

Title: The Underground Proving Ground:  
Women and Men in an Appalachian Coal Mine

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## Introduction

Despite their more limited employment opportunities as compared with their urban counterparts, rural women have been rapidly increasing their labor force participation during the past few decades. However, unlike urban-based labor markets, nonmetro labor markets are comprised of relatively fewer industrial types and contain occupations in blue-collar extractive industries such as agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining, all of which heavily favor male employment (Tickamyer and Tickamyer, 1991). During the coal industry's "boom" period of the 1970's, employment in mining expanded rapidly offering distinctively advantageous opportunities for rural workers (Tickamyer and Bokemeier, 1988), particularly women. Thus, between the mid- to late 1970s, several thousand pioneering women made history when they officially began mining coal (Hall, 1990).

From a socialist feminist standpoint, women's integration into underground coal mining has been constrained by the twin forces of capitalism as it affects all miners and by the forces of patriarchy as it affects women in particular. But before turning to the present investigation of women's entry and their physical as well as social adaptations to the work of mining at a large coal mine in central Appalachia, it is important to have some knowledge about the coal industry and the occupation itself. Therefore, the following chapter begins by briefly reviewing the work environment, the labor process, and the division of labor. Then it focuses on management-labor relations, the male culture of mining and the

women's entry before turning to the case study and its analysis.

### The Work of Underground Coal Miners

Most underground mines are located in relatively isolated rural areas. The inside of a mine is a series of interconnecting and parallel passageways through which miners, their machinery, air, and coal are moved into and out of the mine. Miners enter the mine riding electric-powered steel cars called "mantrips" or "porta-buses," wearing a battery pack for powering the light attached to their hard hats and an oxygen "self-rescuer." In most cases, the section of the mine where miners work is about two miles from the mine entrance, although it is not unusual for miners to be working several miles underground. The average height of the ceiling inside a mine, known as the "roof" or "top," is approximately five and one-half feet. Mine walls are called the "ribs."

As one might expect, coal mines are noisy, dirty, and dangerous. Problems with roof supports, ventilation, lighting, drainage, access, coal extraction and conveyance are always present. Accidents nearly always involve earth, fire, water, methane gas or some combination thereof. Roof falls are the leading cause of death. Miners warn one another about "widowmakers" or loose boulders overhead. Explosions are also a persistent threat when levels of methane gas or coal dust build up and ignite. Additionally, certain areas of "gassy" mines are plagued with deadly "blackdamp" or pockets of oxygen deficient air. Injuries from operating highly-powered equipment and the use of high-voltage electricity in tight working areas where footing is often unsure

can result in twists and sprains of joints, broken bones, dismemberment and hearing loss. Moreover, veteran miners face the possibility of contracting coal miner's pneumoconiosis or black lung.

Without the aid of lights from miner's headlamps, a coal mine is completely dark. New miners can easily become disoriented and wander off in a direction other than that in which they intended to go. Normally, the temperature is usually even, except that the air vented into the mine can make it hot or cold depending on the time of year. The noise from machinery which miners operate directly at the "face" makes their conversation difficult. Otherwise, those miners situated further away work in silence with the exception of sporadically loud popping and cracking sounds which come from the settling of the rib or a low rumbling sound from the "working" of the roof when the rock slabs overhead shift and settle. Timbers placed to support the roof may occasionally creak when taking some added weight from the overburden. Miners have reported feeling the area of the mine around them shake or bounce, or both.

At the face, most underground coal is mined using a continuous mining machine. Operated by a single worker, the thirty-foot long machine, which is equipped on the front with a clawed rotating drum, tears the coal from the face and loads it onto a conveyor belt. One of the most popular mining methods is the "longwall" or "plough" system. Using this method, the working places in front of the face are long rectangular rooms also separated by pillars of coal. As the longwall machine moves forward, it uses self-advancing roof jacks to support the roof while it slices coal from the face.

Once coal has been extracted from the face, it is loaded mechanically into small locomotive cars called "shuttle buggies" or onto long conveyor belts, either of which take the coal out of the mine.

Mining sections are defined geographically. Each mining section contains three crews working in corresponding shifts. Although the operations in a mine are essentially to extract coal, other tasks must be performed to maintain mine safety. Hence, sections and jobs in a coal mine can be divided according to two basic work functions: production and maintenance. Each section, whether it is a production or "down" section, is supervised by a section foreman or crew "boss," who is a nonunion, salaried company employee. Although bosses stay in close contact with workers, by UMWA contract they are forbidden to operate machinery or otherwise perform any work duties (UMWA/BCOA, 1988). Bosses are given the authority by the coal company to make the day-to-day decisions regarding the production activities, safety and work assignments of their workers.

Functionally-related jobs are classified into five grades. Skill and wage levels increase with the grade of the job. Relatively speaking, jobs in Grade 1 generally require fewer skills and more physical strength than jobs in higher grades (2-5) which require specific operative skills or certification in order to perform them. In addition to being dangerous, work in an underground coal mine is highly interdependent. Grade 1 workers perform maintenance duties in support of those miners classified in higher-ranking jobs who either move or extract coal from the face. New miners or "red hats" are usually assigned to the Grade 1 positions of either

general inside labor ("GI") or beltman. After receiving their "mining papers" or miner's certificate, miners become "black hats," at which time they can bid on any newly-posted job provided they have the seniority and necessary skills. The division of mining labor according to job grade and the family of jobs within each classification as formally outlined in the 1993 contract is presented below.

Table 1. Coal Mining Jobs by Title within their Classification Ranks

Rank	Classification of Titles		
Grade 5	A. Continuous Mining Machine Operator	E. Longwall Machine Operator	F. Welder, First Class
	B. Electrician	G. Roof Bolter	
	C. Mechanic		
	D. Fireboss		
Grade 4	A. Cutting Machine Operator	F. Rock Driller	
	B. Dispatcher	G. Continuous Miner Helper	
	C. Loading Machine Operator	H. Roof Bolter Helper	
	D. Machine Operator Helper	I. Maintenance Trainee	
	E. General Indside Repairman and Welder	J. Electrician Trainee	
Grade 3	A. Driller-Coal	D. Faceman	
	B. Shooter	E. Dumper	
	C. Precision Mason-Construction	F. Shuttle Car Operator	
Grade 2	A. Motorman	D. Electrician Helper	
	B. Maintenance Trainee (6 mos.)	E. Mechanic Helper	
	C. Electrician Trainee (6 mos.)		
Grade 1	A. Beltman	E. General Inside Labor	I. Trackman
	B. Bonder	F. Mason	J. Wireman
	C. Brakeman	G. Pumper	K. Laborer-Unskilled
	D. Bratticeman	H. Timberman	

On a production crew, miners who operate machine cutting coal from the "face" are assisted by one or two miner's helpers who may also set timbers to temporarily support the roof near the face.

Once coal is cut from the face, the shifting rock overhead needs to be stabilized more permanently to keep the roof from collapsing. Thus, roof bolting, or "pinning top," is crucial to the work process because it is very unsafe and illegal to work under unsupported roof. By union contract, a miner can refuse to work in an area she or he deems unsafe. "Buggy" or shuttle car operators drive flat motorized cars loaded with coal away from the face and into the main passageway, often bringing supplies back with them. Firebosses journey from section to section making various safety checks, such as measuring levels of metahane gas in the mine. Other underground workers include electricians and wiremen who hang and maintain communications and cable wire to power the portabusses, mechanics who maintain the machines and welders who fix and reinforce metal structures.

Lesser skilled maintenance jobs are performed by workers in Grade 1 jobs. Usually working in groups of four to five or one or two to a production crew, each one of these individuals may perform any one of the duties which maintain mine safety or the pace of production. A section foreman may assign a general inside laborer to hang "curtain" or pieces of heavy canvas in the mine's passageways to let fresh air in and to draw dangerous gasses out before they can accumulate. Because production operations raise potentially explosive amounts of coal dust, general laborers are also responsible for "rockdusting" by throwing limestone powder against the "ribs" (mine walls) to prevent fires. General inside laborers also lay track and deliver supplies to different locations in the

mine. Masons build brick walls for additional roof support and ventilation, "beltmen" walk the beltline, shoveling coal that has fallen off and making certain the beltline is operating properly, and "pumpmen" check and adjust the machines that pump water out of the mine.

#### Management-Labor Relations

Historically, the most intense struggles between miners as represented by their union, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), and the coal operators, known collectively as the Bituminous Coal Operators' Association (BCOA), have occurred during periods when the demand for coal is either rising or declining. When the demand for coal declines, operators try to cut costs by taking back concessions about wages or working conditions previously won by the miners. During demand rises, miners have tried to gain further concessions from the operators.

Thompson (1979) has articulated this historical tension in terms of the dialectic relationship between capitalist accumulation and the relations of production. During the past century, in order to remain competitive as capitalist producers, the coal operators had to insure increasing profits so they could continue to expand their operations. In doing so, they needed to maintain greater control of the miners' work activities at the point of production to increase output and to reduce their labor costs. By increasing the mechanization in the mines the capitalist operators hastened the pace of production and increased the dependability of the output. They also successfully replaced labor with capital and, thereby, increased



productivity. Among those miners not so displaced, increasing mechanization and the establishment of a job hierarchy in the mines did more than simply reduce the miners' skill level. These developments transformed the miners' skills to better serve the operators' goal of accumulating more and more capital.

The transformation of miner's skills had several effects. First, the required training time for becoming a miner was greatly reduced. Hence, the removal of the skill barriers to entry level mining jobs expanded the pool of potential mining labor and increased competition for mining employment. Second, the establishment of a job hierarchy based on the recognition of differential skill levels resulted in a corresponding wage structure. This enabled the capitalist operators to lower the average wages paid to all miners and thereby lower the cost of producing coal.

However, another result of increasing mechanization contradictory to the operators' aims was the proletarianization of the workforce which served to raise the miners' consciousness as a laboring collective in opposition to the capitalist operators (Thompson, 1979). Above ground miners were generally a gregarious lot. Mining communities, being small and isolated, furthered their common interests and many miners belonged to secret societies which served both recreational and political functions. Moreover, before mechanization, the mining labor process did not encourage much interaction underground. During the decades which followed, the deskilling of their craft had an homogenizing effect on miners. Their increasing dependency on one another in the mines strength-

ened their solidarity.

The 1970s was an important period of conflict between the operators and miners which affected the terms and complexion of mining employment significantly (Simon, 1983). As a result of the energy crisis during the early part of that decade, both parties anticipated rapid growth within the industry. The miners had heightened expectations for winning numerous concessions in the 1974 contract and, to some extent, their expectations were fulfilled. Although the companies continued to look for ways to cut costs, they also agreed to increase miners' wages and benefits in order to attract new miners to help increase production -- a move which made mining more attractive to nontraditional employees such as women.

However, during the next three years, unexpectedly the miners went on a record number of wild cat strikes. They felt their safety had been seriously compromised as the operators stepped up production. Moreover, the anticipated growth for the decade had failed to materialize and the industry was generally regarded as being in decline. The disappointments experienced by both parties were reflected in the struggles over the 1978 and 1981 contracts. In the former agreement miners lost certain health and welfare benefits and cost of living adjustments to their wages. In the 1981 contract, miners endured even more "take backs," including limitations on their right to bid on jobs. Into the 1980's the conflicts between labor and management persisted over such issues as mine and machine safety, the flow of mine communication, union jurisdiction, job bidding rights and the handling of miners' grievances.

In addition, at that time miners felt betrayed by their union leaders and believed that without some change in those representing them even further concessions on their part would follow in the next contract. With the election of current UMWA president Richard L. Trumka in 1982, miners entered a new era of renewed militancy and relatively successful attempts to regain the contractual losses of the 1970's, if not the jobs lost due to increasing automation and the recessionary pressures of the early 1980's. It was also during these turbulent times in the coal fields that women began working underground.

#### The Male Culture of Mining and the Women's Entry

Inside a coal mine, work is performed under threatening and anxiety provoking conditions. The work itself, being highly interdependent, strongly discourages work autonomy and results in correspondingly high levels of conformity. Under these conditions, workers come to value certain traits in one another as they collectively cope with the stressors in the workplace. A "good" miner is competent and tough. A competent miner works hard and observes safe work practices, while a tough miner never demonstrates fearful behavior despite their admission to feeling that way. In addition, miners with good reputations display a "team spirit" through cooperation and "give and take" jocularities among coworkers. Miners put a great emphasis on "getting along with others."

Having these qualities enhances one's reputation among coworkers and supervisors, all of whom are locked into relational patterns of

power and dependency. Workers are dependent on a boss for rewards, such as promotions, which stem from the boss's estimations of them as miners. Moreover, what a boss believes about individual workers can influence what workers are inclined to believe about each other. Conversely, a boss is dependent on workers to produce coal which affects her or his own reputation as a company employee. Hence, workers also have the ability to influence what a boss may come to believe about one of their coworkers.

Outside the mines, miners have organized themselves politically and culturally in opposition to the coal operators' attempts to exploit them (Wardwell, Vaught and Smith, 1985). The twin forces of advancing technology and bureaucratic organization have made their work increasingly interdependent. Formally, the union promotes this solidarity; UMWA "brothers" and "sisters" are united in their collective militancy as manifested in the union slogan: "An injury to one is an injury to all." Informally, ritualistic behaviors underground involving teasing, practical jokes, and horseplay serve to reduce tension about the dangers and incorporate individuals into tightly knit work groups.

With regard to coal miners as occupationally-based group members, Ross (1974:176) has found they are "open, friendly, helping but tough; hostile to the company but not lazy; with blunt, unvarnished feelings along with tolerance, always sharing and never cheap; everyone with a nickname, indicating individual acceptance in the group; a social solidarity recognizing individualism ..." . According to Althouse (1974:16), experienced miners, especially

older ones, are immersed in what he calls "the miner mystique --a sense of justice, toughness, manliness, respectability, pride, and above all, solidarity". Hence, most miners evaluate the "worth" of entry-level employees on the basis of their commitment to and their stamina for working underground.

Traditionally, coal mining has been a "man's job" in which women had no place. Although women were working underground in family-operated coal mines in Appalachia during the Depression and shortly after WWII, according to government records, there were no women working in underground coal mines until 1973 (President's Commission on Coal, 1980). During that year, women began entering coal mining jobs at a time when the industry was prospering. But few women were hired without pressure from government agencies. Into the late 1970's, although the women's rate of entry was steady, it was slow. According to advocates of women in mining, the agencies charged with enforcing equal employment statutes had failed to recognize the obvious discrimination in the industry (Hall, 1984).

During the late 1970's, a Tennessee-based women's advocacy group known as the Coal Employment Project (CEP) provided perhaps the greatest impetus toward women's entry and integration into the coal industry. In October of 1977 the CEP staff filed a lawsuit with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) eventually forcing 153 coal companies with federal contracts into paying thousands of dollars in backpay to women whom they had denied jobs and to begin to hire more women until they constituted approxi-

mately one-third of their total workforce (Hall, 1990). During 1978 were less than five percent of all new hires in the industry. By 1979 they were 11.4 percent of all new hires as their absolute numbers in the coal mining ranks began to rise rapidly (Reskin and Hartmann, 1986). By 1986 women constituted almost 2 percent of the total underground workforce (Butani and Bartholomew, 1988) until the coal bust of the mid-1980s and the ensuing layoffs caused a relative decline in their numbers.

### Theoretical Framework

Socialist feminist theorists use the dual processes of patriarchy and capitalism to develop an explanation of women's oppression and inferior status in the family, the labor market, and society at large (Sokoloff, 1988). While its proponents focus on the mutually reinforcing and sometimes conflicting relationships between these two forces, the key concept of patriarchy is seen as an autonomous force which, when combined with capitalism, results in the maintenance of male privilege and the sexual division of labor in the workplace. Heidi Hartmann (1976:138), a prominent socialist feminist theorist, defines patriarchy as "... a set of social relations which has a material [and an ideological] base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, which enable them to control women."

Historically, patriarchy preceded and shaped capitalism. Before capitalism, a domestic division of labor emerged whereby men controlled the labor of women and children in the family. Under the system of patriarchy, men benefitted from the exploitation of

women's domestic labor. They also learned the skills of organization and control. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, the emergence of capitalism and the concomitant loosening of private-public boundaries, especially between the family and the state, threatened men with the partial loss of their male-based privilege in the household. Using the skills that they mastered under the patriarchal system, men moved to preserve their sex-based privilege and maintain their control over women by reproducing it within the capitalist system.

During the past century, neo-Marxist theorists have noted the changes capitalists have made in the work process in order to better control their workers. The sequence of mechanization, task specialization and closer supervision have all brought workers under the capitalists' tighter control. The effects on the working class has been systematic deskilling and further division among workers themselves (Gordon, et al.: 1982). Since patriarchal relations are reproduced in the workplace, socialist feminism "emphasizes the role of men as capitalists in creating hierarchies in the production process in order to maintain their power. Therefore, men are united via their common vested interests in maintaining the status quo and are, therefore, dependent upon one another to make these hierarchies "work." Men at higher levels in the hierarchy "buy off" those at lower levels by offering them power over individuals who are even lower. This is how women become exploited by capitalists as workers, but also as women by other men resulting in their "super-exploitation."

However, out of the resolution between the forces of patriarchy and capitalism comes their renewed antagonism. For example, at times capitalists have used the threat of substituting male workers with lower-wage female labor in order to increase their profits. In these cases, the unions representing the patriarchal interests of males have levied pressure on the capitalists to do otherwise, or to at least admit women so as to accommodate some basic beliefs in the patriarchal ideological system. The unions' role in the creation of internal labor markets, defining occupational hierarchies by establishing positions and corresponding wage rates as well as the rules for advancement, have been crucial to the realization of their power within the capitalists' industrial systems. As with their entry, women's position in the workplace has been the result of the mutual accommodation between patriarchy and capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the concept of patriarchy, another relatively recent theoretical formulations appropriate to this investigation is social closure theory. Social closure theory states that "a status group creates and preserves its identity and advantages by reserving certain opportunities for members of the group" using exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993, 61). Because women pose a threat to men's masculine-based privileges, men will tend to emphasize women's presumed incapability for doing masculine-identified work. Their behavior toward women workers underscores the terms by which they are willing to accept them.

The gendered status hierarchy is preserved through certain "social practices that create or exaggerate the social distance



between status groups" (Reskin and Roos 1987, 7). These practices dictate subordinates' behavior in the presence of dominant group members and shape the casual interaction between them. When gendered status hierarchies are maintained this way, they are usually seen by both men and women as natural and, thus, appropriate, because they recreate gendered social relations occurring in the larger culture. Because women who do "men's jobs" are challenging the routinization of the presumably natural order of gendered relations, they are "at risk of gender assessment" (West and Zimmerman 1987: 136). They are held accountable for engaging in gender inappropriate behavior through other women's and men's (as well as their own) evaluations of their behavior based on "normative conceptions of appropriate attitudes and activities" for their gender category (West and Zimmerman 1987, 139). Thus, women in male-dominated workplaces are required to prove their "essential femininity".

Kanter (1977a, b) was among the first to document that token women's conspicuous presence leads to men's exaggeration of the differences between them. This is accomplished via men's "sexualization of the workplace" during which work relations between men and women are "sexualized" (Enarson 1984; Swerdlow 1989). Sexualizing the workplace and work relations consists of behaviors that express "the salience of sexual meanings in the presumably asexual domain of work." (Enarson 1984: 88). As the literature on women in nontraditional blue-collar occupations has documented, most men engage in at least one of several forms of workplace sexualization

using sexual harassment, sexual bribery, gender-based jokes and comments, and profanity in order to make sex differences a salient aspect of work relations (Enarson 1984; Gruber and Bjorn 1982; Swerdlow 1989). These behaviors, according to Enarson (1984: 109), "constitute a continuum of abuse" and reflect "a cultural tradition which sexualizes, objectifies, and diminishes women."

Men's sexualization of work relations directly expresses the expectation that women should "act like women" by making their integration into a sexualized workplace contingent upon their production of gender as they interact with men. Because men's sexualization of work relations identifies women primarily by their gender category and not by their work roles, it objectifies them. As Schur (1984) has pointed out, this "objectification" of women workers leads to their stigmatization by men about their work-related inferiority. Because there are simply too few women present in a workplace dominated by men, women are usually unable to collectively counter men's expressions of the negative stereotypes upon which their presumed inferiority is based (Kanter 1977a). However, based on their individual adaptations to this set of social conditions women in male-identified workplaces are able to accommodate and simultaneously resist beliefs about men's superiority. These types of mechanisms and strategies employed by women working in an underground coal mine constitute the main focus of the present study.

## Methodology

Primary data from a case study conducted at a single coal mining establishment in southern West Virginia were obtained using in-depth semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and on-site nonparticipating observation. My goal was to gain a full understanding of the subject's beliefs, values, and perspectives about their work and positions in the job hierarchy, and their experiences with co-workers and supervisors on the job. While most of the data came from interviews and conversations with miners company employees, supporting data were obtained from observation and document study for triangulation purposes.

Data collection in the field lasted approximately one month. Sampling is best characterized as a combination of snowball and purposive methods. From the earliest interviews with women I obtained the names of others who, by virtue of their tenure, job rank or other job-related experiences, such as discriminatory treatment, were selected. All of these women consented to be interviewed. In total, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 women and on numerous occasions brief 20-minute discussions were held with seven more who were either unable or unwilling to speak at greater length. In addition, a company management official was interviewed and conversations were held with a high-ranking union official and several male miners during my daily visits to the site. Every effort was made to conduct interviews in quiet private settings, such as my motel room or in the women's homes, at times when the respondent would be at ease

and feel free to provide information and her opinions about sensitive topics. These in-depth interviews lasted about an hour and one-half and were taped with the interviewee's consent.

The brief conversations with the additional women in the study were occurred in the women's bathhouse. The company management official was interviewed in his office at similar length. Brief conversations with a local union official and male miners occurred in the lamphouse.

#### Profile of the Case Study and Sample

Similar to other coal companies, the case study company did not begin to hire women in appreciable numbers until it was forced to do so. In the fall of 1978, the company was sued for sexual discrimination in hiring and settled the charges against it by paying back wages to those women it had failed to hire and by adopting a new hiring ratio beginning in 1979. The management official who was the personnel officer at the time explained that the company operated out of fear and, so, was forced to accept virtually any female who applied. He expressed resentment at the government for infringing on his right to manage the working force, adding that "management had to pay the price for social change." Indeed, the women who applied for jobs at the mine during that time were hired without delay. As relatively large numbers of women entered the mine, several changes in company policy were made. In particular, during the early 1980s the company reissued rules governing workers' conduct underground strictly forbidding any form of harassment, horseplay, or profane and obscene language.

During the early 1980s the company's employment peaked at about 800 miners, over 90 of whom were women. However, since then continued improvements in mining technology and the economic pressures of industrial decline have forced even the largest of coal companies to lay off the least senior miners, many of whom were women. At the time of the study in the fall of 1990, the company employed approximately a dozen assistant foremen or "bosses," all of whom were male, and 466 miners. Based on the list provided by the company, there were 23 women miners who constituted almost 5 percent of this underground workforce. Three pairs of women were working together on their regularly assigned shifts, the others had been working as token members on their all-male crews. All miners at the mine were members of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).

At the time of the study, approximately 35 percent of all the miners in the case study were classified in Grade 1 jobs. However, women miners were disproportionately represented among the laboring jobs (Grade 1) relative to men. Only five of the 23 women working at the mine held job classifications higher than Grades 1. Among women in the sample, six out of ten were classified in Grade 1 jobs. Of the remaining four women in the sample, each held jobs in Grades 2 through 5. The least experienced women had been mining for 9 years, the most experienced for 15 years. The ages of women in the sample ranged from 29 to 50. Most had a high school diploma, one had finished the 10th grade, two others had attended but never graduated from college. At the time they were hired, seven of the

ten were either single or divorced with children. The other three were married with at least one child. The youngest woman, a single mother was black. The rest of the sample was white.

#### From Red Hat to Miner: Women's Adaptations to Mining

During their early days underground, the nature of the women's adaptation to working in the mine was physical and social. In terms of the work itself, both women and men at the mine told me repeatedly: "Not everybody can be a miner, you know." Becoming a miner meant being physically capable and willing to adopt a specific orientation toward work. For the women this was particularly important because they were doing work deemed appropriate for males only because only males were presumed capable of performing it. Moreover, beyond the instrumental challenges of working underground, the women were also hard pressed to form solid working relationships with male coworkers and bosses who had traditionally defined themselves by what women are not in the course of their everyday interactions with each other. As a result, the women in the sample often had to overcome coworker's and foremen's work-related hostility and sexual harassment.

#### The "Brute Work" of Mining

Historically considered to be among the most dangerous of occupations, coal mining requires stamina and strength regardless of whether a miner is doing heavy manual labor or the operating heavy equipment. All new miners are assigned to the entry level position of general inside labor (Grade 1) for a specified period usually lasting between four and six months. Hence, their tasks

consist of what the women call "brute work," including some of the most physically demanding types of manual labor performed underground. Basically, brute work consists of rockdusting, hanging "rag" (ventilation curtain), setting timbers for roof support, shoveling coal that has gobbled off the beltline, moving the beltline structures and power cable, laying track and keeping the mine free of debris.

Unlike miners who are classified as having operative jobs, general inside laborers are given their assignments daily by their section boss. Work assignments and, therefore, a GI's work location are made solely at the bosses' discretion. As one woman working on the belts said: "When you're general inside, they can make you do anything, like shovel a mud hole or hang rag. That's hard work. And in my opinion, that ought to be a top-paying job." Two of the women miners who had started working together commented on their first few weeks:

We was hired the same day. There was about five of us. Remember (looking at her partner)? He (boss) told us to get rock supports and timbers to use? Rough. It was rough for me (after the first few days) your body physically could not move, but you had to do it anyway. These jobs are something different and women aren't structurally built like men.

But, she added: "They hired you here to work and that's what they expected you to do. They expected you to do what they'd tell you to do." Similarly, another woman talked about the difficulties of her early work experiences:

Like when you're hanging rag, that's the toughest job in the mines. You had to lift (and) drag like three boards and two timbers and lift them up and that old cloth stuff, the rag, they call it. You get real dirty and you have to tie this and that up and I'm short anyway. It's just different stuff. All you got to depend on is the

little light on your head. Seemed like nobody felt sorry for me, but I wasn't no man.

Although these women acknowledged that their own lesser strength or stature relative to men's was a limitation, similar to other women in nontraditional blue collar jobs (Deaux, 1984), they insisted that the discrepancy between the physical demands of their jobs and their own capabilities was one of the initial adjustments which they had made long ago. In the same conversation, the two women quoted above also declared:

MW1: It was just hard work, you know we can do it now.

MW2: It's still hard work, we've just adapted to the conditions. We've just gotten stronger and learned the ropes basically. (But back then) it was a whole new world.

In addition to the physical demands of mining, the women also learned to cope with the dangers. Although most miners admit being apprehensive about mine work, they refrain from showing their fears. The apparent paradox allows them to cope with the omnipresent threat of serious injury or death. Moreover, their demonstration of outward calm and restraint in the face of danger is a characteristic male miners associate with being masculine and doing a man's job. Likewise, few of the women mentioned being afraid of the mine and the possible dangers. Rather, as is typical of their male counterparts, one of the women in the sample commented on her approach:

I'm not scared. I have a fear of it because you know you have to, but it don't bug you all the time. You have a fear, you're conscious enough to know something can happen ... (but) if you let it bother you or worry you, you wouldn't go back.

And from another woman in the sample:



I used to be intimidated about all the big machinery, but I never worried about top falling on me or anything, never bothered me a bit. But that's wrong. You really need to be aware of it. But you get so used to it, it doesn't bother you.

Despite some of their own initial difficulties with the work itself, at the time of the study most of the women in the sample expressed satisfaction with their jobs. They most often mentioned the high wage and the financial security which it gave them, but some women tended to be less enthusiastic about their coal mining jobs than others. One of the masons who has held several different jobs during her 12 years at the mine, commented on her current job as follows:

(It's) another hard (kind of) work, a lot of lifting all the time, a lot of smashed fingers, broken fingers and broken thumbs and all that. It's got it's good and bad points. I don't like it, but it's got good things, it's got bad things. It's a job and I make good money and that's it.

But for others, although the higher wage was important, they also volunteered that doing their jobs had certain intrinsic rewards, too. Another woman miner said with pride:

I had to shovel gravel up (at the face) off onto the plow under the track. But I like my job. It's dirty, it's hard, it's cold and wet, but I like my job.

Several of the women in the sample also mentioned that other women who had started working at mine with them quit within weeks of being hired due to their lack of physical strength. While a lack of strength and endurance affects job retention in coal mining, there was no indication that women's relative lack of physical strength during the initial adjustment period affected their prospects for advancing to a more skilled operative position. Rather, acceptance and recognition by male coworkers is more central to the

issue of women's advancement in occupations, such as coal mining, that have strong male-identified traditions for work and social relations (Deaux, 1984). Most of the miners, female and male alike, reported that a miner's work reputation was important, not only for being respected and getting along with one's coworkers, but also for gaining the kinds of opportunities necessary for advancement. Conversely, if a miner has a poor work reputation, there are ways to deny her or him a promotion as indicated in the following dialogue with another woman miner below:

INT: Is work reputation important for advancing?

MW: Yeah, very important.

INT: Seniority determines part of the bid, but is it also possible that even if someone had seniority they might not get the bid based on their work reputation?

MW: Not by their reputation, they've got ways of going around that. I think they'll try them on a job and say they're not qualified.

A miner's work reputation was usually established within the first few years a miner was employed underground. Model coal miners are typically recognized by coworkers and bosses as being able and consistently willing to work, especially "brute" work. In order to establish a good reputation, "my advice to anyone going into mining," one woman said, "is to get the toughest job underground and go at it." But a good work reputation was also based upon having a good work record with few, if any, absences. Not only did the company highly disapprove of absenteeism, but it worked a hardship on a miner's crew. According to one woman: "You can be slow (on the job), but you have to be there." Another woman also told me that the combination of having a bad work record and making mistakes on the job was often grounds for dismissal and that a miner who had a

bad work reputation risks losing the union's support.

Because work is dangerous and labor is so distinctly divided, as previously mentioned, a crew is highly interdependent. Bosses' reputations with the company depend on their crews' willingness to pull together and work cooperatively. Moreover, workers tend to feel a great deal of responsibility toward each other to get work done efficiently and quickly. Otherwise, when work does not get done bosses look bad to the company and miners' resentment builds for one another. Hence, when one worker slows down or fails to complete her or his assigned task, the others must take up the slack. Both the women and the men I spoke with had stories about recalcitrant coworkers. However, women found that they had to be equally as assertive with other men as the men were with each other when attempting to correct the situation as one woman relates in the following account:

You just have to let them know. There's some men like this one guy I used to bolt with. The boss told us one night to go get our pin supplies. Well, he was gonna sit on the back of the bolter and sleep. And I kept carrying him and carrying him and he never did come and help me. So I just made all the pins up that I carried and put them on my side. When we got ready to pin a place, he come over and I said if you take one of them pins I'll wrap it around your neck. And I cussed a little bit and the boss got scared and he went to the miner and said I believe her and I don't wanna see it if she's gonna hit him. But you just have to put them in their place or they'll make it as rough on you as they can.

Crew members can influence what others, including the boss, think of each other based on a miner's work reputation. As two of the women who work together on the same section told me: "... what we have to say about each other means a lot" regardless of gender. Just as a boss can refuse to take a worker on his crew, miners can

affect his decision to do so. Her partner gave me an example:

Like if we're gonna have a belt move. Sometimes they will send us an extra person or two from some place else. When they tell us who it is, we know that person is gonna go up there and lay down, no, we don't want him. All we have to do is say no and they don't ask why or nothing. Just no, we don't want that person. Get somebody else. Why send somebody up there who's gonna sit there on the rib and watch you? Send somebody who'll help you and that's what we want -- somebody to help us.

And the other woman concluded:

If you're a lazy, good-for-nothing, they stick you somewhere where they can't depend on you. So the harder you work, the more they depend on you. So reputation is everything and once you get a lazy reputation, no matter how hard you work from that point on, you still have that reputation.

In the mine men are the dominant sex numerically and culturally, making a token female's negotiations with males over the definition of self as worker problematic. Moreover, in these types of situations, sex role stereotyping is prevalent and often results in the imposition of higher work standards on women in order for them to gain the same rewards as men. Most of the women in the sample agreed that establishing a good work reputation was harder for women than it was for men, although the extent to which they were willing to assert the existence of a this double standard varied. One woman's awareness of the situation is demonstrated in the quote below:

There was a lot of women who didn't care and didn't do anything, but then there were a lot of men who was lazy. You couldn't get them hardly to move. They couldn't say much about the women, but they did. It's awful, but it's true. A boss would make it harder on that woman and they would have taken her to the office (for reprimand) even if she did do a lot of work, they'd still take her in the office. It doesn't make any difference. They want things done a certain way.

To the extent that women must work harder and have better work

records in order to take advantage of available opportunities leading to promotion, they are at a disadvantage relative to men.

#### Joining the Society of Miners

As tokens on work crews, the women posed a threat to male solidarity and those common bonds of masculinity vested in the culture and lore of coal mining. Being threatened with the changes produced by the women's entrance, males reacted in ways to heighten the social boundaries between the women and themselves mostly by exaggerating the women's differences. This was typically accomplished through work-related hostility and the sexualization of work relations in the form of sexual harassment, propositioning, and sexual bribery. The following section discusses how the women accommodated to both sets of circumstances in the overall process of proving themselves as coal miners.

#### Work-Related Hostility

According to the pioneers in the sample, many of their male coworkers made derisive comments complaining about their presence by questioning the sex role appropriateness of women mining coal and the women's capability for doing so. Two women miners related the following:

They would say, well, your husband works what are you doing in here? You shouldn't be here, you're taking a man's job. They'd give us little smart remarks and stuff because we was crowding in, more than one.

And:

Even some of our union brothers (have said) I don't think women ought to be in here. They ought to get out here and let a good man have this job. They said we should be home cleaning house, raising kids, that that's no place for us, that that's a man's job. Other male coworkers simply ignored the women. "They just avoid

you. You couldn't even hardly talk to them or anything," one woman said. "Some will even tell you they don't like to work with women."

In turn, some women in the sample responded with justifications of their presence in the following ways:  
[Male coworker said) why don't you go home and give this job to a man that needs it. I said, well, when I come up this holler to get my job they was begging for men to work and they didn't come and get it. It's mine. I'm keeping it.

And as another woman reported:

I even had a boss tell me he didn't like to work with women and he wanted to know why my dad let me come in the mines. I said, buddy, I was 28, divorced and single. I could do what ever I wanted whenever. And he said I just don't like to work with women. And I said well, you just best get your dinner bucket and go the house (walk off the job) because I'm here to stay and I'll be here when you're gone.

And she avoided some of these men:

There have been a few of them that's said, I really don't think women's got no place in the mines, but they're here or something like that. But they're not being smart about it, they just tell you their feelings and when they do, I just kinda stay away from them. I think, well, that's their right. But my right is here to work and I'll just do my work and not bother around them or anything.

Unfortunately, whether a new women miner avoids or is ignored by her male coworkers makes little difference since the consequences are the same. The resulting social isolation makes a woman's socialization to the workplace and learning new work-related skills increasingly problematic.

All of the women said that male coworkers and bosses had complained that the women were incapable of performing the work required of them. One woman said about her early days on the job underground:

(Male coworkers said) if you can't do the job, what'd they put you up here for, and just stuff like that. They didn't want you to (work), they don't want you to even try because your crowding in on their turf.

Two other women with whom I had a short discussion in the women's bathhouse told me that when they first started, some of the men told them that mining jobs were physically too difficult for them. Both of the women, miners now for almost a decade, felt that the men had substantially exaggerated their claims. They agreed that this was male mythology designed to keep them from aspiring to become miners, not too much unlike the Irish folktale that women were bad luck in a coal mine.

Some coworkers and foremen sometimes used more explicit tactics to demonstrate the women's incompetence in order to drive them out of the workplace. As one woman said:

We were usually shoveling track, shoveling belt. And you had a lot of men that would want you to do all the hard dirty work while they sit on a scoop (piece of equipment). I heard one foreman say his sister-in-law was working there. He didn't want her there and he told me, we tried to run you off, but he said we couldn't.

Another woman said that when she first began working underground: "I went through 8 or 9 bosses, all trying to break me, make me quit." And several of women in the sample also reported that some foremen tried to mar their work reputations as illustrated by the following:

I had put up some ventilation (but) the curtain wouldn't reach the bottom. So I went off hunting another piece of curtain to attach to this curtain. [Foreman] came up and looked and I wasn't there. I went and got my ventilation and put it across the bottom. It was quitting time. [Foreman] didn't say nothing to me. Outside he told [Superintendent] that I didn't do my job right. I'd left the ventilation like that. I went in the office. I said I'm on my time I don't want nothing outta this except us three to go back in that mine and go right over and look at that curtain. We did it. I demanded we do it. They saw that it was done.

And she concluded, "you couldn't please [Foreman] no matter what you did or how hard you worked. He just had this thing against

women coal miners."

In sum, it was made perfectly clear to the women that some of their male coworkers and bosses refused to accept them as bona fide underground workers. Thus, the women felt that they had to prove that they were capable of performing some of the most strenuous tasks underground.

Previous studies have noted that "proving oneself" is a subcultural theme which is reflected in the Appalachian personality and which characterizes the approach many Appalachians take toward work as a means of self-sufficiency (Anglin, 1983). Moreover, Althouse (1974) found that new miner's job-related tensions stem from worries about their own technical competence and the extent to which they can rely on others. Similarly, the women in the sample reported that all new miners hired have felt the need to perform well by working hard, but that they felt more pressure to do so because they were women. As the following illustrates:

The women I have worked around (are) just as good a workers as the men or better workers because they want to show people they can do it. That's it (even) if they do kill theirself in the meantime.

And from another woman:

I think I worked hard and I did the jobs I was told so they respected me there. They didn't have to worry about: Well, we have a woman hanging rag today or we have a women shoveling belt today so help out if you can or we're really slow today because there's a woman hanging rag or running a roofbolter or whatever. So I think that each of us has had to prove to ourselves also that we can do the job that we are in there to do.

However, as the women reported, some men have continued to make "proving oneself" problematic. Several male miners I spoke with said that when women began working at the mine, there was



"trouble." One miner elaborated, saying that "the women wouldn't let nobody help them do nothing. They'd chew you right out and they've stayed here and become all independent." His attitude highlights the double binding or "Catch 22" nature of the situations in which the women miners found themselves. On the one hand, receiving a man's assistance could be interpreted by others, both women and men, as their being either unwilling or incapable of doing it themselves and, therefore, not deserving their jobs. This perception could reinforce male miner's views about women's incapability for doing the work. On the other hand, those women who refused help, regardless of how tough bosses or coworkers made their work, were viewed as acting "independent," an inappropriate characteristic for females. Thus, the woman who is determined to prove her self risks offending male coworkers and losing his cooperation completely. The women in the sample readily recognized this "double bind" and reported that they usually reacted in the following manner:

You've got some men who will not, will almost refuse to help a woman, even though they'd help the men. ... (so) the men will help each other sometimes unless you ask for help. Sometimes you'll get people like that. (Pauses.) Naw, I wouldn't ask for help (Chuckles softly.)

Moreover, not only did the women's presumed incapability for doing "brute work" linger in the minds of their male coworkers and foremen, but also either by what they have said or demonstrated, foremen in particular communicated to the women that they were not suited for running machinery. Several women reported that foremen have bypassed them in favor of men when assigning miners to jobs

requiring operative skills. As one of the women said:

They don't think women are smart enough to put something together. Which I can do. I've done a whole lot. And the boss goes right along with it.

Indeed, one management official with whom I spoke at length said that men have more experience and, therefore, "a more mechanical approach" than women. He concluded that women having more menial jobs in the mines was no more than "the natural settling of their skills and their application."

In sum, the pressure to perform their jobs well by the males' standards persists because the women reported that they continue to respond to it in two distinct ways. Some adopted the attitude expressed below about running machinery:

Sometimes a general inside labor job, it's not easy, but there's no pressure, there's no major head busting decisions to make, somebody else tells you what to do, somebody else takes the blame if it does not get done right. If you don't advance (by running machinery) you don't take a chance on being wrong or messing up. And when you make a mistake, they (male coworkers) really don't let you live it down.

Others decided to take the challenge, such as the 14-year mining veteran who worked at the face cutting coal who commented: "I think women have come a long to prove to these men that we can do the job that they can do." However, she had to repeat the "proving" process when she assumed a new position operating machinery at the face.

Just like me when I went to the plow. I had to prove myself a jacksetter. I had to prove to the people that I worked with because it had been all men up to until that point. I had to prove to the men I could do it, I had to prove to the boss I could do it.

#### Sexualization of Work Relations and the Workplace

While the women had to prove that they were capable of being coal miners, they did not have to do much in order to make their

presence as women known. Male miners' initial responses were mixed. While some were supportive, others responded to the women using different forms of sexual harassment. Half of the women in the sample said they had been sexually harassed by either men coworkers or foremen, using verbal innuendo and body language to convey a sexual message (Gruber and Bjorn 1982). Two women reported that on occasion some of their men co-workers grabbed their genitals in their presence and then pretended to have gotten "caught" urinating. Another woman reported an incident of homosexual buffoonery with a particularly potent message accentuating men's sexuality and solidarity:

They was pretending they was queers in front of me. It was like one was humping the other one, but they had their clothes on. And the boss said, "You scared of us, ain't you?" I said, "No, I'm not scared of you all." And he said, "Well, this is our little world down here and you don't belong."

Some men co-workers and foremen either directly solicited sexual favors from the women or repeatedly asked them for dates. When women first started working at the mine, one woman said that they were treated "like a piece of pussy." Another recalled that "a boss (once said) all the women made beds out of rockdust for the men. You know, like that's all we did was go in there to sleep with them?" Knowing that their male coworkers these expectations, some the women miners said that they consciously adopted certain social strategies for interacting with their male coworkers as reported below:

When I first came here I set myself up right away. I've made it known: Don't bother me, I'm here to work. I'm not here for romance, (but for) finance. Once you establish yourself, they know your boundaries.

However, due to the power differential, sexual propositioning by foremen posed a much greater threat to a women's work status than propositioning by men co-workers. It was well-known by women in the sample that when a woman failed to capitulate to a foreman's sexual demands, she usually faced the prospect of getting a more difficult work assignment. One woman who had been reassigned for her refusal to capitulate was told by a man co-worker "if you let these bosses pinch your titties, you'll get along. If you don't, you'll get the awfulest job that ever was." She said she preferred the "awful" job every time.

Another form of punishment used by a foreman was social derogation designed to humiliate the woman who refused his requests:

One time (foreman) told the guys behind my back that I had sucked his dick, is the way he put it. It came back to me about a week or so later. I went through pure misery for about a year because the boss lied to the crew that I worked with, telling them (other) stuff. I didn't even know why everybody all of a sudden quit speaking to me, giving me the cold shoulder.

In front of her men co-workers, she retaliated:

I walked up to him and I said, "When did I suck your god damned dick down the jackline?" He goes, "I don't know what you're talking about." I said, "You're a god damned liar. You told everyone of them and you didn't think that they'd find out I'm not doing the shit you said I was doing and come back and tell me things, did you?" Right there it proved to the guys (he was lying).

In the above case, the foreman's rumors lead to her co-workers lack of on-the-job cooperation. But even in the absence of rumors, the women's potential for becoming socially isolated was especially great because of their token status. This seriously hindered their ability to do their jobs and made them vulnerable to others' perception that they were incapable of doing the work and not

worthy of gaining the opportunities necessary for advancement. Thus, men's sexualization of work relations underscored the women's sexuality at the expense of their work role performances and substantiated the cultural contradiction of a woman doing a man's job.

When the women were treated as sex objects, each woman was regarded by the men as a representative of her gender category. Hence, each woman was made to feel that she had a moral responsibility to herself and to all her women co-workers for avoiding "loose" behavior. Conversely, the sexual indulgences of other women were also a reflection upon each of them. As one woman explained:

[Boss] wanted to sleep with me. I wouldn't have anything to do with him. He thought if a woman worked for him she had to sleep with him because there was one woman working on the section (who was) sleeping with him. Everybody knew it. When it came my turn, I wouldn't sleep with him.

Although the women in the sample recognized that the men's sexual harassment was usually unprovoked, some of them tended to place the responsibility for the men's actions almost entirely on women themselves.<sup>2</sup> This was especially true among those women who had received little or no sexual harassment. According to one woman:

The majority of the men up there are good to you if you let them. But they'll treat you how they see you act. See, men, they tend to watch women more, I believe it's just the male in them."

Such a charge demonstrates the phenomena known as "blaming the victim" characteristic of Kanter's (1977b) "exceptional woman" who as a token female plays the role of the "insider" by assuming the men's stereotypical orientation toward other females. Similarly, Anglin (1983) has discovered that although sex roles among the Appalachian subculture are changing, some traditional rules for

women's conduct have remained. In particular, women who allow themselves to be left alone with men are perceived to be granting the men license to fulfill their sexual desires. Hence, women who do not voluntarily segregate themselves are deserving of whatever consequences befall them in a man's presence. Note that this is simply a slightly more exaggerated version of the norm for male behavior also found in the larger culture and expressed in the adage: "Boys will be boys." and the implied: "And what's a girl to do?"

When the company issued its mandate against harassment, the superintendent told me it was necessary to "teach the men what harassment was." His remark implied that the men were so accustomed to regarding women in terms of their sexuality that they would find it difficult, if not unnatural, to develop egalitarian work relationships with them. Although the rule has effectively eroded these incidents, the women added that its enforcement put the onus of responsibility on them. Using the rule had the double binding or "damned if you do, damned if you don't" quality because it was the women themselves and not other men, such as foremen, who were solely responsible for reporting harassment. Some women indicated that they were often reluctant to do so because it created tension among crew members. It also violated a UMWA oath of solidarity, thus, defeating the women's attempts to become socially integrated as unionized members of their crews. Although some of the women in the sample said they had never experienced any form of harassment, they allowed that they would readily report it if it occurred.

However, others discussed having used the rule effectively by directly confronting their harassers, but these women ended up being transferred to other work locations.

At the time of the study most of the women insisted that any kind of sexual harassment was largely a thing of the past, due, in part, to the enforcement of company rules. A few also allowed that its saliency was the result of media hype and not indicative of their current experiences. As one woman said:

I think things have changed so much since the first woman came into the mines. She was harassed a lot (with emphasis). But things have changed because they've accepted us.

However, another said: "I think it's still going on, it's just more subtle now." Her comment indicated that although the men's sexualization of work relations had changed form, it had not disappeared entirely.

The primary social arena for the women's socialization occurs within the social boundaries of the work crew on a section. Conversely, as previous research on the social relations of mining has shown, a miner's primary identity is with the work unit or crew (Vaught and Smith, 1980). Looking back over her years at the mine, one woman commented on the adjustment process between her and her all male crew members. In an earlier passage, she said that when she first started working at the mine, "I wasn't scared of the mine, I was scared of the men." But, she added:

Now, the men I work with, they might talk about me behind my back, but in front of me, they got a lot of respect. They're family men and I guess we've grown onto each other we been there so long.

Several other women in the sample who had similar experiences likened their crew membership to being in a family --a social entity in which gender relations and women's subordinate status have already been defined. Below two of the women in the sample describe the atmosphere among themselves and their crew members:

It's just like a family really, especially on sections. It's like you're just one big family. Everybody's working to help each other. If you don't, it makes your job hard. When you get on a section where people aren't like that, it makes your job hard.

However, over time it had become clear to the women that their successful integration had done little to seriously disrupt men's sexualization of the work place. So ultimately, the informal norms of the occupation continue to be male norms governing social behavior underground. Over the course of their mining careers the women have been continually confronted with the conflicting expectations of being female and being employed as miners. As a result they have been faced with two sets of prevailing norms: those governing female-male relationships and those governing peer relations in a masculine-identified work place. While some of the women reported conforming in varying degrees to the informal norms of their workplace, adopting these styles of interacting brought other women into conflict over appropriate role enactments as illustrated in the following account:

I guess, hey, if you're gonna be down there you get more and more like you're a man, in a way you really and truly (do). It takes a lot out of you, like dresses and stuff. You wouldn't hardly see any woman (miner) in a dress outside the mines anywhere. There's nothing delicate about it, it just changes us all over. I don't know what it is.



Two types of men's behavior that contributed to workplace sexualization and help to maintain gender-based boundaries were sexual jokes and stories and profanity. Gutek (1985) has concluded that sex in the forms of graffiti, jokes, comments, and metaphors for work, are a part of workplaces dominated by men regardless of women's presence. However, as women enter the work setting, they are obligated to set limits on some of the men's activities in order to avoid being degraded. Sometimes the men miners were careful about telling jokes in the women's presence. At other times the women found themselves in the position of having to "draw the line" on men's unacceptable behavior. On her crew, one woman said that although she generally "laughs stuff off," she was careful not to "get rowdy with them" because invariably the action would escalate. She commented that occasionally if they got carried away, she would "make them stop." Another woman attempted to curb the men's "sex talk":

They would start making sexual remarks about their girl friends and women and I'd say, "Hey, you shouldn't talk like that! What's the matter with you guys? You ought to be ashamed of yourself," just to get them to watch what they say.

Although she stated "you're not going to change people," she concluded, "all you can do is have them have respect for you."

Similar to other workers employed in dangerous occupations, coal miners are notorious for using profanity. The women said that men would apologize if they thought a woman had overheard them using foul language. Their apologies strongly imply that there is a difference between men's and women's language. Language serves to maintain role boundaries. If profanity is not fit language for a

woman to hear, then certainly she should avoid using it. The women varied considerably in their use of foul language and in their willingness to tolerate it from others. A few women did not swear and had no tolerance for it. However, most of the women miners admitted to using what constituted "men's language," but they said they were careful to conceal or curtail their profanity it. For example:

There's a lot of stuff I will say. I used to not cuss too bad, but I'll cuss now. I'll say it under my breath. I don't think they've ever heard it. They'd die if they heard me say what I say to myself.

Another said: "I cuss some when I get mad, but I always try to watch what I say because I'll lose that edge." That "edge," she explained, was the men's respect.

### Conclusion

Analyses of these case study data demonstrate that although the women had physically adjusted to doing hard manual labor underground, their social adjustments were not made as easily or without compromise. Based on their accounts about coworkers' and foremen's comments and behavior toward them, it was apparent that the women encountered sex bias and stereotyping of their incapability for performing male-identified work. Moreover, the women were not only assumed to be incapable of performing male-identified work, but were viewed as sex objects and treated accordingly. These two sets of men's beliefs and actions about women as workers and women as sexual beings have been mutually reinforcing and have resulted in women's stigmatization and objectification, respectively.

Women are objectified, or treated as objects, when their role as worker is subordinated to their role as female. Specifically, when they are treated as sexual objects and not as individuals within their own right according to their own capabilities. This allows men to attribute certain negative characteristics to women regarding their work performance and results in the women's undervaluation based upon the occupational standards of work as imposed by males in the work setting. Thus, as one woman succinctly put it: "The men look at our bodies and not at what we can do."

Until the men at the mine became familiar with the women they worked with, they were more apt to harass and, thereby, degrade them to the level of sex object. As Swerdlow (1982:381) has noted, "men have a status stake in the sexualization of the workplace when the division of labor renders women equal to men." Or, as the case may be, men have a status stake in sexualizing the workplace and subordinating women's position in it when the division of labor and the way it is maintained provides the potential for rendering women equal with men. Moreover, while the more blatant objectification of women resulting from sexual harassment was regulated according to company policy, more subtle forms of "sexualization" of the workplace replaced them, thus preserving male's sexual-social dominance underground as it existed above ground.

Although most of the women conformed to the work norms expected of all miners, many also behaved in ways which contribute to the establishment and maintenance of gender-based boundaries as they were reset by men. That is, a majority of the women behaved in ways

which maintained the status differential between the sexes by limiting their own visibility in the workplace. At the same time, the women also responded by continuing to prove themselves in the jobs to which they were originally assigned, such as beltman and general inside labor. Despite having earned good work reputations, the women continued to feel the necessity to maintain their good reputations. As a result some of those women who exceeded male work standards were held out as exceptions to the general rule of women's presumed inferiority. Conversely, the rule about women's inferiority as a group was sustained. Still, many of the women expressed great satisfaction with their jobs and spoke of friendships with male coworkers which also provides them with the opportunity for their successful integration as legitimate members of the underground workforce.

## FOOTNOTES

1. As conceptualized by socialist feminists, although the state often acts to support the material interests of capitalists and the ideological interests of patriarchy, it also serves to mediate the conflicts as they occur between them or as they arise from them. In making their challenge, women's groups in support of women coal miners was instrumental in gaining the state as an ally in defense of their cause. The state responded to them via the enactment and initial enforcement of federal anti-discrimination legislation, threatening employers with the loss of federal contracts and their profits. Again, the interests of the capitalists (as defined by the threatening actions of the state) were brought into direct conflict with the system of patriarchy (Sokoloff, 1988). As a result of the state's pressure, more women gained access to a previously inaccessible type of male-dominated occupations, amid the protests from male coal miners that women were taking "men's" jobs. Other previously held beliefs in the ideological system which reinforced women's exclusion were that women could not possibly do the work and the men would have to step in and do it for them which would drive up the cost of coal. This could be viewed as an attempt by male miners to realign corporate interests with their own.

2. Not only do the women miners place the burden of sexual responsibility upon themselves, but the wives' opposition to women miners based upon doubts about the women miner's fidelity reinforces it and may also partially account for male's behavior toward their female coworkers.

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