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## A Study Guide for the Film

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National  
Film Board  
of Canada

Office  
national du film  
du Canada



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## ***Film Synopsis***

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Chryse Gibson and Kate Braid are general construction journeywomen workers, Sue Alcock is a first officer of the Canadian Coast Guard, Elizabeth Davidson is an architect. What these women in very different occupations have in common is their success in fields often thought of as strictly masculine. Each demonstrates through her manual, technical, managerial or intellectual abilities that "women's work" can be anything a woman chooses to do.

*Attention: Women at Work!* presents these role models in order to encourage high school girls to open their minds to a wide range of career possibilities. The film's message, that career choices need not be limited by gender, is an important one to convey to adolescent boys and to women returning to the work force as well.

Through a discussion session with a group of teenage girls, the film also explores some of the fears, concerns and misconceptions young women have about the labor force and about women's role in it. The film's teenagers come from a wide range of backgrounds and provide a heterogeneous peer group that will evoke response in a variety of students. Students will also respond to the film's four working women who demonstrate that the difficulties of pioneering a non-traditional occupation can be overcome and that the rewards of doing so are well worth the effort.

***Attention: Women at Work!*** is a film of special interest to:

- High School Students
  - Guidance Counsellors
  - Family Life Educators
  - Women's Studies Participants
  - Parents, Educators, School Trustees
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## **Background for Guidance Counsellor**

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The young women in your high school have a far greater array of career options than was available to their mothers and grandmothers.

### **Labor Force Participation of Women**

Today, women are no longer legally barred from trades and professions. Virtually every occupation, from astronaut to zoo-keeper, is open to able individuals regardless of their sex. However, although the majority of women now spend much of their lives in the work force, most remain concentrated in a handful of fields considered traditional women's occupations. Two-thirds of women working outside the home are in the clerical, sales and services sectors, sometimes termed the "pink-collar ghetto" and characterized by relatively low-paying, low-status, dead-end jobs. Even those women in managerial or professional groups tend to be in occupations such as nursing or teaching which are thought of as primarily women's fields.

Chances are, most of your female students are also drifting toward these well-travelled paths without contemplating even a fraction of the other career possibilities that exist. One indication of this is the large number of girls who drop high school science and mathematics and, in so doing, close the door on a great many professional and technical fields such as computer science, drafting and business administration, to give just a few examples.

### **Why Is This Cause for Concern?**

Of course, women in traditional jobs perform valuable work, and the intention of the film is certainly not to belittle such occupations. But the woman who chooses a career simply because it is "the thing to do," and not because it suits her particular interests and abilities, is clearly shortchanging herself. Girls as much as boys have the right to develop their full potential.

Moreover, traditional areas of women's employment can be severely limiting economically. Employees in the clerical, sales and service sectors usually earn much less than those in such fields as the skilled trades, for example, which are currently male dominated. More alarming is the fact that many traditional jobs in the clerical, sales and service sectors are likely to become obsolete in coming years as computer technology changes the workplace and reduces the need for certain kinds of labor. The high-demand jobs of the future are likely to be in the trades and technical professions, the very fields which until now have attracted relatively few women.

### **What Do We Mean by "Non-Traditional" Occupations?**

A non-traditional occupation is simply one in which women for a variety of reasons are under-represented. These run the gamut from professions such as law, medicine, scientific research and engineering, to technical occupations and skilled trades, such as plumbing or carpentry. Some of these occupations may involve heavy, physical work. For the majority, however, skill, dexterity, mechanical ability, managerial skills or intellectual ability are what count most.

### **Why Do So Few Girls Consider Non-Traditional Jobs?**

As the film's role models demonstrate, women can be as competent on construction sites and in laboratories as in offices and schools. However, girls continue to be socialized to regard certain occupations and even personality traits such as independence or ambition as inappropriate for women. Influenced by sex-role stereotyping that still pervades our society, girls tend to have a limited vision of what femininity may encompass. For example, a girl may drop a school subject she perceives as "masculine" as a way of reaffirming her feminine

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identity. A bright girl may hide some of her intelligence for fear of appearing "smarter than the boys" and thus risking social disapproval.

Studies also show that many teenage girls still think they will be in the work force only for a few years, until they marry — a highly unrealistic expectation. Nowadays, most women, married or not, work outside the home because of economic necessity, the desire for personal fulfillment, or both. It is predicted that by 1990, 75% of women aged 25 to 54 will be in the labor force.

As a teacher or guidance counsellor, you can play an important role in helping your students explore attitudes that act as barriers to a rewarding lifetime in the work force. Girls need special encouragement to counteract a history of discouragement and to explore the full range of career options.

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## ***Non-Traditional Careers — Myths and M***

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The following are some of the issues raised and responded to in *Attention: Women at Work!*

***"I will lose my femininity in a non-traditional occupation."***

This implies a limited vision of femininity. It is a cultural bias that labels such qualities as competence, independence, mechanical skill, etc., as masculine rather than free of gender. Not long ago, voting or going to college was believed to "masculinize" women. These notions seem absurd today.

***"Women can't do heavy physical work or use 'men's tools.'"***

Not *all* women are physically weaker than *all* men, as stereotyping would have us believe. As well, both men and women now rely increasingly on equipment in physically demanding jobs. Experience and physical fitness are important in many trades and these can be gained by women as well as men.

It is worthwhile to remember that during World War II women were actively recruited to fill blue collar jobs. Billboards proclaimed that if a woman could use an electric mixer in her kitchen, she could learn to use an electric drill in a factory — in other words, that tools are neutral objects. Training and experience in the use of a tool are what counts rather than one's sex.

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## **conceptions**

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***“Male co-workers are hostile to women. Men don’t like to work for women bosses.”***

Certainly, as the film points out, a woman pioneering a field hitherto dominated by men may encounter suspicion or resentment. Such attitudes are likely to change as women become a more familiar sight in managerial suites and factory shops. Exhibiting assertiveness, self-respect and a sense of humor are effective coping strategies for women encountering hostility.

***“Can I combine marriage with a non-traditional career?”***

Most professions and skilled trades require considerable training and education. The woman who thinks of a career as “something to do until she gets married” may not want to commit herself in this way. The point to be stressed, however, is that most married women do end up working outside the home. Waitresses as well as laboratory technicians often have to juggle jobs and family responsibilities. In many cases it is much easier to do both successfully supported by well-paying, satisfying employment.

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## **Before Screening the Film**

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The following short quiz is designed to focus attention on issues raised in the film and to serve as a starting point for discussion. Ask students to answer the questions on a sheet of paper. The answers should be discussed orally *after* viewing the film.

While discussions with mixed audiences are to be encouraged, experience has shown that often girls are reluctant to express their true feelings in the presence of boys. Therefore, to facilitate free and open discussion, it may be advisable to restrict this career session to female students. The guidance counsellor is the best judge of this matter.

### **Questionnaire**

- 1) Suppose you were the “average” Canadian woman. How many years should you expect to work outside the home?
  - 2) What do you think is the percentage of women in the labor force who are married? (Explain that participation in the labor force means working or looking for work outside the home.)
  - 3) Do you think there will be more or fewer women joining the work force by 1990?
  - 4) On the average, how many cents do you think a woman earns for every dollar a man earns?
  - 5) Use a few adjectives to briefly describe your image of a “typical” construction worker, Coast Guard officer, architect.
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## After Screening the Film

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### Discuss Answers to Quiz

- 1) The average Canadian woman will be employed outside the home for 28 years by the year 1990.
- 2) 60.5% of women in the labor force are married. Almost 65% of married women in the labor force are between the ages of 20 and 44 (prime child-rearing years).
- 3) Right now, two-thirds of Canadian women between the ages of 25 and 54 are in the labor force. It is predicted that by 1990 three-quarters of women in this age group will be in the labor force.
- 4) Currently, Canadian women earn 59.4 cents for every dollar men earn. Discuss why this is so; for example, because of the *kinds* of jobs women are doing. Two-thirds of women are in the low-paying clerical, sales and service sectors. In addition, only 30.2 percent of all union members are women.
- 5) Has your image of the occupations presented in the film changed at all? Explain.

### For Further Discussion

- The women in the film all expressed satisfaction with their career choices. What were some of the advantages that each pointed out?
- Name some other occupations that you consider non-traditional. What might their advantages be?
- The women also mentioned difficulties that they had to cope with — for example, hostile male co-workers and combining career and marriage responsibilities. What were some of the ways they coped? Can you think of other coping strategies? What part do men have to play in families with two working parents?

### Related Activities

- Make a list of your interests, abilities, skills. List as many occupations as possible that these could lead to. Trade the list with a partner. Try to think of abilities and occupations that your partner has neglected to consider.
- Role playing:
  - Imagine you are applying for a job in a non-traditional field (choose one). Explain to your partner (the employer) why you want the job and are suitable for it.
  - You are telling a friend, boyfriend or fiancé about your intention to enter a non-traditional field. Your friend (boyfriend or fiancé) has objections. Discuss them.
- Choose an occupation you consider non-traditional for women (other than those in the film). Research the kind of work performed and the training necessary. Imagine you have interviewed a woman in this field. Write an article, based on your research, about this woman including a description of her skills, interests and abilities, her reasons for this career choice and the steps leading to her present job. Include quotes and personal anecdotes.

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## Resources

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### Associations

*Associations of Women in Trades* are located in several Canadian cities. Some community colleges have pre-trades training programs for women and may be a good source of information about women's trades associations in your area.

*Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology*  
P.O. Box 2184  
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 3V7

*Women in Science and Engineering (WISE)*  
P.O. Box 3123, Station D  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6H7

*Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs*  
56 Sparks St., Ste. 307  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5B9

The above associations may be able to suggest or provide speakers for your class.

### Reports, Books, Articles

*Dropping Math? Say Goodbye to 82 Jobs*  
*Mathophobia Can Cost You a Career*

Two posters published by:  
Toronto Board of Education  
Mathematics Department  
155 College St.  
Toronto, Ontario M5T 1P6

Available at approximately \$2.00 each.

Maynaro, Rona. *Why Can't We Give High-School Girls the Career Guidance They Need?* *Chatelaine*. October, 1983.

Ricci, L.J. *High-Paying Blue Collar Jobs for Women: A Comprehensive Guide*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1981.

*Who Turns the Wheel?*, proceedings of a Science and Education Committee workshop; and *Women in Science: Aim of the Eighties*, an education information brochure.

Both available free of charge from:  
The Science Council of Canada  
Publications Office  
100 Metcalfe St., 16th Floor  
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5M1

### Leaflets

*New Directions for Women*  
Employment and Immigration Canada  
Public Affairs Division  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0J9

This leaflet encourages women to consider non-traditional occupations and gives career planning suggestions.

*Job Idea Book for Women*  
Employment and Immigration Canada

An overview of Canada Employment Centre programs and services and how women can participate in and benefit from them.

*Out of the Classroom, Into the Work Force*  
Office of Equal Opportunities for Women  
Public Service Commission of Canada  
L'Esplanade Laurier  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M7

A brochure series on careers for women in the Public Service. The target audience is high school girls.

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## Attention: Women at Work!

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16 mm Color  
106C 0183 594

Screening time: 28 minutes 20 seconds

*Attention: Women at Work!* was produced by Studio D of the National Film Board of Canada and funded jointly by the NFB and the Federal Women's Film Program, a coalition of government departments and agencies formed to promote an understanding of women's perspectives. This film was co-sponsored by the NFB and the following:

*Canadian Unity Information Office  
Employment and Immigration Canada  
Health and Welfare Canada  
Labour Canada (Women's Bureau)  
Secretary of State, Women's Program  
Status of Women Canada  
Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women*

This study guide was prepared by Gabriella Goliger.

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## Related Films

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*Louise Drouin, Veterinarian*  
21:37 106C 0181 059

A positive portrait of a veterinarian who lives and works in a rural area, this film reveals the pressures and challenges of the profession and the problems and rewards of being a working mother.

*I Want to Be an Engineer*  
28:34 106C 0183 536

A film about women and engineering, featuring interviews with three women working in different areas of the profession.

*Laila*  
10:33 106C 0180 148

A portrait of Finnish immigrant Laila Paatinen, owner and creator of a successful drywall taping business near Halifax, that will inspire young women contemplating non-traditional careers.

*Pretend You're Wearing a Barrel*  
9:52 106C 0178 314

Lynn Ryan, courageous and determined to make a better life for herself and her children, learns to be a welder and finds a job as an apprentice engineer.

*She's a Railroader*  
9:48 106C 0178 315

Karen Zaitchik loves working on the railroad and tells how she came to excel at a "man's" job.

*Doctor Woman: The Life and Times of Elizabeth Bagshaw*  
28:52 106C 0178 279

An inspiring portrait of one of Canada's first women doctors, who directed the country's first birth control clinic and retired from practice at age 95.



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