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Abstract

Social and cultural capital are valuable assets that assist individuals to succeed in work. This article reports on gender segregation in the skilled trades. We use Bourdieu’s theory of capital to illuminate how women are successfully recruited and retained in the skilled trades. Our findings indicate that women with pre-existing forms of capital are advantaged. Notably tradeswomen utilise masculine gender capital while maintaining aspects of feminine and female gender capital. In doing so, they *re-gender* the skilled trades and do gender differently. The study also found that female and feminine gender capital detracts from other forms of capital women bring with them or acquire in their trades work. Male gender capital privileges men and disadvantages women. We conclude that capital is an important point of intervention where women can be supported; however, the problems that gender capital creates for women can only be resolved by cultural change.

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Keywords

cultural capital, gender capital, gender segregation, male-dominated occupations, skilled trades, social capital

Introduction – women and the skilled trades

Work is strongly connected with sex-role stereotypes and societal expectations regarding gender and job suitability. Women and men typically choose roles appropriately associated with their sex (Huppertz and Goodwin, 2013). However, women's work has been undervalued and poorly remunerated and choosing work in male-dominated industries can represent a 'pathway out of poverty' (Hunte, 2016: 436) for many women. The skilled trades have a particularly male-dominated workforce that produces and reproduces a gendered culture (Bridges et al., 2020). Also known as the 'manual trades' in Australia, the 'skilled trades' refers to occupations that require an apprenticeship for entry, and qualifications obtained through formal vocational education and training. The skilled trades include electro-technology, automotive, metal fabrication, mining and construction trades (bricklaying, carpentry, painting/decorating and plumbing, installation, renovation, maintenance, and repair work) and are considered non-traditional work for women.¹ The 'skilled trades' is the term commonly used in the US, Canada and Europe, whereas in the UK the trades are referred to as 'the crafts' (Bridges et al., 2020). The barriers to recruitment and retention for women in the skilled trades are the focus of much research in academia, industry and government (Agapiou, 2002; Bridges et al., 2020; Byrne et al., 2005; Fielden et al., 2000; Galea, 2017; Galea et al., 2020; Jenkins et al., 2019; MacIsaac and Domene, 2014; Ness, 2012; Oxenbridge et al., 2019; Rosa et al., 2017). Interest is driven by the recognised economic advantages of a gender-diverse employee base, skills shortages, and equity and inclusion issues. Percentages of women working in these occupations are extremely low and have not increased despite 30 years of efforts from government and industry (Bridges et al., 2019; Galea et al., 2020). In Australia, between 1% and 3% of women work in the skilled trades (ABS, 2018; Rosa et al., 2017). These percentages are consistent with global trends across Western nations. In Canada, women represent 2% of workers in the skilled trades (MacIsaac and Domene, 2014); in the US 3% (Wagner, 2014) and in the UK, Netherlands, Denmark, Spain and Italy women make up less than 1% (Byrne et al., 2005; Ibáñez, 2016; Ness, 2012).

This gender segregation is indicative of barriers that operate to prevent women from entering and prospering in the skilled trades. While sociocultural influences such as gender perceptions of work, gender roles and gendered expectations are known barriers to women's entry into the skilled trades, barriers that operate *at work* are more pervasive (Bridges et al., 2020). Within the industry, tradeswomen experience workplace discrimination related to flexibility (Fielden et al., 2000), opportunity and promotion (Agapiou, 2002; Fielden et al., 2000), and formal and informal marginalisation and social exclusion (Bridges et al., 2020; Ness, 2012). These issues are further exacerbated by an occupational culture that tolerates bullying, hazing, harassment and the sexualisation of women (Bridges et al., 2020; Denissen, 2010).

This article reports on a research project about women in the skilled trades conducted in regional New South Wales, Australia, in 2018 and 2019. The project sought to understand the experiences of women who prosper in skilled trades occupations, and what enabled them to be successful and resilient. This focus offers a unique contribution to the field of women in male-dominated occupations as most studies have been concerned with the barriers to women's progress. This article concentrates on the finding that social and cultural capital were critical to women obtaining apprenticeships and maintaining employment in the skilled trades. Using Bourdieu's (1986, 2010) theory of capital, we illuminate how women are, and can be, successfully recruited and retained in the skilled trades. Unsurprisingly, our findings indicate that women with pre-existing forms of capital are advantaged as they enter and establish themselves.

The article makes a fourfold original contribution to the field of gender in non-traditional work. First, the article offers insight into the ways tradeswomen embrace and perform various forms of gender capital (see Huppertz, 2009a, 2009b; Huppertz and Goodwin, 2013; McCall, 1992; Ross-Smith and Huppertz, 2010; Skeggs, 2004). Utilising masculine gender capital through their identification as 'tomboys' and socialisation with brothers and male friends in preference to socialisation with other women, tradeswomen identify with the masculine attributes of strength, toughness and competencies that are important to prove in the workplace. Interestingly, the tradeswomen in the study also maintained their gender identity as women. Second, the article illuminates how tradeswomen fuse masculine capital, female capital and feminine capital (see Huppertz, 2009a, 2009b; Huppertz and Goodwin, 2013) to succeed. In this respect, we argue that women *re-gender* the masculine space of the worksite by doing gender differently. Third, the study also found that female and feminine gender capital detracts significantly from the other forms of capital women bring with them. In the trades, male gender capital privileges men and disadvantages women. This barrier has not previously been acknowledged in analysis of gender segregation in the skilled trades and is shown here to impact negatively on women's success. Finally, this article is one of a few that link the experience and perceptions of skilled tradeswomen to a Bourdieusian framework, showing how women succeed in a gender-segregated male-dominated industry. We conclude that capital can be acquired from others, from networks, from education and from work experience, and this reveals an important point of intervention, where women can be supported to pursue long-term successful careers. However, the gender capital women carry with them represents a deficit that can only be resolved by cultural change in the construction and building industries.

Feminism, Bourdieu and the gender theorists

This article uses Bourdieu's (1986, 2010) theory of capital to analyse the presence and absence of social and cultural capital. We use feminist and gender theories to ground Bourdieu's theory of capital and draw on Judith Butler's (1993, 2004, 2007) idea of 'performance' as the potential mobility of all bodies. Being 'feminine' or 'masculine' is a particular kind of social and discursive production or 'performance' that has unknowable possibilities and can act against established gender categories (Butler, 1993, 2004). Feminist Bourdieusian scholars' gendering of capital supports a deeper understanding of

how male privilege operates to exclude women, and reduce equity and opportunity for them (Huppatz, 2009a, 2009b; Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013; McCall, 1992; Ross-Smith and Huppatz, 2010; Skeggs, 2004). These theories provide insight into persistent gender inequalities, discrimination and the pervasive cultural issues of gender- and sexual-based harassment in the skilled trades. Gender segregation continues to reinforce the norm that the skilled trades are men's work.

The skilled trades favour a type of hegemonic, working-class masculinity defined by physical capability – where the toughness of the work and the worker is an expression of gender in and of itself (Agapiou, 2002; Ness, 2012; cf. Connell, 2005). Strength, endurance and toughness are attributes of the industry, which actively resists bodies not aligned with this hegemonic 'norm'. The idea incorporates the concept of 'birthright': the perception that 'women don't have the natural ability with tools' (Agapiou, 2002: 701). These ideas also feed fears that women joining the industry will 'feminise' it, causing a loss of status and less remuneration (Byrne et al., 2005; Pringle and Winning, 1998).

For these reasons, men and masculine gender have privileged status over women – female bodies and feminine gender. This normalisation and naturalisation has resulted in masculine gender privilege functioning as 'unearned advantages' (Bailey, 1998: 104) that go largely unseen and unquestioned (Chappell and Waylen, 2013; Eveline, 1994). In the skilled trades in Western nations, the dominant privileged group is white, heterosexual, able-bodied and male (Bailey, 1998; Chappell and Waylen, 2013; Eveline, 1994). Bailey (1998) argues that those who are privileged have advantages in the form of assets or benefits, material or symbolic, which are conferred automatically in unlimited ways. The distinction is important. Earned advantages allow advancement under limited conditions, whereas privilege has what Bailey (1998, 114) calls a 'wild card quality', providing a broader currency, credibility and power. Bourdieu recognises privilege as a 'trump card' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2007: 98). It 'allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to *exist*, in the field under consideration, instead of being considered a negligible quantity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2007: 98). In this context, gender is the highest value of capital one can have in the field of skilled trades.

Over the last 20 years, feminists have used Bourdieu's theories to renew the relationship between feminism and social theory (Adkins, 2004; Huppatz, 2009a, 2009b; Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013; McCall, 1992; Powell and Sang, 2015; Ross-Smith and Huppatz, 2010; Skeggs, 2004). While acknowledging that Bourdieu's theories conform to traditional gender norms, they show how the theory of capital assists in understanding the gendered nature of work identities (Adkins, 2004; Huppatz, 2009a, 2009b; Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013; McCall, 1992; Skeggs, 2004). Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital is intricately linked with class and wealth (Bourdieu, 1986, 2010) in the public sphere (Huppatz, 2009a: 46). For this reason, McCall (1992: 844) writes that Bourdieu overlooked women as accumulators of capital. Indeed, Bourdieu notes that being excluded from 'the social games . . . crucial to society' based on their biology, women were in a position to recognise the difficulty of role of domination that men had 'to live up to' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2007: 172, 173). Yet Bourdieu offers no possibility of women's negotiation of space or 'illusio', or of their interests in the game or field beyond the domestic sphere. McCall (1992) argues this fixing of gender dispositions to sex and the

division between the public and private sphere in Bourdieu's work, failed to recognise that gender disrupts the social order vertically and horizontally.

Importantly for this study, Bourdieu defined capital as 'accumulated labor' (1986: 241). He proposed three primary types of capital: economic, social, and cultural (in the form of embodied, objectified material wealth and institutionalised states, education and skills attainment) (Bourdieu, 1986). Added to this is symbolic capital, which allows the 'natural social order' to legitimise the different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1989). This parallels the discussion of unearned privilege/trump cards above. Social and cultural capital are not as recognisable as economic capital but have the potential to convert to economic capital and allow us to think about wealth beyond the monetary sphere (Bourdieu, 1986: 243; Huppertz and Goodwin, 2013). Bourdieu understands social and cultural capital to be a set of personal attributes and assets acquired or inherited from our sociocultural background or 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 2010: 95). Reay (2004) writes that habitus is complicated. It is a set of physical dispositions, modes of behaviour at once individual and collective, past and present (Reay, 2004). For example, the family is united by its habitus (Bourdieu, 1996). This is not to say that disputes and quarrels don't occur within a family, but that the family is one of society's principal organising structures – at once 'a construction of social reality' and 'socially constructed' (Bourdieu, 1996: 20). The nuclear family is a particular institutionalised 'norm' that is privileged and as such it enjoys the 'accumulation and transmission' of capital (Bourdieu, 1996: 23).² Reay (2004: 432) writes that Bourdieu's habitus 'demonstrates the ways' the body is in the social world and 'the ways . . . the social world is in the body'. In this way, habitus underlies capital (Reay, 2004).

Social capital is about relationships and networks. A good example is what Bourdieu describes as transforming 'all circumstantial relationships into lasting connections' (Bourdieu, 1986: 250). Having access to significant connections will provide opportunities, role models and experiences that support attaining position and reward (in this case, apprenticeships and work) (Bourdieu, 1986, 2010). Interestingly, Bourdieu's analysis of social capital reveals as much about disadvantage and social exclusion as it does about the advantages of privilege and inclusion (Bourdieu, 1986). This describes the informal and formal social networks in the skilled trades. Here, social capital *bleeds* into cultural capital. Cultural capital assists individuals to understand the language, behaviour, 'norms' and values appropriate to a given situation. Bourdieu defines this type of embodied cultural capital as inherited from the previous generation (habitus), which 'functions as a sort of advance (both a head-start and a credit) . . . by providing from the outset the example of culture incarnated in familiar models, [and] enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture' (2010: 63). In workplaces, cultural capital translates into looking and sounding right, knowing how to *fit in*. This occurs when an individual's habitus aligns with a workplace and enables them to immerse themselves and enculturate themselves into the doxa of a workplace and associated educational environments, events and activities³ (see Atkinson, 2011). Knowing the right people and having some knowledge, understanding and experience of the working environment is the capital that opens doorways to success. Traditionally, boys who gain the 'credit' from their father/uncle/brother/cousin, obtain a 'head-start', interpreted as a type

of 'guarantee' of their suitability directly related to the prestige of the father/uncle and son (Bourdieu, 1986: 243).

Re-reading embodied cultural capital through a feminist lens, McCall (1992) and Huppatz (2009a, 2009b; Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013) make a case for gender as a form of capital. McCall argues that 'although forms of capital correspond to occupational fields . . . they have gendered meanings because they are given form by gendered dispositions' (1992: 842). Bourdieu's theory of embodied cultural capital presumes a male body (Bourdieu, 1986). The skilled trades also presume a male body. Conversely, studies suggest that any *body* can engage in the process of cultivating the self, and conscious or unconscious learning based on their family habitus, in ways that do and don't conform to traditional gendered dispositions (Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013; McCall, 1992; Reay, 2004; Skeggs, 2004). Bourdieu describes acquiring embodiment as: 'a labor of inculcation and assimilation [that] costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor. Like the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan, it cannot be done at second hand' (Bourdieu, 1986: 244). Thus girls can acquire certain types of embodiment (familial and cultural) just as boys can.

Following the work of earlier feminists who take Bourdieu beyond himself, we use gender capital to understand how male privilege operates to exclude women and reduce equity and opportunity for women in the skilled trades. Viewing gender capital from inside the traditional social structure makes it easy to identify masculine privilege/symbolic capital. Gender capital rewards members of the gendered group within an organisation, earning them economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital (Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013). This is particularly easy to see in segregated occupations (Huppatz, 2009a, 2009b). Huppatz and Goodwin (2013: 300) found that in feminised industries, women gain gender advantage from having a female body (what they call 'female capital') and traditional, sometimes stereotypical, feminine dispositions or skillsets ('feminine capital') considered innate in popular social discourse (see also Huppatz, 2009a). They also found that while men don't appear to have 'the right body for the job', they do gain advantages by utilising feminine capital – for example, being gentle and nurturing, chatty, caring and sometimes 'camp[ing] it up' (Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013: 300, 303). Even though women gain confidence from having 'the right body for the job', it's not enough to tip the balance away from the trump card of masculine privilege/symbolic capital and men frequently gain superior advantage through promotion and leadership positions (Huppatz, 2009a; Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013; 300).

In the skilled trades, having the advantages of a male body ('male capital') combined with traditional masculine dispositions or skillsets ('masculine capital') comprises 'the right body for the job' (Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013: 300). Indeed men's gender privilege is entirely dependent on the conflation of the male body and masculinity. One of Huppatz and Goodwin's (2013: 300) male participants stated that looking like and being 'a strong *dude*' helped him be successful as a construction worker. Cultivating his masculine capital at the gym enabled him to feel confident about doing hard physical work. In a workplace context, this means that a boy with or without social and cultural capital will get a head-start on a girl with social and cultural capital, based on the privilege of traditional perceptions that he is most suitable for the job. This understanding of gender capital sometimes works mostly *against* women in the skilled trades – initially their

embodiment (female capital) is at odds with their capital (and underlying habitus). It negates their value by assuming they don't possess the correct body and attributes (male and masculine capital) recognised as legitimate for success in the skilled trades.

Importantly for this study, women knowing how to use their bodies productively is a transformative process (Agapiou, 2002; Smith, 2013). In the context of the skilled trades, women are at the point of contradiction – that unique position of recognising their exclusion based on their biology. In response, women utilise their habitus with purpose. Some of the strategies tradeswomen employ include being a tomboy,⁴ working smarter (not harder), employing competent work practices that accommodate size and strength differences, outperforming their colleagues, and taking pride and pleasure in their work (Agapiou, 2002; Denissen, 2010; Smith, 2013). Denissen (2010: 1066) describes this as doing gender differently: 'women *as women* can do masculine defined work' in their own way. This strategy challenges gender stereotypes by rejecting the 'do it like a man' approach with 'I'm not a man. I'll do it in a way that works for me' (Denissen, 2010: 1061). It also challenges the fixing of gender attributes to particular bodies (Butler, 2005; Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013). Women with capital (and underlying habitus) can dip into the space between opportunities and constraints and create change to traditional gendered dispositions in their field (see Reay, 2004: 435). In this way, 'women . . . successfully mobilise masculinity' to their advantage in the skilled trades (Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013: 297). Adding masculine capital to female bodies, bodies that already employ a suite of feminine capital, rejects assumptions about what women's bodies can do and transforms stereotypes into successful work practices.

Method

In order to understand the barriers and success factors that influence women's employment in the skilled trades we conducted a two-stage research pilot in New South Wales and Victoria in 2018 and 2019. In stage one we conducted three industry consultations with 60 stakeholders, representing industry bodies, employers, tradeswomen and apprentices, women-in-trade support networks, Group Training Organisations, education providers, government bodies, local councils, and trade unions. Participants in this part of the study were recruited using a mapping system to determine the stakeholders in the region. We then contacted organisations and businesses via telephone and followed up with information sheets via email. More information about the industry consultations can be found in Bridges et al. (2019) and Jenkins et al. (2019).

The second phase of the research consisted of qualitative interviewing. In total we conducted 27 in-depth interviews with stakeholders (tradeswomen, female apprentices, employers, representatives from Group Training Organisations, the vocational education and training (VET) sector, high school career advisors, employment agencies and state government). Sampling was purposive and interview participants were recruited via snowballing. A list of potential interviewees was developed using contacts with industry stakeholders and via participants who attended industry consultations. We then directly contacted potential interviewees by telephone or email and followed up with an information sheet and consent form via email. This article reports on interviews with tradeswomen and apprentices (see Table 1). We interviewed 15 tradeswomen, 11 in one-to-one,

Table 1. Tradeswomen and apprentice interview and focus group participants.

Interviews			
Pseudonym	Industry sector	Age	Years in trade
Samantha	Utilities and electro-technology	40	23
Jemma	Automotive	45	6
Holly	Building and construction	44	2
Jade	Utilities and electro-technology	24	4
Isobel	Maintenance and planning	25	7
Alice	Operations and production	30	10
Emily	Building and construction	37	6
Madison	Utilities and electro-technology	25	6
Hannah	Building and construction	28	5
Jessica	Automotive	57	
Lauren	Manufacturing apprentice	19	3
Focus Group			
Abigail	Building and construction apprentice	22	3
Caitlyn	Building and construction apprentice	19	1
Zoe	Automotive apprentice	24	1
Olivia	Automotive apprentice	15	1

in-depth interviews and a 4 in a focus group consisting of women apprentices. Purposive sampling ensured that respondents were engaged in careers in the skilled trades and their experience addressed the research question.

Interviews provided a platform for participants to relay their experience and opinions in depth, giving them the space to guide the interview and discuss issues most important to their personal experience and enable consciousness raising among participants (Reinharz, 1992; Wilkinson, 1998). Focus groups 'enable the development of collective understandings of shared problems' (Wilkinson, 1998: 186). The interview schedule was adjusted so that it could adapt to the diverse situations of each interviewee, it consisted of open-ended questions designed to draw out the experiences, perceptions and beliefs regarding their occupational roles in the style of an in-depth discussion. Broadly we asked interviewees to talk about their start in the occupation, their experience of employment and VET institutions, employers, colleagues and other industry stakeholders; we asked them about career goals, perceived barriers, and support required.

All interviews and the focus group were undertaken in neutral spaces. They were recorded and professionally transcribed. Identifying material was removed, pseudonyms provided and transcripts analysed with the assistance of NVIVO. Transcripts were subjected to further coding using a manual framework, specifically identifying themes emerging from the data. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to focus on the main themes arising from the data through a flexible, iterative reading process that identifies social and psychological patterns and concepts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). While several themes relating to the barriers of masculine cultures, hegemonic masculinity, work/

life balance and gender and sexual harassment arose from the data, this article reports on individual attributes and influences from the sociocultural environment (1) capital (social and cultural). That is, the analysis of tradeswomen's and apprentice's transcripts specifically aimed at identifying the presence and/or absence of social and cultural capital, through a feminist, gender capital lens (Huppatz, 2009a; 2009b; Huppatz and Goodwin, 2013; McCall, 1992; Ross-Smith and Huppatz, 2010; Skeggs, 2004). This coding captured the complexities of capital from the narratives of participants.

Discussion of findings

Possession of capital

Our study found a robust relationship between the successful recruitment and retention of women in the trades and the possession of capital. Thirteen of fifteen tradeswomen had considerable social and cultural capital in a skilled trades' occupational context. Both social and cultural capital were evident through family habitus. Social capital was evident with women having close family members and/or partners and friends who were tradespeople. Growing up in a trades family was talked about in terms of providing familiarisation and offering avenues, access and opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships. For example, Caitlyn (19 yrs, first-year apprentice) said:

My whole family are actually builders, my dad's brothers and my cousins and all of that, so . . . I've grown up with all the boys that we work with, and [I] always ask dad questions . . . he's taken me out on sites . . .

Abigail (22 yrs, third-year apprentice) obtained her apprenticeship via Caitlyn's family. They provided the right contacts at the right time. Abigail's boyfriend is also a tradesman and her grandfather had been a builder and gave her his tools to help her start out. Holly (44 yrs, tradeswoman 2 yrs, self-employed) also comes from a trades family – her father and brothers worked in her hometown. Holly acknowledges the opportunity doing her apprenticeship with her father could offer:

I said dad, I know it's a bit late in the day and I know I'm 40, you know, but can I be your last apprentice? I just thought oh, there's so much to learn from dad, you know? And just because I'm a girl, I miss out. I did my apprenticeship with my dad and loved it, *loved it*.

These examples demonstrate how social capital provides access to *informal* networks (Galea et al., 2020). Informal networks remain the most traditional pathway into the trades (work experience, apprenticeships, qualified positions, promotion and other opportunities) so it is vital that women are able to access them. Caitlyn, Lauren, Olivia and Holly acquired cultural capital from men in their families when they were young. Lauren explained:

Dad would always work on the family farm, and I kind of always wanted to weld because I thought it was cool. For Year Ten work experience I went to my uncle, [who] is a boilermaker (Lauren, 19 yrs, third-year apprentice).

Holly's enculturation into the industry began when she was a child. She learned to identify the 'tools' of the trade and also to speak the 'language' through working with her father in the family business. Women in our study used their cultural capital to secure apprenticeships:

I went and saw [company name] and said . . . 'Would you mind if I came down here for a week?' After the week I said 'I'm interested in an apprenticeship, have you got one going?' And I got the apprenticeship . . . I could actually do it, and apparently [that] blew them out of the water (Lauren).

The possession of social and cultural capital provided women in our study access to trades networks and the opportunity to prove themselves which, in turn, led to them acquiring some degree of assistance, protection and acceptance. Those with capital reported a strong sense belonging and identity in the trades.

My first day of TAFE⁵ . . . I was so nervous I was shaking . . . the kid that I worked with, he came up to me and he's like . . . 'What's wrong?' And I'm like, 'I'm nervous, you know, a new group of boys.' And he's like 'Lauren, you're one of us, don't worry about it.' And I was fine after that . . . (Lauren)

The focus group apprentices also agreed that vocational education and training would be 'much harder' for them if they weren't accepted by peers and teaching staff. Others found acceptance arose from associations with family. For example, Holly gained acceptance as a tradeswoman from the 'guarantee' of her father; 'people go, "oh, yeah, that's Phil's daughter" . . . once they see that somebody else has already accepted you, they do the same . . .' The women 'put into practice' their habitus but are unconscious of the stereotypical beliefs that accompany the practice of it (see Reay, 2004).

Doing masculine gender capital

The women in our study described their cultural capital as embodied and gendered. They identified as 'tomboys', 'outdoorsy', not being very 'girly' and spending time with brothers and other boys during childhood. There was a definite rejection of certain types of feminine behaviour. Abigail said that having brothers helped her be 'tough' and 'take it a bit'. She indicates that she has a level of familiarity with masculine behaviours such as rough talk. This is also associated with being physically strong enough to do trades work. Speaking and behaving appropriately in a trades work/social context is to embrace masculine gender capital and to be as tough as the men they work with. Smith (2013: 864) writes that women in the trades often 'find the need to prove their hegemonic masculinity in order to be accepted'. This was despite their employers highlighting that heavy lifting should be done according to safe work principles. When questioned about Zoe's strength, her employer told her colleagues 'if you can't lift something, we have five different options for you to lift. . . It might be a good time for you all to revise your lifting techniques.' Yet, despite workplace, health and safety reinforcements, physical strength was identified as an important part of trades workplace culture. Given that girls are perceived

to have the *wrong body* for the job, it is understandable that the women felt it was an important competency to prove:

I think we have to prove ourselves a lot more, knowledge-wise, capability-wise in the workshop, and it's harder for us . . . it is still a very physical job, but it's getting less and less. . . I go to the gym, and I power lift. . . I can out-lift them in everything at the gym, so I'm like 'there should be no problem' (Zoe, 24 yrs, first-year apprentice).

Women providing evidence of physical strength disrupts the connection between hegemonic masculinity and male bodies – male gender capital – challenging traditional assumptions about what women's bodies can do and blurring the boundary between gendered bodies and identity (Denissen, 2010). However, assumptions about women's physical inferiority are deeply entrenched and put pressure on women to *continually* prove themselves. A strategy women employ is to outperform their male colleagues (MacIsaac and Domene, 2014; Ness, 2012; Rosa et al., 2017). Renold (2009: 226) describes this as 'girls-as-tomboys expressing "masculinity" better than their young male contemporaries'. Men read this as an acceptable level of competitiveness (i.e. masculine gender capital) which ensures women's acceptance and success:

Like my boss always says, no one can do a job better than me, like meaning that the boys will just rush in and chuck it together, whereas I like to make sure that it's perfect (Olivia, 15 yrs, first-year apprentice).

While the women utilise masculine gender capital in combination with social and cultural capital to solidify their success, they don't displace their gender identity as women altogether (albeit not hyper-feminine women).

Re-gendering the masculine space of the trades – feminine gender capital

The women's habitus causes them to reject some forms of femininity as unsuitable to their work. However, focus group apprentices – all of whom identified as tomboys – de-identified with the boys' behaviour in the TAFE classroom and took pleasure in noticing that their behaviour (feminine capital) was favoured by teaching staff:

- Olivia:* The teachers, like just any teachers in general prefer us, the females over the men.
- Interviewer:* Oh, how come?
- Olivia:* We're not boys.
- Abigail:* Because the boys are all dickheads. . . And I know I don't muck around . . .
- Interviewer:* Girls are better behaved, you mean?
- Caitlyn:* Yeah, like the boys in my class always muck up, they leave and come back whenever they feel they need to. We'll be doing a prac and they will just walk over to Abigail's class.
- Interviewer:* The teachers don't like it?
- Abigail:* Not really.

The women use their feminine gender capital to transform or *re-gender* the masculine space of TAFE, they also *re-gender* the workspace – do the work in different ways – ways that work for them. Agapiou (2002), Denissen (2010) and Smith (2013) also found that women have different ways of being (embodied) in the male-dominated spaces of the trades. Women painters/decorators in Ibáñez's (2016: 41) study found that their perceived feminine capital: 'cleanliness, attention to detail, good taste' created demand for their work. In our study, this took the form of how they approached their work (attitudes and desire to learn), what they brought to the workplace (skills) and how they can use their bodies:

[A work mate] was having trouble with an alternator one day . . . he couldn't get in there. He goes, 'Come and have a go at this, will you?' And I did it, my hand fit inside and he went, 'Oh, you can fit your hand in there, you bitch!' So we worked well because we were good at different things because of our size or strength or whatever (Jemma, 45 yrs, tradesperson 6 yrs, self-employed).

I've got a huge advantage in being in a roof. I move through rooves and under houses like ten times quicker than my apprentice (Madison, 25 yrs, tradesperson 6 yrs).

Madison, Holly and Hannah also found that clients, particularly older women and minority groups, respond well to them because they are women. In these instances, their traditional (stereotypical) feminine capital helps clients feel comfortable asking questions and having strangers in their homes. For Madison it's the ability to be 'chatty'. Holly's open and encouraging attitude empowered her clients to try their hand at 'do-it-yourself' work:

Madison: When I go into a female [client]'s house, old women, they love me because I talk. They talk, so it's just like that.

Holly: I had one lady [who] . . . didn't know the difference between an impact driver and a drill . . . she just needed a picket fence built. . . . So I've gone 'Okay, do you want to help out?' She said 'Oh yeah, that'd be great' . . . I said 'Okay, I'll show you' . . . So she built the whole thing . . .

The tradeswomen find interacting with clients in ways that operationalise their feminine gender capital empowering. Importantly, Smith (2013) notes that shared pleasure is a point of connection between men and women and promotes gender equity. The satisfaction women gain from doing skilled trades work also increases their confidence, not only in what they can do but how they conduct themselves in the world around them (Smith, 2013):

Olivia: If someone is like how do you do this, you can actually sit there and like say it exactly how it works. You're like yeah, I know that . . . and you feel like real proud of yourself. . . . It's good when you know more than your dad (laughing).

Zoe: I love going to work. I like being able to do what not many other people can do. And it's a pretty good industry to be in . . . despite the lack of females . . . it's empowering.

Abigail agreed and as her skills increased she gained confidence from positive feedback in the form of requests to do extra work for clients and friends. The women's confidence and accompanying success works to further detach the assumption that the trades work is only for men. Yet barriers to gender inclusion in the skilled trades affect women *with* social and cultural capital, as well as impact on women without social and cultural capital.

Lack of capital and the detracting nature of 'gender capital'

While social and cultural capital are factors that lead to recruitment, easier enculturation and success and longevity, entrenched perceptions of female and feminine gender capital dilute and detract from this. Two participants in our study had no capital and a further four experienced barriers to advancing their capital. They experienced a lack of access to trade networks and apprenticeship opportunities, sexual harassment and unnecessary surveillance and checking of their work.

Jemma was interested in the trades at 16 but didn't have the capital (social connections, family habitus) to help her find one. She decided to enrol in vocational education and training as a mature age student. A TAFE teacher helped her find an apprenticeship. Jemma's lack of family habitus and cultural capital in relation to this field played out in her workplace as a lack of certain language, behaviour, 'norms' and values as *the apprentice*. They expected Jemma would already know how to *do* some of the job:

there was an expectation of a base knowledge which I didn't have, because I'd never been around anyone who worked on cars. I felt that they [workplace] were having an expectation of a certain amount of knowledge that they shouldn't have when you're doing an apprenticeship.

Similarly, Madison had no trades background or family support. Madison did a pre-apprenticeship year at TAFE before looking for an apprenticeship. She applied for a number of jobs in a six-month period and was unsuccessful:

I don't have any trades in my family, so. . . It was really hard to find [a job]. . . I even did work experience and had that under my belt and I was still struggling. Peter [who I did work experience with] called me and said 'Do you want an apprenticeship, none of the other blokes are cutting up to it.' I did a trial with him and it just went from there. The second year [of TAFE] had already begun . . . so Peter said . . . 'There is not really much point in enrolling now. Why don't you just do a year on the tools?' Because . . . I wasn't a tomboy or anything, I wasn't good with tools.

Madison doesn't identify as a 'tomboy', which might have provided some of the cultural capital that would give her knowledge and confidence with tools.

With the support of TAFE and their workplaces, Jemma and Madison cultivated capital and learned the skills needed to do their jobs. Jemma is self-employed and Madison remains in the company she started her apprenticeship in and now trains apprentices. Both continue to work against assumptions they have the wrong body for the job. Jemma gave her business a gender-neutral name and Madison constantly deals with clients' assumptions that she's not in charge:

I always get asked if I'm qualified and how long I've been doing it for . . . they are . . . interested because I am a female. I have a 17-year-old boy with me half the time, he's my apprentice, they always think that he's the qualified [one] and I am the apprentice. As soon as I start talking, they understand that I'm in charge, because I go straight up to the customer and greet them . . . [My apprentice] . . . stands back.

In comparison, Emily came from a trades' family and has strong family habitus and cultural capital. Despite this, she struggled to make use of her social capital to secure an apprenticeship. Emily's female and feminine gender capital reduces her other capital. She had a difficult time with sex-role stereotypes and sexual harassment throughout her apprenticeship:

I ended up taking a job with a friend's Dad. . . . He gave me a go and then there was just the usual sexual harassment . . . by supervisors and colleagues . . . stealing my clothes . . . and then I was told things, repulsive things that people were doing with my clothes (Emily, 37 yrs, tradesperson for 6 yrs).

Jade also has a strong trades background and gained acceptance from the 'guarantee' of her brother who works for the same company. Jade was determined to *fit in* and not be treated differently by her crew and supervisor. Despite this, outside her crew Jade continues to suffer from a lack of trust in her ability simply because she's a woman. Like Emily, Jade's social and cultural capital is undermined by gender capital.

There is some other departments, they need your trade and then I go down there and . . . they'll call for someone else to come down. . . . The first few times . . . I felt pretty upset about it. . . . I'm like 'I can do this job. . . they wouldn't have put me here if I wasn't capable.' . . . The boys on my crew . . . they back me up. Now I just laugh about it (Jade, 24 yrs, tradesperson for 4 yrs).

These examples indicate the difficulties caused by gender capital and masculine privilege in skilled trades workplaces. Jade continues to work for her employer and has the protection of her crew. Emily considered quitting but created opportunities for herself with niche market business ventures.

Our study found that despite the dominance of male gender capital, women who possess social and cultural capital (access to social networks, habitus) find it easier than women without such capital to obtain the benefits of their labour 'that costs time, time invested personally by the investor' (Bourdieu, 1986: 244). These women also utilise strategies that combine masculine, female and feminine gender capital. They are tom-boys, outperform their male colleagues, take pride and pleasure in their work, and employ competent work practices that accommodate size and strength differences. By working in ways that suit their desires, skills and bodies, they do gender differently.

Conclusion

The barriers preventing women from accessing and maintaining work in the skilled trades are complex and varied and well detailed in the literature (Bridges et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the barrier that female and feminine gender capital represents has not

previously been identified and adds another layer to understanding gender segregation in the skilled trades. A limitation of our study on this point is that our participants were successful in navigating male gender capital barriers. We did not interview women who left the trades or were unsuccessful in recruitment because of these barriers. Traditionally, access and opportunity in the skilled trades has been built around access to informal social and cultural practices. These practices produce and reproduce a male culture that has resisted gender inclusion for decades (Byrne et al., 2005; Fielden et al., 2000; Ibáñez, 2016; Pringle and Winning, 1998). In the changing world of work, with skills shortages in these trades, diversity and inclusion are a priority and feminist theories of capital illuminate the advantages some women utilise.

This article contributes to a continuing conversation and analysis about the role of capital in women's acquisition of work in male-dominated industries. We found that social and cultural capital are critical to women obtaining work and maintaining careers. How capital can be acquired and utilised needs to be understood in more depth because capital is pivotal to work in the skilled trades. Capital, therefore, represents an important point of intervention in the recruitment and retention of women in male-dominated industries. Understanding how capital works, recognising its value and replicating its techniques will contribute to improving the success of skilled trades apprentices who lack capital. That means providing women with better access to trades training. Too often, the ways open to women to redress a lack of capital are unreliable and rely on the good nature of men and women in a variety of roles in the industry.

Our study details an original contribution to the field regarding the ways women combine gendered capital to prosper. By fusing masculine capital, female capital and feminine capital women reject assumptions about what women's bodies can do, transform stereotypes into successful work practices and *re-gender* the space of the skilled trades. More research is needed to examine how cultural change could be brought about to encourage a revaluing of female and feminine gender capital; how combinations of gender capital disrupt traditional gendered identities, and the potential of both to change the culture of the skilled trades. This is revealed to be a point of resistance and conflict. This article presents evidence to suggest that it is a point where change can occur. Developing strategies that replicate the advantages of, and access to, capital could be the key that turns around the low percentages of women working in these occupations. Nonetheless, this point of intervention will need to be accompanied by the revaluing of feminine and female capital.

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Notes

1. Our study excluded professional women in architecture, engineering, project management and surveying (see Dainty and Lingard, 2006; Galea et al., 2020; Navarro-Astor et al., 2017;

- Powell and Sang, 2015), and women working in administrative roles in the construction industry because they have more formal organisational supports and protections in place and fewer cultural constraints than skilled trades occupations.
2. We acknowledge the complex arguments that surround family habitus and institutional habitus that are outside the scope of this article. For more information see the work of Will Atkinson (2011, 2013) and Burke et al. (2013).
 3. Atkinson (2011: 340) explains that ‘a doxa transcends any one particular habitus. Even if ultimately produced by particular habitus – namely those possessing symbolic power – it is fed back into and sustained by multiple habitus as shared beliefs and orientations.’
 4. Following the work of Renold and Ringrose (2008), we understand ‘tomboy’ to mean how women employ behaviours and attitudes that distance themselves from ‘heteronormative practices’ which encourage, indeed expect, performances of ‘heterosexualised hyper-femininity’ (2008: 326). I am indebted to the work of Louisa Smith (2013) for the connection.
 5. Technical and Further Education (TAFE) is the largest vocational, education and training provider in Australia.

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