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Entering a man's world: women bus drivers in South Africa

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Abstract

The study explores the experiences of women who enter traditionally male occupations. Bus driving has long been thought of as a masculine job in South Africa. Accordingly the entrance of women into this occupation is a new phenomenon within the country where it has been received with mixed feelings in the labour market and by society at large. This study focuses on these women's experiences, challenges and the coping strategies they use in order to adapt to a work environment that is predominantly male. Participants in the study were ten women long distance bus drivers with work experience ranging from two to ten years. The study employed an in-depth interview method where all the interviews with participants were carried out face to face at one of the largest bus companies in South Africa. There were two separate interview schedules; one for the women drivers and one for two gender coordinators from Trade Unions. Observations were also conducted during trips with five women and two male bus drivers to examine their experiences with passengers, colleagues, service people and management. The study suggests that the continuing acceptance of women in traditional male occupations within the industry is structured by patriarchal social attitudes which encourage the resistance of this sexual division of labour. Unless these attitudes are addressed to promote gender inequality, occupational segregation by sex will continue to thrive.