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CRAFTING KINSHIP AT HOME AND WORK: WOMEN MINERS IN WYOMING

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The article traces the institutional policies and social dynamics shaping women's participation in the northeastern Wyoming mining industry. Ethnographic research suggests that the women's successful integration into this nontraditional workplace is predicated on their ability to craft and maintain kin-like social relationships in two spheres. First, women miners have addressed the challenges of managing their home and work responsibilities by cultivating networks of friends and family to care for their children while they are at work. This finding denaturalizes the masculinization of the mining industry, showing instead how institutional policies such as rotating shift schedules have systematically made it difficult, though not impossible, for women and especially single mothers to participate in this industry. Second, women miners craft close relationships with coworkers in what are called "crew families." These relationships make their work more enjoyable, and the ways in which they create camaraderie prompt a reconsideration of conventional accounts of sexual harassment in the mining industry.

Seven years ago, Nicole[1] started applying for coal mining jobs in her hometown of Gillette, Wyoming, to prove to her husband that she could make as much money as he did. By the time she was offered a temporary position in the pit as an equipment operator, she took the job because they had divorced and she needed the money to pay bills and support her children. Now a full-time employee, she skillfully operates many different pieces of equipment and gets a thrill out of learning new jobs. Although she has had to deal with a couple of sexist remarks in her career, she enjoys spending time with most of her coworkers, especially when they play practical jokes on each other. "It's a good job. It's a lot of fun, but it's what you make of it. I love the physical and mental challenges of it."

Nicole's toughest challenge has been balancing her work and family responsibilities while working a rotating twelve-hour shift schedule. After her divorce, she relied on a friend's wife to babysit her young children while she was at work. She would get up at 4:30 a.m. to get the kids ready and take them to the babysitter's house by 5:30 so that she could get on the bus to go to work at 6:00. After work, she would pick them up at 9:15 p.m. Once home, she had to get them ready for bed, shower, and pack her lunch for the next day. On a good night, she got six hours of sleep. When working nights, she got even less. She dropped her kids off at the babysitter's in the afternoon and then picked them up

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at 9:30 a.m. Preferring to stay up with them during the day while most of her coworkers were sleeping in preparation for the next shift, she slept for only an hour while her kids were napping. She also slept on the bus for an hour on the way out to work and on the way home, which brought her total to three hours of sleep. She also tried to use her thirty-minute lunch break to sleep as well, which helped her make it through the night. "But you do what you got to do sometimes," she said. "And I was surprised I was able to do it."

Since Nicole's children have grown up and are old enough to attend school, she has found it easier to balance her multiple responsibilities. In the past few years, she has also benefited from marrying a man with a more regular schedule and being able to rely on family members who have moved back to Gillette and can help take care of her kids while she is working. She intends to work at the mine as long as she has a job there because she enjoys her work, coworkers, and paycheck. She encourages other women to do the same, while cautioning them: "It's a different world out there. It's a man's world. You get muddy and you endure things I never thought I would."

Nicole is one of many women who work in the coal mines in Wyoming's Powder River Basin. Since opening in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the region has become the country's largest producer of coal. Last year alone, the basin's fourteen mines produced over 430 million tons of coal, or approximately a third of all coal burned in U.S. power plants.[2] To maximize production, almost all the mines run a schedule similar to the one Nicole works: four nights, three days off, three days, one day off, three nights, three days off, four days, and seven days off. Although miners love the monthly seven days off, many struggle to keep up with family demands while working. This challenge is particularly difficult for women miners, especially those who are single mothers, because they receive less support at home than do their married male coworkers. Despite these formidable challenges, however, many women seek and maintain mine employment, making the region one of the industry's largest employers of women miners. Women typically comprise 20 percent of most production crews. In this article, I focus primarily on these women, although many others also work in the offices as managers, engineers, and clerks and many others own and manage successful businesses related to the industry. Their workplace success offers a crucial case study of the integration of women into a traditionally, but not exclusively, masculinized industry.

In tracing the institutional policies and social dynamics shaping women's participation in the northeastern Wyoming mining industry, I argue that the successful integration of women is predicated on their ability to craft and maintain kin-like social relationships in two spheres. By expanding the category of kinship to include friends and coworkers whom the women consider family, I am drawing on Carsten's (1995) pathbreaking call for anthropologists to study the locally meaningful ways in which people imagine and create relatedness with one another through everyday practices. First, women miners have addressed the challenges of managing their home and work responsibilities by cultivating networks of friends and family to care for their children while they work a

rotating shift schedule. This part of the research denaturalizes the masculinization of the mining industry, showing instead how laws and institutional policies such as rotating shift schedules have systematically made it difficult, though not impossible, for women to participate in this industry. Second, women miners craft close relationships with coworkers in what are called "crew families." These relationships make their work more enjoyable, and the ways in which they create camaraderie prompt a reconsideration of conventional accounts of sexual harassment in mines.

The first half of the article outlines the legal, domestic and institutional circumstances that condition women's employment in the mining industry. I begin by arguing that Victorian labor laws banning the employment of women in mines engendered divisions of labor between male miners who worked outside the home and their female kin who worked inside of it. Even though these laws have since been repealed, their legacy is evident in continued gendered divisions of labor in mining communities. Drawing on Wyoming history and the existing ethnographic record of mining communities, I also show that women have creatively carved out spaces within these dominant gender ideologies and practices, with a focus on the activities of miners' wives during strikes. Finally, I turn to my research to show how contemporary women miners in Wyoming have managed their work and home responsibilities by crafting kin-like support networks. The second half of the article explores the current workplace social relationships that condition women's employment in the industry. I focus on sexual harassment because scholars and activists have suggested that it discourages women from taking and maintaining mine jobs. After outlining major trends in how scholars have theorized workplace sexual harassment, I argue that the miners' conceptions of crew families influences their interpretation of jokes and comments as potential harassment.

This research is pertinent to better understanding and addressing the persistence of the gender wage gap. Feminist scholars and policymakers have called for more studies focusing on women's participation in traditionally masculine blue-collar occupations, since these tend to be the highest paying but also the most sex-segregated (e.g., Mastracci 2004; National Women's Law Center 2002). In fact, enabling women's employment in the high-paying Appalachian coal industry was the original impetus behind the Coal Employment Project, the women's advocacy group that crystallized efforts to fight sexual discrimination and harassment in the industry (Hall 1990; Tallichet 2006; Yount 2005). The different histories of women miners in Gillette present a helpful counterexample of women's participation in the industry.

Methodology

This article draws on over a year of ethnographic fieldwork in the Powder River Basin. From June 2006 through July 2007, I lived in Gillette, spent time with and interviewed miners and their families in the community. I also engaged in participant observation at four mines. At each, I rotated with one crew and

interviewed office personnel on "my" crew's days off. Most often, I spent the entire twelve-hour shift riding around with one person in their piece of equipment, taking notes about their life histories, families, and opinions of the industry as we bumped along haul roads. In total, I conducted multiple in-depth interviews with sixty women and thirty-five men, in addition to enjoying informal conversations with countless more.

I also interviewed miners employed by companies other than those where I engaged in participant observation. Many of these people were my former coworkers and their families. During summer breaks from college in 1999, 2003, and 2005, I worked in two different mines, first as a plant technician and then as a haul truck operator. The mines hire employees' children as temporary summer workers, and as the daughter of a mine mechanic, I first participated in this program well before I became an anthropologist. Without a doubt, my own work experiences shaped the questions I pursue in my research, although I do not directly draw on them here.

Conducting research in the community where I grew up raises crucial questions about "native ethnography." Narayan (1993) has influentially argued against the category because it could erase differences between anthropologists and community members and because it could further ghettoize anthropologists from minority backgrounds into studying only "their people." Taking these cogent critiques in mind, I advocate keeping the category due its potential to further decolonize anthropology: the category signifies that someone who was written about is now writing back (Limón 1994). I would, however, call for more specificity in using the category. Currently, it is most commonly invoked by people such as Narayan who work in the country where they grew up, but in different cities or regions. There are comparably fewer anthropologists who research in their own communities or directly involve family members (see Behar 1995 for a helpful consideration of this topic).

Managing Shiftwork and Family Responsibilities

In many scholarly works, mining communities are associated with strict gendered divisions of labor in which male miners are supported by the everyday domestic activities of their female kin. In this section, I show that even though women in Gillette have entered the mining workforce, they have maintained many of the domestic responsibilities associated with more traditional familial divisions of labor. To contextualize these developments, I turn to both ethnographic and historical records of mining communities. First, I argue that even though gendered divisions of household labor may be naturalized in everyday talk, Victorian reform movements and laws engendered strict divisions of labor in nineteenth and twentieth century mining communities. Next, I draw on the existing ethnographic research to show that even though binary gender ideologies may be dominant in mining communities, they do not exhaust the full range of everyday practices. Finally, I turn to my research in Gillette to illustrate how

women miners have crafted networks in order to successfully manage both their work and home responsibilities.

Historical Precedents for Gendered Divisions of Labor

State laws barring women from mine work played a significant role in engendering strict divisions of labor in preindustrial mining communities. Along with seventeen other states, Wyoming's 1889 state constitution banned all girls, women, and boys under the age of fourteen from employment in the state's mines. These laws were part of larger Victorian-era reforms that created strict gender divisions of labor and space where they did not previously exist (McClintock 1995). For example, women worked in underground British and Belgian coal mines since at least the fourteenth century, with evidence of their regular employment as early as 1587 (John 1984; see the contributors to Lahiri-Dutt and Macintyre 2006 for a cross-cultural comparison). Exact numbers are not available because the companies paid only the lead or practical miner who organized the labor of his kin, and all of these women were working for relatives. By the late nineteenth century, fully 10 percent of underground workers in these countries were women (John 1984; Hilden 1991).

Beginning in the 1840s and reaching a critical mass in the 1880s, members of British Parliament began attempting to pass legislation barring women from work underground due to concerns that such labor would "unsex" them (John 1984, 188). Historical records reveal concerns ranging from women's dress (for safety purposes they wore clothing such as boots and trousers instead of dresses and aprons), to their exposure to dirt, their moral behavior while working underground surrounded by men, and fear that such work took them away from their primary responsibility of taking care of their families. Despite the laws, many women continued working until mechanization and a declining coal market pushed them out in the 1950s. In Belgium, women miners were turned into icons of industrial labor for the young country's developing national identity as young, physically strong, and hard working (Hilden 1991). The timing of the industry's western expansion in the U.S. may help to explain the lack of a comparable early history of women miners in Wyoming. By the time the railroad reached the state and the first mines were opened in the late nineteenth century, these reform movements were well underway.

Even though most women in preindustrial Wyoming coal communities were not directly employed as miners, their experiences were nonetheless tied up with the industry, specific companies, and individual miners. For the majority, their daily activities were circumscribed to the domestic sphere. Women spent the majority of their time engaging in the daily activities of family and community maintenance, what anthropologist Finn (1998) terms "crafting the everyday" in her research in mining communities in Montana and Chile. Women in Wyoming held heavy household responsibilities that were complicated by the oftentimes remote locations of their camps and communities. They made their families' clothing, coaxed gardens to grow in arid conditions, mowed hay fields,

canned vegetables, made sausage and sauerkraut, bottled beer, made wine, branded cattle, and milked cows. Even doing laundry was a monumental task. They also cared for disabled men and large families. Many women also turned to the domestic sphere for avenues for paid labor by taking in laundry, housing boarders, and running businesses as seamstresses and bakers (Gardner and Flores 1989; Wheeler 1987). This culturally acceptable wage work can be viewed as an extension of their domestic caretaking responsibilities.

Disrupting Binary Gender Ideologies through Everyday Practice

Yet to say that women's everyday activities were heavily influenced by these Victorian gender ideologies is not to say that they were completely determined by them. Many women in Wyoming ran successful ranches, and county pension files from the early twentieth century also hint that some women ran more covert businesses from their home. One Finnish widow in Lincoln County was threatened with losing her pension if she did not stop bottling beer in her home for profit, and a South Pass City woman ran the mercantile with her husband, managed a hotel, and served as postmaster (Beach 1927). Through these everyday activities, women managed to stretch domestic spaces. It was not until World War II, however, that women were able to join mining workforces as production workers.

Before World War II, many Wyoming women worked for mining companies in their offices as clerks and secretaries, but the war presented them with their first legal opportunity to enter the production side of the workforce. Faced with a labor shortage and increased demands for coal, in 1943, the general manager of Union Pacific and the president of the United Mine Workers of America District 22 signed a controversial Memorandum of Agreement that temporarily allowed the employment of women as miners until the men returned home (Larson 1954, 277). By June 1944, one hundred women were working for Union Pacific in the shops and on the tipples, averaging a wage of $213.29 per month as union members (Larson 1954, 278). Women made the same wages as men in their positions, but were not allowed to take higher-paying jobs underground.

Sorting coal in the tipples was dusty work, cold in the winter, and unbearably hot in the summer. No laws existed to require ventilation or sprinkling the coal, and miners remembered working in "six foot of cloud . . . You couldn't even see the person standing right by you" (Gardner and Flores 1989, 171–2; cf. Moore 1996, 50). Yet many women, including Madge Kelly, enjoyed her work, saying that it was "one of the happiest times of my life. If there was a job open today at a mine and I was younger, I'd be the first in line" (Moore 1996, 52). After applying for work at Union Pacific in 1945 to support her four children as a single mother, she worked on the tipple, and then was promoted to running the panel that operated the tipple. Compared with the other available jobs of working in a cafeteria or cleaning motel rooms, she made excellent money: $9.57 a night, $12.46 on Saturdays, and double time on Sundays. She remembered the

camaraderie of her crew as they worked seven days a week during the war. "We had a lot of fun out there . . . We never thought we were making history. We just knew it was a job the country needed us to do" (Moore 1996, 51). The war's end, however, brought the men home and reduced the demand for coal, prompting women miners like Madge to be laid off even though most of them enjoyed their work and would have preferred to stay (Moore 1996, 51).

Thus, even though Wyoming laws engendered strict divisions of labor in mining communities, women creatively navigated and sometimes challenged them in their everyday practices. Their efforts correspond with broader developments in mining industries. Social scientists working in a variety of locations within the United States and abroad (e.g., Ferry 2005; Finn 1998; Gibson-Graham 2006; Giesen 1995; Nash 1979) have offered textured accounts of the women's everyday caretaking activities—raising children, cleaning homes, cooking meals, etc.—upon which individual miners and the entire industry depend. Even though this research has pointed to the force of binary gender ideologies as they are embodied in everyday practice, it has also drawn attention to moments of disruption in these systems.

Union strikes have provided particularly fertile ground from which to analyze the negotiation and transformation of gendered ideologies and practices. Finn (1998) draws on fieldwork in copper mining communities in Montana and Chile to trace the gender and class identities produced, reinforced, and sometimes creatively transformed by men and women through their everyday practices of self-making. She argues that strikes brought about major reorganizations of gendered behavior, particularly in the relative slowdown and rechanneling of men's productive activity and the ensuing increased pressure on women to provide emotional and financial support for their families (Finn 1998, 152–4). Barbara Kingsolver's (1989) journalistic investigation of the 1983 Arizona mine strike reveals a similar development, in which women extended their daily activities taking care of families to the community at large as a part of their developing class consciousness (109; cf. Reichart 2006; Seitz 1998). In the process, they redefined their relationships with kin, especially by renegotiating domestic responsibilities with their spouses (Kingsolver 1989, 103, 107). Similarly, historian Merithew (2006) challenges common portrayals of nonwage-earning women as traditional and supportive of their husbands through her investigation of the 1930 union fight between the United Mine Workers of America and the Progressive Miners in Illinois. She shows that the wives and daughters of coal miners used this dispute to critically examine and renegotiate their gender and class identities in the face of their changing political consciousness.

All these examples raise larger questions about the relationship between gendered ideologies and practices, especially since mining communities have been portrayed as exhibiting particularly strict gendered divisions of labor. J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006) emphasizes the theoretical benefit of distinguishing between naturalized binary gender ideologies and actual everyday practices: "So while discursive examples of mutually exclusive binary gendering might be quite

common, such genderings are only infrequently and temporarily embodied. In this way we are able to represent the social space as a space of gender diversity and overlap, while acknowledging the existence and even the dominance of mutually exclusive gender in the discursive realm" (218). This perspective enables scholars to acknowledge the ideological force of binary gender ideologies—such as those animating conceptions of mining as naturally masculine—without losing sight of their creative and sometimes contradictory embodiment in actual practice.

My concern here is with the performativity of theory, or the ways in which theory making can obscure or bring to light alternative ways of being in the world (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxi). An emphasis on binary gender ideologies and practices in mining communities obscures the myriad ways in which men and women disrupt those dichotomies through their everyday activities. These moments of disruption appeared throughout my research in the Powder River Basin, suggesting that the masculinization of industries is a negotiated and tenuous process, not a natural or inevitable one (cf. Lahiri-Dutt and Macintyre 2006). At the same time, however, it is crucial not to become so enchanted by these moments of disruption that we lose track of more mundane continuities in everyday practice. Even though women in Wyoming challenge naturalized gender roles in the so-called "man's world" of mining through their everyday working lives, their continued primary responsibility for household duties points to more entrenched notions about gender and domesticity.

Miners, Shiftwork, and Domestic Responsibilities

Women began entering the Wyoming coal industry in large numbers during the boom years of the late 1970s, especially in the newly opened surface mines in the Powder River Basin. Faced with a labor shortage, companies actively hired women to work not only in the office, but also in the shops, plants, and pits even though the 1889 law was still technically in place. Their successful integration into the workplace played a major role in the 1978 state election that repealed the original law barring women's mine employment. Many of these original miners were still working during my research. While their large numbers may be unique to the industry, the challenges they face in remaining primarily responsible for household duties are not.

Like Nicole in the introduction, most of the women miners found that their biggest challenge was not learning how to operate machinery, but was balancing their responsibilities at home and work while on a rotating shift schedule. Even though miners have fourteen of every twenty-eight days technically "off," they use many of these to readjust their sleeping cycles. Commutes range from fifteen minutes to over an hour, and with time added for preparing for work and preshift socializing, miners can easily spend up to sixteen hours a day away from home. This schedule disrupts the more normal functioning of the miners' bodies, as well as their social relationships (cf. Finn 1998, 149; Giesen 1995, 9). Ann, a longtime mechanic, succinctly critiqued the schedule: "I don't think humans were made for these hours. It's hard to be a normal person because no one else

has the same schedule." The long, rotating shifts make it challenging for miners to engage in everyday family activities, from attending their children's school events to managing household chores.

Men who work a rotating schedule often rely on their wives to take care of these responsibilities. Some couples, such as Cindy and Tom, have chosen to live on the miner's salary so that the wife can dedicate herself to taking care of the children and the house. The two of them moved to Gillette during the late 1970s to work in construction during the boom. He eventually got a mine job in order to have more stable employment and insurance while raising a family. Ironically, his work schedule ended up taking him away from their everyday family life so much that she decided to stay home to provide a stable presence for their kids. Today, Tom and the sons take care of all of the garage and yard work, while Cindy is responsible for cleaning the house. In addition to doing all of the laundry and cleaning, she plans, shops for, and cooks all of the meals, including the ones her husband takes to work. When the boys were young, she also chauffeured them to and from their many extracurricular activities and attended all of their school and sports events. All these responsibilities kept her so busy that she said, "I didn't have time to do my own things, my own hobbies, until they were all in school."

Yet arrangements such as Cindy and Tom's are rare, since most couples either prefer or need to live on two incomes. The wives of miners who also work outside of the home also find themselves responsible for a majority of the daily domestic responsibilities. The challenge of balancing their multiple responsibilities prompts many to describe themselves as "single moms," because they cannot rely on their spouses' support on a daily basis. "Usually it was easier to just do it on my own," said Tina, who took care of two daughters while her husband worked shifts. Some men have responded to these critiques by taking up more household duties, especially during their days off. Except for a few cases in which the men take primary responsibility for cooking or cleaning, most focus their efforts on chores in the garage and yard.

Comparatively few women miners enjoy the support of a husband with a more regular schedule, although those that do insist that they would never have been able to pursue their career without them. Patty moved to Gillette twenty years ago after growing up on a Midwestern farm. She began her mining career as a general laborer and is currently in management. She is thankful that while she was on shiftwork, her husband had a straight-days job that allowed him to do the primary caretaking for their daughters. "He was and still is a very hands-on dad. We had daycare. If I was on nights, he'd pick them up when he got off work, feed them, change diapers and pack them and haul them and away they went. Never would have made it without him." Women who are happily married to other shiftworkers have also worked out what they perceive to be an equitable division of household responsibilities with their partners. Linda and Doug have both worked in production at the same mine since the early 1980s. She said, "I'm lucky because he does ninety percent of the cooking and I do all the cleaning. And he occasionally does laundry, and he does all the oil changes. I've got good

support." Yet even with these arrangements, the long hours are still exhausting, as Patty explained: "The twelve hours totally consumes you. When you get home you can barely eat and see your family before you have to go to bed."

It is telling that the married women who are the most satisfied with the division of household labor are those who do not have children and the responsibilities associated with them. In fact, Linda said, "If we had kids, I don't know if I'd be out here. I don't know how we'd do it, since we're so busy without them." A significant number of women in their twenties and early thirties who have reached positions of leadership in the pit doubt that they could raise children while working the rotating schedule, so they have decided to delay or completely abstain from having children. "My husband and I both have strange schedules so I don't think we could raise our kids the way we want to," said Joanie, who runs the dispatch system at one mine. "We could take more menial jobs, but we think the work we do is important." Yet even though raising children while on shiftwork is difficult, many single mothers specifically choose to work at the mine for the high wages and good benefits.[3] Among their crews, they find tremendous respect for their efforts to provide for their families. Yet being both the breadwinner and caregiver presents challenges for them, especially while working a rotating schedule. The single most important strategy to address this challenge is cultivating a support network of family and friends who can care for children at odd hours while the miner is at work.

Women Miners and Support Networks

These networks most often center around mothers, sisters and trusted daycare providers. Krista, a single mom in her mid-twenties, works at one of the closest mines. The rotating schedule sets the rhythm of everyday life for her and her three-year-old son. Even though she hates getting up at five in the morning, she does so on day shifts in order to prepare and take her son to daycare before work. She considers herself lucky to be working at one so close to town; whereas some of her friends have an hour commute, hers is only fifteen minutes. She arrives to work a few minutes before the start of shift to share coffee and some jokes with her crew. Like most of her coworkers, she spends the day operating heavy equipment, such as large haul trucks and blades. In order to make the day go by faster, she brings along an mp3 player full of stand-up comedy and her favorite music. After work ends at seven, she picks her son up from the sitter. Once home, she reheats leftovers for their dinner and tries to put her son to bed by nine. On nights, their schedule is reversed. She takes him to her mother's house before work so he can sleep there, and then in the morning, she takes him to the sitter so that she can sleep at home. "I pop two Tylenol PM's, drink a Bud Light and I'm out." After picking him up in the afternoon, she fixes a light lunch, prepares for work, and drops him off again at her mother's house before returning to work for the nightshift.

Although the schedule is challenging, Krista enjoys working at the mine because it pays well, offers excellent insurance, and allows her 14 days off a

month to spend with her son. She went to college and earned a teaching degree, but quickly realized that she could make more money working at the mine where she had temporarily worked during summer vacations from college. And even though she finds single motherhood challenging, she loves being a parent and is happy that she turned down a marriage proposal from the father of her son. Candidly, she recalls telling him, "I made one mistake and don't need to make another." She has a boyfriend who works a rotating schedule that is completely opposite of her own, but she does not mind only having one day off a month in common: "It's not that bad because then we can't get sick of each other." On her days off, she likes to see her friends, shoot pool, take trips, and, in the summer, go camping.

Single mothers, along with other miners, must creatively manage their schedules in order to keep their households running smoothly and have time to spend with their kids. Both Krista and Nicole try to take care of all major household chores on their days off. They use the days off in-between "blocks" of shifts (such as the four days) to do laundry, clean and cook large meals that could be reheated later in the week—a strategy called "preplanning." Other women use a meal preparation company in town that streamlines the process of planning and cooking meals. Like other similar business becoming popular across the country, this company provides the food, tools, and recipes for a few family-sized meals for customers to prepare onsite and then bring home to freeze. Staff members do all of the clean-up following the meal assembly. The women enjoy the feeling of feeding their families a home-cooked meal and appreciate the time they save in simply defrosting and cooking the meal at home.

Even though the schedule can be excruciating, the benefit is time off during the week, especially during the seven days off that come once a month. Krista loves the rotating schedule for that week off because she can spend quality time with her son. Miners can also strategically plan their personal vacation days. Like many of her coworkers, Nicole saves her personal days for her children's important school and extracurricular events. Choosing which events to attend can be difficult, considering that she only has two weekends off a month, and during some of those, she likes to work overtime. To keep in touch with their children and caretakers during shifts, Nicole and many other parents take advantage of cell phones and increased coverage. Before cell phones became widely available, miners had to rely on the security guards and their supervisors to take and deliver messages for them while they were on shift. Cell phones have facilitated direct contact between parents and their children, as well as between spouses. Carrie, a longtime equipment operator, and her husband raised their children while both of them were on shiftwork. She remembers sometimes not seeing her husband for an entire week: "We lived life through the cell phone."

Broader Implications: Household Labor, Support Networks, and Gender Ideologies

Three key theoretical implications emerge from the preceding discussion of the Wyoming women's everyday practices of cultivating and maintaining

kin-like support networks. First, women remain responsible for the majority of household responsibilities, corresponding with larger patterns in the gendered division of domestic labor in the U.S. (e.g., Coltrane 2000; Dempsey 2002; Mannino and Deutsch 2007). Balancing a "second shift" (Hochschild 1989) of these responsibilities along with a rotating shift schedule is particularly difficult for women miners. While most husbands take responsibility for tasks in the garage and yard, these chores take less daily efforts than those in the house. Even couples that have negotiated a more egalitarian division of labor find that men's domestic contributions are usually labeled as "help," for which the women are "thankful." Carrie initially said that everyone in her house helped out raising livestock and taking care of the house, but later laughed and qualified her statement: "Mom does extra chores. One night I came home from work just exhausted, and they were all sitting there watching TV. They asked, 'What's for dinner?' I was so tired that I just took out a jar of peanut butter and a jar of jelly, slammed them on the counter and said, 'Dinner is served!' " This distribution of household responsibilities suggests that even though men espouse more non-traditional gender ideologies at work by welcoming women miners onto their crews, they also often reinforce more traditional ideas and practices in their own homes.

Second, women miners, especially those who are single mothers, creatively cultivate kin-like networks to assist them in taking care of their children while working a rotating shift schedule. Most prefer to leave their children with family members, but they also rely on the services of babysitters whom the miners come to see as family. It is common for women miners to describe their babysitters as taking their children in "like their own family." Ann, for example, felt lucky to find a babysitter who treated her son "like their own grandson" and even took him on vacations. Carsten's (1995) reconception of kinship as the processual creation of relatedness helps to understand how the miners, their families, and the support networks come to think of themselves as family. In this case, the miners, their children, and their babysitters craft relatedness with one another through the everyday activities associated with families: eating, talking, and playing together, as well as exchanging gifts on holidays and birthdays. Creating these ties enables women to extend their domestic responsibilities over a network and pursue a well-paying job with an inconvenient schedule.

Third, the profound respect of crewmembers for single mothers reveals tensions in the gender ideologies giving shape to both academic discourses about mining communities and everyday life in the Powder River Basin. The figures of the male breadwinner and female caretaker have figured prominently in Western gender ideologies since the development and expansion of industrial capitalism (e.g., Coontz 1992). Yet women miners who are the primary financial providers for their families have successfully drawn on the idiom of breadwinning to integrate themselves into the industry. For example, sociologist Tallichet (2006, 2) retells the story of an Appalachian woman who convinced her skeptical male crewmembers she had a right to a "man's job" because the man who should have been providing for her and her children had deserted them. Other scholars have

noted that miners' wives who otherwise disapprove of women's work underground support the single mothers who work there in order to provide for their families (e.g., Gibson-Graham 2006; Giesen 1995; Tallichet 2006). Women miners in Wyoming face comparably less resistance from their male coworkers and their wives, but they still draw on the ideological force of the breadwinner role to position themselves at work and home. "It's hard being both the mom and the dad," said Nicole. "But we have a nice house, my kids are all fed, they have the clothes they want, and they don't get into trouble. One day I hope they'll go to college, and I'll be paying for that too." This accomplishment is also celebrated by their crewmembers, who recognize the difficulty of balancing their multiple responsibilities without the support of a spouse. The women miners' successful embodiment of the otherwise masculinized figure of the breadwinner illustrates that women can open up spaces in hegemonic gender ideologies to engage in work that is meaningful to them.

Making Workplace Families and Rethinking Sexual Harassment

The previous section traced the laws, institutional policies of shiftwork and domestic arrangements that have conditioned women's integration into the mining industry. In this section, I turn to the workplace social relationships shaping this integration, specifically the ways in which women miners in Wyoming have integrated themselves into workplace relationships by connecting themselves with crew families. I argue that analyzing social relationships through the framework of workplace families, as the miners do, prompts a reconsideration of the ways in which scholars have theorized sexual harassment. I begin by showing that the existing academic research about women miners has been largely defined by the challenges faced by Appalachian women who began seeking mine employment in the 1970s. After critiquing the definitions of harassment used by these researchers, I analyze the ways in which Wyoming miners' definitions and identifications of harassment are predicated on their understanding of membership in the crew families. I conclude by arguing that if scholars are to truly understand and combat the forces excluding women from mine employment—the original goal of the Coal Employment Project (CEP)—they must engage in fine-grained ethnographic analysis of local categories and practices.

Theorizing Harassment

The challenges faced by Appalachian women seeking work in the coal industry have largely come to define the academic agenda for researching women in mining. Beginning in the 1970s, Appalachian women in search of well-paying jobs began protesting the coal companies' decisions to pass over their applications in favor of equally or less-qualified men. The CEP was founded in 1977 as an advocacy group for women coal miners. Drawing on the Equal Opportunity Act's conception of affirmative action, in 1978, they won a

class-action lawsuit against more than 150 coal companies for sex discrimination in hiring practices. Companies were forced to pay back wages to the women, who were eventually hired along with many others. The CEP also offered technical training sessions, held national conferences, and eventually turned its attention to understanding and combating workplace sexual harassment (Hall 1990; Moore 1996). Following a decline in national coal markets during which many women were laid off as a result of "last hired, first fired" policies, the CEP disbanded in 1999.

The few scholars who focus on American women miners have highlighted their struggles with sexual discrimination and harassment, a move that dovetails with the efforts of the CEP. Tallichet (1998, 2006), for example, draws on research at a central Appalachian coal mine to argue that both the organizational and cultural practices of the workplace discriminate against women. Specifically, she suggests that the creation of a sexualized workplace and gender-identified tasks prevents women from advancing into better-paying and safer jobs. Within this framework, she interprets sexual harassment as a strategy for men to reinforce the masculinity of minework and to maintain their dominance over women (Tallichet 2006, 40, 60, 146, 155).

In her research in western underground mines, sociologist Kristen Yount concludes that harassment is a means of expressing male domination and managing the stresses engendered by working conditions (Yount 1991, 405; 2005, 66). Her work is notable for theorizing both the overlaps and distinctions between harassment and what the miners term "razzing." Some women like being razzed and consider it one of the highlights of their days, not a form of harassment (Yount 1991, 415; 2005, 68). Yet razzing can hold multiple and contradictory meanings for different people, and even the most enjoyable razzing can escalate into harassment (Yount 1991, 400; 2005, 66–8). To account for this ambiguity, Yount (2005) eventually collapses the two into a term she calls "harazzment": a hybrid category of harassment and razzing that includes everything from playful and humorous jokes to hostile behavior (66). This term is helpful in identifying a continuum of practices whose interpretation varies according to specific individuals and contexts. Yet collapsing the two terms seems problematic, since they refer to different sets of intentions, contexts, and interpretations.

The concern held by both Tallichet and Yount that harassment disadvantages women in the workplace corresponds with MacKinnon's (1979) foundational argument that sexual harassment is illegal because it constitutes sex discrimination under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Yet MacKinnon established a model of sexual harassment in which "the harassers are always male, their victims always female, and their mode of harassment always sexual" (Anderson 2006, 307).[4] This formulation raises complications for thinking about practices that fall outside of this paradigm, such as the treatment of gays, lesbians, and transsexuals, as well as aggressive horseplay among men and nonsexual harassment of women (Anderson 2006, 288–9). Especially pertinent to the present discussion of the Wyoming mines is the question of sexual banter in the

workplace. Philosopher Elizabeth Anderson (2006) identifies the difficulty in labeling such behavior harassment because it is not clear that it constitutes discrimination, and she cautions that regulating expressions of sexuality could threaten sexual autonomy and impose heterosexist norms on people with queer sex/gender identities (289, 291).

In this vein, scholars have called for more nuanced theories of the "unwelcomeness" standard and consensual sexual activities at work (Anderson 2006, 300). Sociologist Christine Williams and her colleagues argue that "sexual harassment and sexual consent are not polar opposites, in contrast to the assumption of much legal theory. Instead, they are interrelated and overlapping moments in a complex and context specific process" (Williams et al. 1999, 77). The insight that personal definitions of harassment vary according to context is further complicated by studies showing that workers were more likely to label sexualized behaviors harassment when they took place within a situation of asymmetrical power relations, such as those between employees and bosses or customers, or within a situation in which the "perpetrators" were members of a racial minority (Guiffre and Williams 1994, but compare Welsh et al. 2006).

Anderson (2006) neatly summarizes the challenges of theorizing sexual harassment by arguing that the goals of normalizing the wrongs of sexual harassment, investigating its causes, effects and meanings, and matching experiences of harassment to legal frameworks are in tension with one another (285). This insight calls for fine-grained ethnographic investigations into local processes of defining and addressing "harassment." Such work also provides a necessary critique of some generalizing tendencies in the literature. For example, Tallichet (1998, 131) draws on three small case studies to posit the pervasiveness of sexual harassment for women working in nontraditional blue-collar occupations. Ferguson (1999, 188) makes a similar argument by presenting some Zambian male mineworkers' sexualized banter as "only a specific instance of an only-too-familiar global pattern of working-class male sexism" (188). What I find in my research is not another example of some purported globalized working-class misogyny, but a complex field of relations in which women and men carve out spaces to engage in meaningful work and social relationships. Participation in workplace relationships requires intricate social knowledge to judge and manage the distinctions between joking and harassment.

Crafting Camaraderie, Defining Harassment

The women miners who most enjoy their work speak fondly about their close relationships with crewmembers. In fact, the flipside to the miners' disconnection from the everyday lives of their families is that they rotate on a common schedule with their crewmembers. They work at the same time, eat at the same time both on and off the minesite, share the same days off, and sometimes even celebrate holidays together. Returning to Carsten's (1995) conception of the processual creation of relatedness helps to understand how sharing all these activities over long stretches of time contributes to the miners'

feelings of workplace family. Most miners in the basin say that their crews are their second families because they spend so much time together (cf. Tallichet 2006, 137–8). Carrie's explanation echoes those of many miners: "We've worked together so long that we're one big family. We support each other and take care of each other. Sure, we might have our disagreements, but what family doesn't? We still couldn't imagine working with anyone else." Miners integrate themselves into these workplace families not simply by spending time together, but by actively crafting camaraderie with their crewmembers. Participating in both practical and verbal jokes comprises a key part of this process, and also raises pertinent questions about the distinction between enjoyable sexualized banter and harassment. The ways in which the miners distinguish these two types of behavior constitutes an organic critique of much of the academic literature surrounding sexual harassment in male-dominated blue-collar occupations.

To elucidate these differences, I focus on the experiences of two women, Linda—introduced above as a longtime mine employee—and Jennifer, a relatively new miner. During interviews, comments about sexual harassment were most often sparked not by personal experience, but by their criticisms of the 2005 film *North Country*, which was based on Lois Jenson's pathbreaking sexual harassment lawsuit against a Minnesota mining company (Bingham and Gansler 2002). Both Linda and Jennifer argued their experiences had nothing in common with the harassment portrayed in the film.[5] "Things aren't like that out there," said Jennifer. "People don't do dirty and disgusting things to each other." When asked what behaviors they personally would consider harassment, they first mentioned unwanted physical touching by a member of the opposite sex, especially someone in a position of authority. They also included the exchange of sexual favors for better job assignments or promotion, including when they were initiated by a woman pursuing her supervisor. In fact, during my research, the most forceful criticisms of harassment were aimed at women who, as one miner put it, "use their sexuality to get ahead." Men and women miners alike reserved their harshest criticisms for women who were believed to have slept with their superiors in exchange for the best jobs and training opportunities.

Miners in general did not take offense to the explicit drawings and derogatory comments sometimes found in the pit's portable bathrooms unless they targeted a specific person. But most significantly, neither Linda nor Jennifer considered cursing, bathroom humor, or sexualized jokes harassment, even though these are all practices that many scholars and advocates would assume constitute sexual harassment. In fact, like many women miners, they value these interactions as essential sites for crafting positive social relationships and often regard them as the most fun part of their day. "They make fun of me," said Jennifer. "I like it. It cheers me up, gets my day going. They watch out for me." Linda aptly explained the differences between sexual harassment and joking:

> Camaraderie. I love that word because of what it builds. It's more friendly, building a trust, because they know that I'm not going to go to HR [Human

> Relations] . . . You have to know the person first, then you build and you can say whatever you want—body humor, sexual jokes, whatever—because you know each other. You're not going to run off to HR.

These positive experiences support the efforts made by Williams and her colleagues to distinguish pleasurable sexualized workplace interactions from harassment.

The few instances in which women and men labeled behavior harassment involved the verbal degradation of another worker's skills on the basis of their gender. In fact, the only incident during my fieldwork in which crewmembers labeled an action as sexual harassment was when a male equipment operator, before the start of shift, said, "Women should mind their men." Jennifer, the only woman present for the comment, interpreted it as a statement that she did not belong in the mine and thus as an insult to her skills as an equipment operator. The comment was particularly hurtful to her because she took pride in her good work reputation. The men on the crew eventually reported the incident to their supervisor, not only to support her, but also to encourage him to stop "running off his mouth" and "trash talking" his coworkers. At his supervisor's prompting, the man apologized to the entire crew, an action appreciated by his male and female coworkers alike.

These experiences draw attention to the benefit of combining studies of sexual harassment with fine-grained ethnographic research into local conceptions of workplace relationships. In their everyday interactions, both women were less likely to label jokes harassment if they had already established a family-like friendship with the person telling them. In my research, the miners explicitly argued that the family-like relationships precluded the sexual banter from being interpreted as harassment and the instigators of these interactions as being labeled harassers. Jennifer said that she did not consider herself harassed when engaging in joking relations, because her coworkers "look at you as part of a family, not someone you'd date. They thought of me like a daughter." When I asked her how she'd distinguish between joking and harassment, she said, "It depends on how you take it. The same joke can be offensive or not when told by different people. You have to think: Are they a part of your family or not?" She also pointed to the men's expectations for how their own daughters would be treated: "These are nice guys, friendly guys. They have daughters, and they don't want to them to be treated like that." This insight is significant, because even though many scholars have identified the sense of family felt by mining crews, none have used this framework to critically retheorize sexual harassment.[6]

My analysis thus points to the importance of local categories for better understanding workplace relationships, as practices that might be labeled harassment by scholars may not be perceived as such by workers. In fact, many women in Wyoming actively seek out and participate in sexualized banter in order to craft camaraderie with their coworkers. This perspective is vital for studies of gender dynamics in masculinized workplaces, as continued scholarly and popular emphasis on harassment obscure the many positive aspects of workplace

relationships that inspire both men and women to enjoy and maintain their employment long-term.

Conclusions

The mines in Wyoming's Powder River Basin produce over a third of all the coal used in the U.S. to generate the electricity that lights our homes and powers our lifestyles. Women miners work the same excruciating shifts and skillfully operate the same heavy machinery as do the men on their crews. Yet unlike most of the men, they return home to a second shift of childcare and household responsibilities made somewhat less burdensome by networks of family and friends. The women's skills in cultivating these kin-like relationships are also valuable at work, where both men and women miners deftly manage distinctions between enjoyable sexualized banter and harassment.

Despite these formidable challenges, most of the women whom I came to know during my research truly enjoyed their work in the mining industry. They spoke fondly about their crew families, relishing tales of memorable practical jokes and one-liners, and warmly remembering instances of support through difficult tasks or family emergencies. These perspectives are missing from most of the academic and popular accounts of mining communities that focus on women as the wives of miners or women miners as victims of sexual harassment. These women's experiences provide one model for the overall successful integration of women into a nontraditional occupation.

This research is pertinent for ongoing attempts to understand and eradicate the gender wage gap. Mining is one of Wyoming's highest paying jobs, and women and men with equal training and ability receive equal pay. While women have made significant advances in male-dominated professions, such as science and engineering, blue-collar workforces remain heavily gender segregated (Mastracci 2004; National Women's Law Center 2002). Many scholars and policymakers suggest that integrating women into the best-paying and most male-dominated occupations would help to lessen the gender wage gap. Locally, these efforts have crystallized in a program called CLIMB Wyoming that aims to train and place single mothers in higher paying jobs, especially in the state's burgeoning energy industry. While skills training and support groups certainly facilitate women's entry into these fields, my research suggests that they are insufficient to ensure that women stay in those jobs. Ameliorating the difficulties of maintaining household responsibilities while working rotating shifts should be the primary avenue for intervention. This kind of research demonstrates the potential for innovations from feminist anthropology to make concrete improvements in the everyday days of women workers and their families.

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Notes

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1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. Data from the federal government's Energy Information Administration statistics service. Available online at http://www.eia.doe.gov/fuelcoal.html.
3. Single women seeking mine work to support their families are common throughout the industry (Giesen 1995, 128; John 1980, 97; Tallichet 2006, 33, 132).
4. Yount (1991, 416) does complicate simplistic understandings of harassment by offering examples of "tomboy" women harassing men, which she interprets as a way for them to win acceptance.
5. A few women miners experienced sex discrimination in training opportunities during the early years of the Gillette boom (cf. Tallichet 2006 and Yount 1991), but equally many found opportunities to advance quickly through the hierarchy of equipment assignments.
6. Tallichet (2006, 136–8) unites her observation that crews come to think of themselves as family with experiences of sexual harassment to argue that the family is the place where gender dominance is learned.

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