

## Does Sex-biased Job Advertising "Aid and Abet" Sex Discrimination?<sup>1</sup>

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Two studies are reported which indicate that both sex-biased wording in job advertisements and the placement of help-wanted ads in sex-segregated newspaper columns discourage men and women from applying for "opposite-sex" jobs for which they might well be qualified. Both studies were originally conducted and presented as part of legal testimony in actual sex discrimination cases.

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act forbids discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin—and sex. Although the sex provision was treated as a joke at the time (and was originally introduced by a Southern Congressman in an attempt to defeat the bill), the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC)—charged with enforcing the Act—discovered in its first year of operation that 40% or more of the complaints warranting investigation charged discrimination on the basis of sex. According to a report by the EEOC, nearly 6,000 charges of sex discrimination were filed with that agency in 1971 alone, a 62% increase over the previous year.

Title VII extends as well to practices which aid and abet discrimination. For example, the Act forbids job advertisements from indicating a preference for one sex or the other unless sex is a bona fide occupational qualification for employment. In interpreting this provision, the EEOC has ruled that even the practice of labeling help-wanted columns as "Male" or "Female" should be considered a violation of the law.

Nevertheless, a large number of employers continue to write advertisements which specify a sex preference, and many more write advertising copy clearly

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intended to appeal to one sex only. Moreover, many newspapers continue to divide their help-wanted advertisements into sex-segregated columns.

Do these advertising practices aid and abet discrimination in employment by actually discouraging applicants of one sex or the other from applying for jobs for which they are otherwise well qualified? The two studies reported in this article sought to answer this question empirically. Both were conducted and presented as part of legal testimony, the first in a suit filed by the EEOC against American Telephone and Telegraph Company, the second in a suit filed by the National Organization for Women against *The Pittsburgh Press*.

### EXPERIMENT I

As part of an investigation into sex and race discrimination at the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, the EEOC discovered a pervasive sex bias in AT&T's job advertisements and recruiting brochures. For example, advertisements for the jobs of lineman and frameman were clearly written to appeal only to men (even the job titles are male), whereas advertisements for the jobs of operator and service representative were written to appeal only to women. The EEOC therefore asked us to conduct a study to determine whether or not this sex bias acts to discourage applicants of the opposite sex. Accordingly, Experiment I was designed to answer the following three questions:

1. Do sex-biased job advertisements discourage men and women from applying for "opposite-sex" jobs?
2. Would more men and women be interested in applying for such "opposite-sex" jobs if the advertisements were unbiased; that is, if the advertisements did not seem to prefer one sex or the other either in their job titles, pronouns, or overall tone?
3. Would even more men and women be willing to apply for such "opposite-sex" jobs if sex-reversed, "affirmative-action" advertisements were specifically written to appeal to them?

### METHOD

#### *Subjects*

One-hundred twenty seniors from a racially integrated high school in the San Francisco Bay area served as subjects. Half were male and half were female. Few planned to go on to any 4-year college. Students who were not planning to go on to college were purposely sought as subjects so that they might be both appropriate for and interested in jobs like those advertised by the telephone company. (As seniors, many would even be preparing for jobs like these in the near future.)

*Procedure*

Each student was given a booklet containing 12 job advertisements and was asked to indicate on a 6-point scale how interested he or she would be in applying for each job. The scale ranged from "very uninterested" to "very interested" and was labeled at each point. The 12 advertisements included four telephone jobs and eight nontelephone jobs. In order of appearance, the jobs were: appliance sales, telephone operator, photographer, travel agent, telephone frameman, dental assistant, taxicab driver, telephone service representative, assistant buyer, keypunch operator, telephone lineman, and public relations/advertising.

The cover sheet introduced all 12 jobs as follows: "All of the jobs have a starting salary of between \$100 and \$120 per week with regular raises after that. None of the jobs requires any previous training or experience beyond high school graduation; all of them provide paid on-the-job training." The phrase, "An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f," appeared at the end of every job advertisement.

*Sex-biased job advertisements.* One-third of the booklets advertised the telephone jobs in the sex-biased format used by AT&T. In other words, these ads were copied verbatim from AT&T ads and brochures furnished to us by the EEOC. The four sex-biased telephone advertisements were worded as follows:

*Telephone Operator:***WHO SAYS IT'S A MAN'S WORLD?**

Behind every man's telephone call, there is a woman. She's a smart woman. She's efficient. She has to be. She places the complex long distance calls people cannot place themselves or helps them locate telephone numbers.

Hers is a demanding job. But we make it worth her while. We can make it worth your while too. Not only do we pay a good salary to start, but also offer group life insurance, group medical coverage, good vacations with pay and free pensions.

A stepping stone to management positions.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Service Representative:***IF WE WERE AN AIRLINE, SHE'D BE OUR STEWARDESS!**

She is the telephone company. At least to most of our customers, she is. When someone wants a special service, an extra phone, or if there's been a billing problem—this is the girl they talk to.

Her job is to help them.

That's why she sits at a desk. Her own desk. And that's why she doesn't have to type or take shorthand. It's a lot easier to be helpful when you have good working conditions.

She's been to our special Service Representative School. Seven weeks' worth. So she knows her job. And she knows how to handle people. Which is why we need her. Is it any wonder we think she's special?

Pacific Telephone  
An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Frameman:*

The telephone frameman plays a vital role in telephone communications. This skilled craftsman connects cables and wires with equipment in our central office in order to provide telephone service. He also works with other craftsmen to correct troubles in wiring.

A frameman should have mechanical aptitude, a liking for technical study, and an interest in electrical circuitry.

Receive full pay during your full-time classroom training.

Pacific Telephone  
An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Lineman:*

**WE'RE LOOKING FOR OUTDOOR MEN!**

If sitting at a desk or working indoors is not for you, Pacific Telephone will train you as a lineman, and we'll pay you while you learn.

This job requires manual dexterity, pole-climbing ability, and the desire to work outdoors.

It's smart to look into this opportunity because we are offering more than ever in pay and benefits to get linemen. And we will give raises and chances for promotion to keep you.

Pacific Telephone  
An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Unbiased job advertisements.* One-third of the booklets advertised the telephone jobs in sex-unbiased form, that is, in a form which did not seem to prefer one sex more than the other. This involved altering the tone of the advertisements, as well as eliminating all sex-related job titles and pronouns. However, in all other respects, these unbiased advertisements match AT&T job descriptions exactly. The four unbiased telephone advertisements were worded as follows:

*Telephone Operator:*

We need calm, coolheaded men and women with clear friendly voices to do that important job of helping our customers. They must be capable of handling

emergency calls quickly and competently. They also place the complex long distance calls people cannot place themselves or help them locate hard-to-find telephone numbers.

Theirs is a demanding job. But we make it worth their while. We can make it worth your while too. Not only do we pay a good salary to start, but also offer group life insurance, group medical coverage, good vacations with pay and free pensions.

A stepping stone to management positions.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Service Representative:*

**BE OUR AMBASSADOR TO THE PUBLIC!**

You are the telephone company. At least to most of our customers, you would be. When someone wants a special service, an extra phone, or if there's been a billing problem—you are the man or woman they talk to.

Your job is to help them.

You're cool. You know how to handle people in a variety of situations. Yours is a key customer relations job with great opportunities for raises and promotions into management.

Start right off earning a full salary while you attend our special Service Representative School for seven weeks.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Frameworker:*

**WHERE A JOB MEANS MORE THAN JUST GOING TO WORK!**

Just ask frameworkers Susan Frey or Roger Dowling: "We've got a good supervisor. If we run into problems, we can always expect a helping hand. Our supervisor will spend a couple of hours showing us something we don't understand sometimes. We help each other around here.

It's as good an outfit as there is around. If we've got to work for a living, this is the place."

The frameworker plays a vital role in telephone communications. Working in our central office, this skilled craftsperson connects cables and wires with equipment in order to provide telephone service for our customers. The frameworker also works with other craftspeople to correct troubles in wiring.

Receive full pay during your full-time classroom training.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Lineworker:*

**WE'RE LOOKING FOR OUTDOOR PEOPLE!**

Are you a man or woman who likes fresh air and exercise? If sitting behind a desk

isn't for you, stay physically fit as a lineworker working in the great outdoors for Pacific Telephone.

You can start right off earning a full salary while we train you to do the job.

The lineworker's job requires manual dexterity, pole-climbing, and the desire to work outdoors. Modern power tools and efficient machines help the lineworker do the job, but his or her primary aids are intelligence and a pair of good hands.

It's smart to look into this opportunity because we are offering more than ever in pay and benefits to get lineworkers. And we will give raises and chances for promotion to keep you.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Sex-reversed "affirmative-action" advertisements.* One-third of the booklets advertised the telephone jobs in sex-reversed format. In other words, these ads were worded so as to appeal specifically to that sex not normally recruited for these jobs. Once again, however, the advertisements remained true to AT&T job descriptions. The four sex-reversed advertisements were worded as follows:

*Telephone Operator:*

We need calm, coolheaded men with clear masculine voices to do that important job of helping our customers. He must be capable of handling emergency calls quickly and competently. He also places the complex long distance calls people cannot place themselves or helps them locate hard-to-find telephone numbers.

His is a demanding job. But we make it worth his while. We can make it worth your while too. Not only do we pay a good salary to start, but also offer group life insurance, group medical coverage, good vacations with pay and free pensions.

A stepping stone to management positions.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Service Representative:*

**IF WE WERE A GOVERNMENT, HE'D BE OUR AMBASSADOR!**

He is the telephone company. At least to most of our customers, he is. When someone wants a special service, an extra phone, or if there's been a billing problem--this is the man they talk to.

His job is to help them.

He's cool. He knows how to handle people in a variety of situations. His is a key customer relations job with great opportunities for raises and promotions into management.

Start right off earning a full salary while you attend our special Service Representative School for seven weeks.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Framewoman:***WHERE A JOB MEANS MORE THAN JUST GOING TO WORK!**

Just ask framewoman Susan Frey: "I've got a good supervisor. If I run into problems, I can always expect a helping hand. My supervisor will spend a couple of hours showing me something I don't understand sometimes. We help each other around here.

It's as good an outfit as there is around. If I've got to work for a living, this is the place."

The framewoman plays a vital role in telephone communications. Working in our central office, this skilled craftswoman connects cables and wires with equipment in order to provide telephone service for our customers. She also works with other craftspeople to correct troubles in wiring.

Receive full pay during your full-time classroom training.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Telephone Linewoman:***WE'RE LOOKING FOR OUTDOOR WOMEN!**

Do you like fresh air and exercise? If sitting behind a desk isn't for you, stay slim and trim as a linewoman working in the great outdoors for Pacific Telephone.

You can start right off earning a full salary while we train you to do the job.

The linewoman's job requires manual dexterity, pole-climbing, and the desire to work outdoors. Modern power tools and efficient machines help the linewoman do her job, but her primary aids are her intelligence and her own two hands.

It's smart to look into this opportunity because we are offering more than ever in pay and benefits to get linewomen. And we will give raises and chances for promotion to keep you.

Pacific Telephone

An Equal Opportunity Employer m/f

*Summary of procedure.* The same four telephone jobs were thus presented in three different formats: the sex-biased format used by AT&T, a sex-unbiased format, and a sex-reversed "affirmative-action" format. All 8 nontelephone ads were worded in sex-unbiased fashion and remained constant in all booklets. In other words, only the wording of the telephone jobs changed from condition to condition. For purposes of analysis, a subject was defined as "interested in applying" for a job if he or she checked any of the following three categories: "slightly interested," "moderately interested," "very interested." A subject was defined as "not interested" if he or she checked "slightly uninterested," "moderately uninterested," or "very uninterested."

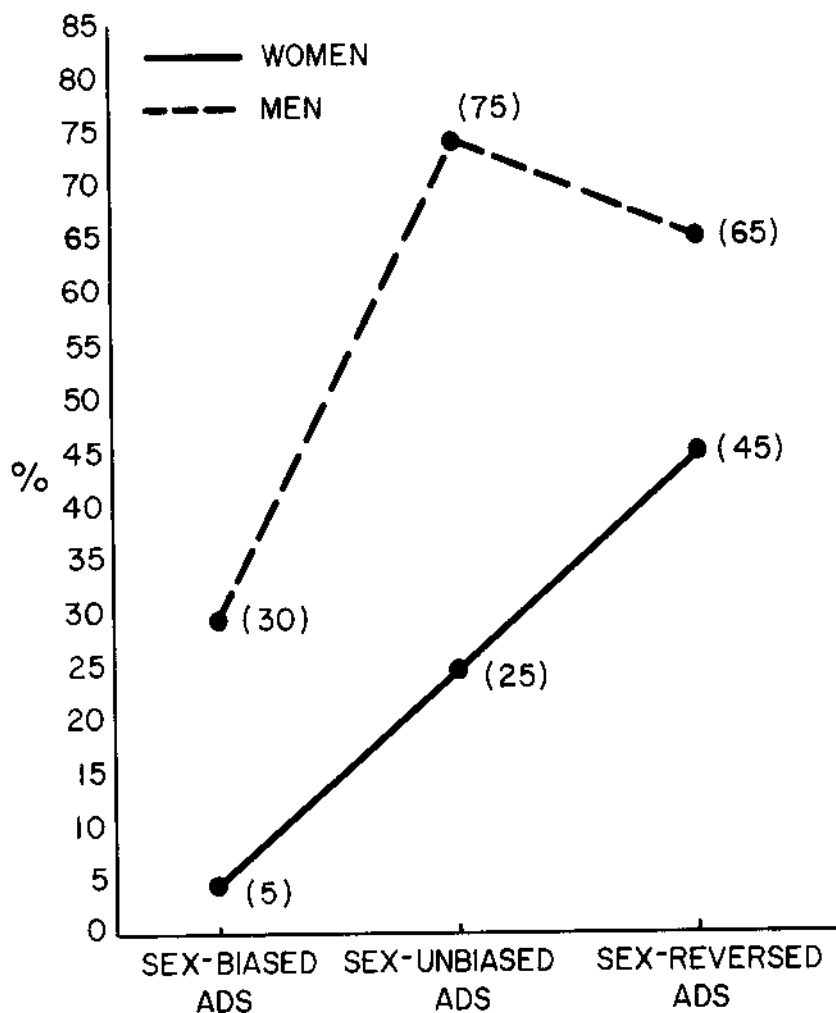


FIG. 1. Percent of men and women who were interested in applying for either of the "opposite-sex" jobs. (Each data point represents 20 subjects.)

### RESULTS

Do sex-biased job advertisements discourage men and women from applying for "opposite-sex" jobs? As shown in Figure 1, our results clearly suggest this to be the case.

Consider first the results for women. When the jobs of lineman and frameman were advertised in a sex-biased format, no more than 5% of the women were interested. When these same jobs were advertised in a sex-unbiased format, 25%



of the women were interested. And when the ads for lineman and frameman were specifically written to appeal to women, nearly half (45%) of the women in our sample were interested in applying for one or the other of these two jobs ( $\chi^2 = 8.53, p < .01$ , one-tailed). In other words, sex-biased advertisements do discourage women from applying for so-called male jobs; more women would be interested in applying for such jobs if the ad's sex bias were removed; and even more women would be interested if affirmative-action ads were specifically written to recruit them.

The results for men show a similar, but not identical, pattern. As can be seen in Figure 1, men are generally more interested in the jobs of operator and service representative than women are in the jobs of lineman and frameman. (This difference may be due, in part, to the fact that Pacific Telephone does employ male operators in the Bay Area.) Despite this fact, the results clearly indicate that sex-biased job advertisements still tend to discourage men from applying for jobs as operator and service representative ( $\chi^2 = 9.09, p < .01$ , one-tailed). For when the sex bias is removed, the percentage of men interested in applying for one or the other of these jobs jumps from 30% to 75%. Wording these ads in sex-reversed "affirmative-action" format does not further increase the percentage of men who are interested. [Neither does it significantly reduce it, however ( $\chi^2 < 1$ , n.s.)]. It may be that 75% is the maximum one can expect for any particular job and that a sex-reversed format *would* serve to further increase male interest for "female" jobs with lesser initial interest.<sup>3</sup>

The results of Experiment I thus indicate that sex bias in the content of a job advertisement does serve to aid and abet discrimination by discouraging both men and women from applying for "opposite-sex" jobs. Experiment II addresses itself to a second form of sex bias: the segregation of job advertisements into "Male" and "Female" columns.

## EXPERIMENT II

### *Method*

Fifty-two women attending Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh were asked to rate each of 32 jobs which had been advertised in Sunday editions of *The Pittsburgh Press*. Sixteen of the ads had been drawn from the "Male" column and 16 had been drawn from the "Female" column. Each woman was given a booklet containing all 32 ads. She was asked to read each ad and to rate it on a 6-point scale which ranged from "definitely unwilling. . ." to "definitely willing—to apply for the job." The women were told to assume that they had the necessary prerequisites for each job: "We are only interested in your preferences, not your skills."

<sup>3</sup>Parametric analyses based on subjects' numerical ratings yield the same conclusions reported here.

*Segregated want ads.* Half of the booklets listed the ads in a sex-segregated format identical to that used by *The Pittsburgh Press*. The 16 male jobs were listed in alphabetical order in a column labeled "Jobs-Male Interest." The 16 female jobs were listed in alphabetical order in a column labeled "Jobs-Female Interest." Of these, half listed the male jobs first and half listed the female jobs first. In addition, the following disclaimer, quoted verbatim from *The Pittsburgh Press*, appeared on every other page of the booklet:

NOTICE TO JOB SEEKERS

"Jobs are arranged under Male and Female classifications for the convenience of our readers. This is done because most jobs generally appeal more to persons of one sex than the other.

"Various laws and ordinances—local, state and federal, prohibit discrimination in employment because of sex unless sex is a bona fide occupational requirement. Unless the advertisement itself specifies one sex or the other, job seekers should assume that the advertiser will consider applicants of either sex in compliance with the laws against discrimination."

*Integrated want ads.* Half of the booklets listed the identical 32 ads in alphabetical order with no sex labeling. The disclaimer again appeared on every other page of the booklet, but with its first paragraph deleted.

### Results

Do sex-segregated want ads discourage women from seriously considering those jobs which appear in a "male interest" column? The results show this to be the case. When jobs were segregated and labeled on the basis of sex, as they are in many newspapers, only 46% of the women in this study were as likely to apply for "male interest" jobs as for "female interest" jobs. In other words, a majority of the women did prefer "female interest" jobs. But does this really reflect a true preference on the part of women for so-called "female interest" jobs? No, it does not. For when these same jobs appeared in an integrated alphabetical listing with no reference to sex, fully 81% of the women preferred the "male interest" jobs to the "female interest" jobs ( $\chi^2 = 6.60, p < .02$ , two-tailed).<sup>4</sup>

For example, the job of newspaper reporter fell in popularity from 7th place when it appeared in the integrated listing to 19th place when it was segregated and labeled as a "male interest" job. It seems clear that the newspaper editor who wishes to hire only male reporters—in violation of the law—can place his ad in the "Male Interest" column, secure in the knowledge that this will effectively

<sup>4</sup>Surveys have shown that jobs listed in "male interest" columns are preferable in terms of objective features like salary, fringe benefits, opportunity for advancement, etc.

discourage female applicants. It is in this way that sex-segregated want ads can "aid and abet" discrimination in employment on the basis of sex.

### DISCUSSION

What can we infer from these studies about the effects of sex-biased advertising on actual job applicants? Can we generalize these results to the actual job-seeking situation? It is our view that, if anything, these studies actually *underestimate* the extent to which sex-biased job advertisements discourage both men and women applicants from applying for jobs for which they are otherwise qualified.

First, we required the men and women in our studies to rate *every* ad regardless of how it was worded. Despite the fact that the instructions on the cover of the booklets stated this specifically and despite the fact that we emphasized the point verbally, spontaneous comments and questions indicated that both the men and the women were highly resistant to reading and rating job advertisements obviously biased as appropriate for the opposite sex. We therefore suspect that most men and women never even <sup>even</sup> bothered to read, let alone seriously consider, "opposite-sex" advertisements.

Second, we asked the men and women in our study only to indicate whether or not they would be interested in applying for each job. They did not, in fact, have to expose themselves to the risk of encountering discrimination—or ridicule—by actually applying for jobs which had already been designated by an employer as inappropriate for their sex. Clearly it is easier to say you will apply for a job than to actually apply.

Third, the newspaper study employed the relatively benign form of sex-segregated want ads used by *The Pittsburgh Press*. But most newspapers do not contain the disclaimer and they adhere to the more explicit headings of "Male Help Wanted" and "Female Help Wanted."

In sum, one cannot justify sex-biased advertising on the grounds that men and women have different job preferences. These studies clearly show that sex-biased advertising helps to create and to perpetuate those preferences and, furthermore, that unbiased advertising can serve to alter those preferences. Thus, for an employer to advertise as if there were "male" jobs and "female" jobs is to produce a self-fulfilling prophesy.

### POSTSCRIPT

As noted earlier, the two studies presented here were conducted and presented as part of legal testimony, the first in a suit filed by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) against AT&T, the second in a complaint filed by the National Organization for Women (NOW) with the Pittsburgh Human Relations Commission against *The Pittsburgh Press*.

When it first became clear to *The Pittsburgh Press* that the pressures from NOW were serious and might lead to successful legal action, the newspaper changed the format of its classified advertising headings from the more blatant "Male Help Wanted" and "Female Help Wanted" to the more benign "Jobs—Male Interest" and "Jobs—Female Interest." In addition, they added the disclaimer reproduced earlier. This alteration of format did not succeed, and the Commission still ruled against them, agreeing with the contention of NOW that sex-segregated advertising columns did, in fact, aid and abet discrimination in employment. Since then the *Press* has lost appeals in the lower courts and the United States Supreme Court has now agreed to hear the case.

The EEOC action against AT&T was filed with the Federal Communications Commission, one of the few federal regulatory agencies with antidiscrimination provisions in its guidelines. The occasion for the complaint was a request from AT&T to the FCC for a rate increase. The EEOC investigation of AT&T was a massive one and resulted in their conclusion that AT&T was the country's "greatest oppressor of women." The case has now been settled, and in a letter to us, William H. Brown III, Chairman of the EEOC, stated:

"The agreement which we reached with AT&T was a milestone in the history of civil rights. In addition to an unprecedented back pay award and greatly increased job mobility for women and minorities throughout the Bell System, the companies are committed to recruit and hire or promote females until they hold at least 38 percent of the inside craft jobs and 19 percent of the outside craft jobs. Males will have to be recruited and hired into at least 10 percent of the operator jobs and 25 percent of the other clerical jobs. In the long run, this means that about 100,000 or more persons will be in jobs traditionally held by the opposite sex. These commitments go well beyond any current or previous programs by any company and they have been obtained largely because of your work. . . . Since AT&T's principal justification for its sex-segregation of jobs was lack of interest by females, your experiment provided the spearhead of our argument on that issue."

In addition, AT&T has now directed that all of its advertising and recruiting materials be rewritten to remove sex bias, and a nationwide advertising campaign has been launched in the mass media featuring sex-reversed "affirmative-action" ads for traditionally sex-typed telephone jobs.

For example, an ad has recently appeared in *Life*, *Newsweek*, and other national magazines which shows an attractive young woman atop a telephone pole. The accompanying text reads:

**THE PHONE COMPANY WANTS MORE INSTALLERS LIKE  
ALANA MACFARLANE**

Alana MacFarlane is a 20-year-old from San Rafael, California. She's one of our first women telephone installers. She won't be the last.

We also have several hundred male telephone operators. And a policy that there are no all-male or all-female jobs at the phone company.

We want the men and women of the telephone company to do what they want to do, and do best.

For example, Alana likes working outdoors. "I don't go for office routine," she said. "But as an installer, I get plenty of variety and a chance to move around."

Some people like to work with their hands, or, like Alana, get a kick out of working 20 feet up in the air.

Others like to drive trucks. Some we're helping to develop into good managers.

Today, when openings exist, local Bell Companies are offering applicants and present employees some jobs they may never have thought about before. We want to help all advance to the best of their abilities.

AT&T and your local Bell Company are equal opportunity employers.

A similar ad is now recruiting male telephone operators. It shows a young man, blonde, casually dressed, sitting at a switchboard, wearing a headset.

#### THE PHONE COMPANY WANTS MORE OPERATORS LIKE RICK WEHMHOFER

Rick Wehmhofer of Denver, Colorado, is one of several hundred male telephone operators in the Bell System.

Currently, Rick is a directory assistance operator. "So far, my job has been pleasant and worthwhile," he says. "I enjoy assisting people."

We have men like Rick in a lot of different telephone jobs. Both men and women work as Bell System mechanics, truck drivers, installers and engineers.

We want the men and women of the telephone company to do what they want to do, and do best.

Today, when openings exist, local Bell Companies are offering applicants and present employees some jobs they may never have thought about before. We want to help all advance to the best of their abilities.

AT&T and your local Bell Company are equal opportunity employers.

When we were being cross-examined at the FCC hearings, our sex-reversed "affirmative-action" ads were criticized and ridiculed by AT&T attorneys. We leave it as an exercise for the reader to compare our ads with those now appearing in the mass media. (Perhaps we should sue for plagiarism.)