

**'THERE WAS SOME HARD TIMES IN THERE':  
WOMEN IN THE QUEENSLAND COAL MINES**

**Georgina Murray**  
**David Peetz**  
Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

Contacts:

David Peetz  
Department of Employment Relations  
GBS Nathan Campus  
Griffith University  
Brisbane QLD 4111  
Tel: 07 3735 7600  
Fax: 07 3735 7177  
email: d.peetz@griffith.edu.au

Georgina Murray  
Department of Humanities  
Nathan Campus  
Griffith University  
Brisbane QLD 4111  
Tel: 07 3735 7371  
Fax: 07 3735 7177  
email: g.murray@griffith.edu.au

## **‘THERE WAS SOME HARD TIMES IN THERE’: WOMEN IN THE QUEENSLAND COAL MINES**

### **Abstract**

The first handful of women began working in Queensland coal mines in 1979, as labourers, in what was seen by some as a public relations exercise rather than a genuine willingness to embrace equal opportunity. Our paper reports on the changing situation of women miners since this period, based on interviews of 22 of these women mining workers recorded between 2006 and 2009.

Some women became miners because of the money, some did it because they could not survive in the city on working women’s wages with children, some did it because their fathers, grandfathers and brothers were in the mines first and lit their way; others did it because they were left stranded by divorce and separations in company towns.

Today women can be found in all mining positions: from the wash plants through to drag lines, from driving trucks that carry up to three hundred tonnes of dirt in open cut mines to the few working underground. Some believe the enthusiasm of certain mining companies for women workers is part of an effort to change, undermine, or avoid the union culture of mines. But women still represent only a small portion of the workforce. They have supported unions whilst resisting the legacy of a traditional, masculine industry culture, and confronted the slowness of organisations and individuals to adapt to change. Even amongst women, views are divided as to whether women should work in the mines. There are stories from some women who adapted fairly quickly to work on the mines – or who made the mines adapt to them. There are other stories of harassment and remarkable stories of persistence and bravery in the face of major obstacles.

### **Introduction**

Our paper reports on the changing situation of women miners since the first handful of women began working in Queensland coal mines in 1979. The primary research reported here comes from a research project on women in mining, for which we interviewed 133 men and women in twelve Queensland coal mining communities and home cities about their work,<sup>1</sup> including 22 women mining workers (19 production or trades workers and 3 professionals). Fictional names are used after the next section. We begin with an acknowledgement of some of the existing literature in this area and brief overview of the key developments in the movement of women out of and back into the mines. The rest of our paper analyses the challenges the women have faced and the motivations, adaptations and struggles involved, focusing principally on the women themselves but also considering the roles of other actors.

### **The decline and rise of women in mining**

In 1842, a British Royal Commission on Employment in Collieries, reported on the conditions facing women and children in the mines. As early British sociologist Harriet

---

<sup>1</sup> The project was financially supported by the Queensland District of the Mining and Energy Division of the CFMEU, for which we express our thanks.

Martineau (1849) depicted it, the report showed how ‘women were employed as beasts of burden’ and ‘made to crawl on all-fours in the passages of the pits, dragging carts by a chain passing from the waist between the legs’. The Royal Commission led eventually to the banning of women and children working underground. By the 1930s, the 45<sup>th</sup> convention of the International Labour Organisation prohibited the employment of women underground. In Queensland, the *Coal Mining Act 1925* provided ‘no female shall be employed below ground in any coal mine.’

Australian women and girls were involved with small surface gold mining operations in the nineteenth century in places like Glen Osmond (SA) and Bendigo (Vic) (Boorman & Mayers 2006), but gradually they withdrew from the industry. For much of the twentieth century, a woman’s place was in the home – at least, once she was married. Women might only find employment in the mining industry in the offices, as typists or secretaries. From the 1960s things began to change. The feminist movement transformed the way society thought about women at work, and by late 1972 the industrial arena had equal pay for work of equal value entrenched as a principle, if not in practice. In the mining sector, technological changes opened up potential opportunities for women that did not exist before. From the 1970s, the development of large scale open cut mines, became the dominant mining technology in Queensland, placing less reliance on brute strength and giving less salience to the excuse that no woman would be safe from men’s dark urges in the blackness of a coal mine. An ‘explicit decision against this discrimination against women’ in the Coal Mining Act ‘was made by the Queensland Miner’s Convention in July 1977’ and the legislative bar on women in mines was repealed. Meanwhile, the traditional area for women in the industry, office work, was subject to its own technological revolution, increasing skills for some but narrowing opportunities for others. Blue collar work in the mines began to look both attractive, well paid and feasible for women.

In less than two years, the Queensland Colliery Employers Union (later the Mining and Energy Division of the CFMEU) recruited its first female members. The first women to join the union (and, as far as we can tell, the first women to work in coal mining, given the very high union membership of the times) were two at South Blackwater mine. Annette Sparks, aged twenty-two, and Lyndal Hunt, aged eighteen. They commenced work on surface cleaning duties in early 1979. In May 1979, having received 104 applicants in response to a job advertisement targeted at women, the Thiess, Dampier and Mitsui (TDM) mine at Moura appointed four women to work at the wash plant. In 1984, Hazel Yarrow and Mandy Harrison started work at the Blair Athol mine near Clermont.

Today women can be found in all mining positions: from the wash plants through to drag lines, from driving trucks that carry up to three hundred tonnes of dirt in open cut mines to the few working underground. But women still represent only a small portion of the workforce, accounting for just 10.4 percent of the mining industry, with many of those being office workers – women account for just 6.3 per cent of operators and production workers and 2.4 per cent of supervisors (Queensland Resources Council 2008).

Working in the mines can be a real source of economic liberation for women. Out of 75 occupations for which the ABS had data on women’s weekly pay in 2006, ‘Intermediate Mining and Construction Workers’ was the highest paid (Australian Bureau of Statistics 6306.0). But in pursuing that goal, women face a large number of challenges. They must deal with issues arising from production, the domestic sphere, the social constructions of their gender and sexuality, their conditions of work and their various social identities. In dealing with these challenges they have made various adaptations themselves and attempted to make other actors adapt to them. None of that is easy, as there are many barriers along the way.

We turn to consider the challenges faced by the women and the adaptations they and others make. We commence with the motivations of the women in seeking to go into mining, and the companies in seeking to employ them.

### **Motivations of the companies and the women**

Mining companies had several motivations in employing women. A number of the pioneer women miners mentioned that they felt that their original employment had been a corporate public relations exercise. Hannah said:

The initial girls were put on as part of a publicity stunt by the mine because several other mines were doing the same thing and they were all in a race. The thing is, once they'd been put on then they were stuck with them. And they just tried to make things basically difficult you know, to make you want to go away. But they'd never had that sort of income before so they weren't going anywhere..."No, we're here. We're in. We're like a virus. We didn't mind the work either."

Eloise, another pioneer, had worked in a number of mines. She loved her job and as a classically pretty woman she had been used extensively for company publicity. But she too said:

they didn't want women out there; they didn't want me there why would they want anyone else?... When I finished my [trainee] time they didn't want me there...The company said "yeah, the job will be available, but basically it's not available to her." And the union stepped up and said, "Well, if you don't give her this job this is grounds for discrimination"...So we backed the company into a corner and I stayed there.

From 1984, the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act meant companies had little choice if they were to abide by the law. Moreover, some believed the enthusiasm of certain mining companies for women workers has been part of an effort to change, undermine, or avoid the union culture of mines. Other researchers have found that a strategy among Australian mining companies since the 1980s was to employ those who had little or no memory of industrial militancy (Eveline & Booth 2002, 562, Thompson 1984). Whether that worked is something we canvass below.

Women's desirability as employees was boosted by their allegedly radiating a 'civilising effect' on the male mining workforce (Eveline & Booth 2002, 564).

From the late 1990s, however, the shortage of labour and high labour turnover made companies especially attracted to hiring women. Hiring wives of current miners already based in the local communities was one of the few ways of adding to labour supply without putting further upward pressure on accommodation costs and hence wage expectations.

For the women we interviewed, motives were more direct. Some women became miners because of the money, some did it because they could not survive in the city on working women's wages with children, some did it because their fathers, grandfathers and brothers were in the mines first and lit their way. Others did it because they were left stranded by divorce and separations in company towns. But they all had one thing in common: they all loved the work and the rewards it brings: 'Operating big machinery – I love it. Yeah it's the best thing,' said Eloise. 'Oh look I just love it. I run up the front of one of them going oooooh!' was Wendy's take. 'Yep, yep! I love the big trucks,' enthused Laila.

### **Responses and adaptations by men**

Opposition to women was strongest underground. Some was based on superstition: one retired metals miner told us that 'at one stage it was taboo to have women on board ships

because they invite disaster ...so women weren't allowed to go underground and that was it.' Even the Queen, we were told, was not allowed to visit underground on a royal tour. Some was based on fear: 'it only needs somebody to cut that [light] cable and that woman is in total darkness. Now she could be raped by fifty people and no way in the world you'd identify them, and anybody with a 500 metre radius is possibly a suspect'. Some was based on physical strength: 'you wouldn't really want to depend your life on them to lift something off you because they're just incapable of doing it.' It is a complaint sometimes raised on the surface mines, where most women work. Belinda said:

A lot of the old miners just didn't like women being around...I can remember a friend of mine – her husband ranting on about how this girl was an electrician and she shouldn't have been because she was too tiny and she couldn't even lift a tool box. And when I mentioned it to somebody, he said, "Neither can any of the young blokes that start there, it's enormous!" [laughter]

Despite years of management training and legislation on equal employment opportunity, some managers still hold negative views towards women mineworkers. 'I had a foreman say to me about two months ago, there is no place for women on a coal field,' said Robyn. A surface mineworker, Moira, thought some of the men were antagonistic to women:

just a few of the guys were actually very anti-women in the workplace and they certainly let us know that we weren't supposed to be there.

One of the men we interviewed noted that women on site changed male behaviour, making them 'close up slightly....Probably not quite so boisterous, that sort of thing. Some still are. A lot of the older guys sort of quieten up.' He seemed to think this was a bad thing.

Many women acknowledged that attitudes had improved. As Deena said, 'Generations have changed. Times have changed, and people's opinions have changed, but you still have a certain [number] still against women being in the mining industry.' Eloise spoke of camaraderie, friendship and mutual aid: 'I like these fellows, you know... when you work with people for a period of time, you start to form a friendship.' As Wynne said, 'If things are bad and I need someone I've just got to pick up the phone and they're there in an instant, even if I haven't talked to them for three or four years'.

### **Adaptations and struggle by women**

We found from our interviews that women faced challenges in five arenas. In each, they had to adapt to those challenges by conforming to the expectations on them, or engaging in struggle, sometimes individually but often collectively, to confront and change them. Some women adapted fairly quickly to work on the mines; others made the mines adapt to them.

#### *The production sphere*

First, women have had to deal with issues of productive efficiency. They have had to demonstrate themselves to be highly capable, reliable workers, often under a microscope of greater scrutiny than their male counterparts, something Kanter (1977) identifies as a feature of workers in 'token' groups (comprising less than around 15 per cent of workers). A young woman miner, Trudy, told us:

I think the light is probably on you a little bit more because you are female. I think the females out there do expect that they have to perform better to be able to prove themselves...There's only so many females out there, faces [are] remembered a lot easier. Whereas if you're just another bloke you're easier to go under the radar probably.

Moira agreed:

You know if you made a little mistake, if you didn't back up to the dump properly and you didn't dump your load over the edge properly, it would be 'oh bloody women drivers.'

One older man thought women were fine in the mine 'as long as it's not trades':

they were bloody hopeless. They couldn't lift half the bloody spanners even. You can go into Mackay now and they're working behind a bar – waste of a trade. I don't give a damn whether you call me sexist or whatever, that trade thing, that mechanical thing, that's a male thing.

Belinda observed that 'it's hard work for the girl because she's got to be better than they are but she's still got to be not offended by them. And they will try very hard to offend.'

Ironically, our interviews showed that women mineworkers are well regarded in the industry, because, as Deidre says, 'we're just a lot more careful, we ask a lot more questions and just treat the machinery a lot more carefully' whereas men's philosophy, to use Marcia's phrase, is 'just drive it like you stole it'. Perhaps they are also well regarded because only the good women mineworkers survive in the industry.

#### *The domestic sphere*

Second, women mineworkers have had to deal with the domestic sphere, often managing significant household responsibilities while working full-time. While for some women mine working was an escape from house working – said Maxine, 'I would prefer to be outside than inside cleaning the house; I tell you, I still can't do it' – this expansion of possibilities did not necessarily transform the sexual division of labour. Monica, who worked 'crib relief' (shorter shifts, usually six to eight hours, taking control of a truck while the normal driver is having his or her break or 'crib' on a rotating basis), said:

I still take [my daughter] to school, I pick her up, I take her to work, you know I still try and do my motherly, I still cook,...

*So nobody makes your crib?*

No, they say where's mine? ... I still do all those things for them, wash and iron me son's clothes and do everything for them, 'cause it's like my job.

Deidre and her husband both worked twelve hour shifts, with Deidre enjoying the bonus of domestic duties as well as the mood shifts from night work:

I do the cooking, cleaning, plus working as well. I'm very cranky. My husband, even though he does night shift as well, he loves night shift, I hate it, I don't sleep very well...It mucks around with our body clock and I think that's why we get cranky, coz we feel all out of sorts.

#### *The social construction of gender and sexuality*

Third, women have had to deal with issues arising from social constructions of their gender and sexuality. This has several aspects to it. One is overcoming old *prejudices* about the role of women from supervisors and workers, and even other women. Women such as Bernice and Monica felt that 'there are definitely guys out there that think we shouldn't be there'. These men are 'typically a bit older, but there's some young ones too and it's probably because their father's say it that they think it'. Moira said 'I just let it go over my head...treat it with the contempt it deserves. I basically said to one of the guys.... "look, we're here, get used to it. Deal with it." Ever since then he was good.'

Even amongst women, views have been divided as to whether women should work in the mines. Opal, a young mother, told us:

‘I personally don’t believe that a woman should be out there any way. I have got old fashioned values. My mother always taught me that, “Unless you are going to piss standing up, don’t do a man’s job”’.

Betty a senior women, was against women being in the mines for reasons of their health and safety. She thought men would try to rescue them if there was an accident and that would kill them both. Even Deena, a contracted ‘lampie’ – maintaining and repairing miners’ lamps – expressed slight unease about her job: ‘It’s a stigma that’s been around, like even when I was growing up, mining were for men, and women were shop assistants, or hairdressers,’

Dealing with constructions of their gender also, more dramatically, involves sometimes defending themselves against *harassment*. Hannah spoke of how, when she was young, ‘you did have people try to come onto you, usually married men. Leila identified harassment from men as the worst thing about her job: ‘They don’t realise how hurtful they can be.’ Not all women we spoke to experienced harassment, by any means. Selina said: ‘It was very male dominated at the initial start but, no, I was accepted and the men were very respectful and they treated me quite well.’ But several of our respondents did experience it, especially amongst the pioneers. Eloise described how a male had written sexually graphic details about her which went into the work system, from which one of the few female supervisors was able to read a transcript of his comments: ‘She found out about it, and got the printout... He lost his job...I couldn’t believe that the silly bugger would do something like that’.

However, Eloise pointed out that she ‘mainly had problems with supervisors and managers [who] wanted to test me out to see if they could break me’. Hannah gave management a broader responsibility for harassment:

The attitude came from the top down that this was acceptable behaviour. If their attitude had been different, the blokes do as they’re told basically, and they would have done as they were told.

Dealing with the social construction of their gender and sexuality also required confronting the sexual *insecurity of fellow women* outside the mines. Some women in the community ironically feared women miners would be sexual predators. One woman ‘bailed up’ Wynne in the meat department in the supermarket, accusing her of making advances on her husband:

I said to her “luv have you had a look at him seriously?” I said [laughter] “if I’m going to do it, it ain’t going to be with your old man...Go home and take your rose coloured glasses off and have a good look at him – like, come on!” [laughter] She just didn’t know what to say.

Iris reported that:

Friday night and all the girls would get drunk and say, “What do you do with my husband out at that mine?” But most of them were really good. The older ladies thought that women shouldn’t be there and that it wasn’t for women.

### *The employment relationship*

Fourth, women must deal with issues arising from their conditions of work. This involves, crucially, achieving *job security*. As the industry has boomed they have become more important as a source of reliable labour – but more readily discarded when the good times appear to end. When job cuts came, Maxine encountered heavy social pressures from both the company and her male colleagues who wanted those most in ‘need’ to keep their jobs:

they put up a Voluntary Redundancy and said “look this will be the last time the VR is offered. We would like the older people to go and give the younger people the opportunity” and because I was one of the bunnies I said “yes, I will go, and give my son an opportunity at the mine,” which he never ever did.

The greater vulnerability of women miners has resulted not just from social pressure, but also from their location in the labour process. In 2007-08 women were 4 per cent of permanent blue collar workers but 16 per cent of casual blue collar workers in the Queensland mining industry and 14 per cent of contractors (Department of Mines and Energy 2008 p40; Queensland Resources Council 2008). When the boom temporarily ended with the global financial crisis, it was overwhelmingly contractors and casuals who were laid off from the coal mines, disproportionately affecting women.

Obtaining *training and skills career paths* has also been a problem. In 2007-08 only 2 per cent of mining tradespeople were women. Winona, a trained electrician, had to take a second job – in a restaurant at a contractors’ camp – to get by in her first apprenticeship year.

At one mine where most workers were multi-skilled, access to training did not appear a problem. Elsewhere, however, when we asked Wynne whether she thought the training and career opportunities for women were the same as for the men, she answered, ‘No! Still not even today it’s not, no way in hell!... Girls are on trucks... A few get a dozer, they very rarely get a shovel.’ Moira confirmed that ‘A lot of the other guys are multi skilled, we’re not.’ Eloise had been blocked from training on the equipment she wanted for some time and, as she saw it, the biggest obstacle to women’s career advancement was ‘supervisory attitudes... It does have a little bit [to do with] the blokes around you. But, they’re not the ones giving you the opportunity to advance.’ Another part of the problem was that crib relief, disproportionately employing women, was not providing opportunities. Wendy saw that:

Temps that have come on, with not even a truck skill, get trained up and now they’re being offered dozer and grader and whatever. But because I’m crib relief I don’t have those opportunities...Every employee should have a career path. Well, I don’t have one. Crib reliefs don’t have one.

Dealing with issues concerning conditions of work also involves women addressing their *rights as workers* alongside their co-workers, male and female. Women like men face challenges in coping with the rotating twelve hour shift schedules that now dominate mine work in Australia and elsewhere (Smith 2008). Danielle described how the shift patterns make her cranky, and how her daughter ‘knows when to just leave me alone. She’ll leave me alone, the dogs won’t bark, the birds won’t chirp.’ Not all disliked the long shifts. Nellie liked them because ‘you get it all over and done with.’ However, the popularity of crib relief among women reflected the difficulties posed for many by the twelve hour shifts.

Consistent with other research showing women as likely to be involved in unions as men, other things being constant (eg Youngblood, et al. 1984), we found little evidence that women were inactive in union affairs. Nadia, for example, was a union delegate who was in ‘boots and all’ fighting for the union. Still, some of the women who had used the union felt that they would like to be more activist but that they were too vulnerable to being singled out for retribution, as Danielle said:

I really believe in what the unions stand for and what they’re doing. But I’m held back because I have to tread carefully...The original reason I joined the union was to protect myself from arseholes in the industry.

*Managing public identities and support networks*

Fifth, in order to successfully stand up for those rights as workers, women need to **manage public identities** so that their gender is not seen as excluding them from the class and occupational identities of their male co-workers.

For women miners, the challenge was to be seen as part of the class and occupation that united the workers in their dealings with management and with each other. This meant men needed to recognise that gender was not a core issue that defined their relationship to work and management. This was most difficult to achieve when women might be seen as being used by management to undermine working conditions and solidarity. As mentioned, it was not an uncommon view: introducing women miners was seen by Tessa as a way of undermining the male workforce, 'You know, "if you guys cannot do it we'll get some women in here."' This was the concern that accompanied Wendy, who started work as only the second woman ever employed on her site just after a bitter industrial dispute had concluded at that mine. The day she started was 'the hardest thing I'd ever had to do... [They were] very mistrusting of each other let alone a woman, you could see 'em thinking, "what's she going to do?'" It took her three months to get accepted but, she said, 'By the time I left out there, I got along famously; they were a great bunch of blokes.'

The management of their public identities is closely tied to their need to develop **networks of support**, in both their domestic and working 'crew' worlds (Smith 2008). Regarding the former, some women relied heavily on husbands or relatives for support. Daryl, a mineworker's husband, was very clear: 'I'm very proud of my wife for what she does'. Often this overlapped with the latter. Having a male mentor, such as a father, brother or husband at the mine, was a source of security for many. Those without male mentors appeared more vulnerable. That said, many women experienced support from their fellow workers. Having more women in the mines helped, said Danielle, and it was clear to us that when someone was the only woman on a crew it could be harder. But she and others also talked of support from male co-workers. Robyn spoke of camaraderie: 'I tell them, "don't get me wrong, don't think that I like you now just because I'm standing up for you. This is all about family"... Yeah. And that's what you do, you stick together.'

Others as part of this collective support relied on the union and resisted efforts of some companies to break down union solidarity. Eloise used the collective force of the union to fight a longstanding harassment case against the company. She had returned to work with the help of the union, not for the money but because she wanted

to stick it into them: 'I'm back and this is what I've done! Don't mess with me!'...It was quite stressful because it went on for nine or 12 months ... coalmining industry has still got a culture, it's still got that male testosterone thing but it's a lot better.

A key question facing women has been the extent to which they seek to maintain unique or 'feminine' aspects of their behaviour, and that to which they seek to become '**one of the boys**'. Assuming the language and norms of 'the boys' was a strategy commonly used by the women. Marjorie explained it this way:

I'm not going to go out there wearing an apron. I'm entering a male environment; so therefore, I've got to be one of the guys. If I want to be treated as a woman I'd stay home... I don't take offence at anything... So I've never had a problem.

It is a strategy that worked for many women but it was not without its dangers. One of the women we interviewed would seek to 'humiliate' those who crossed her, but she had one of the most difficult times of any of the women to whom we spoke. As Eloise explained:

You can be one of the boys, but in being one of the boys, sometimes the boys can take it a bit too far. So, if you're going to be one of the boys, make sure you know your limits. Be prepared. If you're going to be one of the boys, dish out certain things, be prepared, too, for them to dish it back to you...You got to have that respect. They have to respect you, as a woman. But, respect you for the work that you do. And what you can do...If you're good at what you do, they'll have more respect for you.

### **Adaptation and struggle by the union**

No blue collar union with a history of a heavily skewed male membership finds it easy to accommodate and respond to the wishes and interests of women. There is evidence from around the world of how difficult it is for women to break into traditional male occupations, and for men to adapt to them; likewise, for any visible minority group (eg Kanter 1977). The history of exploitation of female labour in nineteenth century underground mines solidified traditional attitudes about women's place. That said, women have had a longstanding historical role in the coalminers' union, in particular via the women's auxiliaries and miners support groups in the local communities. Through these, women were actively supportive of union campaigns, including in disputes such as the Collinsville stay-down strike of 1952, the housing tax strike of 1980 and the BHP dispute in 2001 (Bailey 1983, Murray & Peetz 2008, Thomas 1986, Thomas & Mallory 2007). The union had long recognised women as essential allies and so was less likely to dismiss women's interests.

The union took a number of proactive steps. It voted for the end of the bar on female employment in the mines. When one of the pioneer women had a baby, the union successfully pressured the company to allow her to take maternity leave and return. In 1996, the miners union held its first 'women in mining training course' in Emerald, 'which was fantastic' according to Maxine. Attended by 21 of the 32 women members in coal at the time (plus three from Mt Isa), it sought 'to inform women of their legal rights and how the union operates and assists its members' and 'for the union to find out the problems facing women members' (Vickers 1996). Hannah 'didn't know there were so many lady miners, from all over the place. It was good to see there were so many.' She saw it as alerting the district office of the union to issues that needed urgent attention in particular lodges, while Robyn saw it as identifying 'what road they could go down and who they could contact for assistance in getting things'. Another course followed in Mackay by which time, said Robyn, a number of the 'problems had finally been resolved'. The union also ran cases on behalf of women members, such as on behalf of Eloise, mentioned above.

### **Conclusions**

When women enter what was once an exclusively male employment domain, a complex and iterative process of adaptation and struggle ensues and it involves all parties. To date, women have adapted more than other parties – they have adapted to the industry more than the industry has adapted to them – but each has been forced to adapt in various ways. There have been no passive players in this process. The needs for companies to abide by the law, or male employees to establish and maintain a workplace environment that is a reasonable place to inhabit, and for unions and their male and female members to create solidarities and deliver mutual support all ensure that much changes when women enter the industry. The behaviour of each party has shaped how others have responded and behaved and influenced outcomes for women. The experiences of women are influenced not only by the strategies that they employ but also by the decisions of others. These adaptations have led to varied outcomes for women over time and across places. As Wendy said:

Yeah, there was some hard times in there. And hard to keep your chin up because, "oh

I don't wanna go there", "yes, you do!" It's because you love doing it. "Don't let em win. Out you go. Keep your head high. You can do this!" And I did.

We heard stories of harassment and remarkable stories of persistence and bravery in the face of major obstacles. Women's adaptations and struggles have centred around five challenges. First, they have had to deal with issues of production – they must demonstrate themselves to be highly capable, reliable workers, often under a microscope of greater scrutiny than their male counterparts. Second, they have had to deal with the domestic sphere, often managing significant domestic responsibilities while working full-time. Third, they have had to deal with issues arising from social constructions of their gender and sexuality – sometimes defending them-selves against harassment, overcoming old prejudices about the role of women from supervisors and workers, and confronting the sexual insecurity of fellow women outside the mines. Fourth, they have had to deal with issues arising from their conditions of work: achieving job security (as they are in particularly vulnerable positions, in the most easily discarded forms of employment), obtaining training, developing career paths, and standing up for their rights as workers. Fifth, in order to successfully stand up for those rights, they need to manage public identities so that their gender is not seen as excluding them from the class and occupational identities of their male co-workers. In doing so, they need to develop networks of support, from each other, from male co-workers, and from the union. None of that is easy, as there are many barriers along the way facing women. But for all the hardships, the women love the work and the rewards it brings. As women's employment increases, adaptations become more favourable, and women begin to approach the numbers that enable them to more effectively force adaptations onto others and go beyond the point of being a 'token' group (Kanter 1977). One day, perhaps, we might move towards a situation where women do not have to become 'one of the boys' to survive.

## References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, unpublished data. Canberra 6306.0.
- Bailey, Dennis J. *Holes in the Ground: Queensland Coalminers in Struggle 1840-1980*. Brisbane: Dennis J Bailey, 1983.
- Boorman, Peter , and Lynne Mayers. 'Women and Mines Worldwide Gallery.' 2006, <http://www.balmaiden.co.uk/WomenWorldwideGallery.htm>.
- Department of Mines and Energy. *Queensland Mines and Quarries: Safety Performance and Health Report, 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008*. Brisbane: Queensland Government, 2008.
- Eveline, Joan, and Michael Booth. 'Gender and Sexuality in Discourses of Managerial Control: the case of women miners.' *Gender, work and organisation* 9, no. 5, 2002.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women.' *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 5, 1977.
- Martineau, Harriet. History of England. The Peel Web, edited by Majorie Bloy 1849, <http://www.historyhome.co.uk/readings/martinea.htm>.
- Murray, Georgina , and David Peetz. "'You have us riled up!": Women's role in a 2001 miners' strike.' Paper presented at the Workers, Corporations and Community: Facing Choices for a Sustainable Future, 22rd conference of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand: Volume 2: Non-refereed papers and abstracts, , Melbourne, 6-8 February 2008.
- Queensland Resources Council. Unpublished survey of QRC members Queensland operations. Brisbane: QRC 2008.
- Smith, J. 'Crafting Kinship at home and at work: Women Miners in Wyoming.' *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labor and Society* 11, 2008: 439-58.
- Thomas, Pete. *The Coalminers of Queensland*. Ipswich: Queensland Colliery Employees Union, 1986.
- Thomas, Pete, and Greg Mallory. *The Coalminers of Queensland - Volume 2: The Pete Thomas Essays*. Brisbane: CFMEU, 2007.
- Thompson, H. 'Class and gender in the Pilbara.' *Arena* 68, 1984: 124-40.
- Vickers, Andrew. 'Women mineworkers gain new confidence in our union.' *Common Cause*, 1996.
- Youngblood, Stuart A., Angelo S. DeNisi, Julie L. Molleston, and William H. Mobley. 'The impact of work environment, instrumentality beliefs, perceived labor union image, and subjective norms on union voting intentions.' *Academy of Management Journal* 27, no. 3, 1984: 576-90.