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Turnover of Women in the Nontraditional Skilled Crafts: A Literature Review

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12 PERSONAL AUTHOR(S)
Patricia W. Lunneborg, Kristina Kellman-Vowell, an Debra S. Srebnik

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Women are vastly underrepresented in the Navy blue collar jobs as compared to their representation in the labor force. The reasons need to be identified so that strategies for recruiting and retaining such women can be improved. This literature review as conducted to investigate the organizational, social/cultural, and individual variables associated with the job behavior of women in blue collar jobs. Journals and books published over the last decade were searched for research addressing which women chose skilled craft jobs, how their experiences on the job affect them, and what variables are associated with their retention. Three reasons were cited in the studies for women leaving blue collar jobs: their lack of experience/training, co-worker and supervisor unpleasantness, and lack of advancement opportunity due to denial of training. Variables for inclusion in entry and exit surveys were recommended to guide the research on the underrepresentation of craftswomen in Navy industrial activities.

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SUMMARY

Problem

Despite affirmative action programs designed to correct barriers encountered by women in the nontraditional skilled crafts, vast underrepresentation of women in the trades persists. The reasons for this underrepresentation need to be identified in order to develop strategies for improving retention of women in blue-collar jobs.

Objective

The purpose of the literature review was to investigate the organizational, social/cultural, and individual variables likely to influence the job behavior of women in skilled craft jobs at Navy industrial facilities. These variables need to be identified prior to designing surveys for use in a research project.

Approach

Journals and books dealing with occupational behavior in psychology, sociology, business management, and personnel were reviewed keeping in mind the following questions: (1) Who are the women who chose the skilled crafts and why? (2) What do these nontraditional women experience on the job and how does it affect them? (3) What internal and external factors are associated with women's attrition and retention; in other words, what are likely variables to include in a study of the success and failure of women in these male-dominated jobs?

Findings

There are but a handful of studies devoted to why women leave nontraditional blue-collar work, but they point to three primary reasons: (1) the women's lack of experience, training, and qualifications (in spite of having been hired); (2) co-worker and supervisor harassment in the forms of social unpleasantness and denial of training, of which denial of access to work-related information is more important; (3) lack of promotion and advancement based on denial of training. The literature provides clues as to how organizations and employers contribute to these problems and thus facilitate or inhibit the integration of women into the skilled crafts.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the survey instrument that will be designed to investigate factors associated with the retention of women in Navy civilian blue-collar jobs address the following constructs: job expectations and satisfactions, work values (motivation for choosing the skilled crafts), recruitment and the background that individuals bring to the job, extent of social support, importance of work to the individual, and reasons for leaving one's present job.

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Patricia W. Lunneborg
Kristina Kellman-Vowell
Debra S. Srebnik

University of Washington
Seattle, Washington

Reviewed by
Patricia J. Thomas
Head, Selection and Classification Division

Approved by
John J. Pass
Director, Personnel Systems Department

Navy Personnel Research and Development Center
San Diego, California 92152-6800

INTRODUCTION

The problem that generated the need for this literature review is the continuing underrepresentation of female employees in Navy civilian skilled craft jobs. This underrepresentation represents a threat to affirmative action goals, which aim for proportions of women in various jobs that closely approximate their numbers in the civilian labor force.

Journals and books in the disciplines of psychology, sociology, business management, and personnel were reviewed for research pertinent to the problems. The employee turnover literature lacked studies of nontraditional civilian women in the skilled crafts, but it served as a reminder that such a study should include both external and internal variables associated with individual choices. Work-related variables need to be considered, such as pay and satisfaction with supervisor, along with personal variables, such as age and number of dependents (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). The literature reports the primary variables of use in the prediction of turnover to be job expectations and job satisfactions, and such variables ought to be the primary ones for tradeswomen as well (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979).

One way of arranging the potential variables affecting women's retention in skilled craft jobs is to start with the women themselves, before the decision to pursue nontraditional work is made, and to progress logically forward as such work is sought, entered, pursued, and survived (or not). Thus, background and personality variables identified in the literature with nontraditional blue-collar women will be discussed first.

The next logical set of variables focuses on motivation. What are the factors involved in women making this choice? What role does level of knowledge about actual job conditions play in that choice and later? Intertwined closely with the decision process is the type of recruitment that brings women to these jobs. After recruitment, training should be considered, both before and on the job.

Job entry and the job expectations that women bring with them to the workplace are also important considerations. As time passes, these expectations influence specific job satisfactions or dissatisfactions. Intrinsic and extrinsic work values are realized or not. Home and family responsibilities are met more or less satisfactorily. Prospects for advancement and promotion become more or less salient.

This literature review, then, will be organized as a natural life history of a job might be. A major goal of the survey that will be based on the literature review is to know where along that job life line interventions are needed to keep women moving ahead. With such knowledge the Navy can stop the steady flow of women out of the skilled crafts.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Most surveys begin by asking respondents how old they are, what their marital status is, how much education they have, etc. These background factors are potentially relevant to the turnover of blue-collar women, also. In this regard, the literature revealed that nontraditional women may, compared to the men they work with, more often be single, divorced, separated, and widowed (e.g., Jurik & Halemba, 1984; Stringer & Duncan, 1985), sole breadwinners (e.g., Hammond & Mahoney, 1983; Walshok, 1981), have more high-

school and college education (e.g., Jurik & Halemba, 1984; McIlwee, 1982), and be younger (e.g., Jurik & Halemba, 1984; Meyer & Lee, 1978).

Large numbers of women appear to be interested in the skilled crafts. Lillydahl (1986) found in a random sample of women that 50 percent of those under 35 had considered a male-dominated, blue-collar job and 58 percent were interested in receiving the requisite training; the percentages for women between the ages of 35-60 were 35 percent and 33 percent, respectively. In Lillydahl's sample, when age and education were controlled for, men and women were equally interested in training for blue-collar employment! The women were most interested in becoming truck drivers, carpenters, and heavy equipment operators. In a sample of white-collar women, O'Farrell and Harlan (1982) found 98 percent thought they could learn nontraditional skills and half of them had considered moving into a nontraditional job field, even going so far as to take a qualifying exam.

PERSONALITY VARIABLES

Of all the personality variables that might come into play (e.g., high need achievement, perseverance, independence, risk taking, enjoyment of outdoor activities), perhaps the most salient for nontraditional women is self-esteem (Chusmir, 1983). Again and again in the literature, "not believing in oneself," personal insecurity, and low self-confidence were identified as the most troublesome problems of nontraditional working women (e.g., Holder, 1983).

Job dissatisfaction has been related to both low self-esteem and diminished life satisfaction among blue-collar workers (Keon & McDonald, 1982; Tharenou & Harker, 1984). A major source of job dissatisfaction that leads to low self-esteem among blue-collar women is sexual harassment (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982). Sexual harassment not only lowers women's self-esteem in relation to work, but can lower it in a more generalized sense (Schroedel, 1985). Regardless of the direction of the relationship between self-esteem and job satisfaction, self-esteem is clearly a personality variable of great importance in studying nontraditional women's work behavior. Moreover, self-esteem items blend in naturally with items having to do with intrinsic job motivation within a survey.

Job motivation is another salient noncognitive variable identified by Meyer and Lee (1978) and Walshok (1981) as the paramount internal factor in women who succeeded in their blue-collar jobs.

MOTIVATION AND WORK VALUES

Many factors contribute to women's choice of a nontraditional career, but the primary incentive is money; salaries are higher in male-dominated jobs than female-dominated jobs (Hammond & Mahoney, 1983; Holder, 1983; Jurik & Halemba, 1984; Lillydahl, 1986; Riemer, 1979; Stringer & Duncan, 1985; Walshok, 1981), and pay remains the major source of nontraditional women's job satisfaction (O'Farrell & Harlan, 1982). For example, Jurik and Halemba's female security officers and Hammond and Mahoney's coal miners tended not to be married, and as primary breadwinners their need for higher wages made nontraditional work a natural choice. Along with pay, the women in Holder's sample chose nontraditional work because of improved benefits, increased responsibility, status, and recognition, and the opportunity to improve skills. The investigations by Lillydahl, Riemer, and Stringer and Duncan also found that physical or outdoor activity and working with one's hands were a draw for some women.

In regards to the possibility that women and men have very different work motivations and sources of job satisfaction, Walker, Tausky, and Oliver (1982) found no sex differences in intrinsic, extrinsic, or affiliative work values when they controlled for occupational category. The only consistently significant sex difference found was that female workers emphasized the importance of the convenience of work more than male workers; that is, hours, distance from home, and reasonableness of amount of work and time to complete it. Their findings support the idea that most of the sex differences reported in work values and job satisfaction (e.g., men place greater value on pay and promotion, women on interpersonal relationships) are due primarily to the separation of men and women into different occupations.

RECRUITMENT

Decker and Cornelius (1979) have shown that the method of recruitment impacts employee turnover. They contend that employee referrals are the optimum method, so that, to the extent that women are recruited in other ways, they would be less likely to remain on the job. Chacko (1982) found that women who felt they were selected to fill affirmative action quotas were less committed to their employers, had more role conflict and ambiguity, and less job satisfaction, a combination that could be predicted to lead to greater turnover. Meyer and Lee (1978) imply this kind of persuasive recruitment simply to meet Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) goals was a primary reason for very high dropout among blue-collar women. They also suggest that companies that gave applicants good information about jobs had less turnover. Other reports that imply that turnover is related to the absence of negative knowledge about blue-collar jobs include Decker and Cornelius (1979), Muson (1981), and O'Farrell and Harlan (1982). Premack and Wanous (1985) have demonstrated that realistic job previews decrease turnover by increasing dropout before job entry.

TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

Inadequate training and lack of relevant work experience are well documented problems of women entering blue-collar jobs. For example, Meyer and Lee (1978) cite lack of previous experience as a special handicap, especially for women transitioning from clerical jobs, and recommend special training to put women on an equal footing with men as a successful strategy for overcoming this handicap.

Walshok (1981) found that on-job training (OJT) was haphazard and very poor for blue-collar jobs and that women workers constantly hustled to learn on their own. McIlwee (1981) reported that 75 percent of the women who left skilled craft jobs the first year said it was due to poor performance, lack of training, and inadequate access to work-related information, while only 20 percent said it was due to interactional problems with men. In Stringer & Duncan's (1985) study, lack of nontraditional work experience was the most frequently cited barrier to women entering skilled trades. Lillydahl's (1986) non-metropolitan women gave lack of training and experience as reasons why they wouldn't want a skilled craft job. Holder (1983) also noted that training was a serious hurdle for most women in skilled trades; 72 percent of the women in this study had to resort to OJT because no other means of acquiring the needed skills were available.

Although women may be told training is available, there is evidence that they are excluded by the men from it (O'Farrell & Harlan, 1982). In many jobs OJT is informal; job

task information is passed from worker to worker via casual conversation and demonstration. In correctional institutions, for example, women entered with less useful employment experience, such as military service, than newly hired men and were subjected to the contempt of veteran officers whom they sought out for informal OJT. Restricted assignments to clerical and control work followed, all of which denied them the experience and skills they needed for promotion (Jurik, 1985). Busche and Bush (1978) found among industrial saleswomen a link between lack of role clarity (what you're supposed to do on your job) and their wish to leave the company. These authors proposed the establishment of company policies to promote more informal fraternization so that women's training in this mode could be improved.

Lack of training initially leads to hiring into the lowest skill levels and then, when OJT is withheld, opportunities for upward advancement are not forthcoming. Denial of OJT leads directly to female blue-collar ghettos associated with high turnover (Harlan & O'Farrell, 1982). Walshok (1981) attributed women's success in learning trades to their taking charge of their fate. In other words, these women actively sought out men who could teach, help, and sponsor them, regardless of how these men felt about blue-collar women. Competence for these women was more important than acceptance.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical demands of blue-collar work are sources of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction for nontraditional women. Although many blue-collar women are candid about their limited physical strength, others feel that the work is not as physically taxing as conventional stereotypes suggest, particularly when they are given the opportunity to learn the "tricks" men use (Hammond & Mahoney, 1983; Lembright & Riemer, 1982; McIlwee, 1982; Riemer, 1979; Walshok, 1981). Being able to master difficult physical work, working with their hands, and working outdoors, are sources of job satisfaction and self-confidence for these women (Stringer & Duncan, 1985).

Another factor that blue-collar women face is lack of toilets, showers, and lockers for women on-site (Lembright & Riemer, 1982; Schroedel, 1985). Not providing these facilities constitutes a subtle form of discrimination, reinforcing the isolation experienced by token employees. Women also dislike the fact that, in contrast to the clean, quiet environments of white-collar work, blue-collar work environments are very dirty, noisy, hot, and cold (Meyer & Lee, 1978; Schroedel, 1985; Walshok, 1981).

Safety is another important concern to nontraditional women. Hazards in the physical environment, such as exposure to toxic substances and inadequate observation of safety regulations, are a source of dissatisfaction and a minor factor in quitting (McIlwee, 1982). Munson (1981) reports that redesign of equipment (tools, ladders, gloves, goggles, shoes) permits both women and men to do the job with greater bodily ease and safety.

CO-WORKER RELATIONSHIPS

The studies that cite negative co-worker attitudes as a big problem in the lives of nontraditional women include Gruber and Bjorn (1982), Gutek and Morasch (1982), Lillydahl (1986), McIlwee (1982), Meyer and Lee (1978), O'Farrell and Harlan (1982), Remmington (1983), Riemer (1979), and Stringer and Duncan (1985). Pay and work content are the most important job satisfiers in the lives of both blue- and white-collar women, but more so for blue-collar women. Nonetheless, if relationships with fellow workers get intolerable, some women quit (Gutek & Morasch, 1982; McIlwee, 1982;

Schroedel, 1985). Male journeymen, interviewed by Riemer (1979), said women would never make it in the construction industry, and the deep and bitter resentment expressed toward token women on the job made this observation a self-fulfilling prophecy. Meyer and Lee (1978) noted that harassment of blue-collar women in some public utilities was so serious that it was impossible for the women to succeed.

A crucial factor in the life of a woman in the skilled crafts is that she often works as a token, as the lone woman in a work group. She is more visible than her male peers, her failures and successes are exaggerated relative to theirs, and she is segregated into playing a stereotypic role such as mother or cheerleader (Kanter, 1977). Being a symbol is extremely stressful and the problems associated with tokenism undoubtedly contribute to attrition in nontraditional occupations (Jurik, 1985). Munson (1981) reported that AT&T adopted a buddy system of assigning two women to service garages to counter isolation.

A problem with male co-workers is that they often do not allow women to perform the more masculine tasks in the job. For example, Remmington's (1983) study of women police officers revealed that male police protected female co-workers and did not allow them to take calls they felt were dangerous. The women could not practice their police skills because they were perpetually kept from situations where such skills could be of use. The women eventually felt as though they were not capable of performing as well as the men.

Sexual harassment of blue-collar women is well documented (e.g., Gutek & Morasch, 1982; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Lillydahl, 1986; McIlwee, 1982; Remmington, 1983; Schroedel, 1985). It is difficult to believe that any woman who has worked a blue-collar job has not been subject to sexual harassment of some form. Most harassment is verbal, a category that includes teasing, come-ons, innuendos, rumors, and vulgarity. Younger women, single or divorced women, minority women, and women in low status positions within organizations are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982).

Sex discrimination in the form of social isolation also occurs (O'Farrell & Harlan, 1982; Riemer, 1979). The men's resentment of women is expressed by not conversing with women co-workers, not answering their questions, or refusing to even look at them. When one biased man can control the social behaviors of the other men in his work group, women are subjected to extreme social rejection, alienation, and hatred. More active forms of this type of sex discrimination are profanity for its own sake and sabotage of a woman's work (Kanter, 1977; McIlwee, 1982).

Male co-worker hostility reduces job satisfaction, negatively coloring women's feelings about the work they do, co-workers, supervisors, and hope for promotion (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; O'Farrell & Harlan, 1982). The other side of the coin is that support and encouragement from co-workers and supervisors increases job satisfaction and decreases turnover. For example, the satisfied women coal miners in Hammond and Mahoney's (1983) study were accepted by the men as sole breadwinners for their families. These men helped them in their work and created a friendly, cooperative work environment.

SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIPS

Studies that cite the importance of the behavior and attitudes of supervisors in regards to providing information, training, promotion, and general support include Ganster, Fusilier, and Mayes (1986), Holder (1983), Jurik (1985), McIlwee (1981, 1982), Meyer and Lee (1978), Muson (1981), O'Farrell and Harlan (1982), and Yoder and Adams (1984).

Fear and Ross (1983) identify the most important person in the working life of a nontraditional woman as the line supervisor. This individual has the primary responsibility for implementing affirmative action goals. This person makes the decisions regarding filling vacancies, making specific assignments, evaluating performances, deciding who will get promoted, and selecting for training and development.

> "The overall success of the affirmative action program depends on the sum of its implementation in each individual unit. Hence, it is the supervisor's crucial role to make it work in his or her unit. The big picture of an organization's EEO effort is composed of the 'little' scenes going on in the work units of individual supervisors." (Fear and Ross, p. 24)

Meyer and Lee's (1978) interviews with blue collar supervisors revealed that their discriminatory attitudes, especially regarding promoting women, were a serious problem; for example, believing high-level jobs required more mechanical skill than women possess, or that men will not accept a woman as a supervisor.

The performance of nontraditional women workers is affected by the well-researched tendency of raters (of both sexes) to rate women lower than men when performing "masculine" tasks, and to rate work performed in a "feminine" mode less highly than work performed in a "masculine" mode. This is nowhere better illustrated than in law enforcement and corrections (Jurik, 1985; Remmington, 1983). The extent of men officers' beliefs that women are not capable resulted in women simply not being allowed to perform their duties. The men were suspicious of women's verbal strategies as substitutes for using physical force and did whatever they could to prevent the "more peaceful responses" and the "service orientation" of female officers.

Yoder and Adams (1984) provide one of the best illustrations of the vital role of the supervisor in advancement and promotion. The women junior Army officers they studied said supervisors did not give them advice on careers, did not help in assessing strengths and interests, or help in gathering career information to the extent that they did for men. As a consequence, women rated their relationships with their superiors less positively than did men junior officers. These problems with superior officers surfaced as contributing to the women's significantly greater tendency than men's to leave the Army after their obligation.

In one of the few studies that actually says anything about why skilled craftswomen leave, McIlwee (1982) cites discrimination in hiring and firing and harassment by co-workers and supervisors, where denial of information to do the job was critical. The other two reasons for leaving were task performance problems and lack of training, both of which are related to supervision. McIlwee (1981) identified supervisors and trainers as the "problem people" for skilled craftswomen, more so than co-workers, because they controlled training.

OUTSIDE SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ROLE CONFLICT

Support from a variety of sources is an important variable to measure because women who have enough support are more likely to pursue and stay with their positions in male-dominated occupations than women who do not (Holder, 1983; Schroedel, 1985; Yoder &

Adams, 1984). For Stringer and Duncan's (1985) sample of tradeswomen, the lack of both sources of outside support--discouragement from families and co-worker harassment--was an even bigger barrier to success than lack of experience.

It is evident from research on social support that it is an important factor in the health and overall career and life satisfaction for working women. Social support from supervisor, co-workers, family, and friends has been found to significantly increase job and life satisfaction, even when that support had no effect on job stressors, such as lack of variety or skill underutilization (Ganster, Fusilier, & Mayes, 1986). Husband approval, support, and sacrifice (willingness to relocate, redistribution of household chores) are positively related to marital, career, and life satisfaction (Houseknecht & Macke, 1981). Social support is especially important for those nontraditional women who must respond to the combined pressures of work and family responsibilities.

Role conflict often refers to the guilt women feel when confronted with competing demands from their work and home environments. A major area of role conflict revolves around children, particularly when children under five are at home. Women in nontraditional jobs frequently have odd hours or shift work that increases the difficulty in finding adequate childcare (Hammond & Mahoney, 1983). When women quit shift work and night work positions because of difficulty with childcare, they may be giving up promotional prospects.

Although Gaertner (1984) focused on the highly traditional occupation of nursing, her study of unemployed nurses' reasons for leaving has relevance for this literature review. She found that family responsibilities, and unattractive hours and work schedules were their primary reasons, indicating that role conflict predisposes women to quit work which otherwise may be satisfying.

FACTORS IDENTIFIED WITH LEAVING

The job mobility literature indicates that changing jobs is a major method by which women, as well as men, advance their earnings and status. Thus, to the extent that women are satisfied with their wages and socioeconomic level, they are less likely to leave. Felmlee (1984) found, however, that the more qualifications a woman had (education and mental abilities) the more likely she was to leave. Could this tendency explain the high turnover of skilled craftswomen? Do they leave to obtain better jobs with more earnings and status? One study supports this idea. O'Farrell and Harlan (1982) found that some apprentices in the trades at one company were using the apprentice program as a route to management.

Why do women stay in the skilled crafts? Walshok (1981) found that the women who do not leave the skilled crafts have the following three characteristics: good job skills, work savvy, and deep job commitment. By implication, then, the women who fail tend to be incompetent, have lack of job savvy, or are not deeply interested in the work. Walshok places the most emphasis on lack of commitment, "no highly specific sense of the trade." (Her recommendations for what institutions can do about this, however, stress building job competence.) Meyer and Lee (1978) also stressed that high job commitment led to being perceived as a good performer and being accepted by peers and supervisors (working very hard, trying hard to learn the job well, and demonstrating determination to succeed).

CONCLUSIONS

The studies reporting data on why women leave the skilled crafts are few. They point to three reasons:

1. Women can't do the work they were hired to do. Another way to put it is lack of experience, training, and qualifications (McIlwee, 1981, 1982; Stringer & Duncan, 1985).

2. Women are harassed by co-workers and supervisors, principally in the form of being denied information and training necessary to do the job (Gutek & Morasch, 1982; McIlwee, 1982; Muson, 1981; Stringer & Duncan, 1985).

3. Women aren't promoted or advanced because of discrimination, and because of the lack of OJT necessary for promotion. (Harlan & O'Farrell, 1982; Holder, 1983; McIlwee, 1982).

Based on the literature review, the survey that is to be designed to investigate the retention of women in Navy blue-collar jobs should contain seven sections that incorporate the concepts identified above. These sections could appropriately be titled: Background; Reasons for Choosing This Job; How You Found This Job; What You Expect in Starting This Job; What Knowledge, Skill and Ability You Bring to the Job; Support You Get from Others On and Off the Job; and How Important Work Is to You (Includes Self-Esteem).

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