usually beginning their careers and are grappling with an uncertain status. Their stress is compounded when forced to compete with a female in a traditional male occupation. A woman physician reflecting on her medical school experience captured the tension involved here. A male student told her, "You realize that if you flunk out you've taken up space that a man could have had!" Not only are threats to the male ego involved calling forth questions of male superiority and women's traditional roles but the males feel a compulsion to excel in their competition with women in order to gain the expected praise from established male workers. A woman apprentice electrician reflects on this same conflict condition.

"I worked on a job with another apprentice. He was a small guy but kinda tough, you know, a lot of muscles and stuff. We would both see who could do the most - like showing off to the boss. It was funny. Like I was trying to do better than him. He really hated me, honest to God, like I don't think he would have worked that hard if he was just there."

This problem is compounded when male and female apprentices congregate at school. A classroom education is an important part of the training they receive and during the beginning of their apprenticeship they attend school one day each week along with some night classes. Under these conditions it becomes extremely difficult for a woman to "fit in", and relatively easy for the young males to harass and ostracize the woman making her situation even more uncomfortable. The same apprentice relates an incident that illuminates this tension.

"There was this guy at school, we just didn't get along. He hated me and I hated him. He said really rotten things to me. One day he asked if my husband ironed my clothes for me. I was so mad. I started crying. I was so mad I grabbed his shirt. And I was pulling his hair and grabbing his shirt and swearing saying the

worst words. I was really terrible. I never get like that, I couldn't believe it was me. I ripped his shirt off."

A woman executive suggests that in the business world it is also the younger males that are most threatened.

"I think women are a greater threat to men at a lower level than to men at middle and higher levels. At lower levels men seem to be threatened by everybody, think everybody is after their job (Sifford, 1976:4c)."

And this same threat is exhibited in the medical profession. According to a woman graduate of Harvard Medical School, "... men don't treat you as a colleague but as a threat. . . . The patient calls you "nurse" because you're a woman: the colleague expresses an interest in your work and then makes a crude pass, (and) the surgeons tell you to stay out of that specialty because women are too weak to stand up long enough to do major surgery." (Edelson, 1976).

A third reason for male skepticism can be traced to the male subcultures that dominate traditional male occupations. Male workers "do certain things together and discuss various topics using terms that are frequently considered not for women's ears. What they do, what they talk about, and how they say it are frequently regarded as off limits to females." Male subcultures serve as support groups for male workers and through their existence exclude women.

Women understand this exclusion and try to adapt to it. A woman who works for a large industrial organization commented that she is the only female manager in the organization who is a member of the Executives' Dining Room. Knowing that the men feel uncomfortable when she enters she always asks the hostess to seat her at a separate table so she will not impose on the men.

Within the building trades occupational culture is exclusively male oriented and male dominated. It has strong similarities to an army camp. Here you will find profanity, pin-up pictures, crude behavior (farting, chewing, spitting, blowing one's nose without the aid of a handkerchief), dirty clothes and body odor, drinking on the job, girl watching and sexually related jokes, stealing, urinating and defecating in open areas, and a range of related behaviors some persons may find repulsive

(Riemer, 1978). When women enter these settings some modifications are made by the men but typically it is the women who *must* adapt.

How do women in male dominated occupations cope with male skepticism? Women have chosen to over compensate in the face of male control. A woman supervisor for a large data processing organization stated, that competence is important. A woman engineer in a middle management position at a large industrial organization said: "The most important characteristic a woman manager can have is unassailable competence." Women agree that they must work harder to get the same recognition and promotion opportunity as men. Men expect a man to succeed while they expect a woman not to succeed.

With male workers continually scrutinizing their behavior coupled with a lack of sufficient role models, women are faced with a social situation that encourages the self-imposed development and enactment of excessive work demands. If male workers continue to question a woman's ability to carry out her duties, who will tell her when she has done enough? A woman construction apprentice expressed this continual need to prove herself.

A woman business executive expressed this same view. A woman "needs to be willing to get in and work twice as hard - if she's interested in moving toward the top - or else she should get out" (Sifford, 1976: 4c).

In the building construction industry where men are perhaps more resistant to women, tactics are employed by some women to offset these barriers. A woman carpenter from Washington, D.C. offered a number of these "survival strategies" for women in the building trades.

"After walking onto a site and finding a foreman, I never walk away from him until I've told him three times that I really want to work and that I'm a good worker.

If it's a federal job, I always ask him how many women are working on the site and whether there is discrimination. I always go to a site looking like a construction worker ready to work. That means wearing, dirty, baggy overalls, a hardhat and your tool belt slung over your shoulder. Once you get the job, never be late, never miss a day. This is an easy way to make points, because absenteeism runs rampant and many escape layoff be-

cause of a steady work record.

Don't let anyone help you with work you know you can handle yourself. If a foreman sees a guy doing some of your work, he'll think the woman can't do it herself and you'll get laid off earlier. If you let a man take work away from you, you'll look bad."

### CONTROLLING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

A second common problem facing women in male dominated occupations is sexual harassment. It is difficult to define sexual harassment in the workplace. The term has been used to include behavior ranging from casual flirtation to forcible rape (Silverman, 1977; Safron, 1976). Definitional criteria vary among working women across occupational lines. Some women are more tolerant or even encouraging of male sexual advances (Roy, 1974). A woman bank manager when asked if she ever encountered sexual comments such as jokes or teasing responded by laughing and saying, "Sure, but I kind of enjoy it." Other women may be offended by prolonged eye contact or an accidental touch. We may also assume that some women workers actively solicit sexual liaisons with superiors as a strategy for promotion or as a fun activity. Still others may be coerced into sexual practices with their superiors in order to keep their jobs, like the "fuck or fail" practice said to exist in academe (Munich, 1978).

If a woman is attractive it becomes confusing to not view her as a sexual object. Bell (1976:409) suggests that "because so many men are geared to seeing women primarily as sexual objects they find it very difficult to see them as something more." This is particularly apparent in the building trades. Dullea (1977) states that womens' frequently cited complaints include: graffiti campaigns waged against them, finding dildos made of bananas or large screws in their lunch boxes, finding nude centerfolds (male and female) in their tool boxes and a full range of sexual and sexist verbal abuse.

Verbal abuse occurs most frequently. Subtle comments between male co-workers when one of them has worked with a woman apprentice reflect this. "Did she give you a good job today", "How does it feel to have a woman working under you" or "You mean you were up in that crawl-space with her all day . . ." are fre-

quently heard comments (Riemer, 1978).

Physical harassment occurs more frequently in blue collar settings, whereas verbal harassment is more common in white collar settings (Silverman 1977). A woman informant in an office setting related a subtle "proposition" by a male co-worker.

"While working at her desk shortly before quitting time a man from another department approached her desk and said, "Perhaps some evening if you don't want to go to school, we could get together." She was surprised by the "proposition" because the man was married and had three children. She pretended she didn't know what he was talking about and simply said school was very demanding and continued to work.

Hennig and Jardim (1977) found that the twenty-five successful women executives they interviewed had experienced some form of sexual harassment on the job in the early part of their careers.

Young attractive women seem to receive more of this harassment. A young woman apprentice in the building construction industry related the following incident.

"I came back from a break and found this notebook on my desk and it has these really gross pictures in it. They were so gross from a real cheap magazine. That was dumb, I mean little kid dumb!"

Of course, not all men treat women co-workers as sexual objects. Some work at changing their behavior as a consideration for the women. Wood (1978: 154) in a research of 100 male and female managers found that "most of the men confided that they have had to clean up their language and jokes. At least temporarily! Apparently the male managers made this decision arbitrarily, not because the women complained!" Similarly, a woman in the construction industry related that on her first day at work she noticed a pin-up picture from *Hustler* magazine hanging in the work room. The following day it was gone.

Most women do not complain about sexual harassment but rather try to ignore it. They see themselves as a relatively powerless minority. As a consequence, they often experience various psychological and medical problems ranging from ulcers to psychosomatic aches. To complain is embarrassing and their complaints usually go unheeded anyway. It is the women

that are made to feel guilty for not accepting the unwanted sexual advances from their male co-workers. Women typically live with the harassment as best they can or quit their job if they experience excessive stress.

Graham (1976) offers five suggestions for women workers to counter sexual harassment!

1. Stop feeling it's your fault if you're harassed.
2. Confront a man directly and call his bluff.
3. Threaten to tell his wife if he doesn't stop, or call his wife, but don't count on her help.
4. Don't be afraid to make a scene and embarrass him in front of witnesses.
5. Seek legal help, go to a union, file a complaint, get publicity.

When women do follow these strategies they may end up being fired but at least they will maintain their integrity.

Other women encourage more subtle techniques for ameliorating sexual harassment. Women are encouraged to employ sophisticated ploys against overly aggressive males. A woman banking executive suggests that if a woman dresses like a professional there is a better chance she will be treated like a professional (Sifford, 1976). Similarly, some women have found that some men may be successfully managed if their advances are treated as a joke. This play is even more successful when other males are present because they will often take the lead initiated by the woman and continue to tease the man. Other men may be discouraged if the woman tells them she doesn't believe in dating anyone from work. She can also tell persistent males that she has someone she is going with. The best technique woman can employ is one that uses tact. Most men can be rebuffed without retaliation if their egos are not destroyed. A successful woman manager said: "Never say yes, never say no, always say maybe." (Henning and Jardim, 1977:155).

If the situation becomes intolerable drastic action may be needed. Sexually harassed women workers can always quit their job, transfer or try legal action. If the latter is chosen, the best case would include documented incidents of harassment, ideally with witnesses involved. When a male superior will not be stopped the woman may have no other recourse but to leave. Alpert relates how one

woman manager handled an aggressive male supervisor and was fired as a consequence.

Her newly divorced supervisor called her into his private office, calmly took off his shoes, shirt, trousers, and said, "Let's get down to business, honey. She said, "Yessir," took his pants and shirt out to the receptionist's desk, and hung them on a coat hanger (Alpert, 1978:110).

### REDUCING FEELINGS OF PERSONAL INADEQUACY

Feelings of personal inadequacy stem mainly from being isolated in a male oriented work world. Female role models are often not available and many women must rely on males for direction and praise. While being interviewed a woman electrician apprentice asked repeatedly if any other women had applied. She was the only woman in the skilled building trades in a city of 700,000 people. She recalled being reluctant to apply for her apprenticeship. "I thought they were going to laugh at me", she reflected.

This felt inadequacy is strongest early in the careers of women workers but may never disappear. Successful women workers may become more adept at camouflaging it. This defense is essential. Women working in a man's world would must appear in control of their situation. As a successful woman who worked as a field underwriter for an insurance company put it, "I appear to be cool, aloof, and have it together." Women in male occupations are forced to be self-conscious. They must calculate the impression they make and strive to give a favorable one for the benefit of their male co-workers.

Successful women workers in male dominated workplaces have adjusted to the demands of their work and their co-workers. They have become "wise" through on-the-job, trial and error learning. They know how and when to emphasize their abilities and conceal their shortcomings. In the male dominated professions according to Patterson and Engelberg (1978) women tend to choose specialty areas that are congruent with their female role. Similarly Ritzer (1977) points out that women executives tend to choose positions in organizations that emphasize the feminine values of humanitarianism.

How can women in male dominated occupa-

tions best reduce feelings of personal inadequacy? First, they should intentionally work at increasing self awareness. They should search themselves for their own personal strengths and limitations. They should become attuned to self awareness.

Successful women executives cited consistently hard work, outstanding performance, the achievement of higher levels of job competence and further training, either in-house or through college programs and courses. Then there were behavioral factors which they talked about in the following terms — developing greater self-confidence, becoming more aggressive, more effectively delegating work presently done by themselves (Hennig and Jardim, 1977: 25-26).

In part this requires getting past the myths about women. Willett (1971:514) contends that successful women workers "know the myths about women, but they do not believe them." Women in our country are supposed to have "personal warmth and empathy, sensitivity and emotionalism, grace, charm, compliance, dependence and deference. They should show a lack of aggressiveness, lack of personal involvement and egotism, lack of persistence and a lack of ambitious drive." (Epstein, 1970:20-21).

Successful women workers are able to move beyond these stereotypes to the extent they they are able to function in male dominated industries. This requires self awareness.

A second way women in male dominated occupations can reduce feelings of personal inadequacy is through contacts with support groups composed of understanding women. Women workers who are isolated from other women need an understanding ear to sort out their work experiences and to discuss their problems. These groups can be informal and small as when two women get together over coffee to discuss their personal problems or the larger discussion groups frequently organized by local agencies or womens' groups.

### DISCUSSION

We have presented a series of common troubles facing women workers across a range of male-dominated occupational lines and the common strategies they use to ameliorate these problems. By illustrating these troubles

and tensions along with how they are typically reduced we hope to aid women in their struggle for equitable participation in the work world. Until more women enter these work places the women currently there will be faced with added stress and tension.

With ever increasing changes in the workplace due to the entrance of women, male workers need to be more understanding of the problems women face. It is the male workers who are in the best position to institute equitable changes and break down the informal sexist and sexual barriers in their work place.

The ameliorative tactics that women employ are merely stop-gaps. They will not eliminate the problems women face. They can best be thought of as successful "survival strategies" that usually work to reduce tension and stress. Only when more women enter these nontraditional work places will women workers begin to amass the collective power to determine how they will be treated as workers.

Time, of course, is the sure answer. In time, many of the older male workers will retire and with them will go many of the rigid views regarding women workers. Of course, some older, established male workers are already supportive of women's efforts. We feel this is because they are less threatened in their secure positions and can easily extend understanding and support.

In time, increased exposure to women workers should also reduce some of the threat that younger male workers feel toward women co-workers. Experience should alleviate personal insecurity. Concomitantly, many women now in entry positions will have advanced to higher positions. Their experience will prove useful as they become role models for other women. Through time, all workers, male and female, should become more accepting and understanding of the social changes occurring in these male dominated occupations.

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American Dream and accept the normative values of the liberal/elites.

White Southernism having had social change forced upon them by the federal government since 1863, will simply not comply with radical gun control laws. The role of the firearm is so secure in the South that attempts to regulate guns would invite either totalitarian moans of enforcement, or non-enforcement. In both cases, the social and financial costs of such an action would be prohibitive.

Southern violence is a cultural expression whose regulation might be best left to individual states. State and municipalities, being smaller governmental entities, have greater responsive capabilities than does the massive federal machine. States and community government more accurately reflect the cultural ideologies of ethnic constituencies than does the federal government. Therefore, the most logical way in which to regulate the misuse of cultural relativism, may be to delegate gun control responsibilities to the individual states. In this manner an individual state would be able to focus its efforts on legislation that is germane to its socio-cultural milieu and that is viewed as appropriate by its citizenry. Thus, gun control laws which are constructive and culturally consistent within one region of the country, would not be applied to radically different culture areas. The appropriate role for federal legislation and enforcement efforts, in such an instance, would be to criminalize interstate violations, such as taking firearms into a state which has a strict gun control regulations.

Policy makers in the field of criminal justice have traditionally employed socio-economic information, crime and victimization statistics, and other so-called hard data in their policy deliberations. In so doing, they have neglected cultural inputs in favour of sociological data or legal precedents. Policy makers need to attempt assessment of their own ethnocentrism in order to realize the ideal of "cultural relativism." Evidence suggests that members of the liberal/elite policymaking class have their own distinct cultural biases. Those biases and dominant assumptions are in conflict with those of mass society, and Southern culture.

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