



# Nontraditional

## Jobs for Women



HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU JUMPED INTO A TAXI and found a woman at the wheel? Have you ever been on a commercial flight piloted by a woman? When you've had a leaky faucet, was it fixed by Mark or Marcia? Even though the last few decades have brought great advances for women in the United States, we still tend to congregate in certain occupations (usually low-paying ones). Women have made some breakthroughs in professional, male-dominated jobs, but have made very few gains in nontraditional blue-collar occupations.

### Why should we care?

It's the wages, ladies. Women on average earn less than men, and much of that difference can be explained by the occupational choices we make. Many occupations that are traditionally held by men are high-wage, high-growth jobs—positions that could be of significant advantage to single-moms or other women who are the primary income source for their household. And, it isn't just the wages. Many nontraditional careers offer benefits, flexibility (yes, flexibility) and opportunities that aren't available in traditionally-held female careers.

Every so often, someone calls our office and asks what are the best jobs for women. Well, the best jobs are the best jobs. Women have the choice to work wherever they choose. They should choose the jobs that are most likely to benefit themselves and their families.

### What's Up?

Have you ever noticed that many high-paying male-dominated occupations have counterpart lower-paying female-dominated occupations? Doctors—nurses; dentists—dental assistants; managers—secretaries; commission salesmen—cashiers; college professor—preschool teacher. It's not that we aren't interested in a particular field; it's that we just don't get the education that will provide us with the higher-paying alternative.

### Exercise, exercise

Try this exercise. Come up with a list of items that are important to you in your career choice (hint: wages, flexibility, benefits, interest, etc.). Then make a list of male-dominated occupations and another list of female-dominated occupations. Finally, go through your important career characteristic list and decide—in general—which group of occupations most closely meets your career criteria. Typically, you'll discover that male-dominated positions are the better career choice.

### If Mom did it. . .

If nontraditional occupations are high-paying and meet our career criteria, why have women shied away from them? Attitudes about “men's work” are the most likely reason. But rest assured, these beliefs are mainly the result of tradition and socialization and not because of sex-related job requirements. Socialization is probably why we see women over-represented in “pink collar” professions such as nursing, school teaching, and clerical positions. If most of the women you know are in certain occupations, you begin to believe those are the jobs you should have.

### The Fear Factor

Also, our aversion as women to risk taking may factor in to the job choice equation. Let's be honest, taking a job where you are the only woman is a scary (but rewarding) proposition. Finally, most women tend to underestimate the amount of time they will spend in the labor force and may not see additional education as a profitable investment.

### What are they?

What exactly is a nontraditional occupation for a woman? The U.S. Department of Labor specifically defines it to be an occupation in which women comprise 25 percent or less of total employment. From a national standpoint, those occupations include such positions as architects,

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truck drivers, aircraft pilots, construction occupations and auto mechanics. In Utah, wages for many of these nontraditional occupations measure above the statewide median hourly wage of \$14.50.

It is certainly true that in this day and age a woman is more likely than she was 20 or 30 years ago be a part of the workforce at some point in her life, whether it is by choice or necessity due to divorce, parenthood, a spouse losing his job or just needing to “make ends meet.” Women need to be prepared for the workforce, and the most powerful tool in choosing a career is knowledge. Knowing that nontraditional jobs are a viable and lucrative option is just one more piece of information to help women make those important career decisions. ☞



Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services, 2007 OES Wages

**MYTH:** These jobs are dirty!

**FACT:** While it is true that *some* nontraditional occupations will involve getting a little grease under your fingernails, technological changes have cleaned up many of these occupations. For example, auto mechanics are just as likely to be seen working on a computer as they would be under the hood of a car! (Many traditional female jobs are pretty dirty, too.)

**MYTH:** The “good ole’ boys network” will keep me from getting a job in a “man’s occupation”.

**FACT:** Times have certainly changed and many women have broken through the glass ceilings that used to hamper their entry and advancement in the workforce. Women are generally more widely accepted in the workforce and people are used to having female coworkers. Most male upper-level managers have spouses or daughters in the workforce. Plus, employers are starting to understand the benefits of a diversified workforce. If necessary, you do have law on your side to ensure you have just as much of a chance at that job as your male counterpart. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

**MYTH:** I won’t get paid as much as a guy for doing the same job.

**FACT:** The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA) protects men and women who perform substantially equal work in the same establishment from sex-based wage discrimination. Again, the law is on your side.

**MYTH:** I won’t be respected or taken seriously.

**FACT:** It’s true that women in any occupation struggle sometimes to have their abilities recognized, and it could be especially difficult if you are one of only a handful of women in that line of work. However, your coworkers are human beings just like yourself, and in time if you prove yourself you are sure to win the respect of those who deserve yours in return.