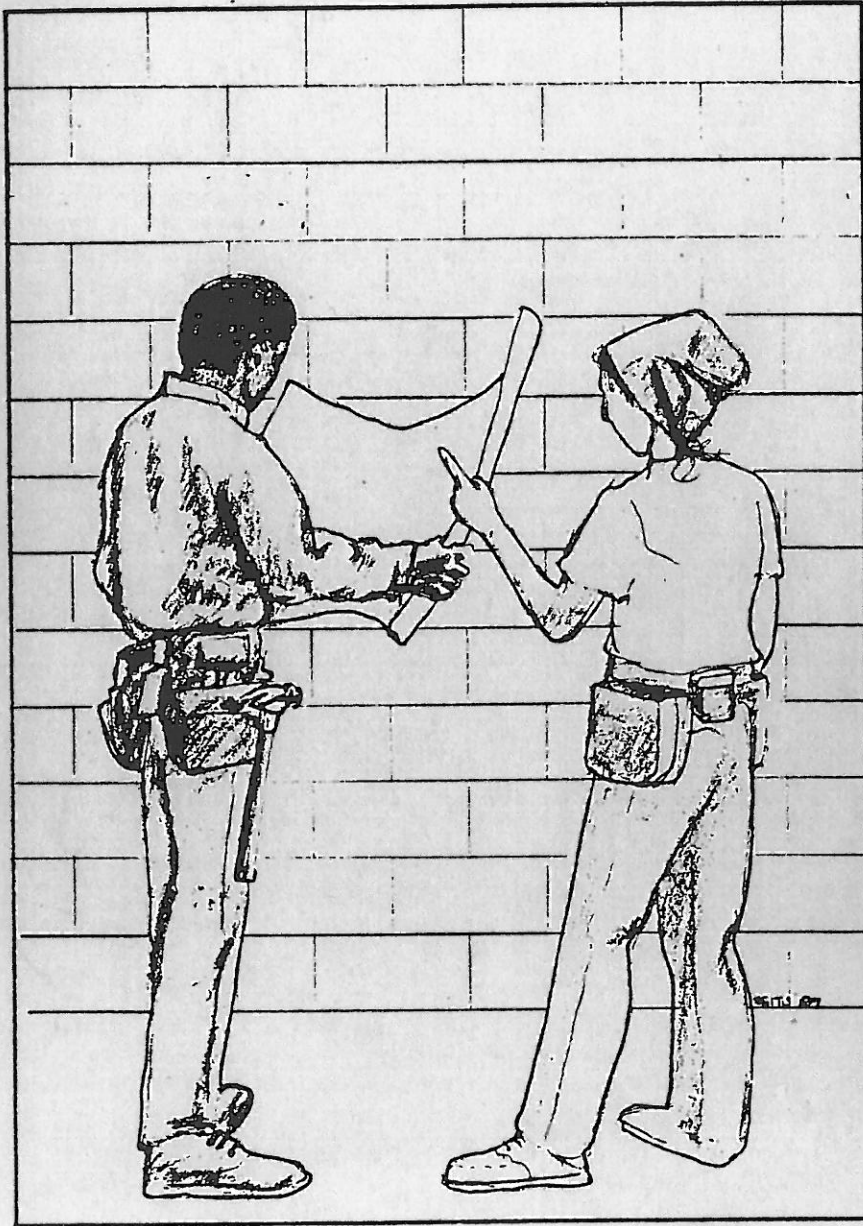


# BARRIERS TO PROGRESS



**People of Color and Women  
and  
Minneapolis Construction Occupations**

August 22, 1989

I. Distribution of Attitudes of People of Color and Women Towards Various Areas of Employment In The Construction Industry.

Question No. 1 - Did you experience any problems being hired because of your race or sex?

Seventy-six point three percent (76.3%) of the women answered affirmatively to this question; 80.0% of the people of color. The high affirmative response from both women and people of color indicated the feeling that a serious problem existed at the entry level in the construction industry. Both women and people of color respondents also felt these barriers were above and beyond those normally expected in seeking employment, and directly related to their gender or race. A large number of those interviewed talked about experiences in which white males applying before and after them being hired while they were not. The experience of one respondent was not unusual when he said, "I was sent to the job site by my business agent in Robinsdale Shopping Mall and the foreman did not put me to work because he said he did not like me and he and his men did not like working with me."

A prevalent attitude expressed by both people of color and women was stated by one respondent in particular: "If it were not for these type of programs (affirmative action), I would not have this job. I've applied for many jobs in the past but never to get hired except through this program. They try to often degrade you by saying "the only reason I am hiring you is because I need a minority or women."

Question No. 2 - Did you encounter problems with apprenticeship training programs because of sex or race?

Eighty-three point seven percent (83.7%) of the people of color and 61.5% of the women answered this question in the affirmative. This

level of response represented the attitude of a serious problem for women and a critical problem for people of color.

Both women and people of color talked of discouraging attitudes and remarks of personnel in apprenticeship offices in completing applications and securing full documentation for acceptance. Both also questioned the written test and subjective nature of oral interview. Many talked of the use of experience or procedure for advancement similar to one respondent who stated: "Policy of Apprenticeship Board will allow possible one to two years advancement when applying for program, when previous experience is documented. This seems unfair, but even when I supplied the board with this same information, no advancement was even considered. To be accepted into the program, an appeal had to be made. Without a race discrimination charge, there would have been no apprenticeship program for me even though I was more than qualified and had previous experience."

Many respondents seemed to feel that regardless the requirement, the board selects whom they desire. Many times those selected appeared to be relatives or friends of contractors or members of the union or apprenticeship program. One female respondent exclaimed, "I didn't experience problems getting in although the other women that I saw applying the same day as me must have because none of them got in and I knew many of them were more than qualified. I'm the only woman out of 50 apprentices chosen last year. That stinks! Last spring, when I applied for the apprenticeship, I counted 15 other women in the waiting room the half hour I was there, yet out of the almost 50 applicants accepted, I was the only woman. I think affirmative action should be strengthened. I've heard contractors say they'd rather pay the financial penalty imposed by the government than suffer the reduced productivity associated with having a minority or women on the job. It seems that many have already made up their minds that minorities and women can't do the job."

Question No. 3 - Did you encounter problems securing union membership related to race or sex?

Seventy-six point two percent (76.2%) of the respondents of color and 61.5% of the women respondents felt they experienced definite difficulties getting into the union directly because of their race or sex. Twenty-three point seven percent (23.7%) of the respondents who were people of color and 39.5% of the female respondents felt they had minor problems or none whatsoever getting into the union because of race or sex.

The high percentage of respondents who answered in the affirmative indicated that a serious problem may exist in securing union membership, required to work for almost all major contractors.

Almost all respondents who believed they had serious problems getting union membership, expressed a major concern about the requirement of securing a job with a contractor before they could secure union membership. White males could secure jobs while women and people of color were over-whelmingly rejected, unless temporary employment was made available to fulfill affirmative action requirements.

Both women and people of color reported that they were made to feel unwanted with rude and abrupt attitudes by union officials when they attempted to apply for union membership. Many discussed having to wait for hours and hours while the agent or business representatives joked with others and refused to acknowledge their presence. Many of the respondents knew other women or people of color, so discouraged by the treatment at the union hall that they walked out to seek employment in other industries.

Question No. 4 - Have you encountered problems on the job because of your race or sex?

Ninety-six point two percent (96.2%) of the people of color and 94.7% of the female respondents felt they had encountered problems



on the job directly related to their race or sex. The level of the affirmative response indicated a serious problem that must be addressed if women and people of color are ever to be considered as desired members of the construction industry.

The respondents told tales of horror involving abusive language, racial and sexual jokes, rigged traps that could injure or even kill them, harassment, intimidation, and constant criticism of work. One female respondent said, "Yes, I encountered problems on the job, sometimes it's just being underestimated: White males think women aren't strong and they think women have reduced mechanical aptitudes. Sometimes it's verbal abuse and intimidation or belittlement and put down. I've been told the only reason they let women in is because 'we'd rather have white women than niggers.'"

Other respondents stated that most white males, --whether supervisors, foremen, or non-management-- were allowed to order around people of color and women. Respondents overwhelmingly seemed to feel that when women or people of color reacted to adverse situations they were classified as "sensitive", "troublemakers", "incompetents", "non-team players", etc. This often lead to early layoff and a stigma that made it difficult, if not impossible, to secure employment or even referrals at other sites. As one respondent said, "You're doomed if you accept the disgraceful treatment, because it makes it hard for you to live with yourself and you can't be respected, but you're fired or laid off, if you, respond. Many times it's a living hell when you must hide your dignity and sense of self respect."

Another major problem encountered by most of the people of color in the construction industry was their belief that they were assigned the filthiest, hardest, most undesirable jobs that no one else wanted to do.

Question No. 5 - Do you believe grievances are handled fairly?

Seventy-seven point eight percent (77.8%) of the women and 76.2% of the people of color who responded did not feel that grievances were handled fairly. This represents a serious problem: When employees feel they have no avenue to address legitimate and serious problems, it affects their work, and in many situations, their safety.

Most of the respondents felt that they were either discouraged from filing grievance or complaining about degrading and unhealthy work environments. They also believed that grievances were never considered important. Most respondents expressed the feelings expressed by one respondent who said, "You are often victimized and disgraced when you attempt to address your problem." Many respondents stated that often the shop steward or business agent would fail or refuse to process grievances if the aggrieved was a person of color or woman. This is a serious concern, because not only are unions obligated to equally consider, negotiate, or arbitrate grievances of all members; but also, under Title VII, have an affirmative action obligation to protect and demand the elimination of discriminatory company policies and practices.

Question No. 6 - Have you experienced any continuous racial or sexual harassment such as inappropriate advances, jokes, language, touching, or other treatment?

Ninety-five percent (95.0%) of the people of color and 94.7% of the females interviewed felt a hostile work environment created by actions and behavior of others was directly related to their sex or race. This is an alarming, dangerous condition perceived by almost all of the respondents interviewed. Most of the females interviewed expressed repeated incidents of sexual advances, constant touching of breasts and posterior area, sexual language

and suggestions, inappropriate sexist remarks, pornographic posters, and threats to get laid off or fired, or continual intimidation, if sexual offers were not accepted.

People of color expressed problems of abusive racist language, creating conditions for accidents, refusal to work with them, delegation of hazardous and dirty assignments and constant harassment. As one respondent said, "Certain people will continue to say things to bother you, it's like they're trying to get you to quit." Another respondent said, "I've been called chief and the Indian. Some whites at work ask me questions like, 'What do you think of Custer?' During the drought, whites ask me to do a rain dance. I just laugh, I grew up with this. If I let it get to me I could never hold down a job. Ever [sic]." Respondents seem to feel that the work environment is negative and degrading and if they complain nothing is done or they are the ones who suffer.

Most of the respondents feel that it is better to accept these conditions if you wish to continue to work or be referred to other jobs.

Question No. 7 - Do you believe job assignments are fairly made?

Eighty-two point five percent (82.5%) of the people of color and 57.9% of the women respondents did not believe jobs were assigned fairly, while 42.1% of the women and only 17.5% of the people of color believed the job assignment system was implemented fairly.

The level of response as regarded fairness in making job assignments would indicate a serious problem for people of color and a problem for women. Many of the respondents who felt a problem existed in the assignment of jobs expressed similar concerns as the respondent who said, "I had a lot of dirty jobs (greaser, at crushing plant, shovel, or swinging sledge hammer) but I've been told you have to start at the bottom and work up with my responsibilities. I agreed. I need a job but I see myself getting the worst job even when I have more experience and seniority than

most of the whites on many projects." Others spoke of being assigned the heaviest, hottest, and more difficult jobs, both as laborers and skilled trades person.

Respondents recall the common language of one foreman who assigned certain jobs by calling them the "nigger jobs." Other respondents talked about jobs being assigned by "the buddy-buddy" system, consisting of white males who knew the foreman or supervisor. Some of the women who believed the job assignments were fair, felt that often there were strenuous jobs that some women, and some of the men, couldn't perform and this was taken into consideration. They also reflected on the position that when the same was done for some women, everybody cried favoritism.

Question No. 8 - Do you believe lay offs are made without regard to your race or sex?

Ninety-one point two percent (91.2%) of the people of color and 81.6% of the women expressed feelings of the existence of extreme bias against them in implementing lay offs. Most respondents firmly believed that lay offs were blatantly sexist and racist. This high degree of attitudes concerning a major employment practice indicated a need for serious review, analysis, and modification.

Some of the following statements are typical feelings of the majority of protected class individuals. "I feel I'm just helping their minority (or female) quota. As soon as that is met I'm laid off." "There are lay offs of minorities and women while there is excessive overtime for white male workers." "Minorities (and women) are the first to go and the last to get called back. White people think Indians like or are used to being poor." "I was the first to be laid off because I am a woman. They had their minority hours in for the year." "I feel when there is a layoff I am the first to go every time work gets slow." "Many times I am a token woman filling a quota, and they state that quite clear to me when I come to the job or am laid off, but better a token they have to



endure than unemployed." "Large number of people of color and women are becoming...extremely angry and are reaching the boiling point."

**Question No. 9 - Do you feel union referrals are made fairly with regard to your race or sex?**

Sixty-five point eight percent (65.8%) of the women and 64.1% of the people of color who responded felt that the union was unfair in making referrals for employment. 34.2% of the women and 35.9% of the people of color expressed attitudes that the union was fair in making referrals. This area, while it represents a problem, also had the highest percentage of individuals who felt some sense of objectivity in the industry. Many of the almost three-fourths of respondents experiencing bias in the process believed there was a "buddy-buddy system": "They put all the whites to work and then put me to work last" or that "Minorities and women are only referred to government-assisted jobs and not private jobs." Some of the respondents discussed situations in which they were discouraged by being falsely told that no work was available only to find that many whites had been sent out and hired. Another major problem for women and people of color that repeatedly surfaced was the fact that preference was given to experience in the trade or long record of having worked for union contractors. These practices were used to avoid hiring or referring protected class individuals.

**Question No. 10 - How would you describe your experience as a person of color or woman employed in the construction industry?**

- a. Fair Treatment
- b. Minimum Discrimination
- c. Moderate Discrimination
- d. Extremely Racist and or Sexist and Discriminatory

Ninety-three point seven percent (93.7%) of the people of color and 92.1% of the women who responded felt that the construction industry based on their experience was extremely sexist, racist and discriminatory. The summary response is consistent with the way the overwhelming majority of the respondents rated questions 1 - 9 of the questions asked during the interviews.

Most of the respondents seemed quite frustrated, angry, and disgusted when their feelings were summarized. Most also felt they were as well qualified, or better prepared, than most of the white males, but felt as one respondent said, "The deck is stacked against you and no matter how hard you work or how prepared you are, you are doomed to fail." A large number expressed the attitude that they wanted to succeed in the construction industry because the compensation gives them an opportunity to provide a life of dignity for them and their families.

Question No. 11 - Do you feel intimidation or reprisal will result if you complain about existing discriminatory practices?

Ninety-seven point four percent (97.4%) of the people of color and 89.1% of the women who participated in the interviews felt that they would definitely receive reprisal such as termination, lay off, or failure to secure future employment, if they complained about existing discriminatory practices. It was quite obvious in a majority of the interviews that many respondents were afraid that the information they contributed may be directly attributed to them and repercussions would follow. An extremely large amount of time had to be taken in each interview to assure the respondent that their response would be included as part of an overall summary and their names or identity would be protected.

While fear of reprisal was dominant, it was also clear that many respondents were fed up and ready to take action, if changes were possible.

Question No. 12 - Would you refer others to work in the construction industry, based on treatment of individuals by race and or sex?

Ninety-three point seven percent (93.7%) of the people of color and 81.6% of the women who responded in the interviews would not recommend that others work in the construction industry, based on their personal experiences.

Table 25

Distribution of Attitudes of People of Color  
Towards Various Areas of Employment  
in Construction Occupations

QUESTIONS	# of People of Color Respondents	Yes	%Yes	No	%No
1. Did you have problems being hired because of race?	80	64	80.0	16	20.0
2. Did you encounter problems with apprenticeship training programs because of race?	49	41	83.7	8	16.3
3. Did you encounter problems securing union membership related to race?	80	61	76.2	19	23.7
4. Have you encountered problems on the job because of your race?	80	77	96.2	3	3.7
5. Do you believe grievances are handled fairly?	80	19	23.7	61	76.2
6. Have you experienced continuous racial harassment such as jokes, language or treatment?	80	76	95.0	4	5.0
7. Do you believe job assignments are fair?	80	14	17.5	66	82.5
8. Do you believe lay-offs are fair?	80	7	8.7	73	91.2
9. Do you feel union referrals are made fairly in regards to race?	78	28	35.9	50	64.1
10. How would you describe your experience as a person of color employed in the construction industry?	80				
A. Fair Treatment?		3	3.7		
B. Minimum Discrimination		0			
C. Moderate Discrimination		2	2.5		
D. Extremely Racist & Discriminatory		75	93.7		



**Table 25 (Con't)**  
**Distribution of Attitudes of People of Color**  
**Towards Various Areas of Employment**  
**in Construction Occupations**

QUESTIONS	# of People of Color Respondents	Yes	%Yes	No	%No
11. Do you feel intimidation or reprisal will result if you complain about existing discriminatory practices?	76	74	97.4	2	2.6
12. Would you refer others to work in the construction industry based on treatment of individuals by race or color	80	5	6.2	75	93.7

**Table 26**  
**Distribution of Attitudes of Females**  
**Towards Various Areas of Employment**

**in Construction Occupations**

QUESTIONS	# of Female Respondents	Yes	%Yes	No	%No
1. Did you have problems being hired because of your sex?	38	29	76.3	9	23.7
2. Did you encounter problems getting in or during an apprenticeship training program because of your sex?	26	16	61.5	10	38.5
3. Did you encounter problems securing union membership related to your sex?	38	23	60.5	15	39.5
4. Have you encountered problems on the job because of your sex?	38	36	94.7	2	5.3
5. Do you believe grievances are handled fairly?	36	8	22.2	28	77.8
6. Have you experienced sexual harassment such as inappropriate advances, suggestions or touching while employed?	38	36	94.7	2	5.3
7. Do you believe job assignments are fair?	38	16	42.1	22	57.9
8. Do you feel lay-offs are made with regard to sex?	38	7	18.4	31	81.6
9. Do you feel union referrals are made without regard to sex?	38	13	34.2	25	65.8
10. How would you describe your experience as a female employed in the construction industry?	38				
A. Fair Treatment?		2	5.3		
B. Minimum Discrimination		1	2.6		
C. Moderate Discrimination					
D. Extremely Sexist & Discriminatory		35	92.0		

**Table 26 (Con't)**  
**Distribution of Attitudes of Females**  
**Towards Various Areas of Employment**  
**in Construction Occupations**

QUESTIONS	# of Female Respondents	Yes	%Yes	No	%No
11. Do you feel intimidation or reprisal will occur if you complain about discrimination?	37	33	89.1	4	10.8
12. Would you refer others to work in the construction industry based on treatment of individuals by sex?	38	7	18.4	31	81.6