



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA

Advancing Work and Career

MODULE 26

Women In Non Traditional Occupations

Overview

Women should consider the option of working in a non-traditional occupation because many of the traditional jobs most easily available to them -- housework, restaurant work, garment industry work -- involve marginal working conditions, very low wages, job insecurity, and few opportunities for promotion. With very few exceptions, non-traditional occupations pay much more than the occupations which have traditionally been filled by women.

Non-traditional occupations for women are any jobs which have usually been done by men, such as construction, plumbing, machine operating, mechanics, driver, or pilot. However, instructors should remember that many occupations which are now routinely filled by both men and women in California may, from the perspective of an immigrant woman who has learned about careers in her native country, seem non-traditional. These kinds of occupations include work in jobs such as: equipment salesperson, financial planner, utilities meter reader, telephone installer, computer programmer, landscaper, television camera person.

Some of the occupations reserved for men have been justified as requiring particular physical effort. But in reality, the physical demands of these jobs can be easily met by almost all women. Some of the most male-dominated jobs -- auto mechanic, heavy equipment operator, truck driver, cable installer, tree planter -- require no particular strength although working conditions are often demanding.

Some jobs which are now routinely filled by both men and women may often involve some perceived measure of danger or intimation of risks of sexual attacks which used to justify women being denied access to these occupations. Now, many of these occupations are particularly promising for women as large companies want to hire the most qualified person, regardless of gender. These sort of jobs include for example, pest control, police officer, and work in jobs such as cable installer, telephone installer, security guard, etc.

Finally, many jobs which have not traditionally been filled by women were formerly reserved for men because men were the primary wage earner. These jobs include a wide range of management, professional, and technical positions.

Although these occupations now include women as well as men world-wide, they may not have been considered carefully by women in adult learning programs.

In considering, non-traditional occupations, women should recognize that access to jobs in these areas is competitive because they are well-paid. Anyone, man or woman, who seeks a job must take advantage of personal networks, be prepared to learn rapidly and accurately, either in pre-employment training or on the job, and overcome any pre-conceptions they may have about whether it is appropriate for men and women to work together in close quarters, under stress, or in stressful working conditions.

Basic Skills Development

Basic Skills	reading and analyzing job descriptions; estimating the costs and benefits of major undertaking;
Thinking Skills	reflection and self-assessment of vocational interests and aspirations; considering alternative options to achieve desired goals;
Learning to Learn	establishing a definite plan to acquire new skills needed to enter a new occupation;
Personal Qualities	building awareness of occupational skills by emphasizing transferability from one domain of functioning, e.g. from family or community to the workplace; assuming responsibility for own decisions; overcoming stereotypes;
Uses Resources	using job descriptions, labor market analyses;
Interpersonal Skills	networking for information; countering hostility; getting along with people different from oneself;
Uses Information	securing specific information related to one's interests, assessing one's own interests, skills, and personal qualities
Works With Systems	understanding job classifications, understanding the differences between informal systems, such as networks and formal systems, such as, company gender-neutral hiring policies.

Teaching Points

- 1. An important reason for women to seek to work in non-traditional occupations is that they are better-paid than in occupations traditionally filled by women.** With very few exceptions, non-traditional occupations pay much more than the traditional female jobs. On the average, women make about 73 cents for each dollar earned by men.
- 2. Non-traditional occupations for women consist of jobs which have usually employed men such as construction, truck driving, plumber, machinist, auto mechanic, or electrician.** Some of these jobs require formal training, certificates, or union membership. For example, in many areas of the country, becoming a plumber, a boiler mechanic, or an electrician requires completion of a union-sanctioned apprenticeship program. However, in some occupations there are both some unionized and some non-unionized companies (for example, companies employing truck

drivers, painters, or welders). Women interested in non-traditional occupations must carefully research not only occupational skills required but, also, the labor market and industry patterns.

3. **Additional careful research can help a woman get into a non-traditional occupation which is very competitive.** In some very competitive occupational areas, a woman may find a place where there are more openings -- for example, seeking work in a roto-rooter company cleaning out drains instead of in a company installing plumbing in government buildings. Similarly, a woman who wants to work as a pilot may fairly easily find employment as a flight instructor, since employment as a commercial airline pilot is almost impossible to obtain. These positions which are more accessible may pay less than premium employment but they are likely to pay more than work in a traditional occupation and open the door to eventually access premium positions.
4. **Many men's jobs believed to require a great deal of physical strength don't really require unusual strength.** Some of the most male-dominated jobs -- auto mechanic, heavy equipment operator, truck driver, cable installer, tree planter -- require no particular strength although working conditions are often demanding. Women seeking these kinds of jobs need to be prepared to confront occasional hostility and defuse it by doing their job well, cheerfully, and efficiently.
5. **Some men's jobs require physical prowess but many women can perform this work as well as many men.** Work as a roofer, truck loader, logger, fireman, all place heavy physical demands on whoever does them -- male or female. Women thinking of entering one of these occupations, realistically, should consider whether they are physically prepared to do this work. If they are, they need to recognize it will require stamina to deal not only with the physical demands of their job but a variety of challenges --some subtle, some direct -- from their male co-workers.
6. **Many jobs in emerging occupations or semi-technical blue collar occupations pay very well, or at least better than comparable jobs traditionally filled by women and are easier to access than male-dominated occupations.** For women with appropriate skills these kinds of jobs are an opportune occupational objective as hiring is usually gender neutral. Many of these occupations are particularly promising for women as large companies are clear that they simply want to hire the most qualified person, regardless of gender. Important jobs of this type include cable installers, telephone installers, meter readers for utility companies, electronic equipment repair, software development, landscaping, and sales of specialized equipment.
7. **There is strong demand for women in a variety of management, professional, and technical positions.** These occupations, employing almost as many women as men world-wide, may not have been considered

carefully by many women in adult learning programs. Most of these jobs require formal education, but there are some opportunities for upward career mobility for women who begin in traditional jobs in a company. As in all career advancement efforts, women seeking to move into better-paid non-traditional occupations should consider the possibility of seeking a new assignment or new responsibilities, as well as looking for a new job.

Secretaries and clerical workers, jobs traditionally filled by women, have often found upward career mobility by transferring into areas where their technical abilities or management abilities were valued. Waitresses can work their way up into management positions in the restaurant industry. Women farmworkers with good mathematics and communication skills can become supervisors or managers.

8. **In competing for the relatively well-paid jobs in non-traditional occupations, a woman must be prepared to take advantage of personal networks.** She must also be prepared to learn rapidly and accurately, either in pre-employment training or on the job, and overcome any pre-conceptions she may have about whether it is appropriate for men and women to work together, in close quarters, under stress, or in stressful working conditions. In many areas, informal or semi-formal women's networks can provide valuable information and support to women who, like them, are willing to make the effort to enter into an unfamiliar occupational area. At the same time, male friends, family members, or neighbors can help a qualified woman get a job in a non-traditional occupation from which she might otherwise be excluded.
9. **One of the first steps a woman should take is to consider carefully her actual vocational interest, aptitude and experience.** Many women have censored themselves by downplaying their ability in areas which traditionally had been thought to be a man's area, such as, mathematics, mechanics. This is where vocational tests and good vocational counseling can be most helpful, revealing that a woman's actual skills and interests make her well-suited for an occupation she may never have considered. It is useful for women to reflect on how skills they may have developed in the course of managing their families or in community participation may transfer into the workplace. One of the most obvious recognition is that parenting provides excellent experience for working in a wide variety of managerial jobs.
10. **There is a great deal of stereotyping and misunderstanding of the skills and aptitudes required for many jobs.** For example, police officers require good communications skills and the ability to work well in teams, as much as they need to be able to shoot well. Electricians need more skill in blueprint reading than in construction itself. Women seeking to enter non-traditional occupations should take initiative in finding out all they possibly can about the occupation, the job requirements, the reputations of different companies. Ideally women should simultaneously inventory their own aptitudes and interests while reviewing what skills are actually required

to do well in a non-traditional occupation. For example, repairing electronic equipment makes high demands on problem-solving ability, reference skills, and fine motor dexterity but requires little mechanical ability. Skill inventories, required by many personnel directors, place more emphasis now on the ability to communicate well, motivate, nurture, negotiate, and back up one's team than in the past -- skills very similar to parenting.

11. **Immigrant women probably face special barriers while, at the same time, having special advantages, in competing for non-traditional jobs.** Immigrant women should carefully inventory the advantages they have in competing for some non-traditional occupations while weighing these against the special constraints they face. For example, immigrant women who are bilingual have a special advantage in competing for many supervisory or management positions where they would supervise a limited-English workforce (e.g. in the hotel industry, in agriculture, in electronics manufacturing). Yet they may, at the same time, need to overcome barriers because they retain an accent or are not yet familiar with cultural mores in a job where management is inclined to hire an employee with whom they feel at home. These pluses and minuses need to be acknowledged and confronted ahead of time, not to dissuade women from seeking these positions but to prepare them to prevail.

Suggested Learning Activities

1. Have the class prepare a table with two columns. List in the left-hand column jobs traditionally filled by women; list in the right hand column, jobs traditionally filled by men and compare the pay rates for each. Using an occupational outlook manual (or local labor market information) have the class research the pay rates for all the jobs listed. Have the class compute the average pay for the men's jobs listed vs. the women's jobs. Why is there a difference? What does the difference amount to over the course of a year?
2. Prepare a table with columns for eight different categories of skills -- communication skills, physical strength, problem-solving, decision-making ability, mathematical reasoning, reading ability, fine motor dexterity, and teamwork. List the skills needed for a variety of non-traditional jobs for women and identify to which category each skill belongs. Do women in the class feel more optimistic about their ability to do this kind of a job after the exercise than before. If not, why not, and what might a woman who was interested in one of these jobs do to compete for it. Good occupations to consider include: police officer, bank manager, copy machine repairer, telephone installer, landscape contractor, plumbing, cabinet-making, carpentry.
3. Ask a woman who works in a non-traditional occupation or who is an owner of a business with non-traditional occupations to talk to the class about how she decided she was interested in that field, what it took to get into the field, and what she or other women she knows could do to help interested women get

into her occupation.

4. Review, with the class, the basic job qualifications for non-traditional jobs listed in the newspaper and compare the qualifications with class participants' skills. Discuss what kinds of educational investments, including self-directed study, might allow them to develop the skills they need.
5. Have the class discuss whether there are any opportunities for transferring from a traditional woman's job to a non-traditional job at the company they work at or in the industry they work in. What considerations would enter into seeking to transfer into a new non-traditional kind of work.
6. Ask the class to identify four male-dominated occupations they are interested in and invite men working in these occupations to the class to explain why they think it would be a good or a bad idea for a woman to get into their line of work.
7. Invite an employment lawyer or a human resources specialist from a large company to talk to the class about the kinds of companies which tend to emphasize gender-neutral hiring and why. Ask them to explain to women how they can identify companies which will be open to women seeking non-traditional employment.
8. If the class has access to the Internet have women explore the Web Pages maintained by the U.S. Department of Labor on non-traditional occupations.
9. If the class has access to the Internet have women use the browser to research information on non-traditional occupations by listing the occupation job title.

Resources

California Department of Education
Career Development Unit - Gender Equity Office
Sacramento, CA
(916) 558-4860

Non Traditional Jobs Speakers Network
Ms. Lyn Dabney Shaw
(310) 430-9181

Counselors, Local Adult School or Community College

Resource Sheet #1

Women in Trades Training Partnership, "Quick Self Assessment"
Developed by WOW. It can be used by other communities, with an acknowledgment to WOW.

Resource Sheet #2

"Non-traditional Job Interest Inventory"

Online Resources

Web sites for different occupation/industry clusters. These sites have a wide range of resources, including bulletin boards for posting resumes or listing jobs, generic information on occupations and/or wages, training schools, and much more.

Department of Labor

www.dol.gov

Employment and Training Administration

www.doleta.gov/programs

Apprenticeship and Training

www.wdsc.org/bat/

California Employment Law

www.emplolaw.com

www.accessil.com/iwttp/nontrad.htm

American Vocational Association

www.avaonline.org/

Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)

www.wave.net/upg/immigration/dot_index.html

Occupational Outlook Handbook.

stats.bls.gov/ocohome.htm

Commercial Textbooks

ESL For Action, Addison Wesley

Unit IX, Looking Ahead

How To Get A Job And Keep It, Steck Vaughn

Unit 8, Changing Your Job

Job Survival Skills, Educational Design, Inc.

Ch. 10, Initiative

Ch. 11, Goal Setting

Ready to Work, Contemporary Books

Ch. 10, Succeeding On The Job

Working In English, Prentice Hall

P. 142, Talking About A Promotion

Workskills Book 1, Prentice Hall

Unit 9, Goal Setting

Unit 10, Job Training and Continuing Education

150 Ways To Keep Your Job, J. Weston Walch

Ch. 8, Getting Promotions and Raises

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