

BEYOND RECRUITMENT:  
LESSONS FROM THE WORKPLACE ABOUT  
RETENTION OF WOMEN IN THE SKILLED TRADES

by

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Thesis Advisor - Dr. Edwin Meléndez, Assistant Professor

**Abstract**

Retention of workers within an occupation is a good measure of their satisfaction and "fit" in the workplace. Particularly when a new group of workers is entering a field historically closed to them, it is important to understand not only how they can gain access to that field, but also whether they remain there and under what conditions. Women who work in the construction trades are, by most standards, new workers in these traditionally male occupations. In this thesis, I answer the questions of why and under what conditions some women who have made large sacrifices to gain training in carpentry, painting, electrical and other trades opt to leave, and why others stay.

Using the Boston building trades unions as a testing ground, I present evidence directly from the workplace, and from each of the players that help shape it--tradeswomen themselves, their male co-workers, their union representatives their supervisors, and their employers. Together, they reveal that women's slightly lower retention rates are largely affected by a set of barriers at work that constrain women's ability to consistently and successfully negotiate the internal labor market of industry.

While there is truth to the notion that it takes a certain kind of person to make it in the trades, testimony to these barriers is provided most convincingly by the women who have remained. The problems are not related to what women themselves bring to the jobsite, but have more to do with conditions and terms set at the job site. Deterrents to retention are based in industry-wide mechanisms of deployment, the assignment of tasks on the jobsite, training and skills acquisition, and promotion, and sexual and racial harassment. Outside of these workplace factors, women's existence in the trades is also impacted by prevailing economic conditions and by their common need to straddle the roles of sole parent and sole wage earner.

The barriers described are neither universal nor evenly felt by women. Their variability indicates that there is no straightforward, easy answer on the issue of retention. It is a more complicated story of the integration of a workplace which requires careful attention to both the blatant and the subtle impediments. Arriving at solutions demands digging for minor and overlooked successes. This thesis identifies the problems and uncovers those small but important successes, pointing to ways in which they can be replicated by unions, contractors, government and training and advocacy programs to improve retention of women in the trades. Such changes have the potential to both keep women in longer and to encourage more women to enter the trades.

The evidence shows that getting women into the trades is only the first step in successfully opening the industry to women. I believe this will be useful to groups specifically concerned with training women for non-traditional jobs and perhaps more universally to employment training programs. It will also serve unions and employers as they acknowledge the issue of women's retention. All face the challenge not only of placing traditionally excluded workers into new and sometimes hostile environments, but also of keeping them there.

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## Notes and Acknowledgements

In the summer of 1991, I saw a posting for an internship at Women in the Building Trades (WIBT) in Jamaica Plain. They wanted someone to research the issue of job retention among the women they recruited and trained to enter the trades. For me, it was a match made in heaven. I was interested in exploring strategies to improve women's economic lives and of course I had to write a thesis in the coming year. Shortly after, I entered into a partnership with WIBT that I believe was fruitful for us both. Within this partnership, Priscilla Golding and Connie Nelson offered scores of contacts, guidance, critique, support and friendship.

In doing this research, I made a commitment to maintain the anonymity of the people I interviewed, both to protect them and to avoid the possibility that readers might get sidetracked trying to attach a person to a particular point, rather than looking at the whole picture and the institutional context in which it exists. The drawback is that I cannot properly acknowledge the individuals in the construction industry who contributed to this thesis. I can only state my deepest gratitude to all of the carpenters, painters, electricians and other tradespeople, the union officials, the contractors, the government officials and the women's advocates. I am faithful that their willingness to open their homes, their unions, their construction sites, their offices and, most importantly, their minds to me is indicative of their concern for women's futures in the trades.

I graduate from MIT feeling proud to have worked with a thesis committee and a topic that go against the grain at this institution. As my thesis advisor, Edwin Meléndez was unwavering in his confidence in me and provided a kind of support I have rarely encountered anywhere, especially as a student. Leticia Rivera Torres went above and beyond the call of duty in providing contacts with the community, critique, and a chair in her office when I most needed it. The two of them, together with Priscilla Golding of WIBT, have helped me to develop new tools with which to approach the problems of an unjust society. Judith Tendler also supported this endeavor and encouraged me to look for answers in the most unsuspecting places.

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## Introduction

Retention of workers within an occupation is a good measure of their satisfaction and "fit" in the workplace. Particularly when a new group of workers is entering a field historically closed to them, it is important to understand not only how they can gain access to that field, but also whether or not they remain there and under what conditions. Workers who quit may not like the job, they may be ill-prepared for or ill-informed about the job, or they may find that the workplace is still very unwelcoming or alienating to them. If the new workers are leaving the workplace in significant numbers, then either their own preparation must be improved, or the workplace and the various groups within it must be changed. Or both.

Women who work in the construction trades<sup>1</sup> are, by most standards, new workers in these traditionally male occupations. Although there have been periods in history when women filled many of the positions in craft occupations (for a review of this history, see Anderson, 1988), today's wave of female "hardhats" date back just about 15 years. In this thesis, I seek to answer the questions of why and under what conditions some of these women who have made large sacrifices to gain training in carpentry, painting, electrical and other skilled trades opt to leave, and why others stay.

Using the Boston building trades unions as a testing ground, I have gathered evidence directly from the workplace, and from each of the players that help shape it--tradeswomen themselves, their male co-workers, their union representatives, their supervisors and their employers. The experiences of these different groups provides unique insight--beyond theoretical and political debate--about why women might abandon the skilled trades.

The amount of statistical information is limited, yet it does suggest that women have slightly higher turnover rates than men, at least during their three to five year apprenticeships. Together, the women and men interviewed reveal that these lower retention rates are largely affected by a set of barriers at work that constrain women's ability to consistently and

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<sup>1</sup>Herein I use this term to refer to the unionized sector of the labor force, which works predominantly in industrial and commercial construction. I use "construction trades" and "building trades" interchangeably. Chapter 2 includes an explanation of my focus exclusively on the union sector.

successfully negotiate the internal labor market of the building trades. While there is some truth to the notion that it takes a certain kind of person to make it in the trades, testimony to these barriers is provided most convincingly by the women who have remained. For the most part, the problems are not related to what women themselves bring to the jobsite, but have more to do with conditions and terms set at the job site.

Inequities are based in industry-wide mechanisms of deployment, the assignment of tasks on the jobsite, training and skills acquisition, and promotion, as well as sexual and racial harassment. Outside of these workplace factors, women's existence in the trades is also impacted by prevailing economic conditions and by their common need to straddle the roles of sole parent and sole wage earner.

The barriers described are neither universal nor evenly felt by women. With regard to on-the-job training, for example, some women have been able to advance rapidly, while others have found that the deployment practices of contractors or the unwillingness of journeymen and foremen to teach them has impeded their training. Likewise, sexual harassment affects newer entrants more frequently, while the limitations on career advancement within unions and companies have a greater impact on women who have put in as many as ten years.

The variability of these factors indicate that there is not a straightforward, easy answer on the issue of retention. It is a more complicated story of the integration of a workplace which requires careful attention to both the blatant and the subtle impediments. Arriving at solutions demands digging for minor and overlooked successes.

This thesis uncovers those small but important successes and points to ways in which they can be replicated to overcome the failures. One foreman's tale, for example, of how he taught a small woman to combine tools and physical strength in a different way than the way he used them suggests not only that training programs could easily incorporate techniques to meet the needs of workers of varying size, strength and sex, but also that supervisory skills for foremen and journey level workers should be emphasized in order to encourage experimentation and good teaching. In the final chapter, I build on these simple successes to make recommendations for how unions, contractors, government and training advocacy programs can help to improve retention of women in the trades. Such changes have the potential

to both keep women in longer and to encourage more women to enter the trades. The recommendations are mainly programmatic, addressing in detail what each party can do to change the work environment toward that end.

Evidence from the workplace demonstrates that getting women into the trades is only the first step in successfully opening the trades to women. I believe the results and the recommendations from this study will be useful specifically to groups concerned with training and placing women in non-traditional jobs and with other kinds of women's economic development. More universally, it will be valuable to employment training programs for women and men. It will also be useful to unions and employers as they acknowledge the issue of women's retention. All face the challenge not only of placing traditionally excluded workers into new and sometimes hostile environments, but also of keeping them there.



## Chapter 1 Understanding the Problem

### Women in the Trades

There is little dispute that women's wages overall are lower than men's and that the primary factor in the gap between women's and men's wages is due to the segregation of women in certain types of undervalued, underpaid work (Treiman and Hartmann, 1981; U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, 1990). One strategy to overcome the disparity between women's and men's wages and working conditions is to remove the barriers to women's entry into those jobs previously reserved for men through measures such as affirmative action and recruitment. Another is to improve women's skills by providing training for women, thus enabling them to pass entrance tests and do what is required of them on the job. The goal of each of these strategies is to help women to enter well-paying fields traditionally reserved for men, thereby increasing individual women's incomes and serving to open new opportunities to women in general.

In 1978 in response to two legal suits over affirmative action for women in apprenticeships, the Carter Administration issued regulations, goals and timetables for bringing women into the construction workforce. Executive Order 11246 called for female participation on federally financed construction projects where contracts exceed \$10,000. By 1981, the participation of women on such projects was to equal 6.9 percent. Guidelines for apprenticeships issued by the Department of Labor in the same year also set the goal of female representation in numbers equalling half of their proportion in the labor force at large. The following year, the goal was raised from 20 to 25 percent (Glover, 1988).

Numerous programs have been developed nationwide to support those goals and to assist women in entering non-traditional fields, including construction trades such as carpentry, electrical and plumbing, and other types of work such as machining and electronics. The construction trades are known to be high-paying, yet entry has traditionally been difficult if not impossible for women as well as people of color.

Through organizing, lobbying, advocacy, legal challenges and employment training, women have made their way into a tightly guarded network.

Moderate measures of success have been achieved in increasing government and employer support, opening up unions and apprenticeships to women, changing behavior of male workers, and developing programs to prepare and support women in the trades. Many women have found satisfaction at being able to see the product of their work, learning a skill and being paid well for hard work.

Yet progress is slow. In 1988, women nationally made up 2.1 percent of all non-supervisory construction workers, up from 1.9 percent in 1983 (U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, 1991). Interestingly, although aggregate numbers are stubbornly low, the picture is different if one looks at entry versus exit. On the entry side, the picture is more encouraging. Between 1978 and 1988, the percentage of women registered as apprentices increased from 3.1 to 7.0<sup>2</sup> (U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, 1991). In Boston, women were 4.9 percent all registered apprentices in 1988 (Department of Apprenticeship Training, Boston, MA, 1988). But advocacy groups and tradeswomen themselves have also found that retention rates of women once they have been placed are lower than desired. "We're getting women into the trades, but they're coming out the other end," said the director of Women in the Building Trades in Boston.

Some women spend extended periods of time without work and then give up, others make a clear choice to leave the trades. They go on to jobs which build on the skills they acquired in the trades or return to previous types of employment in traditional jobs. Some spend a spell on public assistance before securing other work. While the construction trades have an overall attrition rate like any other occupation, the suspicion is that women leave for a different set of reasons than men.

In the remainder of this chapter I will employ both labor market theory and evidence from the workplace in order to establish a framework for understanding why women stay in or leave the trades. It is a framework which requires inquiry into all factors bearing on women's work experience--women's personal and domestic lives, the institutions in which they work and the macro economy--and provides insight into where and how policy and practice can make a difference.

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<sup>2</sup>Figures are for all apprenticeable occupations, which are almost all non-traditional but not entirely construction.

I will briefly show how conventional and institutional theory contribute to, but are limited in their explanation of women's labor market experience, and suggest how a third, gendered framework is ultimately the most useful. I will also review the findings of prior research on tradeswomen's retention, and show how these efforts can be understood in the context of the theoretical work.

Taken together, the theoretical and practical research done to date support an explanation of women's retention which focuses principally on institutions, but also considers women's family responsibilities and larger economic factors which bear on their employment. They provide not a complete explanation of why women leave the building trades, but rather direction as to where to look for the answers.

Finally, following the guidance of the theoretical and practical work done on this subject, I will, in the last section, present a detailed picture of the building trades and how they interact with the people who compose them and the economy that shapes them.

### **Theoretical Framework on Women's Turnover in the Labor Market**

To date, little is known specifically about why women leave their jobs in the trades (Glover, 1989; O'Farrell, 1988). Using apprenticeship data, researchers have found *quit rates* during the training period to be equal, if not lower than men's (For a review of this evidence, see Glover, 1989). This analysis, however, offers little explanation for why women leave their apprenticeships and whether staying required different amounts of effort and commitment for women than it did for men. Further, it does not tell us about what happens beyond the apprenticeship.

Economic and sociological literature on women in the labor market help to shed some light on what is going on behind the numbers. Within this literature, there exists a spectrum of theoretical approaches to the issue of gender differences in quit rates. All begin by accepting empirical evidence that *overall*, women's employment turnover rates are higher than men's. Beyond the empirical work, however, there is divergence in the attempt to explain this more general trend as well as differences among turnover rates of women in different occupational environments. Inherent in each of these approaches are certain assumptions that help to determine how proponents of each might interpret the issue of women's retention in an occupation.

The conventional explanation for women's higher turnover focuses on their household role. According to this view, women have less attachment to the labor market because they leave to raise families and engage in other household work. "Factors that tend to reinforce this behavior include the lower wages paid to women, indicating a lower opportunity cost for nonmarket activities, and their common status as secondary earners in the family," (Meitzen, 1986, p. 152). The focus here is on the individual and assumptions are made that women have choice and control over their labor market participation. This explanation also assumes that women's households are composed a certain way--that they are not heads of households.

Consistent with this view and its focus on the individual is the economic argument that workers' success in the labor market is based on their own human capital--their training, education, information about the labor market, physical ability, etc. (Van Houten, 1989). Women's tenure in the labor market would be determined in part by the appropriateness of their "human capital" for the job.

Some of the existing literature specifically on women in skilled blue-collar occupations has emphasized women's own human capital and what they bring to the job. For instance, in a study of women in the building trades over a three-year period, Walshok (1981) found that at the end of three years, 46 percent of her sample were still employed in the trades. Focusing on those women, she found that it was their ability to handle the work and the workplace that determined women's success and tenure in the field. The women who stayed exhibited certain characteristics including competence, "work savvy" and commitment to the job.

A second explanation of women's turnover focuses instead on the conditions women face at work as the determinant of their attachment to their jobs (Waite and Berryman, 1986). In a survey that included women who were currently *and* formerly employed as highway construction workers, for example, a research team compared responses of the two groups of women (draft document, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and CONNDOT, 1991). Their findings showed that the experience of those who stayed and left had as much to do with the work environment as it did with the women themselves. Many women in the field reported harassment and inadequate facilities on the worksite, but notable differences between the ones

who stayed and the ones who left included role models early on in life encouragement from male co-workers and supervisors.

The focus in this study is on the labor market itself rather than on the individual. More general research shows that women's higher quits are correlated, at least in part, to the low earnings, little room for advancement and poor working conditions women find in the labor market (Osterman, 1982). This being the case, it stands to reason that women would switch jobs, or even jump in and out of the labor market altogether more frequently than men. Contrary to the belief that sticking with a job will bring a worker positive returns, women's jobs often show little promise of getting much better. Poor employment does a poor job at instilling commitment to the firm on the part of the worker.

This latter explanation suggests that when allowed access to jobs with more status, better wages, more control and more room for advancement, women could begin to display greater attachment to their jobs. "Aspirations, work commitment and a sense of organizational responsibility could...be aroused by a dramatic increase in opportunity," says Kanter (1977) in her study of the internal labor market at a U.S. corporation. In the case of the construction trades, one could measure status, opportunity and control by looking at the extent to which women advance to firm supervisory or union leadership positions, or make their way into circles of influence within the industry.

The conventional emphasis on women's domestic responsibilities and the institutionalist emphasis on the workplace itself each have something to offer to the particular study of female retention in the trades. The institutional framework is particularly compelling because it points to specific ways by which we can affect change in the internal labor market. Yet neither approach is complete on its own because they do not capture *all* of the dynamics bearing on women's employment.

A third approach to women's labor market turnover that is ultimately the most useful is one that takes into account both the household and the institutional environment in which women work, but uses gender as a means of analysis (Bookman and Morgen, 1988). A gendered theoretical framework is more holistic in that it considers "...the interaction of patriarchal attitudes towards women's work, individual choice, family

responsibilities, and economic and discriminatory mechanisms" (Van Houten, 1989, p. 54) and the economy.

Looking at women's worklives in this way replaces more deterministic explanations of women's attachment to the labor market with the idea that women may go to work *because of* their family responsibilities, or that gender roles within the household may shape the way that traditionally male workplaces such as the building trades are structured to support male but not female workers.

Research by the Machine Action Project (McGraw, 1991) considered the barriers women face at work as well as those at home, and found that the two together had caused some women to leave their jobs. Changes in policy and practice, therefore had to be geared toward both sets of problems.

Together, the three studies cited demonstrate the difference in answers, given the set of questions and the framework used. The first study sought to determine *which women* succeeded by comparing their characteristics. Walshok described the difficult environment, but her focus was on the women themselves. The two other studies also used women as the subject of the survey, but instead compared and contrasted those women's experiences with the work environment. The Machine Action Project research also drew on women's home experiences to present a complete analysis of women's experiences in a non-traditional labor market.

The emphasis on the work environment is important, particularly when considering occupations where women have worked for only a short time. In such situations, they are often subjected to isolation or harassment due to the resistance of others within that occupation to accept change. Women in traditionally male occupations are more apt to be employed in non-supportive, if not actively hostile, work environments--thus reducing the attractiveness of that occupation (Waite and Berryman, 1986).

The policy prescriptions for these three sets of findings are quite different. One says to find women with the right characteristics or experience and to enhance their suitability to the occupation through training and education, but would have little to say about changing the occupational setting itself, or how to lessen the additional burden borne by female *working* heads of household. Another policy prescription says to try to change the environment to make it better for all women. The last says that changes in the workplace must accommodate women's multiple roles.

The research cited is important for the sake of future research in other ways as well. They demonstrate the value of taking into account not only the experiences of those who remained in the construction trades but also of those who left. Yet as the Connecticut authors point out there is a need to interview men in the field to understand more about the conditions under which women work and what could be changed. In addition, research must take into account some of the more complex elements of the trades, such as the importance of the union and the system of lay-offs, that may have an impact on women's worklives.

Consideration of other players and the complexities of the workplace has revealed additional information to what women articulate themselves. By surveying employers, for instance, Dorsey and Minkarah (1991) were able to provide a context to women's struggles in the trades. Employers generally had a laissez-faire stance on women, and were doing little to attract, train or promote more of them. They also had doubts about the sufficient supply of skilled women, and about women's capabilities and physical strength. The beliefs expressed by employers, whether based on reality or on their own socially constructed ideology, may make them reluctant to hire women or treat them differently on the job.

When Dorsey and Minkarah (1991) surveyed women, many of them were enthusiastic about their work, but a bare majority wanted to remain in the trades. A large number believed that their training was inadequate and that they would probably not be promoted to assume greater responsibility. Those who knew of women leaving said they did so because of abuse from co-workers and supervisors.

Dorsey and Minkarah point us in two useful directions in the study of women's retention in the building trades. First, we must query all the important players and their roles in the workplace. O'Farrell further emphasizes the need to "...understand men's reaction to women in these jobs because they directly affect women's abilities to learn jobs through procedures such as on-the-job training, as well as the general quality of work life on a day-to-day basis," (1988).

Women themselves paint a particular view of their experience at work, but this is all within the context of employers, supervisors and co-workers who have pre-existing notions about women as workers and act accordingly. Women in the trades face discrimination that will continue to affect their

access to and mobility within the trades. Dorsey and Minkarah surveyed construction industry employers. Also key are tradesmen and, in the case of the unionized workplace, union representatives.

Second, we should carefully assess the rules of work and how they interact with women's progress. In a study of the impact of affirmative action on women's quit rates, for example, Osterman (1982) found that an additional factor in the equation on women's quits was opportunity. Increased opportunity through the enforcement of affirmative action reduced women's quits.

Yet when an affirmative action policy is overlaid on a set of existing rules of work, the opportunities can be superficial or short-term. This is clearly demonstrated in a study of women in non-traditional occupations at a General Electric plant in Massachusetts. Strauss (1991) found that despite affirmative action and training programs for women, when economic conditions called for firm-wide lay-offs, the internal labor market of the company impeded their success. Pre-existing rules about job bidding, advancement and lay-offs created structural disadvantages for women. In the construction trades, written and unwritten rules govern lay-offs and call-backs, job assignments and advancement.

Given the existing research and its consideration of women's human capital and household roles, the workplace and the macroeconomy, we know certain things about women's retention in the skilled trades. Their personalities and emotional stamina, their knowledge of someone in the trades prior to entering, support from men on the job and access to career ladders help keep women in. Abuse sometimes drives them out, particularly when coupled with the difficulty women face meeting the demands of home and work. Mechanisms within the internal labor market and economic conditions also have an impact on women's tenure, but the directional forces vary with particular configurations.

Beyond the actual findings, we can see that a theoretical framework shapes not only questions, but answers and solutions. Most importantly, a framework that uses gender as a starting place tells where to look for the answers about women's retention--directly into the workplace as well as to women's domestic lives and prevailing economic conditions. Emphasis on institutional factors--the work environment and the internal labor market--is particularly important in that intervention is most possible in these areas.



This framework also permits us to understand the forces that bear on women's experience in the labor market not as static, but rather as a set of dynamic ones. We can recognize where and how individual people wrestle with each of these forces, maintaining them and changing them (Bookman, 1988). Consideration of human agency will lead to a clearer picture of first what bears on women's retention and ultimately to policy recommendations that fully address women's lives.

### **The Industrial Relations System within the Construction Industry**

Before introducing the evidence gathered from interviews within these three spheres, it remains to explain the exact institutional context of the building trades. In the following sections, therefore, I will sketch a picture of what the unionized trades look like and point to areas that deserve close scrutiny in the search for answers about how women fare.

The internal labor market of a firm determines what happens to a worker once she secures a job. In occupations in which an internal labor market exists,<sup>3</sup> once the worker enters the firm, differences and relationships among firms becomes less important, and the world of promotions, job bidding and job security inside the firm takes over. Similar to the way in which the external labor market functions, the internal labor market is where the demand for labor is matched (or not matched) with supply. It encompasses the way that compensation, promotion, termination, training, authority and working conditions are established in the firm. In contrast to the external market, personalities in addition to productivity play an important role. Some companies have written employment policies that dictate operation of the internal labor market, others have a more informal set of policies.

The nature of the construction business, as well as the heavy influence of the trade unions within it, have made for a unique internal labor market within the industry. First, employment in construction is casual. The industry experiences wide fluctuations in response to general economic conditions and the availability of credit (Marshall and Glover, 1975). The demand for labor is also generally less than the supply of available workers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In many low-wage jobs, it could be said that no internal labor market exists in that there is no job ladder, no system of wage increases and no employment security.

<sup>4</sup> In 1991, picture is particularly grim. Estimates place unemployment among construction workers in the Boston area at 50 percent (Boston Building Trades Council, 1992).

General contractors, especially, cannot predict far in advance where and when they will need workers at all, much less when they will need the carpenters and when they will need the electricians on a job. Thus, contractors prefer to maintain only a very small, permanent "core" workforce, and hire other labor as needed. As a result, a non-core worker who is part of the internal labor market of one firm one week may enter another one the next week.

Second, the construction industry is largely unionized. The Boston Building Trades Council estimates that in the Boston area, 80 percent of all projects completed by dollar volume is union built. This figure varies among geographic area, trade and industry segment, and is lower when the seasonal workforce is included (Dunlop and Mills, 1968).

Krasner, a union electrician, describes the employer-union relationship this way: "Whether to grow or shrink the business, what kind of projects to bid: business strategy is primarily management's responsibility....The main worker/union role in business strategy is constraining contractors' ability to adjust to changing conditions by reducing wages, hiring less skilled employees, or cutting corners on safety," (1991, p. 29). The relative strength of the union combined with the nature of the industry allows the union to play an important function both in controlling the labor market in general and in helping shape the internal labor market. The highly competitive market also helps explain many of the unions' procedures which are designed to protect members' ability to work.

In the unique internal labor market of the trades, the union plays a dominant role, and informal procedures are as important as formal ones. In certain respects, the union acts as representative of workers. For instance it negotiates certain work and pay standards with construction contractors. In other respect, the union acts as an extension of the employer, making deployment decisions about who works, and who doesn't and when, and, to some extent, what kind of work each worker will do. In still other respects, the union shares responsibility for the establishing the terms of work, as in the case of training.

### *Deployment*

Contractors set the demand for labor, the unions set the supply. Unions play an important role in the deployment of workers. They serve as a hiring hall for the industry, providing contractors with workers and workers with

jobs. The union chooses which workers will fill the positions as requested by the contractor. The functions of the hiring hall are administered by the union business agent. An elected official, the business agent has the greatest power and exerts the most influence on the daily lives of workers of anyone in the local.

Hiring hall operations vary among unions. Some unions have a first out, first in policy. That is, first laid off goes back to work first when a new job becomes available. Others do not follow a formal list and depend more on the discretion of the business agent or the ability of workers to secure their own work from employers. Favoritism and nepotism can play a large role in determining who works and who doesn't. Skill and specialization, too, can often put a tradesperson at an advantage as new jobs arise.<sup>5</sup> While skill does not earn a worker a higher hourly wage, it can earn her more hours worked (Marshall and Glover, 1975).

Apprentices also have a slight advantage in remaining employed in that a certain number of apprentice positions are usually guaranteed in the contract. The ratio of apprentices to journey level workers is often an issue of dispute among contractors and unions. Since apprentices are paid less, contractors will often prefer to have more of them. The union prefers the opposite, since most of its members are journey level.

The economic advantages of employing apprentices can also take on a gender dimension in that contractors are willing to employ women when they are apprentices, but less so when they become full-fledged tradeswomen. Given this system, there are clearly returns to being highly skilled, to understanding how the system runs and knowing the person who runs it. These variables call for close examination in the case of women since women generally enter with less exposure to the trades, they generally rely on individual personalities for their on-the-job training, and they have less access to important networks than do their male counterparts.

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<sup>5</sup>Krasner's (1991) findings on the effects of training among union electricians in Boston show that employers generally *do not* reward increased training with more employment. However, this may not be the case in other trades which handle deployment differently. Further, the findings are not broken out by male-female responses, and according to the author the survey was returned by very few women. Thus it remains to be determined whether the findings are applicable to women. Interviewees in the present study believed that skills *are* rewarded with more employment.

When work is scarce, tradespeople turn to other informal networks to secure jobs. Though performing non-union, commercial construction work is prohibited by the union, skilled workers can often find short-term employment in residential construction or elsewhere. Jobs are secured through contacts with other union members, former employers, etc. The importance of networks make this another area for inquiry.

### *Affirmative Action*

Contractors bear the responsibility to meet federal, state and local regulations regarding the hiring of women and minorities. Government enforcement units monitor construction projects for compliance. The way that women are placed on jobs is principally an issue of deployment, but it also has a bearing on women's on-the-job training and promotion.

### *Training*

Training is the joint responsibility of the union and contractors. Under federal and state regulation, Joint Apprenticeship Committees (JACs) operate apprenticeship programs. For each trade, the JAC is composed of three union and three contractor representatives. This committee oversees selection and administration of the apprenticeship program, which is also funded jointly by both sides.<sup>6</sup> An apprenticeship coordinator, hired by the committee and almost always a union member, oversees the actual training and ensures that the curriculum is followed and that apprentices are moved around to learn all aspects of the job.

Training consists of on-the-job and classroom time. In the trades included in this study--painting, carpentry and electricians--the apprenticeships are three, four and five years, respectively. Although apprentices are not formally required to have prior knowledge of the trade when they enter the apprenticeship, many do since they have either worked non-union construction before and/or they have grown up with family members in the trades.

On-the-job training is supervised by journey level workers. Apprentices are assigned to work either on a one-on-one basis with a journey level worker

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<sup>6</sup> In 1989, union electrical contractors in Boston, for example, contributed 22 cents per labor hour to the JAC (Krasner, 1991).

or with a crew. Upgrade training to improve skill and master new technology is also available to union members beyond the apprentice stage.

The training system's treatment of women merits close examination along several dimensions. First, the content of training may build on experience or skills which may be unfamiliar to women. Second, training may be based on the experience of male construction workers, rather than female in areas such as the sources and uses of physical strength and equipment use. Third, in that training is reliant on individuals, assumptions about women's appropriateness and capabilities for the job may limit their training.

### *Promotion and Career Ladders*

The construction industry is unique in the high degree of mobility which exists between rank and file worker, union representative, supervisor and owner. Unlike most industries, in the construction industry, a tradesperson may move in and out of being a steward or a foreman, depending on the job. Depending on the size of the job, individual foremen usually answer to a general foreman, who in turn answers to a construction superintendent. Foremen also remain union members, even though they actually represent management on jobs.

A worker's competency at the trade, and visibility and connections with the contractor contribute to her promotion. In ways similar to those described above, promotion mechanisms within the building trades may be biased against women. Individual contractors may not believe that women merit supervisory roles, or may have fears about negative workplace dynamics arising from putting a woman in charge of male workers. Dorsey and Minkarah (1991) found that nationally women make up less than one percent of supervisory personnel in the construction industry (both union and non-union).

Union members can also rise up through the ranks of the union hierarchy. The extreme importance of the unions in the construction trades in determining the employment and the working conditions of its members warrants an examination of the structure of the organization. This is particularly important when considering how women fare within the unionized workplace. Reluctance among membership to elect them, along with women's small numbers, could have negative implications for

women's ability to have their concerns represented and to bring about change on their own behalf. A lack of female representation throughout the union hierarchy may lead women to believe that there is not much prospect of change within the union and that they themselves will probably never achieve an elected or appointed position.

### *Conditions*

Health and safety standards, working conditions, pensions and welfare funds are negotiated by the union and an association of contractors.<sup>7</sup> A typical contract lasts two to three years. Once negotiated, maintaining such conditions is the responsibility of the contractor. It is through the contract negotiation process that the two sides might set family policy including provisions for childcare, sick dependents, etc. They could also set policy on workplace harassment.

### *Compensation*

Wages are also negotiated under the contract. During her apprenticeship, a worker earns a percentage of the journey person's wage, which rises incrementally. Once at the journey level, the worker's wage remains the same, subject to contractual increases. There is no system of seniority in the building trades, and no wage hierarchy based on tenure on the job. Earnings do differ for union representatives and for supervisors. As is explained above, further variation in earnings among tradespeople is based on hours worked.

There is no evidence that women in the unionized sector of the construction industry are paid a lower hourly wage than their male counterparts. In fact, the absence of a seniority system may promote greater pay equity in the construction trades than in other industries. Wages superior to those in many traditionally female occupations are a compelling reason for women to remain in the trades.

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<sup>7</sup> In negotiating a single contract with contractors, the union maintains uniform working conditions for its members across the industry and avoids having to outbid itself as new jobs arise.

## The Case for Further Research

Each of the components of the internal labor market described above constitutes an area of inquiry into women's retention in the trades. Within each of these areas, the task is now to determine whether or not, and if so *how* intentional and unintentional mechanisms (Van Houten, 1989) militate against women's success and tenure in this occupational setting.

In addition to looking at the internal labor market, the research reviewed in this chapter has also highlighted some factors which may influence retention. First, women's individual ability to cope might assist them in surviving and thriving. Their family responsibilities will also have an impact on whether they decide to stay or go. Second, women who are loaned support rather than hostility during their careers are more likely to stay. Third, women report that there exist constraints on their training and their ability to advance in their trades. Fourth, women believe that the women who leave do so because of the abuse they face. Fifth, employers have doubts about women as construction workers and give the issue little attention. Also vitally important is the economic context surrounding the construction industry.

The theoretical and practical material reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that the way in which the subject is conceived plays a large role in determining the questions, answers and policies derived on women's retention. A household or human capital approach calls for a focus on the tradeswoman herself. An institutional approach requires examination of the players, the environment, and the institutions involved. A broader framework also incorporates the economy *and* relies on human experiences to further define obstacles as well as strategies and conditions under which they are mediated.

Overall, the findings of these inquiries pave the way to further research. They are instructive in illustrating how to more fully capture all the factors which affect women's quits from the trades, and how to conceptualize policy which is both realistic and effective.

## Chapter 2 Methodology

The research for this project consisted of two main parts. The first was a search for success stories regarding women's retention. I wanted to know, when employers, employees, unions, advocates and government *have* been concerned about retention, what did they do? This search took me to the newspaper, trade and academic journals, non-traditional women's employment programs in the U.S. and Canada. I felt that once I had some notion of what had promoted retention in other situations, I could measure what I found in the building trades and be able to make feasible recommendations at the end.

The second part of the research, which composed the bulk of my work, consisted of interviews. If the workplace held the answers, then it was to the cast of characters inside that workplace that I had to go. I interviewed women, their male co-workers, their union representatives, their employers, their supervisors and the government officials responsible for ensuring that they worked.

### **Area of Focus**

My research focused strictly on the unionized sector of the construction industry in Boston. This represents approximately 80 percent of commercial construction work done in the city (Boston Building Trades Council, 1992). Some of the union members I spoke with were uncomfortable with the idea that I was omitting the non-union sector from my study, since that was where women really had it hard. Yet I chose to concentrate only on the union sector for several reasons, each of them based on my underlying faith in the strength and the value of the union movement.

First, the union sector composes the largest portion of the industry. Second, the unions are institutions. This means that not only are they researchable, but they are also subject to federal, state and local laws. Third, as institutions, the unions can change. Within them exist a set of rules regarding work, compensation, rights and how workers will interact with the employer and with each other. These rules can be identified and targeted for change. In the non-union sector, on the other hand, employment, pay, and



individual rights are less consistent and identifiable, making individual workers, especially women more vulnerable.

The final reason is that because unions exist to represent the interests of workers, it is most important that they be accessible to all who work in the industry. In other words, it is more valuable to women to work toward change of a movement that proports to represent all workers, than to try to change a part of the industry in which workers have no established organization.

Within the unionized trades, I selected three different trades from which to draw my research participants. After reviewing a list of approximately 240 tradeswomen who had participated in a pre-apprenticeship training program, I found that women were most highly represented in the painters', the carpenters' and the electricians' trades.<sup>8</sup> In these trades, therefore, I was able to find the most women, as well as the most men who had worked with women.

There is, of course, a flipside to my selection of these three trades. The higher number of women in these trades may make them less representative of other trades such as the ironworkers, where there are very few women. This fact remains, and I can only guess that those trades are somewhere in line behind the others in the gradual continuum of change in the building trades.

### **Interview Protocol**

The research should in no way be understood as statistically significant or even an attempt at the same. The small number of women actually in the building trades in the Boston area would make such a study quite difficult. It is true that I selected participants based on their varying backgrounds, ages, races, realms of experience, etc. However, rather than try to have a large group of people answer all the same questions, I felt it was more important to be able to have a small group of people answer different questions--to hear their experiences, to push them to think hard about certain issues and to build on each person's contribution as I went along.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Women are also highly represented in the asbestos workers' union in the Boston area.

<sup>9</sup> A quantitative study of the issue of retention of women in the trades is currently underway under the auspices of the organization, "Chicago Women in the Trades."

Within the three trades selected, I interviewed nine women currently working or waiting to work and eight women who had left the trades. Most of these women's names were taken from past enrollment lists at "Women in the Building Trades." Others were women I found or whose names were passed on to me when I went out to construction sites, to union halls, to contractors and to people's homes. They were evenly representative of the three trades selected. About half were or had been apprentices, the other half were journey level. One woman was a foreman and one was a steward. Of the women who had left the trades, some had gone on to other kinds of construction work while others were working in very different jobs or unemployed.

The women were White and African-American, lesbian and straight, and of different educational and family backgrounds. At least six had other family members in the trades--one a mother, and another an aunt. Only a couple of the women were married. Others had domestic partners with whom they lived and shared household responsibilities. Almost half of the women had children. One had left to have a child, another had given birth to two children during her tenure in the industry. They ranged in age from 23 to 34, though most were in their early thirties. Most of the women had entered their apprenticeships at slightly older ages than their male counterparts--a trend O'Farrell (1988) attributes to educational and employment agencies which track women into traditional, low-paying jobs.

Many tradeswomen entered the trades only after trying to support themselves and their families on the salaries they earned in those jobs. Thus, although conventional theory on women's labor market participation posits that women will leave their jobs because of family responsibilities, for many women it serves as impetus to enter or stay in the labor market, or, in this case, seek a higher status job. As one of the women interviewed said, "Many of the women are single parents, and the only way to comfortably support a family is to work in a man's job."

The men I interviewed were construction workers, union officials, apprenticeship training directors and foremen in the same three trades as the women. Some of these men were also contacted through "Women in the Building Trades," others were recommended to me by women and by men in the union. I also interviewed three contractors, two of them project managers and one an owner. In one of these instances, I went to a contractor

who was singled out by a female construction worker as a good employer. I went to find out why.

I also interviewed other various women and men involved in different trades, unions, non-traditional workplaces and geographic areas. Their insights are sometimes included as matters of reference.

### **Interview Content**

I began with a set of fixed questions that I intended to ask of each of the groups of people, but found those questions confining and sometimes missing the mark, depending on the person interviewed. As I interviewed more and more people, new issues arose, some individuals were more difficult to "uncork" than others, and, as mentioned above, I gradually emphasized more and more what strategies were successful. Thus, I went from having an interview process based on one set of questions that asked everyone the same thing, to one that allowed each person to contribute his or her own piece of the story.

For example, mid-way through my interviews, I learned that one of the unions included in my study had made an impression on women as one that seemed to treat women the best. Particularly telling--and distinct from the comments of women in other trades--was one apprentice's observation that in this union, women's had "clout" at meetings, and that their opinions were listened to and valued. I then turned to the union, and tried to find out more. What I found was a set of values and adherence to those values through policies and specific practices. Small but significant examples included a sexual harassment policy and the practice of having journeywomen come in on "book night" to speak to apprentices as they were formally accepted into the union. This different environment had been shaped largely through the earlier efforts of activist women in the the union.

I had several goals in mind as I interviewed. First, I wanted to become familiar with the kinds of experiences people had. This was, in effect, a starting ground. For example, in order to eventually ask them how they went about advocating for themselves, I had to first know what kinds of problems women ran into. Similarly, I tried to get a sense of how men felt about working with women in general.

Second, I wanted to know what was positive for them--how women learned, who their allies were, what made them go back to work each day.

Especially the women who seemed to be doing the best--I wanted to know what they had going in their favor. I asked men about what they did that benefitted women. Third, I asked about retention and turnover. If women had left themselves, I wanted to know what factor, or set of factors, had made them go. Of others I asked about the issue in general and the people they knew that were no longer working in the trade. The most fruitful answers here were from women who had developed friendships with other tradeswomen, and from apprenticeship directors who were in close contact with women during their first years.

Fourth, I asked women and men what they thought needed to be improved and how. I felt that if anyone had answers about what needed fixing, it was the people on the ground. In some instances, I took one person's solutions to another to check the feasibility of the first person's recommendations. Several women, for example, suggested that more women instructors teach the apprenticeship classes. I then asked the training directors whether they had women instructors, and if not, were they open to the idea. In the end, it was these types of suggestions and solutions which allowed me to make recommendations for change. Rather than coming from the outside, the recommendations have the appeal of being derived directly from participants in the workplace themselves.

## **Factors Impacting the Methodology**

### ***Gender***

One of the largest challenges in conducting this research was finding a way to talk to the men about women. My subject is not neutral, nor am I. Therefore, while I found some men were very open with me, others were slightly hostile to the idea that I was asking them questions or that I was conducting this research at all.

The problem diminished somewhat as my research matured. That is, as I gradually shifted my focus from the problems women faced to strategies to overcome those problems, I found the discussions went more smoothly. Understandably, men were more comfortable talking about what they were doing right than what they or their peers might be doing wrong. In fact, setting the discussion in this tone prompted some men to open up a bit more about their views about women working in construction.

The fact remains, however, that as a woman I may not have gotten the full story from men. My consolation is that I am reasonably certain that I was privy to information from women that a male researcher could not have gathered. In a similar vein, the fact that I was an outsider to the industry sometimes worked to my advantage and sometimes did not. Although I may have raised a few suspicions, as an outsider I was permitted to ask certain questions about how and why things worked the way they did that an insider could not have asked.

### ***Economic conditions***

In 1992, employment in the trades is at an historic low. The construction industry is a leading indicator of the economy in general, and with the national economy in the midst of a severe downturn, the buildings trades are some of the hardest hit in terms of business and employment. The Boston area alone lost 40,800 jobs since 1988, marking a decline of 56 percent (Department of Employment and Training, Current Employment Survey 790). Thus almost every person I interviewed mentioned the hardships being suffered among union members.

This situation colored the issue of retention. People said that the incidence of workers leaving the trade at least temporarily was significantly higher due to the lack of work in construction.<sup>10</sup> Certainly more men and possibly more women were seeking work elsewhere if they could find it. For the people I spoke with, it meant that they were thinking about retention more than usual. It may also have meant that any distinctions among male and female retention were overshadowed by a generally increased departure from the unions.

### **The Match Between Methodology and Theory**

Overall, the methodology I employed was one tailored to the theoretical framework through which I approached the problem. Interviews with all the important players in the industry--both male and female--gave me a robust picture of how gender figures into the household, the internal labor market

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<sup>10</sup>Data from one apprenticeship program suggest that this may not be the case. The average percentage of apprentices who either moved, were dropped or quit the program was actually lower in the years 1989-91 than it was in the three previous years, when the construction industry was still in a boom period. I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

and the macroeconomy and their bearing on retention. Inquiry into how individual actions and the surrounding conditions had made a difference allowed me to conceive of how broader change could occur. Most importantly, the methodology I used is one that treats *human experience as theory* (March, 1972).

### Chapter 3 Views from the Workplace

The amount of statistical information I was able to gather on women's retention is limited, yet it does suggest that women have slightly higher turnover rates than men, at least during their apprenticeships.<sup>11</sup> In one apprenticeship program, for example, over a twelve year stretch beginning in 1980, female apprentices had either graduated or were still active in the program at a rate of 78 percent, compared to a 90 percent rate for the program as a whole. In a second apprenticeship program, women also graduated (or were still active) at a rate 11 percent below the overall rate, and 13 lower than male apprentices. In the latter case particularly actual numbers of apprentices--especially female--are low, but the consistency of the graduation rates over an eleven year period lend support to the case that women's retention rates in the apprenticeship programs is lower than men's.

As previous theoretical and practical work demonstrates, in order to truly understand these figures, we must look to the barriers and the struggles women have faced in their work in the trades. Few women go without having their very presence challenged--either directly or indirectly--by someone in the workplace. Some women have been told flat out that women don't belong, others have found themselves doing what one woman describes as "girl jobs" while their male co-workers were learning new skills and performing work they could take pride in.

What is equally important to understanding the issue of retention, however, is what makes women stay? What keeps any worker from leaving a field they once chose? The paycheck, the possibility for promotion, stability, job satisfaction, the comraderie, the difficulties involved in transferring jobs, lack of skills required for a better job. Yet for women in the construction trades, the barriers are distinct enough that we might better ask why *didn't* women leave? Or better yet, what enabled them to stay?

In this chapter I will attempt to answer both these sets of questions: why women left and why they stayed. The principal framework I will employ will be that of the internal labor market--deployment, affirmative action, job assignments, training and skills acquisition, promotions and discrimination.

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<sup>11</sup>No figures were available on journeywomen's turnover.

Although women themselves obviously did not relate their experiences with this framework in mind, I believe that by analyzing them in this way we can best understand how and to what extent individual women and men, and the institutions they compose, have adapted to women's presence in the trades. In addition to the internal labor market, there are family and greater macro-economic issues which weigh on women's working lives. I will address these at the end of the chapter.

Some interviewees, female and male, did have clear ideas about why women left the trades. They attributed women's departures to the instability of the industry and recession-period lay-offs, to pregnancy or marriage, to harassment or simply to a desire for a career change. Other interviewees, including the women who themselves had left, spoke about something more like a "cumulative effect" of many different factors. My intent here is to delve into each of those different factors which make up women's daily lives in the trades and to understand why, when added up, might cause a woman to quit.

If any one answer emerged from the research, it is that there is, in fact, no single determinant of individual women's retention in the trades. Although I expected my research to uncover clear distinctions and lines between the women who stayed and the women who did not, I found instead that these two groups of women looked a whole lot alike. Painful stories were told to me as much by the women who stayed as by those who had left. Similarly, the women who had left had indeed had a difficult time, but also shared with me some very fond stories of their experiences in the trades. Ironically, it is the women who stayed who provide the strongest testimony for the argument that factors intrinsic to the trades themselves are what slow the integration of women into the industry. No woman had had all negative experiences, and no woman all positive. Yet if the good outweighed the bad, and mostly it did, then they stayed.

Since this research is not merely about failures, in each section I place great emphasis on what has been successful for women, and how they held and gained ground. With each woman, there was something that made a difference, that changed, that made them stay, at least for a while. There were identifiable factors that contributed to their desire to remain. For women who had left, those factors were not as evident.



The changes, the differences are most often small. The pull toward the status quo is stronger than the drive to rock the boat in the construction industry. As is often the case with institutions, there is reluctance and resistance to change. So neither men nor women are quick to make sweeping changes in the way things work. For these reasons, the changes that have been realized by women or to the benefit of women are incremental.

Such small measures are often hardly noticeable. Indeed, the union officials I interviewed usually felt they had little or nothing to say when I asked them what they did that might have had a positive impact on women. Yet, it turned out that they actually did little things that could determine whether women made it or not on the job.

A steward, for example, told me he covers for women when they have to take a day off because of family responsibilities. A male training director passes women's phone numbers to other women when he sees they are having a hard time so that they can get some support. He also sets the rosters for the apprenticeship courses so that there are always at least two women, ensuring that they are never isolated from other women. A foreman gives a woman a chance to work and learn alongside him, making her feel for the first time that she is wanted and valued as a carpenter.

Although these measures are small, they can be useful if they are recognized, replicated and even systematized. In this way, even the slightest, incremental changes can gradually give way to strategies designed to augment retention and overall numbers of women in the building trades. A steward covering for a woman means he has recognized that women are often the sole caretakers *and* wage earners of their families, and that the workplace must be more flexible in order to take those two roles into account. If an individual steward can figure out how to make his own family policy--albeit indirectly--what could the union or contractors do? Most important, how can such a recognition be incorporated into the already existing rules of work through contract, policy, regulation, education, etc.?

In the following sections, therefore, I present how women themselves, the men they work with, their unions and their employers have contributed to retention, given the environment and the internal labor market as they understand it. I will also show why women have left in the absence of these positive elements. In the final chapter, I will return to these findings and discuss how they can be consolidated and systematized.

## Deployment

Each of the trades included in this study has a different method of sending workers out to work, ranging from a formal list, known as a referral list, to no list at all. All three unions maintain a separate list of apprentices, and administrators of these lists interact regularly with those in charge of general deployment.

Each of these systems has its merits. In the electrician's union, I.B.E.W. Local 103, the union hall maintains a referral list. When a union member is laid off from a job, her name is placed at the bottom of a list at the hall. As contractors make requests for workers, she makes her way to the top of the list. Federal, state or city regulations may require that the list is subordinated to contractors' needs for female, minority or Boston resident workers, but in general the union is known for strict adherence to its referral list. This system is probably the most equitable. Detractors, including members of other unions and contractors themselves, say contractors should be able to call a worker by name if they want, and not have to take whoever happens to be at the top of the list. Under this system, veteran skilled workers can also find themselves laid off for long periods of time.

The carpenter's locals maintain a list to keep track of who is out of work, but because member's skills, familiarity with particular contractors and status and connections in the organization are so varied, leaders do not adhere to a fixed, numerical list. To operate a list like the electricians do, said one union official, would be unfeasible for the carpenters since the field includes so many different kinds of work. A carpenter who knows concrete formwork for example, cannot be sent out to do finish work. With a looser system, proponents say, the union is better able to supply the contractor with the most appropriate person for the job.

In the painter's union, said a union official, members solicit their own work directly from contractors, whose names and phone numbers are supplied by the union hall. No list at all, he said, forces members to build a good job history and be skilled. Painters depend on their skills and their references. "It's an old boy's network. It starts out when you're an apprentice going to union meetings. Then you get to know contractors and the foreman. Then when you get laid off [and are looking for work], people know you." Those with poor skills or poor behavior on the job will be less likely to secure

work. "Word gets out very fast whether or not you're a deadbeat," said another union official.

### *Guidelines and hiring goals*

While these systems are quite distinct, the deployment of women in the trades looks more similar across the three trades studied. In this case, it is government regulations, rather than the unions, that have the greatest impact on deployment. Under federal law, contractors working on federal projects must have a workforce which includes at least 6.9 percent women. Under the Boston Residents Jobs Policy, contractors on city sponsored projects and private developments totaling over 100,000 square feet must make best efforts to employ women such that they complete 10 percent of all hours worked, by trade<sup>12</sup> (EDIC, 1991).

The unions must comply with contractor's responsibilities to meet federal, state and city guidelines. Therefore, as stated above, even in the electricians union, when a contractor puts in a request for a woman, they will send one out although she might be low on the list. In terms of deployment, women seem to make up a distinct category in all the trades.

Participants in this study were in agreement that most women get hired because of the regulations. Individual women sometimes stay on a job because of their abilities, but it is practically unheard of for a contractor to go beyond the legal requirement for female workers. One apprenticeship director stated that he does not only send female apprentices out to a job when women are requested, but as another official in his union said, "(Contractors) balk when you send a woman."

All three contractors interviewed agreed that if not for the regulations, the likelihood of them hiring women at all would be practically nil. A business agent confirmed that in saying, "I have never gotten a call from a contractor--not a white owner, nor a minority owner, nor a woman owner--asking for a woman or a minority unless they had to." Although his statement may miss the point, since desirably women would be sent out no matter who was requested, the message according to union officials, contractors and women themselves is clear: women are working because of the regulations.

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<sup>12</sup>The policy also requires 25 percent minorities and 50 percent City residents. As recently amended, the policy permits the counting of one individual only as a female or a minority, but not both. Individuals in both categories may also be counted as a resident.

The interaction of the two systems of deployment--one for white male workers and another for women (and men of color) has some positive implications for women and some negative. Many of the men and women interviewed believed that in economic times like these, women as a whole had a slight edge in terms of remaining employed, since employers are obligated to keep a minimum number of women working on any project underway.<sup>13</sup> "If a company with a male and a female apprentice whose work is equal has to lay someone off, they'll lay off the man and keep the woman," said one woman. Yet they also said that under these circumstances women take the brunt of considerable resentment from their male co-workers and possibly from contractors as well. As one union official said, "in tough times...it becomes the white member against the minority and women member."

Said another union representative, "When it's time to lay people off, you have to keep the women and minorities around. The men don't like that. They might be better mechanics, but they get laid off first. So when the lay-offs come, men sometimes think the women are taking their jobs away. That's when they bitch." Although some of the men interviewed made suggestions as to how the guidelines and/or enforcement should be changed to make compliance easier, they agreed with women that they should remain. "It's just part of doing business," said one contractor. "It's the nature of the beast."

### *Shuffling*

The mixture of advantages and disadvantages of the regulations is common to affirmative action programs. Those protected by affirmative action may have better access to jobs and also suffer resentment from the unprotected class of workers. What is unique in the trades are some of the more subtle ways that contractors' strategies to comply and to work around the guidelines take a toll on women. One of these strategies is what I will call "shuffling."

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<sup>13</sup>No statistics are readily available on this issue. Some women report that while the need for contractors to have women on any job underway may make female employment rates proportionally better than men's in 1992. Under more favorable economic conditions, they say, male employment rates are higher.

Women are often moved around from job to job a lot by contractors. Contractors are required to have a certain amount of hours worked performed by women. Yet loopholes in the law and imperfections in the monitoring process allow contractors to run jobs for extended periods of time without the required number of women on site. Thus in Boston, although a job legally cannot be completed unless 10 percent of the hours, by trade, are completed by women, a job might be nearly complete by the time the contractor actually starts working on compliance (EDIC, 1992). "We take corrective action--hold up payments--at the beginning, when a job is 20 percent complete," said a Boston Residents Jobs Policy administrator in describing how contractors take advantage of loopholes in the policy. "But sometimes they can't find the women.<sup>14</sup> We tell them 'don't forget you still have to put women on the job.' But they might not do it until the job is 80 percent complete."

Contractors running several jobs at once might move workers from one site to the other, using the same women to meet the requirements for all the jobs. The same is true for people of color and sometimes for Boston residents as well. White male workers might also be moved around, due to variations in workload and tasks, but not for the same reasons, and not to the same extent as women. "The last job I worked on--it was so obvious," said Erica.<sup>15</sup> "They had *one* woman on the job the whole time. Towards the end of the job, they were short on hours. They brought in an Hispanic woman and a Black man to clean up. He was a big man, he looked very strong, but they had him sweeping."

The implications of this shuffling game are mixed for women. Nearly all women were aware of the practice and spoke negatively about being "used" by contractors. "When they get you in they use you as a quota--especially me," said Cindy, a Black female Boston resident who had been on more than one job as briefly as two days, a week or two weeks. A few women believed they personally benefitted while others believed they were hurt by it. The women in the first group said that they met a lot of people and were exposed to many

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<sup>14</sup>The issue of whether or not the supply of skilled craftswomen does or does not meet demand is a debated among tradeswomen and their advocates, unions, contractors and government. One organization, the Boston Tradeswomen's Network is currently trying to compile a "Tradeswomen's Registry" of Boston-area women working or available for work in order to address this issue (Boston Globe, 4/28/92).

<sup>15</sup>Names have been changed to protect the anonymity of interviewees.

different kinds of work, allowing them to accumulate a broad knowledge of the trade. Elizabeth added that although she disliked this shuffling process, it enabled her to get to know a lot of people in the trade so that when she started a new job there were always a couple of familiar faces--a definite plus for a female construction worker.

Many women, however, believed that being moved around a lot was harmful to them in learning their trade. One fourth year apprentice said she had never worked on a job more than four months. Under the contractor who currently employed her, she had worked no job longer than a week or two. She felt that as a result, her training was inferior to that of her male classmates:

Most apprentices go on a job and stay there till the job is done. I have yet to start and finish a job. They'll put me on one job and pull me off to go to another one, and then put me back to the first job, then move me somewhere else. They bounce me around. It gets frustrating after a while....Every job is different and it takes a little while to acquaint yourself with the whole process. Once you start to understand it, you're gone. If you stay in one spot, you can absorb more. In a short time, you only have a limited capacity to learn. You don't see the whole layout of the building. It's detrimental to your education.

Based on their own experience, seasoned female construction workers were adamant about the fact that apprentices needed to see projects be built from the ground up in order to really understand the construction process. For women, they said, not gaining this type of exposure had negative implications for their ability to become skilled and to be promoted to supervisory positions. If they themselves had been made foremen, it was because they had had opportunities to glean a well-rounded knowledge of their trade.

### *Isolation*

Another variable in the deployment system which has important implications is the number of other women with whom tradeswomen work.

"If someone had asked me what a non-traditional job was, I would have said 'what are you talking about?'" said Carolyn of her pre-construction days. "Until I walked on the job. It was like I had no clothes on....They created so

many inhibitions for me." Since there are so few women on the job, women's actions are more closely scrutinized than men's. One woman interviewed said that when she missed a day of work, the steward or the foreman would often come and speak to her about it, although they did not do that with the men. In addition, women frequently take the heat when other women did something unacceptable. Some women said that even they were particularly watchful of other women on the job, checking their skills, their interactions with co-workers and even how they dressed, because they knew that one woman could make it or break it for other women.

Working with other women was nearly always positive for the women interviewed. They were able to talk about their lives outside of work, their families and their problems on the job in a way that bridged the gap between their work and home lives not possible in other situations. They also spoke of the teaching, advising and critique that went on among women. The exception to these experiences was being teamed up with a woman who wasn't a hard worker or who was trying too hard to prove herself. These situations made things worse. One woman remembered being able to feel comfortable during the one time that she had worked with a nearly all female crew (five out of seven were women). The crew did duct work, which is considered important and skilled work.

These issues of deployment--the dual system for women, the shuffling of women from one job to the next and isolation--are not reasons alone for women to leave the trades. They are, however, integral to the way that women are viewed and treated by other workers, to their skills development and to their long-term success as tradeswomen. As one will see in the following sections on skills and promotions, decisions by contractors and unions on how and where to put women to work can make significant differences in the extent to which women are fully integrated into the workforce.

### **Job Assignments**

Recent research on women in skilled trades has found that the same type of occupational segregation that keeps women out of the trades repeats itself even *within* the trades. In a study of women in machining, McGraw (1991) found that "Certain jobs with no room for advancement, little training involved, and lower wages are now becoming the domain of women and

minorities in the trades. Bench inspection, deburring, repetitive assembly, and stock handling are examples of this kind of segmentation," (McGraw, 1991, p. 5). Similarly, female police officers reported that part of the discriminatory environment they encountered on the police force included being given job assignments inferior to those of their male counterparts (Boston Globe, 2/23/92).

For women who work in the building trades, pay equity is not an issue, since all journey level workers earn the same wage, and apprentices make a percentage based on their level of completion. In fact, many women said that this was one of the most positive aspects of the trades for them--"making the same money as the guy next to me." Job assignments are, however, an issue of concern. Actually data on this subject is difficult to obtain, but women do report that in some situations they are given less challenging work which is also less central to the project and in turn means for slower skill accumulation than other apprentices. They believed that these assignments were based more on assumptions by the foreman about their capabilities, than on their own skills.

Once workers are requested from the union or hired directly by a contractor, they usually are put on a crew of approximately five people led by a foreman. It is the prerogative of the foreman (sometimes with input from the steward) to assign each apprentice and journey level worker to a particular task or set of tasks. Apprentices might be assigned to work alongside a specific journeyman, or be given their own tasks to complete on their own. Since apprentices are less expensive labor, when there is unskilled work to be done, apprentices will do it.

When a job begins, or a new worker is brought onto a job, the foreman is often in the position of making a quick decision about where to place workers with whose skills he is unfamiliar. The foreman might ask his crew what they know how to do, or he might simply size them up and put them to work. The assignment of workers to specific tasks is an area where assumptions about women's skills, capabilities, physical strength and preferences, well-intentioned or not, can be detrimental to their own progress in the trades.

"Most women don't like to work outside. They like to work inside. I try to place them where it's not so hard. I try to keep them on the ground--they don't like to be up high" said one union steward, who said he would



sometimes talk to the foreman about where people should work. "I can just tell by looking... After a few days, you can just tell. That's part of being in the business this long--you just know."

But women's experiences and preferences for work often do not match what their union representatives or foreman assume. For instance, one male union official said that if he were a woman in the trades, he'd like to be an electrician and install receptacles, since that was inside and not strenuous work. Yet three different women interviewed mentioned that they believed such work was unchallenging "busy" work, and that women sometimes got stuck doing it for long stretches of time *because* they were women.

For one woman, being the female on the job meant getting whatever work was leftover after everything else had been assigned. "I would always be the last one to get work," said one carpenter. "They would always say, 'What are we going to do with Coleen today?' Most men know what they are going to do when they come into work in the morning. I would never know....But I take my job seriously. I'm not just in it for the money. I want to go home at the end of the day feeling like I did something."

A good foreman, said women and men, will realize different worker's potentials and give them a chance. He would look not only to what women *couldn't* do, but what they *could* do and were good at. Women and men said, for example, that women were sometimes given supervisory roles based on their strong organizational skills. One contractor who had employed women as foremen gave this as a reason: "They have to have a head on their shoulders--planning ability. Sometimes they can see better what's going on, they're more organized."

A good foreman would also put women on new and varied tasks, even when they might not have done that task before, so that they learn different aspects of the work. So, while many men spoke of physical strength as a problem for women, for example, one foreman interviewed said that didn't have to be a problem. He recalled teaching a female apprentice how to compensate for less strength by gaining more leverage from the tools, in order to bend conduit. "Other than size, there's nothing women wouldn't be able to do as well as a guy. And in time, they can learn different ways around the size thing too," he said.

Many women said that they, too, had discovered that when they learned how to use their own strength or equipment properly, they were able to carry

out physical aspects of the job often considered too strenuous for them. This is an important point, since several men interviewed said that they believed women had more accidents on the job than men. They believed that women were less able to handle the physical requirements of the job and that they had more accidents than men because they did not know their own limitations. While no data is available to support or deny this claim, it suggests that contractors, unions and women themselves should strive to ensure that women are instructed as to how best to use their bodies and equipment to effectively and safely meet the requirements of the job.

Although inquiry into successes in this vein was not a focus of this research, examples from other workplaces exist. At the telephone company NYNEX, for example, women trying to become line workers found that they were able to carry a ladder using strength from their hips rather than their shoulders, and climb telephone poles using boots properly fitted to them rather than standard (male) boots. Once these discoveries were made, said a Business Agent for I.B.E.W. Local 222, company training programs could be more closely tailored to suit women. Male union members also made a practice of taking female union members out to teach them to climb telephone poles, since that element of the qualifying exam was hindering women.

### **Skills and Training**

A tradeswoman's skills are central to her success in the trades. Regardless of guidelines which support the hiring of women, skills are the key to survival in the long run. Both women and men support the notion that women have to prove themselves every time they go on a job. "When a man walks on a job, it is assumed he is skilled and trained," said one contractor. "When a woman walks on, she has to prove herself, despite what her background is." Being skilled will increase the likelihood that women will be requested by name by a contractor looking for workers, be kept on one job from beginning to end rather than be bounced around, be retained by a contractor when a job ends or be promoted to foreman.

After she graduates from her apprenticeship, a woman's skills may even determine whether or not she works. A journeywoman is more expensive to a contractor than an apprentice, and contractors very rarely hire more women than they are required to by law. Thus, a journeywoman may find that she is

laid off and replaced by a female apprentice, or that she has a harder time finding work in general. Having a reputation of being good will help.

While the overall goal of the apprenticeship training programs is to make union tradespeople the most skilled in the field, everyone knows that there are differences, even among apprentices at the same level. What makes for those differences are aptitude, a record of good job opportunities and being allowed to learn. Men and women alike know that one of the worst things that can happen to a tradeswoman (or a man, for that matter), is that she doesn't learn.

"We've had women come on the job as journeywomen who don't have nearly the skills they should," said the same contractor. "There are a lot of jobs a carpenter might have been doing that were non-carpentry related. A foreman can tell in a very short time if that is the case." This contractor cited skills as a principal reason why he had not brought women on as part of his core workforce or as foremen.

By no means did the women I spoke with take it for granted that they had, or would, get skills. This is not to say that they felt that their present skill levels were low--on the contrary they supported the oft-cited saying that a woman had to be twice as good to be considered equal. Rather they said that reaching the levels they did was often a struggle. Women who were both in and out of the trades, women who had eventually been made foremen and those who were still apprentices alike, had been put in situations in which they felt they were not learning. Given that, each recounted a series of strategies as to how they made sure they were gaining skills.

Carpenters remembered not being allowed to do carpentry work. "They stuck me in a corner and said this is where you work, so they could show the monitor I was there when they came around. I was so confused and self-conscious. They didn't want to teach me, so I didn't know how to do anything. Contractors want people who know how to do things, but I couldn't learn."

A painter remembered not being allowed to paint. "I was working with a whole crew of guys who had been in the trades for 25 years. Their wives stayed home and cooked all day long, so they didn't want women to learn anything." At first, she was not allowed to do the same work as the men, but after much advocating on her own behalf, she finally won a place for herself alongside the other painters. "It took me a whole month of bugging that

foreman to finally let me paint. It was just blockfiller I ended up doing, but at least I wasn't dragging drop clothes around and setting up masking on my knees anymore."

An electrician told of being assigned, as a third year apprentice, to put all the electrical receptacles in a building while the male apprentices ran conduit and learned new tasks and concepts of the trade. She finally went to the male training director, who agreed with her and transferred her to a job where she worked with some of the most highly skilled electricians in the field. That job was "border line vicious," she said. "It was the only time I feared for my life a little. They didn't want me there, but I didn't say anything because I knew if I did they'd switch me off the job, and I wanted to stay there and learn."

As discussed in the section on "shuffling" above, being moved around from project to project to help contractors fulfill government guidelines may also have negative implications for women. To be dropped in on a number of different jobs, but never seeing one from beginning to end may prevent women from ever really understanding construction. "Contractors can run the whole job, and at the end bring in the women and minorities to sweep and do receptacles," said an electrician who said she completed her five year apprenticeship without ever working on a job from the beginning. "That's wrong because the way you learn skills is being there from the start, and seeing the whole process."

Another woman who did work a job all the way through provided further illustration of this point. She stayed on one project for two-and-a-half years, moving among different contractors, this time with quite positive results. Each contractor had been contracted to complete a different part of the building. Developing a good reputation as she went, Carol worked for the companies that did the concrete work, sheetrock, ceilings, all the way through to the hardware installation. Over the period she worked there, she gained a broad knowledge of the trade.

When women found themselves in a "no-learn situation," they sometimes brought the problem to the foreman, the training director or the business agent. As the story of the painter demonstrates, that is often no easy task. Even when they weren't pigeon-holed into an unfavorable work situation, they made sure they asked a lot of questions. Doing this helped them to continue to learn, and demonstrated to the journeymen and the

foreman that they wanted to improve their skills and knowledge. Some women said they felt this even benefitted the male apprentices, in that they were often shy about asking questions. A male foreman interviewed provided support for this strategy: "I have found that women are more interested in being instructed. I prefer to teach them because they make a conscious effort to learn the trade. A lot of guys are just there because they have to be."

What women said they did for each other regarding skills was telling, both of what teaching *is* and what it *could be*. "There was a woman journeyman on the job. She was great. She would tell me how I screwed up, and how to fix it." In contrast to other journeymen who sometimes would just tell her how she had screwed up, or worse, wouldn't say anything at all, those tips were welcome. For the most part, women felt comfortable asking other women questions because they believed their presence and their skills were non-threatening to the journeywomen. A female foreman recounted how she would sometimes take time out on the job to do a tool lesson for women because she remembered the problem of not being familiar with tools.

Foreman, journeymen, training directors and contractors have a great deal of control over whether or not women learn. The best journeymen and foremen, say women, are the ones that show them how to do things and then trust them to do it. One journeywoman electrician described how things turned around for her when, as an apprentice, she finally had an opportunity to genuinely learn her trade:

What really helped me was that I got teamed up with a journeyman who was so great. He was an older guy with a couple of kids, and he was small and had a stutter so the other guys were sometimes hard on him. Besides giving me support, he taught me so much. That was what it was supposed to be like, working with a journeyman. He was the reason I stayed.

The foreman was also really great. ...He had never worked with women before but he thought if you wanted to do the work, you should be able to. He got me teamed up with that journeyman. Once he saw that the team worked, he made sure I stayed there. I stayed with him for two years.

Much can be learned from women's experiences in acquiring skills. Female *and* male apprentices often are unable to develop a well-rounded basis of knowledge of their trade because of the work available and because contractors have an interest in using less expensive labor to do less skilled work (Krasner, 1991). Yet women face further barriers to gaining skills in that those responsible for teaching them sometimes doubt their capabilities or would prefer they were not there at all.

Switching a woman off a job because she doesn't know how to do it, or dropping her into many different jobs for a short amount of time keeps her from gaining solid skills. In turn, the next time she walks on a job, she has a harder time doing what every man and every woman in the trades knows she has to do: prove herself. Most relevant for this research is that although a woman's skills alone will not be a sole indicator of whether or not she will remain in the trades, they will have a significant impact on her ability to get hired and be assigned to meaningful work and the likelihood of her being promoted to a supervisory or management role.

Like the actual classroom end of a tradesperson's training, the on-the-job component must also be more standardized and monitored. Government monitors, as well as unions, can play a greater role in ensuring that women are exposed to all aspects of the work and are allowed to see jobs through from beginning to end. Foremen and journeymen and women should also be given greater incentive and training to teach apprentices. Mentoring relationships can also be established between journeywomen and female apprentices, allowing women to pass skills and knowledge on to each other.<sup>16</sup> I will provide further detail on these recommendations in the final chapter.

### **Promotion and Career Ladders**

Promotion is a critical factor to consider in the study of retention of workers in any setting. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis of women's job attachment have shown that when given greater access to opportunity, responsibility and status, women exhibit greater commitment

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<sup>16</sup>The establishment of mentoring relationships should be done with care. Although women expressed enthusiasm about working with other women, they also said that women working together sometimes got them pegged with lousy work or more grief from their male co-workers. Thus, the recommendation should be carried out in consultation with women experienced in the trades, so as to determine how best to do it.

and attachment to their jobs (Kanter, 1977; Osterman, 1982). On a practical level, human resource departments at major U.S. corporations concerned with high female and minority turnover rates have found that "the primary key to retention is making sure people move up through the system," (NYT, Dec. 1, 1991).

Within the building trades, there are two separate but related "systems" through which a union tradesperson may rise--the union and the company. The impact of women moving through these ranks is important in three, related ways. First and most directly, for women who have been in the union a number of years, becoming part of the union leadership or making it into a firm's core workforce may increase her desire to stay. Second, seeing other women in leadership roles may give more recent female entrants greater incentive to stay.

Finally, as women assume higher positions in the industry, they help to facilitate the incorporation of women by creating an environment in which women become insiders and not always outsiders. They also serve to change assumptions and stereotypes about women. Men and women interviewed agreed that the industry is a difficult one for anyone to grow old in since the work and the environment are hard. Yet for women, say some, the options to advance at any age are fewer. A 38 year old journeywoman exemplified this in expressing a desire to move into something more specialized within the industry or to use her skills to move into a different but related field. To her, it seemed the opportunity to make choices did not exist for her.

Another longtime tradeswoman confirmed her doubts: "Women are still not in the core group, so they don't have the possibilities to do what they want, like be supervisors, or teach, or just keep being an electrician. They don't have the opportunities to decide what they want to do and pursue that....It's hard to have a job where you're just a body."

### *Women in union leadership*

In the union, a member might be appointed steward, or to a particular committee, or be elected treasurer, secretary, executive board member, business agent or manager, president of a local or district council, etc. By decision of the Joint Apprenticeship Committee (representatives of the union and contractors), a member might also be hired to teach at the trade apprenticeship school.

Based on the evidence from this study, women in the building trades unions are more highly represented in positions to which they are appointed than to those to which they are elected. These positions also happen to be those with less stature.

This finding is consistent with those of Heery and Kelly (1989), who, in a study of female full-time union officers, attributed this trend to the necessity for elected officials to spend an extensive period of time proving themselves able and committed before attaining office. They assert that women's responsibilities at home can reduce women's chances of being electable since they would be less able to spend time taking part in union activities and "proving themselves." Additional bias might exist if male sponsorship of candidates is important (Heery and Kelly, 1989). This is likely to be the case in the building trades, where union leadership is often passed from one relative to another.

Many women and men interviewed said that they did know of women who were stewards and who sat on committees such as a joint affirmative action committee. One woman interviewed was a steward in her union. Of the three unions included in this study, the Painters District Council was the only one to have had a female teacher for the apprentice program, although they do not currently. All three of the apprenticeship directors expressed interest in employing women as teachers, and in fact, one was working actively at the state level to increase the number of non-traditional teachers in vocational schools.

Even at this level, though there is still some resistance and ambivalence about women's ability to carry out the functions of the job. Indeed many of the women interviewed said that being a steward was a thankless job, in which the individual walks a fine line between the workers and the contractor. Stereotypes about the nature of the work and about women, and a "mismatch" between the two persist. A business agent of a union that had not employed a woman as an instructor expressed doubt that young male apprentices would heed directions from a female teacher. Likewise, he said, the nature of the industry, particularly on large sites, often involved tremendous pressure from many people with different interests and constantly changing variables. Occasionally, union officials even had to deal with violent situations. Having a woman in that kind of situation, he said, was questionable. In the past, the results had been mixed.



For one of the women who had left, a lack of place to go further in the industry was a contributing factor to her departure. She had been very involved with the union and the trade for nearly ten years and began to look for some sort of position within the union network. She found nothing. In one case, she actually applied for a job, and invested considerable time preparing for it, only to find that the position went to a man who was far less experienced than she. Finally, she gave up and found work in a different field.

Although women today are still in the low-level, lay union positions, some women and men interviewed believed that the environment would soon be ripe for women to progress like their male counterparts into higher leadership positions within their union, because men were getting used to the idea that women were there to stay. Most women asked said that if given the opportunity to become a union leader, they would like to try it. They would take advantage of their unions' steward training courses. One woman said she would like one day to become a business agent, although she acknowledged that it would be a difficult job to hold as a woman since male members would probably be skeptical of her ability to do a good job. Others said that the day an overwhelmingly male membership would elect a woman was a long way off.

### *Women in firm leadership*

Advancement within companies is reliant on a tradesperson's skills and non-skill factors including character, ability to get along with people, initiative and willingness to work hard, personal relationships and connections (Krasner, 1991). "Becoming a foreman has to do with longtime friendships, nepotism and skill," said one foreman interviewed.

Three women interviewed had worked as foremen, out of six who had worked in the industry beyond being an apprentice. The women who had worked as foreman felt they were somewhat unusual, and could remember how it was that they had come to be chosen for those positions. In each case, they said it was dependent on their skill. One of the women also had family members in the trade. A male union official said that he had once convinced the company for which he was working to hire a woman as a foreman by appealing to their self-interest: He suggested that it would help to boost their

equal opportunity image. The plan was effective, both in seeing that the woman was promoted and the company looked good.

The women who had worked as foremen had by no means walked into their positions unnoticed. Carolyn was made a foreman while she was still an apprentice. She met with resistance that first time and every time afterward that she walked on the job as a foreman. On one site, pornographic pictures went up in the carpenters' shack the day she was made foreman. "I had been on the job eight or nine months already. If they had been up when I first came, fine, but the day they went up was the day I was made foreman," she said.

When Carolyn asked the union representative on the job if they were union sanctioned and threatened the men with their jobs, the pictures came down. On other occasions, she said, she has gone to the contractor and told them that her authority to carry out her job was being undermined, and that it was in their interest to reestablish her authority. Following all of these strategies, and proving her capabilities along the way, allowed Carolyn to effectively carry out her job as a foreman.

The same male union official mentioned above recalled that when the woman he had recommended to the contractor was actually hired, people reacted. "I took a lot of heat for it," he said. "I had 75 people ready to throw me off the building. ...I had two cousins working on that job. I had to tell them if they didn't like it they could pick up their tools and leave. That was family I told that to. It wasn't easy."

Working as a foreman had in general been positive. It meant moving closer to the inside track, and being treated with greater respect on the site. "If you're the foreman, no one's going to mess with you," said one woman who said she felt like an outsider during her time as regular crew member.

For only one woman who no longer worked in the trades was the lack of room to grow and "to be on the inside" in the trades given as the direct reason why she left. But this was mentioned by several women as they thought about why their female co-workers might have left the trades, or even why they themselves might leave. Certainly male construction workers face some of the same limitations in terms of choices and opportunity. Yet as women do grow older and remain in the trades, their paths into leadership, as well as the barriers, will have to be more closely examined. Affirmative action regulations and union-company contractual agreements can be

extended to address promotions by contracting companies, and the problem of journeywomen being replaced by apprentices.

## Harassment

Almost everyone interviewed for this study agreed that the problem of sexual and gender harassment in the trades is becoming less severe. On a more general level, there is more awareness about the problem and attitudes are changing. On an individual level, men are growing more accustomed to working with women and women are learning to recognize harassment and put a halt to it more quickly. Literature on women in non-traditional workplaces indicates that sexual harassment in such settings tends to lessen over time, be directed to a few women and come from a relatively few men (O'Farrell, 1988).

Two women said that while they knew other women on the job did experience sexual harassment, it was not part of their experience. One of them said she was actually shocked when, two years into her career in the trades, she heard another woman talk about harassment at work. "It surprised me," she said, "It had never happened to me."

*Yet sexual, gender and racial harassment have in no way been eradicated from the jobsite in the construction industry.* As is the case with women in other non-traditional workplaces, those who are either unmarried, young, black or in low status jobs are those who suffer the most harassment (O'Farrell, 1988). Young women and recent entrants tell stories similar to the early experiences of their older and more experienced counterparts.

Black women report being subjected to language which recalls images of slavery. Two women said that the abuse they witnessed during their time in the trades was more than they could handle. What was so difficult for them, was not only what they experienced themselves, but a general environment in which everything they were was spoken of as *other* from the majority white males. And if sexual harassment in general was at all becoming less severe, the ostracism still endured by men of color in the trades demonstrated to Black women that progress was painfully slow. One of these women said:

There was so much prejudice. You never realize there's that much prejudice in the world. I had never experienced anything that strong. For a young white man, he probably hears that all his life, but I had never heard that kind of stuff....I think that really wore on me. I never

really had the sexual harassment so much because they thought I had a husband at home. But I experienced the prejudice. Being a woman, being black--it was so many things at once.

These are some of the most serious issues facing women in the trades. In addition to making the workplace a threatening or uncomfortable place to be, harassment can have an impact on almost every other aspect of a woman's job.

Some types of harassment are not unique to female versus male tradespeople, nor to women in the trades versus other occupations. Men who have been different--African American, Hispanic, Asian American--from the majority construction worker have met with prejudice as they have attempted to enter and negotiate their way through the trades (Erlich, 1986; King, 1981). And, as most women know, few workplaces are immune to sexual harassment. Women in blue, white, and pink collar jobs experience harassment from their co-workers, their bosses, their teachers, etc. Furthermore, in the trades, male apprentices as well as female almost always go through an initiation period. They are sent for coffee, made to do 'grunt work,' and sent for tools or equipment that sometimes do not even exist, etc. As one training director said, "The apprenticeship is a difficult time of anyone's life, male or female."

However, the harassment that women in the building trades face is unique in several ways. First, women are most often isolated from other women. Some women work on jobs where there are no other women, and when there are other women, they are often stationed in different work areas. Second, the environment is intentionally hard. As one woman gently put it, the guys are a "rough cut," and mince few words. So, while harassment in another type of workplace might be more subtle or cloaked, in the building trades it is blunt and more unabashed.

Third, and perhaps most important, is the nature of the industry in which employment is casual and one's reputation plays an important role. Although formal complaint procedures and legal remedies do exist, a construction worker who complains about a co-worker or employer may find herself at best ostracized and at worst permanently unemployed in the industry.

### *Complaint procedures*

Many of the women interviewed expressed qualms about taking their problems--either harassment or otherwise--to a higher authority, particularly early on in their careers in the trades. Negative rumors about women who were troublemakers made them wary of being cast in the same light. "I had heard about women who if you wink at them they bring you up on charges," said Cindy, recalling her first job. Her co-workers were persistently making comments about having an affair with her and called her "every name but my own, including honey, missy, baby and sweetheart." Her steward had pornography on the wall, and talked about her own body in reference to the pictures. "I didn't want to be a trouble maker," she said.

Erica, another apprentice, also knew of women being ostracized for making a complaint. "When you talk to people higher up, it gives them the impression you're weak, like a little kid tattling to mama. I've seen it happen where a woman has complained. It turned her into a leper. The guys don't go near her. I don't want to give that impression."

Carla's experience of making a complaint, and bringing charges against another union member demonstrates this point. On one job during her first year, a co-worker consistently made sexually and racially harassing comments to her. When she saw that her steward and foreman were simply "looking the other way," she brought charges against him. Other male co-workers who had been vocal in their support for her up to that point refused to testify in her hearing. With tradeswomen in the room for moral support, she went alone before the all white male district council, and won her case. The man was fined \$500 and was issued a warning by the union.

Other women mentioned the problem of not being able to complain to a foreman or a steward because it was that person who was causing the problem, or because that person's relative was in charge.

In most cases, women told of a learning process, a strategy or some other source of support that helped them to deal with an environment where harassment was always a possibility. After their first couple of jobs, women learned to "nip it in the bud," by letting men know right off what was and was not acceptable. They found they could 'tell off' someone giving them a hard time. One woman said that she had an easier time coping with harassment in the trades than she had working in an office. "In the office, I had no base of power. When someone put their hand on your leg, all you

could say is 'please don't do that,' or go to the personnel office that did nothing." In the trades she felt she had power as a union member and was more free to speak her mind to any offender.

Women who had been afraid to speak up on their own behalf at the beginning had learned to do so, and felt more confident that they would be able to handle such a situation in the future. One woman even threatened use of a weapon on a man if he ever harassed her again.

Women are not always alone in dealing with harassment. In some cases, women spoke of other women and of men who had loaned support, intervened, or used their authority to stop or prevent harassment. Pattie, a young apprentice, mentioned how when there were journeywomen on her site, they made sure she understood that she did not have to stand for any abuse. When Carolyn was sexually assaulted by a co-worker, every other woman on the jobsite told the assailant they knew about him and not to ever come near them.

In another situation, an apprentice's male co-workers stepped in when a fellow worker made a sexually offensive comment to her. They roughed him up and forced him to apologize to her. Other women said that their foreman had transferred them to another work area when co-workers were abusive, or better yet, they had transferred the harasser himself.

Contractors and unions have also taken steps to prevent harassment, with some holding more weight than others. On one job she worked on, Cindy said the contractor circulated a warning letter to all employees about sexual harassment. The letter was issued after Cindy reported to her foreman that one of his crewmembers was harassing her, although she was uncertain whether it was in response to her complaint. One contractor interviewed said he himself had once gone out on a site to tell his female employees to let him know if they had any problems. (In a separate interview, a female apprentice singled this company out as one where she had felt valued.)

Unions, too, have instituted measures to prevent sexual harassment. In at least two of the three unions included, for example, training courses for stewards included an evening session on sexual harassment. For a steward out in the field, that meant making sure his men didn't talk offensively to women on the site, and either pulling them aside or even laying them off if they did. The bottom line, he said, was that women could sue, and that was in no one's interest.

Sexual harassment continues to be a variable in the lives of tradeswomen. And, while none of the women who had left gave it as a direct reason why they had left, harassment most definitely had an impact on their careers as well as those of the women who had stayed. The prevalence of harassment, combined with the high risk women believed they would incur by reporting it, points to the need for both preventative measures as well as the establishment of a safe reporting process. Further, when sex and race are both taken into account, the implications for women are more serious. It was not just the sexual harassment, and not just the racial harassment, *but both as one*, that caused one woman to leave her work in the trades.

### **Family Responsibilities**

The presence of children in the family had different implications for women's decision to remain in the trades. Overall, it made having the job more difficult, yet in some cases having children was one of the strongest motivations to stay. The workday beginning at six or seven a.m., the evening classes for apprentices and evening union meetings all weighed heavy on women with children, especially since all but one of them were single parents. As difficult as it was to meet the demands of the job, however, women who were parents had strong incentives to remain in their jobs in order to support their families. As one participant pointed out, "A lot of women entered not because they liked or disliked the work, but because they are single women who wanted to support a family. These days, the only way to comfortably support a family is to work in a man's job."

One of the women interviewed left her job because she was pregnant. At the time of this study, she planned to begin looking for work again when her infant son was a bit older. Carol, on the other hand, had had two children during her time in the trades. She had, in fact, returned to work at one point after a spell out *because* she was pregnant and needed insurance coverage. Later, however, after being laid off for eight months, she had to turn down a job because of a lack of childcare. When the union called with a job, she was unable to set it up fast enough in order to accept the job.

Other women had children already when they entered their trades. For them, it was difficult, though not impossible. Evelyn said she was able to work because she had a friend to cover transportation to daycare and teachers at his school who were supportive of her career and went out of their way to

accommodate her schedule. Another woman who was slightly older said that although she was interested in trying a different kind of work after seven years in the trades, she had recently purchased a house for her family. As a single parent, her mortgage payments were dependent solely on her salary and she could not afford to switch jobs.

Interestingly, the evidence gathered about women's family responsibilities showed the sharpest difference of opinion among men and women. Almost overwhelmingly, men believed that women having children was a deterrent to their retention. Women, on the other hand, provided a much richer understanding of how family responsibilities had been an extra burden, but that they were often positively correlated with their retention in the trades. The implication these findings is that in order to make the workplace more equitable for men and women, contractors, unions and government will have to work toward meeting the needs of women with family responsibilities.

### **Economic Conditions**

Nearly all the men and women interviewed said that the main reason anyone was leaving the trades now was the economy. With the ending of the construction boom in Boston, the area industry has suffered a 56 percent job loss (Department of Employment Security 1992, Current Employment Survey 790). Union members had been laid off for as long as two years, and union officials quoted unemployment rates as high as 80 percent in some locals, with an overall unemployment rate of 50 percent (Boston Building Trades Council, 1992). In fact, three of the eight women who had left the industry had done so in large part because they had been laid off and eventually gave up waiting and found other work. Each of these women had gone on to work that built on the skills they had developed as construction workers.

Apprenticeship data from one union<sup>17</sup> suggests that in fact the economy has *not* caused more apprentices to leave because they are discouraged by the lack of work. Instead, the average graduation (or "still active" for those who have not yet completed the program) rate for the past three years is actually higher than it was in the three preceding years. And while women's

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<sup>17</sup>Other apprenticeship data were either not available or not broken out by year in order to show responses to economic trends.



numbers in that union were too low to draw firm conclusions, their graduation--or retention--rates follow the same pattern.

Without more complete statistical information or supporting research, one can only speculate as to whether women have higher permanent quit rates than their male counterparts in economic downturns such as these. One woman suggested that since women generally enter the trades at an older age, they have a wider range of job experience and therefore might be more likely to enter another line of work when they are laid off from construction for extended periods of time. It may be also that men are more likely to find construction "side work" than women, thus remaining in touch with the industry, whereas women have fewer contacts and opportunities to do construction related work than men. I raise this as a possibility based on three women who said that they worked at a supermarket, a hospital, and unpaid light construction work on family members' homes during lay off times.

## **Conclusions**

Within each aspect of the internal labor market described in this chapter, we find distinct barriers facing women already working in the trades. These are barriers that exist beyond the initial problems associated with women's entry into the construction trades, such as socially constructed gender roles which begin taking a toll during childhood, imbalances in the education system, and biases among unions and employers against taking on women. The story told here by women *and* men is one of an environment that, although it includes women, has not truly integrated them. This subtle but pervasive exclusion, I believe, is the most important factor contributing to women's lower retention rates.

No one factor is solely responsible for women's continued existence on the margin rather than in the core of the construction industry. Rather, throughout women's careers in the trades--both in their beginning years and later in their careers--they confront systems and networks that are ill-suited to their success and their pursuit of the trade. Early on, women are most affected by impediments having to do with training, deployment, job assignments and harassment. Having negotiated those areas successfully, more experienced and skilled women are deterred by a lack of opportunities open to them and by the instability of employment. Parenting and childcare

concerns also continue to be additional burdens for women working in the trades.

The story of retention, then, is one that cannot be told quickly. There are no singular or easy answers, but more a complex web of factors that make women's presence in the trades difficult. Within this web, the greatest promise lies with whoever goes slightly against the grain, be they female or male. The evidence from this research shows that for each set of barriers, there are strategies and conditions under which women have been able to negotiate them. The barriers and strategies as interviewees describe them are as follows:

First, women continue to be deployed on the jobsite only to the extent that they have to as required by law. The requirements mandate 6.9 percent women on federal projects and 10 percent women on city sponsored projects and large private developments in the city. This makes a strong case for federal, state and city guidelines. Yet it presents unique problems for women in that women's overall numbers on the jobsite are low. These problems include being moved around from job to job by contractors and continuing to be in the spotlight and isolated from other women.

When women have been permitted (either consciously or by happenstance) to remain on jobsites for long periods of time and through several stages of work, they have benefitted greatly. In addition to augmenting their skills base, women were able to establish and build relationships with their co-workers under these circumstances. Another positive experience for women was the opportunity to work in a crew with other women.

Second, assumptions and stereotypes about women's preferences and capabilities by their foremen and stewards sometimes lands women with marginal job assignments they feel are not only inferior but also detrimental to their development as tradeswomen. Examples of such marginal work included installing slews of electrical receptacles, putting up masking for paint or simply "looking busy."

When foremen and journeymen have given women central rather than marginal roles in the completion of the work, and provided them opportunities to develop their own strengths and abilities, women have succeeded the most.

Third, while in general, the training system developed by the building trades is effective in producing skilled workers, when we look inside of that system, we find that with respect to women, training and skills acquisition is not always equitable. Being shuffled from job to job, brought in only at the end of a job or given unchallenging routine work hinders women's ability to learn and develop a good reputation.

The greatest learning opportunities for women occurred when they were teamed up with journeymen sincerely interested in teaching them, given a chance to work on jobs from beginning to end, and able to ask many questions. Women also benefitted uniquely from the supportive critique and teaching they received working with other tradeswomen.

Fourth, in their unions and the companies they work for, women have made some progress in terms of gaining leadership roles, but their opportunities remain limited. Ambivalence about their capabilities in terms of leadership and skills, and lack of connections often prohibit them from going beyond first-rung union positions, and from making it into contractor's core workforces.

Women have gained ground when they were appointed (rather than elected) to positions and when they were recommended or supported by male union members who held positions of power. Contractors have been most willing to hire women as foremen when they believed it made sound business sense based on either a woman's technical or organizational skills, or when it would improve their affirmative action track record in the eyes of government.

Fifth, sexual, gender and racial harassment, while less severe and more localized than it once was, continues to be a problem for women. New entrants, women without connections and women of color face the most serious attacks. The use of existing channels--one's steward, supervisor, employer or union--is sometimes effective for women, but continues to be seen as dangerous by many due to fear of ostracism or greater resentment from co-workers. The interaction of racial and sexual harassment is a persistent problem.

Over time, women have found ways to set boundaries with men and effectively let them know when they have crossed them. They have also appealed to men's self-interests in maintaining their job, or, in the case of

contractors, their profit. In some cases, male co-workers, contractors and unions have intervened with individual actions, policies or even training.

Sixth, women's family responsibilities have made working in the trades difficult, particularly because many are single parents. Finding accomodating childcare only begins to ease the double burden of women. With regard to retention, however, the presence of children has had varying implications. In some instances, women have left their work in the trades to find work more accomodating to their family lives. For other women, having children has been the strongest motivation for them to enter or remain in their construction jobs.

Finally, all construction workers, female and male, are feeling the effects of the current economic downturn. The tightening of the labor force has, in some cases, increased tensions among workers along the lines of sex and race. This research did not reveal clear evidence as to whether or not the recession is taking a deeper toll on women in terms of their retention or not. However, information about how workers support themselves in these times suggests that women's lesser access to networks within the industry may make them less likely to find construction side work, and more likely to enter other jobs and not return.

The experiences and opinions expressed by the women and men interviewed contribute significantly to both a theoretical and a practical approach to women's retention. They support a theoretical perspective which takes into account women's family responsibilities, the conditions at work and the general economy, while at the same time recognizing individual capacity to intervene throughout these categories. At a practical level, they provide human experience on which to develop policy and effect institutional change.

In the proceeding, final chapter I will outline specific steps that can be taken by government, unions, contractors, advocates and women themselves to replicate and systematize these success stories.

## Chapter 4 Recommendations

All of the institutions involved in the construction industry need to take seriously the retention of women workers for several reasons. First, the industry will not be immune to demographic changes taking place in the workforce. Women will account for 62 percent of growth in the labor force in the coming decade, eventually making up 47 percent of the civilian labor force. This is a steady increase over previous decades, when women made up 38 percent, 42 percent and 45 percent in 1970, 1980, and 1990, respectively (U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, 1992). As one union official aptly put it "if people don't realize (the demographic changes) they're going to get left in the dust."

Second, unions and contractors alike are concerned with training costs and commitment and loyalty of members and workers. A worker who leaves the industry represents a loss of valuable training dollars, meaning that supportive retention policies and practices make good business sense (Bohnen and Klie, 1990, p. 1).

Third, contractors and unions must continue to meet federal, state and local guidelines for the number of women employed (Bohnen and Klie, 1990). In Boston, they will be required to comply with the Boston Jobs Residents Policy, and elsewhere with state and/or federal laws. Attention paid to all aspects of the internal labor market detailed in this thesis will help to ensure that female workers employed under these guidelines and beyond maximize both their job satisfaction and their productivity.

Government agencies charged with enforcement of federal and city guidelines should pay as much attention to the experience of women and the rules of work as they do to recruitment and placement. In turn, advocacy and training organizations that are in direct contact with tradeswomen have much to offer in understanding not only the barriers that women face but also why some women are successful in overcoming them.

The recommendations that follow are based directly on the interviews conducted for this study. They are in response to problems raised by the interviewees--many were suggested by them. In some cases the recommendations include useful examples of remedies taken from other

workplaces. I present the recommendations in a format that is consistent with both the theoretical framework and the evidence from the research which place emphasis on the institutional environment in which women work.

Together, unions, Joint Apprenticeship Committee training programs, contracting companies, individual foremen, government compliance agencies and training and advocacy organizations can address the barriers women face at work and in balancing the responsibilities as parents and wage earners.

## **Unions**

1 - Inequities related to on-job-training, skills acquisition and the assignment of jobs can most effectively be dealt with through more thorough and efficient training of journeymen and foremen. Better preparation of foremen and journeyman as managers and teachers should be made a priority of the unions. This will benefit not only females but male construction workers as well. Krasner (1991) found that organizational and management skills were not evenly acquired among union electricians, and were often not considered foremost in promotion decisions by contractors. He recommends the type of training described above to address this problem.

These training efforts could be undertaken in cooperation with contractors' associations under an agreement similar to those establishing Joint Apprenticeship Committees. Unions already provide various upgrade trainings for advanced tradespeople, and contractors associations already offered supervisory training for selected personnel, so expanding the scope and availability of these trainings is feasible.

Topics covered should include general ones such as the discussion of integration of the workplace and specific ones such as the assignment and rotation of tasks among workers, the development of successful crews, the training of workers at different levels, with different experiences and strengths, etc. Instruction on each of these points should be done with an eye toward assuring that tradeswomen--both apprentices and journeywomen--develop well-rounded knowledge of their trades.

Such training can serve multiple purposes. Apprentices will be better trained, advanced mechanics will be better prepared for supervisory roles and

companies will be able to make promotion decisions based on sound skill decisions.

2 - Unions should also provide a forum for discussion and guidelines for preventing and addressing sexual and racial harassment. This should be offered on positive terms to veteran union members, and as part of larger training initiatives such as the one described above. Part of institutionalizing change is to make it part of business as usual. This training too should be provided in cooperation with the contractors associations and/or government.

3 - Unions should play a stronger role in determining where, how, and for how long female union members are deployed, in order to prevent their being moved around frequently and/or placed on jobs only at the tail end by contractors simply trying to fulfill legal requirements. This need not be a special system for women, but rather a system by which to ensure that all apprentices develop a well-rounded knowledge of the field. Apprenticeship directors and business agents responsible for job referrals can institute a system to track which skills members have and have not acquired to date, and refer women *and men* to jobs accordingly.

4 - In order to more fully integrate women into the union, both in lay participation and in leadership, the unions should continue and increase appointments of women to leadership posts where applicable. In addition, they should sponsor and/or support leadership training for women so as to encourage the candidacy and election of women to higher office.

5 - Part of the prevention of sexual and racial harassment is the provision of safe and effective methods for dealing with it when it occurs. The union should establish a safe and confidential reporting and assistance process for victims of sexual and racial harassment.

A policy put in place by the United Steelworkers of America Canadian division (date unknown) provides a successful example for how to do this. The policy is designed to bring justice to victims and perpetrators of harassment, and to increase awareness of the problem through the

retainment of a permanent employee in each district whose sole responsibility is to address harassment within the union.

The Sexual Harassment Complaints Counselor's job is to investigate and follow through on worker/worker and worker/supervisor complaints. In the building trades unions, a position could be established either within the context of an affirmative action committee or elsewhere. The neutral party holding that position could follow up on complaints, recommend further action, provide assistance to individuals on how to handle harassment, etc. This process must remain confidential in order to be effective.

6 - Support research and development of childcare provision for construction workers. Both men and women, as well as the industry as a whole, will benefit from this.

### **Joint Apprenticeship Committees (JACs)**

1 - The JACs can play a role in strengthening the career ladders and opportunities of women by hiring female instructors. This will help to broaden the vision of women as leaders to both female and male apprentices, and help to incorporate a more diverse range of trade techniques into the curriculum.

2 - In order to promote the equity of training as well as productivity and safety among all apprentices, the JACs should also include instruction that recognizes differences in size, strength and experience of all apprentices. The instruction should thus be based on the participation of tradespeople who are diverse along the same criterion.

### **Contractors**

1 - Contracting companies should hold joint, if not the majority, of responsibility for the supervisory instruction described above in the first "Union" recommendation. Some contractors' associations have experience at providing formal supervisory training for segments of their core workforces (Krasner, 1991)--these initiatives should be expanded to reach all advanced tradespeople.



2 - Given their interest in the productivity of workers *and* their need to meet legal requirements on the employment of women, contractors should see to it that women develop strong skills. One means of doing this is to end the practice of shuffling women from site to site to meet compliance regulations. Instead, contractors should retain women on projects for longer periods of time. This will lead to increased skill development of female workers.

3 - Contractors should demonstrate strong leadership in developing an environment truly integrative of women. The workforce must feel that equitable and respectful behavior toward women is part of the job. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized. In other settings, such as the Pittsfield Police Department, not until leadership gave clear orders did the force see that harassment would not be tolerated, and did supervisors begin to change the way assignments and promotions were made (Boston Globe, 2/23/92).

This commitment should be extended through company owners, project managers, construction superintendents, foremen and others. It should include bringing women into the core workforce, enforcing workplace rules against pornography, and keeping in contact with female employees to understand their problems, strengths and solutions.

### **Foremen**

1 - Foremen can have a significant impact on women's and men's skills development. They should rotate workers evenly among tasks to ensure well-rounded skills acquisition by workers, and fairness. They should also realize women's potentials by allowing them to work on challenging tasks which are central to completion of the project. Check with women about own assumptions about their preferences and capabilities.

2 - Since much of a tradesperson's skills are acquired through the informal channels of work experience (Krasner, 1991), foremen should strive to provide the best possible conditions under which that can take place. They should team women up with journeymen and journeywomen able and willing to teach them.

3 - In order to mitigate the effects of isolation endured by many women and to support mentorship, foremen should also assign women to crews in which they work with other women.

4 - Encourage safety and teamwork in heavy physical labor among all workers.

5 - Participate in and help shape training for foreman and journeyman as described above.

### **Government Compliance Agencies**

1 - Maintain and strictly enforce existing affirmative action guidelines.

2 - Government should promote the retention of women by helping to strengthen career ladders and long-term employment. Changes in the Boston Jobs Residents Policy should be made to provide incentives (or disincentives) for contractors employing women beyond their apprenticeships and as foremen.

3 - The federal, state and city governments should support research and data collection regarding female employment rates and available workers.

4 - Government compliance units can and should stem the incidence of women being brought onto jobs only at the end. This practice is in contradiction to the intent of the regulations, and has negative implications for women's skills development and more generally their integration into the workforce. Execute "corrective action" against employers more rapidly, thus decreasing the number of projects that run out of compliance for extended periods of time.

### **Training and Advocacy Agencies**

Advocacy and training organizations have been vitally important to the preparation of women for the trades. They should also take a more highly visible role in reshaping the institutions into which women enter. They can participate in the development of more inclusive apprenticeship and supervisory training, the creation of safe, confidential measures for dealing

with sexual harassment, etc. As organizations made up of and in closest contact with women, they have the unique ability to provide insight toward success.

## **Appendix I Definition of Terms**

**Apprentice**-One who has been accepted into the union and is enrolled in a Joint Apprenticeship Committee training program.

**Journeywoman/journeyman**-A tradesperson who has completed her/his apprenticeship. In an attempt to use inclusive language, I have in some cases used the phrase "journey level worker."

**Mechanic**-Synonomous with a journey level worker. The term is used across various trades.

**Foreman**-A supervisor in charge of operations on a construction site. A foreman is generally employed directly by a contractor, but remains a union member. A person who is once a foreman is not always a foreman. A mechanic might be a foreman on one job and not on the next, depending on the job and and the contractor.

**Contractor**-A construction company or the owner of one. As I use it here, the term also includes construction company managers.

**Steward**-A direct union representative of workers, appointed by the business agent. The steward is always on the jobsite and brings grievances to the contractor when necessary. Walking the line between representing workers on one hand and remaining employed by the contractor on the other often make being a steward a difficult job.

**Business Agent**-This is generally an elected union position, but responsibilities vary across unions. Responsibilities might include negotiation and enforcement of contracts, promotion of union workers to non-union contractors and oversight of deployment through the union hiring hall.

**Appendix II**  
**List of Interviews**

**Tradeswomen**

*Currently working or awaiting work:*

Carpenter, 7th year journeywoman  
Carpenter, 3rd year apprentice  
Electrician, 10th year journeywoman/forewoman  
Electrician, 3rd year apprentice  
Electrician, 4th year apprentice  
Electrician, 8th year journeywoman  
Painter, 2nd year apprentice  
Painter, 4th year journeywoman

*No longer working in the trades:*

Carpenter, completed 2nd year of apprenticeship  
Carpenter, completed 6 years  
Carpenter, completed 10 years  
Electrician, completed 1st year of apprenticeship  
Electrician, completed 10 years  
Painter, completed 2nd year of apprenticeship  
Painter, completed 1st year of apprenticeship  
Painter, completed 3 year apprenticeship

**Tradesmen, Union Officials**

Carpenter, Apprenticeship Director  
Carpenter, Steward  
Carpenter, Business Agent  
Electrician, Apprenticeship Director  
Electrician, Foreman  
Painter, Apprenticeship Director  
Painter, Apprenticeship Instructor  
Painter, Business Agent

**Contractors**

Owner, small Boston-based company  
Project Manager, national company  
Project Manager, New England subcontracting company

**Government Officials**

Assistant Director, Boston Residents Jobs Policy

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