Women and traditionally male trades: A new approach

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What are we looking at?

How might we increase the recruitment and retention of women in trades roles in traditionally male trades occupations?

and:

• What are the key factors that enable or prevent increasing female participation in such trade - and largely STEM – occupations?

This question will be considered at the individual level, through immediate relationships to those at the community and society levels.
Low female participation rates in traditionally male trades have persisted for many decades. Women NSW (2013) reported that:

Fewer than two percent of construction, automotive and electrical tradespeople in Australia today are women. There were just 676 female carpenters, 931 female motor mechanics, 638 female plumbers and 1,432 female electricians nation-wide in 2011 within a total technicians and trades workforce of nearly 1.43 million people, just over 14 percent of the workforce. In the largest single trade occupation in Australia – that of electrician – women were just 1.3 percent of the total.

(Women NSW, 2013, p.5).
Why does this matter?

Gender diversity in the workforce:

1. Enlarges pool of potential employees
2. Increases productivity through increasing the range of capabilities available to a business
3. Enables individual women to achieve their ambitions
4. Enables individual women to access higher paying jobs
5. Helps break down rigid thinking about gender roles that contributes to societal harms
So what’s the problem?

- Lack of opportunity to develop relevant interests and skills early in life
- Stereotypes and bias against women working in such trades, starting at school
- Negative perceptions of some trade-based industries and a lack of awareness of opportunities and career paths such trades offer
- Stereotypes and myths about women in male dominated workplaces and the sorts of capabilities and qualities women possess to perform the work
Moreover, there may also be

- Workplace cultures which are non-inclusive, masculinist or ‘blokey’ with a higher tolerance of what might be seen as inappropriate behaviours e.g. sexualised and sexist language, bullying

- Biases against recruiting, developing and advancing the careers of women in male dominated trades

- Structural issues such as flexibility of employment and work-life balance – including offering options for appropriate workplace facilities and uniforms.
But:

Previous interventions aimed at increasing the participation of women in traditionally male trades have generally failed because they have been short term and one-dimensional.

An alternative ‘ecological approach’ suggests that strategies to increase the participation of women in male occupations must, like the problem, be multidimensional and complex.
What analytical framework did we use?

- **Societal**: Whole of society beliefs about gender norms
- **Immediate Relationships**: Influence of family, friends, school/RTO/work colleagues
- **Individual**: Personal attributes, capabilities, attitudes
- **Community**: Organisational influences such as school/RTO timetabling, workplace practices

**Influence Factors**
What did we do? What are we doing now?

In the first phase we:
- Interviewed 87 auto industry participants (17 tradeswomen, 26 female apprentices and 44 employers)
- Digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews
- De-identified them and analysed the interviews using NVivo

In the current phase we will:
- Interview apprentices, tradeswomen and employers in the electrical trades
- Also interview tradeswomen and apprentices that have left the trade or their training
- Work with NCVER to examine statistical data related to female participation in traditionally male trades
# Findings: The barriers and enablers at the individual level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Enablers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in rigid gender roles.</td>
<td>Love of cars, in the case of auto apprentices and tradeswomen.</td>
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<td>Inability to perform hands on tasks.</td>
<td>Preference for hands-on work and practical problem solving.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak intrinsic motivation.</td>
<td>Strong intrinsic motivation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intolerance of negative male behaviours.</td>
<td>Tolerance of negative male behaviours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative attitudes to dirty, heavy work.</td>
<td>Positive attitudes to dirty, heavy work.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some quotes

It's sort of - it's - it does get - it is a bit weird being the only girl, but I've - I feel comfortable in that situation because I grew up around it, being with my brother's friends and all that. So I don't mind hanging around, having males dominate the workshop and everything

Kelly, motorcycle mechanic apprentice

...once I finished in the workshop I moved up...to be a service advisor where I was basically customer service, took all our work in. Then I moved on to workshop manager and I was workshop manager for a couple of years and I only just recently came into operations manager

Molly, heavy vehicle mechanic tradeswoman
# Findings: The barriers and enablers at the immediate level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunity to learn about automotive trades or to experience hands on work with cars.</td>
<td>Fathers (and other family members) tinker on cars with daughters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunity to participate in VET automotive programs in schools.</td>
<td>Family members in trades occupations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and school discouragement of female interest in automotive trades.</td>
<td>Families encourage non-traditional career choices.</td>
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<td>Employers’ discouragement of female trades employees.</td>
<td>School teachers encourage interest in trades.</td>
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<td>Male co-workers and RTO students’ belief in rigid gender roles and abilities to ‘do the job’.</td>
<td>Employers encourage female trades employees.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Male co-workers and RTO students welcome female colleagues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>RTO teachers encourage and support female trades students.</td>
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</table>
Dad said if you're going to do it, you may as well learn how to do it properly… Then he gave me these two Minis in the back yard, and told me if I wanted to learn how to fix them, I'd better go and learn how to fix them.

Lisa, light vehicle mechanic and auto electrical tradeswoman

Because she is the only female I think also she is basically trying to - she works extremely hard but I think even then she's got to prove her gender all day, the whole time she's there to prove herself. Not just prove herself, but to - she's a female and she can do this job. She works 100 per cent all day to try and prove herself.

Bruce, large metro, with current female trades employees
# Findings: The barriers and enablers at the community level

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of provision of VET automotive programs in schools.</td>
<td>Provision of VET auto programs in schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of organisational will to change masculine workplace cultures.</td>
<td>Organisational support for female trades employees – work allocation, physical amenities, protective clothing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak organisational support for gender equality (physical amenities, protective clothing, job design and scheduling).</td>
<td>Recognition of value women add to automotive businesses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bullying and harassment of female employees.</td>
<td>Employers effectively manage gender-inclusive workplaces.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RTO teachers effectively manage gender-inclusive classrooms.</td>
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</table>
Some quotes

But to be able to wear pink steel capped boots or something like that. I think that would be a lot nicer than wearing men's black ones, apart from the fact that it's safer to wear shoes that are built for your feet.

Chloe, auto refinishing apprentice

One of the things - no, one of the things that when I do the interview with them is I point out the fact that it is a male orientated industry, but that doesn't mean that I'm not - that I don't accept females. But 90 per cent of the industry is male. I ask the question, now, is there anything that you would feel that would be offensive regarding language or things like that. I'm not talking about harassment or abuse or anything, I'm just talking general, talk of the mill where - you know these days what it's like.

Colin, employer

It's nothing personal that we don't do it but just purely we don't really see the women as fitting there with what we do

George, employer
Findings: The barriers and enablers at the societal level

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Intolerance of women in non-traditional roles.</td>
<td>Acknowledgement of women as automotive trades people.</td>
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<td>Masculine industry culture.</td>
<td>Positive media portrayals of women in trades.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of careers available in the</td>
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<tr>
<td>automotive industry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of media portrayal of women in trades roles.</td>
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Some quotes

... when customers come in and stuff and they ask, can I speak to a mechanic, and you say that like I can help you, sometimes they just underestimate you...once I've solved their problem, they'll say, oh sorry, and then they will be fine then afterwards

Chloe, auto refinishing apprentice

I can remember one particular occasion when a gentleman had driven a vehicle quite a distance, over 100 Ks, to have some radio and mobile phone kits fitted and he was quite reluctant to have a young female work on his vehicle. But after a little bit of my intervention he changed his mind a little bit and said I'll give her a go and I explained the circumstances. It was quite funny because as we rolled the pages forward, several months later he had another vehicle that he had to send in and the same girl that he'd been very reluctant to have work on his vehicle was his key person that he asked for. I actually was on deck that day when that was happening and I don't know whether it was me that took the call or whatever but I said to him at some stage, I said wasn't the girl that girl you weren't so keen on once before? He said oh no, no, she did a very good job and I have my utmost confidence and she's exceeded most of the expectations I've had in previous jobs, so he said I want her back and I want to make sure she works on our vehicles in the future. I thought great, we had a win that day.

Raymond, employer
## Impacts on the business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most to least significant impacts</th>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Tradeswomen/Apprentices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most significant</td>
<td>Improved customer service*</td>
<td>Increased productivity due to cleaner, better organised, more efficient workshop*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased pool of potential employees to fill skills gaps</td>
<td>Improved, less masculine, workplace culture*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Increased technical skills base amongst employees with potential to be promoted into management or other administrative roles</td>
<td>Improved interpersonal communication amongst co-workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Least significant</td>
<td>Increased capacity to handle intricate work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* indicates items considered of significant benefit or importance.
Some quotes

I think they have a positive impact on the workplace. I think it breaks down some of the old boy actions in the workplace. It cleans it up a bit, if you’d like. Certainly the guys will tend to watch their language a bit more

Russell, employer

I think in some way they [Females] have a positive effect because it adds more of a professional way of doing things in the workshop. I've noticed that a lot of other workshops that I see guys coming from, they talk about they have pictures of girls in the paint room and stuff like that but the one I'm at now it has - it's completely professional and everything. One of the other apprentices here - the panel beater - he has a girlfriend who also does spray painting, so she's like - they're good there as well, and she said as soon as she started working there they took down all the pictures and everything, and everyone acted a bit more professional with what they were telling her and stuff like that.

Jenna, spray painting apprentice
What are the ways forward: maybe site-based saturation?

- The ecological approach enabled us to organise our analysis in ways that highlighted the importance of the dynamic, complex interactions between women and their environments in shaping the choice of a non-traditional trades occupation.

- The term *site-based saturation* has been used to describe an ecological approach to a complex ecological problem such as increasing the participation of women in traditionally male occupations. It is an approach that ‘...features both depth and breadth of activity in one geographical location’
Its attributes

• A ‘site’ is limited to one, or several related, business/es with demonstrated capability to effectively manage the employment of women in trades roles

• A stakeholder partnership is developed with a nearby RTO with demonstrated capability to provide a successful learning experience for female apprentices and/or programs to transition women into traditionally male trades learning

• Stakeholder partnerships are developed with one, or a few, nearby secondary schools with demonstrated commitment to vocational learning and capability to provide successful careers and other relevant programs to support young women to prepare for careers in traditionally male trades
And -

- Consideration is given to the development of fast track program for female career changes to transition to the trade

- A program of change strategies is aimed at, simultaneously, building:
  - experience in, and aspirations for, traditionally male trades amongst women and girls,
  - gender inclusive culture and adaptable attitudes to gender roles in the school, RTO and workplace,
  - adaptation of flexible work practices for male and female trades employees.

- A plan is developed to commit to, lead, coordinate and support the change program over a sustained period, 5-10 years.
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