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Barriers to Entry into Non-Traditional Careers and Training Programs Perceived by Women

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Why don't women choose to enter training programs that would prepare them for typically higher paying non-traditional jobs? Even when school personnel are receptive to females entering non-traditional occupational preparation programs, few enroll (Lewis, Kaltreider, Murray, Lewis, & Flanary, 1976). This is especially a concern in *Industrial-Technical education because of the sex stereotyping in many of the occupations for which training is offered.*

Women desiring entry into non-traditional careers and training programs probably will be discouraged from the start by sex stereotyping or sex bias which is more subtle and often more serious than outright sex discrimination (Koontz, 1972; Lehman, 1977). Also, women are likely to encounter institutional barriers as well as the less visible attitudinal barriers among administrators and instructors in the educational delivery systems. Institutional barriers are from written and tacit policies that tend to preclude the entry of women into specific programs or activities. Significant others, such as parents, teachers, and peers, can also communicate information and societal norms about expected female stereotypic roles. Females learn at an early age which roles are acceptable for females and which are not (Looft, 1971). Removal of legal and institutional barriers has not resulted in a great influx of females into careers and occupational training programs considered to be male-dominated. The major deterrents to female entry into these programs appear to be psychological and cultural barriers imposed by society and women themselves. Thus, the perceptions of female students play a major role in the selection of a curriculum, especially if it is non-traditional (Lewis, et al., 1976). The perceptions appear to be reinforced by the absence of encouragement by school personnel for students to enroll in the non-traditional programs (Smeaton & Wagner, 1976).

Objectives of Inquiry

This study was designed to identify the non-institutional deterrents to entry into non-traditional occupations by women. Specifically, the research was de-

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signed to: (a) identify the perceived barriers for women entering non-traditional occupations and training programs, and (b) determine how women who had considered entry into a non-traditional occupation "seriously," "a little," or "not at all" rated different types of deterrents.

Theoretical Framework

Situations where seemingly insurmountable odds exist have created a phenomenon described as "learned helplessness." This phenomenon is described by Cohen, Rothbart, & Phillips (1976) as occurring when individuals repeatedly find that their attempts to achieve a goal are not being rewarded. Women who have expressed interest in non-traditional occupations and have found either institutional and/or personal-social barriers are likely to learn to feel helplessness in getting into occupations other than those normally considered appropriate for women. The degree to which women have been deterred from entering non-traditional occupations is likely to effect the amount of helplessness they feel which in turn appears to effect the quantity and type of deterrents identified.

Method

This study, which included both interviews and mailed surveys, was designed to identify the barriers women perceive to entering employment in male-intensive occupations. This section includes a description of the method employed to identify the population, design of the instrument, and collection of the data from a randomly selected sample of the identified population.

The population selected for use in this study included 6236 females employed as secretaries, teachers, and nurses in a Florida county of medium population density. There were 4167 secretaries, 930 teachers, and 1139 nurses within the identified population. The rationale for the selection of secretaries, teachers, and nurses was that these are careers traditionally acceptable for women into which women retreat following attempts to enter male-intensive occupations. Two samples were drawn from the population; one to identify the deterrents used to develop the instrument and one for rating the significance of identified deterrents.

The sample for instrument development included the first fifty women from stratified, randomly ordered lists who had, at one time, considered entering a male-dominated career, but were deterred and were willing to be interviewed with regard to these deterrents. The group used for rating of the identified deterrents was a stratified random sample of 500 women to whom the questionnaire was mailed. In both the identification and rating samples, the number of secretaries, teachers, and nurses was as near equal as possible.

Instrumentation

Deterrents to entering non-traditional occupations were extracted from interview protocols obtained from the sample of 50 women interviewed. The deterrents, thus obtained, were typed on cards and sorted according to similarity.

Questionnaire items were written to reflect the essence of the deterrents expressed in the interviews. Redundant items were rewritten or discarded. This procedure resulted in 200 statements which were then assembled into the instrument format. A five point Likert-type response scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) was provided. Thus, a lower score indicated a high level of deterrence. An additional question was employed to determine the extent to which the respondents had considered entering a non-traditional career.

Reliability and validity. Internal consistency and content and construct validity have been established (Thomas, Christie, Colvin, & Denbroeder, 1979) for the instrument. Internal consistency was estimated at .98 (coefficient alpha). Evidence of content and construct validity was provided by a Q-sort and a factor analysis of the items.

Procedures

The Barriers to Entry Survey instrument was mailed to a stratified random sample of 500—167 secretaries, 167 teachers, and 166 nurses who had been identified previously. Returns from the original survey mailing and two follow-up procedures (telephone contact and a second mailing) resulted in a final sample of 256 women (51% return). Response percentages for the secretaries, teachers, and nurses were 48, 55, and 50 respectively. A personal information sheet provided responses needed to classify respondents into deterrent groups: (a) those who had seriously considered a male-dominated occupation, (b) those who had considered a male-dominated occupation only a little, and (c) those who had not considered a male-dominated occupation.

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the total sample and for each of the deterrent groups to ascertain which of the statements listed on the Barriers to Entry Survey were considered by the respondents to be deterrents to entering non-traditional occupations. If 40% or more of the responding women rated an item "strongly agree" or "agree," the item was considered by the researcher to be an important deterrent. This criterion was applied to the deterrent groups as well as the total group. An analysis of variance was performed on each of the item scores to determine whether there were significant differences in mean responses among the deterrent groups, considered a male occupation a little (Moderate group; N= 51), seriously (serious group; N=61), or not at all (never group; N=142). Any significant main effects ($p \leq .05$) were followed by examination of differences in mean responses using the Newman-Keuls multiple comparison technique.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section is presented in two parts which coincide with the objectives of the study. The results of the identification of barriers and the comparison of the level of deterrence perceived by the three deterrent groups are presented in turn. The discussion of the findings is included in each section.

Identification of Barriers

The percentage of the 256 respondents who agreed or strongly agreed was calculated for each item. In addition, the percentage of respondents within each of the three deterrent groups who agreed or strongly agreed was calculated for each item. An examination of the total percentages indicated that 43% (85) of the 200 items were considered to be deterrents according to the established criterion of 40% or more of the respondents indicating agreement or strong agreement. A closer examination of the percentages of the three deterrent groups suggested that the number of deterrents identified differed according to the degree of consideration of a male-dominated occupation. Women who considered a male-dominated occupation only a little (moderate group) identified 51% (102) of the items as being deterrents. Women giving serious consideration to a male-dominated occupation identified 44% (88) of the items while those women not considering a non-traditional occupation (never group) identified 40% (80) of the items.

Items identified by these deterrent groups reflect the impact of external forces. The influence of family members appeared to play an important role in deterring women from non-traditional occupations. Women's perceptions of the attitudes of people in non-traditional training programs, as well as in the male-dominated work setting, also represented perceived barriers. Women may also be deterred by a lack of knowledge of how to obtain information concerning non-traditional occupations. The respondents appeared to perceive themselves as having the capabilities needed in the work place and thus did not rate items dealing with perceived competencies as being important deterrents. In addition, the attitude of friends did not appear to deter women from pursuing male dominated occupations, and higher education was not perceived as being just for males.

Although the similarities of deterrent groups were more striking than the differences, a pattern was observed among the barriers that met the 40% deterrent level. Women who had considered male-dominated occupations "only a little," appeared to be deterred significantly more by fear of dissatisfaction on the job and the reinforcement of the stereotypic role of women by family members than other deterrent groups. Those who had "seriously considered," were deterred significantly more by the perception they held about the role they would play in a work environment dominated by men. Thus, it would appear that when one considers entry more seriously, the deterrents include a more factual view of the deterrents rather than fear of the unknown.

The most salient deterrents, i.e., those with which 70% or more of the respondents either agree or strongly agree, are listed in Table 1. These deterrents represent a wide variety of barriers to entering occupations usually held by men. They include family responsibilities and expectations, fear of failure or dissatisfaction in a male-dominated job, and compliance to the female stereotype.

Table 1
Deterrents to Which More Than Seventy Percent
of the Respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed

Item	Percentage of Agreement
B. Information about careers usually held by men:	
5. May not be available in the form of a female role model.	74.9
D. A woman who attempts to get training in a male-dominated field is likely to feel that persons offering the training program:	
3. Think of her as a female, rather than someone interested in pursuing a career.	70.8
G. Women who hold jobs in traditional female fields find it difficult to leave their jobs to acquire jobs traditionally held by men because:	
2. They don't want to give up their job security.	78.1
3. They know they can be successful in the jobs they hold.	74.2
4. They want to stay where they are safe and secure.	72.0
J. A woman may have difficulty getting qualified and staying qualified for jobs traditionally held by men because:	
4. She feels she can't leave her family to go to a training program in another state.	77.0
15. She finds it easier to get into and/or reenter jobs traditionally held by women.	84.8
O. Women may have difficulty getting jobs usually held by men because:	
1. Women can't pick up and move to a job as easily as a man.	72.5
R. A woman who works in jobs usually held by men:	
1. Must earn respect rather than have it conferred on her as the men do.	75.5
T. A woman's family may affect her career decision by:	
1. Expecting her to have babies.	70.5
2. Expecting her to marry well.	70.5

Differences Among Deterrent Groups

As may be observed from Table 2, significant differences in mean item responses of deterrent groups were obtained for 38 of the 200 items. It should be noted here that because of the number of comparisons made, statistically significant differences could be expected by chance alone for at least one-fourth this number. Thus, the results should be interpreted cautiously. In addition, the reader should note that differences, although significant, may not be of practical significance, i.e., a difference of one-half of one scale point may not be meaningful. However, when the differences in item means were viewed collectively, it was apparent that deterrent groups perceived some types of barriers to entering non-traditional occupations and occupational preparation programs as having a greater

Table 2
Mean Response to Survey Items by Deterrent
Group for Which Significant Main Effects Were Obtained

Item	Deterrent Group			F Ratio
	A Little (1)	Seriously (2)	Not at all (3)	
A. A woman may decide not to enter careers that are usually held by men because:				
5. She doesn't see herself as a professional	3.08 (2,3) ^a	3.87 (1)	3.62 (1)	6.20**
6. She doesn't feel that she is as competent as the man in the field	3.40 (2)	4.05 (1,3)	3.70 (2)	3.99*
B. Information about careers usually held by men:				
2. May never be sought by women	2.82 (2)	3.34 (1)	2.99	3.72*
C. If a woman seeks information about non-traditional occupations (those usually held by men) she may find that:				
2. She has difficulty getting people to talk to her about these occupations	2.63	2.39	2.78	3.19*
D. A woman who attempts to get training in a male dominated field is likely to feel that persons offering the training programs:				
3. Think about her as a female, rather than someone seriously interested in pursuing a career	1.96 (3)	2.23	2.42 (1)	4.29*
4. Would have the perception that women would not "stay with" the training program	2.16 (3)	2.36	2.62	4.63*
5. Would recruit her into a female dominated occupational training program	2.45 (3)	2.38 (3)	2.83 (1,2)	6.03*
7. Think that the occupation for which they offer training "Just isn't for women"	2.33 (3)	2.30 (3)	2.72 (1,2)	5.37**
9. Think she won't like the working conditions	2.55	2.42	2.78	3.16*
10. Think she won't fit in with those already in the profession	2.35 (3)	2.34 (3)	2.75 (1,2)	4.96**
E. A woman may be reluctant to seek training for a career usually held by men because:				
8. She has a low paying job which doesn't allow her to save enough to pay for additional training	2.28	2.43	2.67	3.60*
G. Women who hold jobs in traditionally female fields find it difficult to leave their jobs to acquire jobs traditionally held by men because:				
1. They like their current job	3.28 (3)	3.21 (3)	2.69 (1,2)	9.11**
3. They know they can be successful in the job they hold	2.51	2.38	2.20	3.06*

Table 2 (Continued)
Mean Response to Survey Items by Deterrent
Group for Which Significant Main Effects Were Obtained

Item	Deterrent Group			F Ratio
	A Little (1)	Seri-ously (2)	Not at all (3)	
J. A woman may have difficulty getting qualified and staying qualified for jobs traditionally held by men because:				
8. She doesn't feel it is worth the hassle to get the required training	2.90 (2,3)	3.33 (1)	3.36 (1)	3.87*
10. She usually enrolls in a school curriculum that doesn't prepare her for a job	2.74 (2,3)	3.18 (1)	3.15 (1)	3.45*
15. She finds it easier to get into and/or reenter jobs traditionally held by women	1.84 (2,3)	2.15 (1)	2.17 (1)	3.65*
K. A woman may feel that if she is successful in an occupation typically held only by men that:				
3. She would lose her reputation as a lady	4.35 (3)	4.21	3.96 (1)	4.50*
L. An employed woman may not be willing to risk seeking a job usually held by men because:				
1. She isn't concerned with how much she makes	3.94	4.25 (3)	3.84 (2)	3.72*
N. A woman may be reluctant to pursue a career in a field dominated by men because:				
1. She is afraid of being rejected by males with whom she would be working	2.98 (2)	3.48 (1)	3.16	2.87*
12. She feels that she wouldn't like doing the tasks that these jobs require	3.73 (3)	3.75 (3)	3.28 (1,2)	6.12**
O. Women may have difficulty getting jobs usually held by men because:				
3. They don't plan for a lifetime career	2.96 (2,3)	3.43 (1)	2.99 (2)	3.04*
P. Women do not seek the same careers as do men because:				
2. They can't stick with the discipline of preparation for a career	4.51	4.48	4.23	3.42*
3. They lack self-confidence	3.37 (2,3)	3.89 (1)	3.96 (1)	4.71**
9. They aren't emotionally strong enough	4.47 (3)	4.51 (3)	4.16 (1,2)	3.87*
10. They are more suited for other careers because they are more sensitive and compassionate	4.04	4.16 (3)	3.72 (2)	3.87*
11. They are not good at decision making	4.59 (3)	4.62 (3)	4.28 (1,2)	5.87**

Table 2 (Continued)
Mean Response to Survey Items by Deterrent
Group for Which Significant Main Effects Were Obtained

Item	Deterrent Group			F Ratio
	A Little (1)	Seriously (2)	Not at all (3)	
Q. A woman who obtains a job in an area dominated by men may find it difficult to cope with: 9. The dangers that exist in some jobs	3.31 (3)	3.31 (3)	2.94 (1,2)	3.75*
S. A woman is likely to choose to enter a "female" career (those usually dominated by women) because: 2. Her friends chose it too	2.47 (2,3)	3.07 (1)	3.09 (1)	5.95**
5. Books, TV, and magazines all portray women in stereotype roles	2.41 (2,3)	2.87 (1)	2.96 (1)	3.77*
6. She lacks a commitment to any career	3.12 (2)	3.64 (1)	3.35	4.26*
10. She has not been told to pursue other alternatives	2.78 (2,3)	3.22 (1)	3.32 (1)	5.31**
T. A woman's family may affect her career decision by: 1. Expecting her to have babies	2.04 (3)	2.39	2.52 (1)	3.47*
2. Expecting her to marry well	2.04 (3)	2.36	2.54 (1)	3.95*
4. Expecting her to please them rather than make her own career decision	2.75	2.56 (3)	3.06 (2)	3.66**
U. A woman may not go into a non-traditional or previously male-dominated career because: 1. Her family feels that academics are for men; easier studies for women	3.06 (3)	3.36	3.54 (1)	3.46*
4. Her family gave little or no positive feedback regarding her career plans	2.45 (3)	2.73	3.01 (1)	4.09*
7. Her parents felt that professions that require a college degree are not for women	3.51 (3)	3.84	3.96 (1)	3.61*

^aThe number(s) of the group mean(s) from which this mean is significantly different at $\alpha .05$ i.e., for Item A-5 the "A little" group is significantly different from the "Seriously" (2) and "Not at all" (3) groups.

*p.05.

**p.01.

impact on them than other barriers. Although discussion here focuses on collective differences rather than item differences, the reader may wish to investigate the mean responses for individual items.

Respondents who have considered entering a non-traditional career "only a little" perceived themselves less as working professionals than those who had considered entry "seriously" (Items A-5 and A-6) and perceived that they were less capable of completing the training or successfully entering the non-traditional job market (Items C-2; D-3, D-4, D-5, D-7, D-9 and D-10) than those who had not considered non-traditional occupations. In addition, the moderate group was more apt to fear failure and/or job dissatisfaction in non-traditional training programs or jobs (Items J-8, J-10, J-15, and K-3) than either those who had "seriously" or "never" considered non-traditional occupations and more likely to indicate that they were influenced by reinforcement of the stereotypic role of women from their families than were the "serious" group (Items S-5 and S-10) as well as the "never" group (Items T-1, T-2; U-1, U-4, and U-7). Although none of the deterrent groups felt they lacked the capabilities to work in a non-traditional job, the "never" group perceived the issue of capabilities as much less of a deterrent than the "serious" or "little" groups (Items P-2, P-3, P-9, and P-11).

Conclusions

The barriers to entering non-traditional jobs for women that emerged from this study appear to fall into two major categories, the women's own perceptions of non-traditional jobs and pressures from persons considered by the women to be important to them, e.g., family. These findings appear to be congruent with those of Lewis, et al., (1976) who noted that the perceptions of students play a major role in their vocational curriculum selection.

Women's perceptions appear to change if they give more serious attention and thought to entering non-traditional jobs. Those who had been deterred from non-traditional jobs only "a little" were deterred by their perceptions of what it might be like to work in a non-traditional job. Those who had given "serious consideration" were more concerned with deterrents that represented a more realistic perception of the requirements and problems that exist in non-traditional job settings.

It appears that women who are deterred from entering non-traditional jobs with "little" or "no thought" are those who are more concerned about perceptions of what others think about them than what the jobs may be like. This is exemplified by the results for Item N-1, "A woman may be reluctant to pursue a career in a field dominated by men because she is afraid of being rejected by males with whom she would be working." This item received the highest mean rating of agreement from the "moderate" group. Item N-12, "A woman may be reluctant to pursue a career in a field dominated by men because she feels she wouldn't like doing the tasks that these jobs require," which received the highest mean level of agreement from the "never" group, is also exemplary of this concern for the thoughts of others.

The finding of Smeaton & Wagner (1976) also appears to be supported by the present study. Women who had considered entering non-traditional careers were more likely to report that persons offering training programs that would prepare them for non-traditional jobs would reject them in one way or another and think of them as women rather than as potential trainees. Thus, rather than encouragement, they perceived that they would (or did) receive discouragement.

In general, there appear to be more similarities than differences in the types of deterrents identified by the three deterrent groups. However, women giving "a little consideration" identified significantly more deterrents than the other groups. One possible reason for this is that women who have never considered a non-traditional occupation have probably not explored these occupations and as a result may be unaware of some of the problems and therefore identify fewer deterrents. Conversely, women who have "seriously" considered non-traditional occupations may have explored them more in depth than women giving "less consideration" and as a result of being more knowledgeable about these fields may identify fewer deterrents. The "moderate group" identified a significantly greater number of deterrents and had a lower mean rating for most deterrents. Thus, they could be considered the most deterred group.

Recommendations

The recommendations listed here are those that would appear to be the most salient to persons wishing to develop programs to assist women in overcoming barriers to entering non-traditional Industrial-Technical occupational preparation programs and careers.

1. Program planners should assess the deterrents perceived by women they wish to recruit into Industrial-Technical programs. This should be done prior to delivery of a program designed to assist women overcome such barriers, since it appears that knowledge of the deterrents the target population perceives as existing is a prerequisite to providing assistance in overcoming such barriers.

2. Industrial-Technical education instructors should be alerted that women perceive it to be difficult to obtain information about non-traditional occupations.

3. Instructors of traditionally male-dominated occupational programs should be made aware that women perceive that they will be seen as a female rather than someone seriously interested in a career. This knowledge may be of assistance to the instructors in their attempts to reduce the sex bias they unintentionally emit.

4. The perceptions of women that they have the ability to perform jobs traditionally considered for males only, for the most part, eliminates the need for convincing women that they can do the work. Thus, programs designed to assist women obtain such jobs should focus on coping with factors such as the attitudes of training personnel and family members.

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