"What you do is who you are":

Gender Identity in the Resources Industry

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the meaning of gender and gender identity among people in the resources (oil, gas and mining) industry. Global economic and political trends have contributed towards new labour relations in this industry. I consider how fluctuating commodity prices, increased expectations of flexibility and mobility combined with lack of long-term job security impacts on gender roles and relations among employees and their families. I carried out ethnographic research among the members of three different groups, trying to establish their relationship to work, home and family. The main focus group of this study is commuter families, but I also worked with expatriates and mining town residents.

I found that the dominant gender ideology among people in the resources industry resemble models of the nuclear family constructed by sex role theorists (Parsons and Bales 1956) in the 1950s. Women, regardless of whether they are employed in paid work or not, take main responsibility for domestic tasks relating to the household as well as nurturing and caring of family members. They are perceived, and perceive themselves, to a large degree, as better suited to perform these tasks. Men, on the other hand, are seen as having 'instrumental' qualities which make them better equipped to perform work outside home. They generally draw on their work status and breadwinner role to inform their sense of self, while women strongly identify with their roles as a wife and mother.

The sexual division of labour in the resources industry is rooted in beliefs about 'natural' biological differences between women and men that prescribe each sex feminine or masculine roles that influence how people in the resources industry think about themselves and others. This case study reveals that people are not, as assumed by many postmodernist theorists, free agents in the construction of their own identity. By utilising practice theory this thesis offers some insight into how women and men's gender identities and actions are influenced by, and simultaneously help reinforce and transform social expectations, norms and practices in the wider social and political structures of which they are part.

The ideology which connects men to the labour market and women to domestic activities has long justified and reproduced an unequal power relationship. I found that

men's contributions to the household, which were often seen as being their 'gifts' to marriage, were generally regarded as more valuable than women's contributions. Women had a lesser sense of entitlement and were grateful for any 'help' towards household tasks which they perceived as being their responsibility and 'duty'. This higher valuation of men's work combined with their overwhelming control of finances creates a power imbalance among married couples in this study. In order to shed light on the persistent inequality between women and men I examine the historical processes which led to the division of the private and public sphere and situate my own research within debates in the social sciences surrounding the sexual division of labour, gender identity and power.

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Numerous people and institutions readily offered their assistance both in Western Australia and Norway, and it is unfortunately not possible to mention them all here. First of all I would like to thank the many people who agreed to be interviewed for the purpose of this research. For reasons of confidentiality, I cannot name any individuals, but I am deeply thankful to all those who contributed and provided hours of interesting discussions. Throughout the thesis real names have been changed.[1]

I give thanks to my principal supervisor Associate Professor Victoria Burbank and my two secondary supervisors Dr. Beverley McNamara and Associate Professor Loretta Baldassar. I am grateful to them all for sharing their knowledge, providing stimulating discussions as well as being patient with me. I would like to give special thanks to Victoria who supported me, both academically and emotionally, through the completion of this project. Her enthusiasm and guidance was a source of inspiration. I also wish to thank Professor David Trigger who provided input and advice along the way. I owe Dr. Cheryl Lange a big thank you for playing a central role in assisting with reading chapters and providing valuable feedback and comments. I appreciate the assistance of fellow student Linda Low in identifying people for interviews. Finally I would like to thank fellow postgraduate students, in particular my friends and colleagues Martin Forsey, Raelene Wilding and Jemma Pope with whom I have shared many hours of inspiring and challenging discussions.

Finally, I would like to thank my family (Inger, Arne, Svein Gudmund, Randi and Kristine) in Norway and my friends here in Australia who have supported and

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[1] I have changed the names of all those whom I interviewed for the purpose of my research. I have also changed the names of two minesites that feature in the thesis (to the pseudonyms of Goldmine and Mt Nickel) and the names of four mining companies (to the fictitious names of Red Rocks, Big Rocks, Giant Rocks and Mega Rocks).

encouraged me along the way. Most of all I would like to thank my wonderful husband and best friend Thrym Kristoffersen, for his unwavering support and for doing the lion's share of domestic work in periods of intense research and writing. His encouragement and belief in me when at times I was ready to throw in the whole project made it possible to see the completion of this thesis.

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1 INTRODUCTION

She worked until the children came, he wanted her at home

And indeed she felt they needed to be near her

And if at times she has felt as though she lost herself somewhere

The knowledge that they loved her best would mostly cheer her

She worked in school canteens and barracked football at weekends

She remembered being told that kids would suit her

And willingly she raised them, their friend's mothers were her friends

And quietly she made plans for her future.

From 'Planning for the Future' by Judy Small (1986)

1.1 Central Themes of the Thesis

In this thesis I am seeking to explore the centrality of gender in the lives of people who are involved in the mining, oil and gas industry, mainly in Western Australia. It is my belief that particular structures of the resources industry highlight and emphasise differences between men and women, and that gender identity in this industry correlates closely to a limited biological understanding of what it means to be male or female. The question for me is not whether there are any biological differences that can be attributed to gender in the way that women and men in the resources industry feel, think or act, but instead *how* this understanding of gender comes to influence their lives.

In this introduction I present a summary of the central topics of this thesis. I describe how I collected data among the three groups of informants, and discuss some of the challenges I faced in the process of doing so. I consider some of the historical developments which led to the separation of the domestic and public sphere, and examine how this separation has influenced ideas about what it means to be a woman or a man in Western societies. I provide a summary of some of the recent changes in work conditions that employees in the resources industry have had to contend with in the past few years, including flexible work arrangements, increased expectations of mobility and

less job security. Finally I situate my work within practice theory as described by Bourdieu (1977), Giddens (1979, 1984, 1991) and Ortner (1984, 1989).

Social scientists often disregard biological models of explanation as many perceive them as being too closely associated with biological essentialism (Ashmore 1990, Strang 1998). Though theorists vary in the weight they attribute to the possibilities for variation and changes in gender identity, most define gender in terms of dichotomous difference. Some view differences between men and women as innate and 'natural' facts of biology (Durkheim 1933, Malinowski 1922, Murdock 1949), while others see this difference as a result of gendered socialisation by which men and women's roles are learned and constructed (Connell 1987, 1995, Hochschild 1989, 1997). Another group perceive this difference as a byproduct of the degree of difference men and women experience in their access to material and social resources (Engels 1990, Benston 1969, Eisenstein 1979, Holmstrom 2002), and others view gender and difference as a social construction, a performance and an accomplishment of the individual (Garfinkel 1967, Goffman 1959, 1977, Kessler and McKenna 1978, West and Zimmerman 1987, 1991). The similarities between these approaches is that they all start with the premise that men and women are different and hence take for granted the dualism of sex and gender.

Rather than situating sex differences in terms of the interminable nature-nurture divide, I prefer to explore issues of difference in gender identity by accepting the dichotomies that people in the resources industry operate with for the purpose of my analysis. As such, the premise of this thesis is to acknowledge the experiential relevance of dichotomous gender differences, regardless of their epistemological status.

My focus on the emic world of the people in the resources industry stands in contrast to a post-structuralist/post-modern approach to gender identity. Post-structuralist/post-modern feminist theorists have in the last twenty years actively sought to deconstruct, destabilise and abolish the very dichotomy of male/female (as well as other dichotomies). Theorists such as Butler (1990a, 1990b), Irigaray (1996) and Kristeva (1980) contend that dynamics of power and domination cannot be attributed to a distinction between male and female, but to a multiplicity of forces that influence people's lives. I too recognize that power differentials exist not only in the interactions

between women and men, but in multiple fields of social dominance. Along with most other social scientists I acknowledge that class, race, religion and ethnicity are but a few of the markers of identity that impact on a person's access to power and resources. However, I still think it is useful in understanding the lives of people in the resources industry to hold on to concepts such as 'woman' and 'man', though the meaning of these concepts may vary according to social, cultural and historical circumstances.

When seeking to understand how people in the resources industry think, feel and act I found that gender plays a significant role in how they structure their lives. The focus of post-structuralists/post-modernists is that the complexities of everyday life bring about possibilities for individual's agency, but in my view their lack of contexualisation within a larger framework makes for a limited understanding of people's lives. In order to analyse the meaning of the perceived and received sexual differences between men and women in the resources industry it is paramount to look at the larger structural forces at play. By utilising practice approaches, particularly as outlined by Ortner (1984, 1989), I aim to analyse the relationship between practice and structure in order to better understand how gender identity is formed and maintained among people in the resources industry. Only by situating people's actions within an analysis of the global and historical trends in the resources industry is it possible to understand what gender means to these people.[2] The mobile and flexible work conditions of this industry influence differently women and men's identities and has consequences for people in their everyday life. Being a man or a woman in the resources industry has an effect on life chances in terms of available roles and hence access to power, occupation, status, and material rewards.

The increased demand for flexible working arrangements in the resources industry exaggerates and reinforces differences in gendered identity that resemble the differences between men and women routinely constructed by sex role theorists (such as Parsons) in the 1950s. The 1950s can be described as a period in which 'mass media, popular culture, and norms… encouraged an exaggerated traditional femaleness, sexual and domestic' (Breines 1986:76). These trends, according to Breines, led to a glorification of women's role as wives and mothers.

Social scientists were partly responsible for 'shap[ing] the terms of discourse' (Breines 1986:70) in which gender differences were seen as being natural features of women and men. Two of the most influential theorists in the 1950s were Parsons and Bales (1956) who saw women and men's roles in light of their 'expressive' (emotional and nurturing) and 'instrumental' (rational and cognitive) functions for society. Sex role theorists have since been criticised for constructing models of society that displayed 'static and ahistorical tendencies' (Ferree 1990:867), and for failing to recognise the power differentials at play between married couples (Goodwin 1999:42). Lending my support to this critique, I simultaneously propose that the model of the nuclear family posited by Parsons and Bales, in which the sexual division of labour is conceptualised as 'natural' and 'correct', still exists as a powerful ideology, if not always a lived reality, among many people involved in the resources industry.

Stereotypes that posit men as breadwinners and women as nurturers have changed little over the past fifty years amongst the majority of people I came across in my fieldwork. Rather than trying to prove or disprove the origins of the stereotypes and difference, my thesis is concerned with the *meaning* and consequences that these powerful categories have for people. Despite the fact that participants in my study came from a variety of economic, social and national backgrounds, the vast majority shared similar views and ideals of woman and manhood. The overarching gender ideology central to these people's lives is a 'traditional'[3] one which sees men drawing to a large degree on their work status to inform their sense of self while women strongly identify with their roles as wives and mothers. The ideology that connects men to the labour market and women to home has long justified and reproduced an unequal power relationship between men and women. While not all women and men involved in this study view the traditional division of labour as 'natural' and 'correct', few questioned the gendered arrangements that were based on this premise.

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[2] I will not endeavour to fully examine the macro economic processes of the resources industry. In this thesis I am more interested in analysing the *impact* of events and processes, rather than analysing how these events and processes came about.

[3] By traditional I refer to ideologies by which women identify with those of their activities that centre around their home and family. Conversely, men who hold traditional beliefs about gender roles generally see their main task in relation to their family as that of the main provider and their identity is also tied strongly to their work.

1.2 Methodology

Marcus's reference to the 'disjointed spaces' in which the anthropologist often finds him or herself 'with all sorts of cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments' (1995:113) resonates with me. A combination of my own political positioning as a feminist and socialist coupled with an anthropological training that favors the 'subaltern point of view' (Marcus 1995:114) led me to question my loyalties during fieldwork. Marcus and Fischer (1986) suggest that anthropologists have tended to take a critical stance when doing fieldwork at home, while there has been an emphasis on being descriptive when doing fieldwork abroad (Marcus and Fischer 1986:4). In seeking knowledge about their own society, anthropologists have, according to Marcus and Fischer, held a 'hidden agenda of critique of their own culture, namely the bourgeois, middle-class life of mass liberal societies, which industrial capitalism has produced' (1986:114). Only in retrospect am I able to admit that during the early stages of my fieldwork I positioned myself by 'taking sides' with those who were less powerful, simultaneously taking a negative stance towards those whom I regarded as more privileged.

I mention this as an example of my hesitation in 'studying up' (Nader 1974). Forsey (2000) suggests that anthropology's uneasy relationship to those in positions of power might be related to 'particular biases against [the] so-called middle-class, bourgeois lifestyle' (Forsey 2000:208) and that anthropologists' unwillingness to 'study up' 'possibly lies in [their] not wanting to be seen to legitimise [that] way of life' (Forsey 2000:208). I initially wanted to give preference to the lives and experiences of working class people. However, I realised that I would not learn much about the lives of these people if I were not able to understand the lives of those more privileged. I needed to get over my predisposition to favour the 'underdog' in order to fully understand the lives of women and men in the resources industry. Further pressure was put on me by some of my anthropology colleagues who suggested I change the focus of my research to include Indigenous people, the traditional owners of the land from which mining companies explore and extract minerals in Australia. They perceived Indigenous people as being the 'real victims' and as such they were deemed to be more appropriate subjects of research than women and men employed by the resources industry's multinational corporations.

Several factors influenced my decision to work with people involved in the resources industry. I grew up in Stavanger in Norway where the oil and gas industry plays a significant role in terms of the economy, politics and employment. Knowing people who were involved in long distance commuting[4] to the North Sea and expatriate[5] families who moved around the world at regular intervals made me curious about their particular lifestyle. My personal association with the oil and gas industry by the way of being married to a man who works for an oil and gas company was also influential in my choice of topic. The deciding factor though, was related to my discovery of numerous Norwegian studies concerned with the topic of commuting.[6] These studies analysed the impact of commuting in light of the relationship between work and home, the sexual division of labour and other topics related to marriage, housework and gender identity. Their focus on gender relations awakened my interest in the relationship between work and family in the fly-in/fly-out context.

Perth, similar to my Norwegian hometown, is also a major centre of activity for the resources industry. Almost 29,000 people are employed in the mining industry in Western Australia (ABS 2001).[7] Despite this high involvement I was only able to locate one Western Australian study that made references to the social impact that long distance commuting has on families (see Pollard 1990). The majority of research related to the resources industry in Australia is technically or economically oriented and excludes considerations of the social impact, let alone gender which provides the focus of my research.[8]

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[4] Long distance commuting is described by Hobart (1979) as being 'all employment in which the work is so isolated from the workers' home that food and lodging accommodation are provided for them at the work site, and schedules are established whereby employees spend a fixed number of days working at the site, followed by a fixed number of days at home' (Hobart 1979, quoted in Shrimpton, Storey and Husberg 1998:7).

[5] In this thesis I define expatriate (or 'expat' as expatriates often refer to themselves) as 'a person living semi-permanently out of his or her home country' (Shell Ladies' Project 1993:184). From this definition it is clear that an expatriate lives abroad only for a limited time period and that they in theory will return to their home country.

[6] See for example Leira 1978, Sørhaug and Aamot 1980, Karlsen 1981, Heen and Solheim 1982, Holter 1982, Oljedirektoratet 1982, Solberg 1983, 1985a and 1985b, Borchgrevink and Melhuus 1985, Solheim, Heen and Holter 1986a and 1986b, Heen 1988, Solheim 1988, Haukelid 1989.

[7] See Chapter 3 for a more thorough discussion on employment statistics in Western Australia. Interesting to note here is the fact that the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not publish any statistics from which one can work out how many people are employed in positions that require them to 'fly-in/fly-out' to their work place.

[8] I did come across some studies that made references to the 'problems' often experienced by residents in remote mining towns, such as a transient population, the limited access to educational, medical and

In seeking to find out more about how people in the resources industry construct, represent and define their gender identity, I carried out research among three different groups. The members of these groups are linked to the resources industry in various ways, either directly, as a current or past employee, or indirectly as the partner of an employee. I refer to people in these groups as commuters, expatriates and mining town families.

The group of commuters is made up of employees and their family members who work, or once worked for, oil and gas or mining companies as long distance commuters. The majority of long distance commuters in my study reside in Perth. Most work at oil platforms or mine sites in Western Australia, although a small number work on offshore or onshore oilfields in the Middle East, Africa and Northern Europe. People in the industry also refer to long distance commuting as 'fly-in/fly-out'.

I acquired information from the long distance commuters and their families by conducting interviews with 45 people in Perth,[9] interviewing about 20 people during a visit to a fly-in/fly-out minesite (Mt Nickel), and visiting several other minesites. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between one and six hours, and most were recorded on tape. A list of the different interview schedules can be found in Appendix 2.

The interviews generally took place in people's homes, though a few were carried out in offices or cafés. On most occasions interviews were conducted one-on-one, though a few took place with two or more people present. In some cases couples preferred being interviewed together, and sometimes I interviewed two or more women at the same time. On the occasions that I met up with two partners, I typically interviewed each of the informants separately at a later stage. I conducted 11 repeat interviews with six female informants and I kept in touch with those whom I had interviewed via telephone

retailing services and the reliance on a single company for the bulk of employment (see for example Jackson 1987, Newton and Robinson 1987, 1988, Storey and Shrimpton 1989a, 1989b, Department of State Development 1991, 1992, Houghton 1993 and Haeren 1996).

[9] See the table in Appendix 3 for more details regarding the sample of long distance commuters and their partners who were interviewed in Perth.

and e-mail for a period of time following the interview, and in some cases also met them again socially.

The expatriate group consists of the members and their partners of a club named the 'Petroleum Women of Perth'. This is a club that caters mainly for expatriate women who are married to men employed in the oil and gas industry in Perth. My knowledge and understanding of the lives of members of Petroleum Wives of Perth has been informed by participant observation at club activities and functions over a period of three years. I also conducted in-depth interviews with four women, two of whom are also categorised as being part of the group of long distance commuters. During the period of my research I participated in numerous lunches and other social events such as excursions, craft making sessions, cooking classes and wine and cheese nights at members' homes. My extended relationship to Petroleum Wives of Perth and its members over a period of three years provided me with valuable insights into how gender is constructed among members of this group.

The last group I conducted research amongst were employees, and their partners, of an international mining company who resided in three mining towns in the North West of Western Australia. This fieldwork component was intensive. I often had interviews scheduled from eight in the morning until ten in the evening. In three weeks I interviewed about 100 residents of three towns. These interviews were similar in structure to those conducted with long distance commuters, but there were generally more people present at each interview and they were normally shorter in duration. Most lasted two hours. In comparison to the interviews I conducted with commuters, interviews in mining towns generally had an air of ease and informality. I often started out by talking to one or two people, and frequently ended up with groups of up to four or five people answering questions. This usually happened when unexpected visitors arrived at the house of the people whom I had originally set out to interview. In addition to doing interviews, I also participated in a number of local events and some workshops where I interacted with local residents on a more informal level.

I believe that my sample of long distance commuters can be regarded as representative of the industry in so far as it includes commuters and partners from a variety of backgrounds. I interviewed families with young children and families with older

children, as well as couples without children. The sample also includes single commuters, and both male and female commuters. There are commuters who have worked in the resources industry for a long period of time, as well as people with a relatively short history in the industry. Finally this sample consist of people who are employed in a variety of positions at the mine, ranging from manual workers to management.

My sample of mining town residents also represents a cross-section of the population of these communities. I interviewed people who had lived in the towns for a long period (some more than 20 years) as well as people who had lived there a short period. In addition I interviewed single people, married couples, de-facto couples, families with children of various ages and a small group of retired people. While the majority of interviewees were white Australians, the overall sample included people from different national and ethnic backgrounds who held a variety of trade qualifications and educational levels. Some of the people interviewed were representatives of a particular community service or group (e.g. the police, schools, business, sports clubs), but most of them only represented themselves. Most of the interviews were recorded on tape.

In contrast, women in the Petroleum Wives of Perth whose husbands are employed in middle to upper management roles are representative of the wealthier and more powerful segments of the oil and gas industry. Most of the women are middle-aged, although there are some younger members who have young children. The larger body of oil and gas expatriates generally includes many single people and couples with younger families. A benefit of studying the Petroleum Wives of Perth was the fact that the club provides a common meeting place for its members. In contrast, the general expatriate population of the oil and gas industry is geographically spread all over Perth, and consists of people working for a variety of companies. The members of Petroleum Wives of Perth live in the more affluent suburbs but these are spread throughout Perth so it would have been difficult to locate these women if they had not been members of the club.

At the outset of my fieldwork with members of the Petroleum Wives of Perth I was keen to promote my identity as a feminist and researcher rather than my role as the wife of a man working in the oil industry. As I moved between conflicting positions I

learned to question my own prejudices and biases as I came to achieve the much sought-after status of 'insider'. I found that if I was not to alienate other members, I had to stop emphasising my status as a student. With time I learned to focus my conversations on the identities I shared with other members, mainly that of a wife of a man involved in the oil and gas industry and sometimes my identity as a foreigner. In fact, had it not been for my husband's employment in this industry I would most possibly not have been able to conduct fieldwork with this group of women. However, my new-found awareness and position did not preclude feelings of awkwardness and alienation.

My plan was to carry out research that concentrated on gender relations, similar to the Norwegian studies, focusing on the particular circumstances of the resources industry in Western Australia. I had envisaged that my fieldwork, carried out almost twenty years after the Norwegian research, would identify new relationships between women and men, specifically that I would find more equality in the division of labour than the Norwegian researchers had found. Some of these Norwegian studies (see Solberg 1983, 1985a, 1985b and Heen and Solheim 1982) pointed to emerging signs of increased participation by male commuters in tasks that were traditionally considered to belong to the female domain. The Norwegian researchers believed that this increase was related to men's presence in the household during daytime when they have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with work that is usually performed by women. I consequently set out to do fieldwork anticipating I would find families and couples who had an 'alternative' approach to the division of labour. Instead I discovered that most of the families I studied had a very 'traditional' division of labour.

The division of labour that I found to exist between couples in the resources industry is in no way limited to this particular industry. The presence of concepts such as 'breadwinner' and 'caregiver' are relatively new, but the gendered division of labour that sees women as being associated with doing work at home, and men outside it, has a long history in Western societies. A hierarchy that places men as head of the household with more power than women has always been present, but it is my view that fundamental power differentials exist in the relationship between women and men in the resources industry. It is my argument that the imbalance in access to power is exacerbated by the flexible working conditions of the industry. Before pursuing this

argument further, I would like to situate my own work within the debates surrounding gender, gender identity and power in anthropology and sociology over the past 50 years.

1.3 Women as Homemakers and Men as Breadwinners

The association between women and domestic duties and men and paid employment is characteristic of the capitalistic structure of Western societies. The industrial revolution brought about a separation of the place of residence from the place of work in which there was a 'segregation of domestic labour from industrial labour' (Morris 1990:3). As conceptualized by Scott (1993) the gendered division of labour did not come about as a result of the industrial revolution, but rather, 'it helped shape those conditions, giving relations of production their gendered form, women workers their secondary status, and home and work, reproduction and production, their oppositional meaning' (Scott 1993:426).

Moore (1988) suggests that the separation of the domestic sphere from the public sphere saw women and men being accorded different 'rights': 'the identification of these different 'rights' further constructed a specific cultural understanding of what women and men were meant to be, both within the home and outside it. This construction formed the basis for ideas about motherhood, fatherhood, the family and the home' (Moore 1988:22).

Women and men involved in my study were allocated different rights based on their contributions to the household. As I see it the allocation of separate rights is related to their understanding of the differences between women and men as corresponding to inherent biological differences. By viewing 'social arrangements based on sex category… as normal and natural… [one is] legitimat[ising] ways of organizing social life' (West and Zimmerman 1991:32). I found that men's work is generally regarded as being more stressful and difficult. This combined with the fact that men's employment usually brings in more money to the household results in a higher valuation of men's contribution to the household. The different value placed on women and men's work, combined with a view of women and men as being more or less suited for certain types of work, may help explain the persistence of an inequitable sexual division of labour among those involved in the resources industry. As Williams (2000) points out 'the

close linkage of masculinity with breadwinning has proved remarkably resilient despite the shift of women into the labour force' (2000:26-27).

In order to understand how women came to be associated with domestic work, and men with wage labour, it is useful to analyse the historical processes that led to this division. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, we find that dominant ideas about biological differences posited women as unsuited to work in the public sphere. Their smaller physique was regarded as better suited to carrying out domestic activities (Moore 1988). Women at this time had few political rights (for example, they could not vote) and consequently were not regarded as full citizens of their respective 'Western' nations. Instead women's identity, particularly in middle- and upper class families, became increasingly associated with their roles as wives, mothers and homemakers (Saunders and Evans 1992:160).[10]

Giddens (1986) reminds us that the link between women and domesticity was first generated in the higher classes, and the notion that women belong in the home was filtered down to other classes. He writes that this idea had different implications for women according to their class status. Women in higher classes had servants and maids to assist them, while working class women often had to cope with both employment in the industrial sector as well as performing the majority of household tasks (Giddens 1986:121-122). Though some women were engaged in paid labour in the late 18th and early 19th century, men were increasingly accorded the role of the breadwinner, mainly because of their earning potential.[11] As a result of this most women became financially dependent upon their fathers or husbands. This dependence resulted in a power relationship in which women had less influence and fewer rights than men did.

However, numerous women were engaged in paid labour both prior to and during the period of industrialisation. Berg (1993) writes that many women were employed in

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[10] Saunders and Evans suggest that working class families, 'strongly influenced by hegemonic pressures to conform' sought to adopt similar ideals in order to be regarded as respectable families (1992:160).

[11] One of the reasons why women got paid less than men was that their work was less valued, even if they performed the same work as men. Scott (1993) writes that women's low wages were justified by reference to the biological differences between women and men. Women were supposed to perform '"women's work" that 'somehow suited their physical capabilities and their innate levels of productivity. This discourse produced sexual divisions in the labour market, clustering women in some jobs and not

workshops and factories as well as in 'putting out' work (whereby women did tasks such as knitting, lacemaking or laundry from their home). In addition there were numerous women who worked as domestic servants. In seeking to redress one of the common misconceptions about women and work at the time of the industrial revolution, Berg writes that the 'standard image of women working within the context of the family economy is a great distortion for the eighteenth century. Substantial numbers of single women, either spinsters or widows, needed to gain an independent subsistence, but in many cases, wages were pitifully inadequate or highly precarious' (Berg 1993:37).

Marx (1990) and Engels (1990) were among the first social scientists to identify a connection between the capitalist mode of production, the sexual division of labour and the devaluation of domestic work.[12] Engels' (1990) analysis of the connection between women and domestic work is still relevant to modern day society. Although women's emancipation has advanced greatly in the last century, women are still expected, and to a large degree expect of themselves, to take responsibility for the social and emotional tasks related to the household and family, even when they are employed in full-time paid work (Baxter 1998, 2000).

The majority of married women who participated in my study identified closely with their caring and nurturing abilities and their roles as a wife and mother. Looking at women's participation in the labour force, Hochschild (1989) found that the rate of married women with children who were employed (full-time) in the labour force has steadily risen since the 1950s. In contrast, the majority of married women that I interviewed were either employed in part-time work or not engaged in paid work at all. There are a number of reasons as to why these women have withdrawn or limited their participation in the sphere of paid work. However, I found that an important factor contributing to their decision not to take on full-time work was the presence of powerful ideas and norms regarding what it means to be a wife and mother in the resources industry. Some of the women employed at commuting minesites told me that they were often questioned, mainly by male colleagues, but also by other women in their community, about the legitimacy of their working role (i.e. 'what does your husband

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others, placing them always at the bottom of any occupational hierarchy, and establishing their wages at less than subsistence rates' (Scott 1993:409).

[12] See Chapter 2 for a more thorough discussion of Marx and Engels theory concerning the origins of women's subordination.

think about you working away'?). In contrast no male commuter ever reported being asked by colleagues about their wife's opinion on their work.

Men's role as the breadwinner in the public and 'productive' sphere enables him payment in wages, while women are not compensated financially for the 'reproductive' work that they perform. Borchgrevink and Melhuus (1985) argue that the results of housework, as opposed to paid work, cannot be measured in economic terms. Rather they are measured in terms of the well being, happiness and success of the family. Women's contribution to the physical and emotional well being of their family members is, in contrast to paid work, not possible to plan in advance. This means that women always have to be accessible to serve the needs of other members of the household.

The gendering of housework cannot, according to Melhuus and Borchgrevink (1984) be attributed to the relationship that is formed when the husband brings home a salary: 'Married women do not only perform housework as a form of repayment for men's paid work. If that had been the case, housework would have been equally divided between the spouses the minute the wife took up paid work outside the home' (Melhuus and Borchgrevink 1984:335, my translation from Norwegian). One possible explanation for why men do not contribute equally to tasks around the house is that women who are engaged in paid work 'intensify their contribution towards housework in order to maintain their gender identity' (Melhuus and Borchgrevink 1984:335, my translation from Norwegian). The close association between women's identity and housework might also explain why so many women, as Solheim points out, are hesitant to 'extend to their spouses a joint responsibility for domestic duties' (Solheim 1995:54). She suggests that a woman's contribution to housework can be seen as her gift to her husband: 'the structure of this gift exchange seems to place the husband as the legitimate receiver of particular products and services of his wife, *without* reciprocity in kind' (1995:54, original emphasis). Women who do not perform these domestic 'duties' are seen to be expressing a 'lack of love and care' (Borchgrevink 1995:133). Though many couples in modern day society adhere to notions of domestic equality, the reality is that 'whatever the ideals, reproductive work is still mainly women's work' (1995:134).

In her analysis of seafarer and offshore worker families[13] in Norway, Solheim advances the connection between femininity and domesticity to include concepts such as female purity and sexuality, cleanliness and order. The husbands, inhabiting an 'outside' world full of dirt and dangers are welcomed by their women into the 'safe, warm and redeeming shelter of the home' (Solheim 1995:64). Only in this space, 'the sheltering womb' of the woman, can men seek shelter from the outside world (1995:63). The strong connection between a woman and house is, in Solheim's view, associated with her continuous presence. Both the house and wife can be viewed 'as a bodily frame and space that exists for *the husband* to enter and be taken into, to fill up and leave and come back to again' (1995:62, original emphasis).

Commuter wives become the link between their husbands and the household. And herein lies one of the paradoxes that commuting families often experience. Solheim articulates the dilemma of women who in their husband's absence have to manage the household independently while creating an '"open" space of activities, work tasks and functions' (1995:50) upon their return. Though 'the very proof of his *belonging* or indispensability within the family – in some fundamental way is belied by her coping with everything alone in his absence' (1995:50). At times wives have to make a special effort to ensure that their husband does not become 'superfluous' to the daily life of their family. Some of the women I interviewed said they purposely set aside certain tasks (that they could often easily perform themselves) for their husband to do upon his return. The relationship between men and home will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

In most of the interviews I conducted with the women in my study, themes relating to their personal life, such as their family, home and housework kept resurfacing throughout the interview. In interviews with men I would ask questions relating to the same topics, but on most occasions these subjects did not entail lengthy discussions. Men generally offered more information about the technical aspects of their job and details about their workplace. With one exception, women who were employed in the resources industry did not provide the same amount of information about their work environment.

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[13] The commuter families in my study are similar to the families involved in Solheim's research as they all experience prolonged periods of (usually) male absence in the household.

In a study of young mothers in the suburbs of Bergen (Norway), Gullestad (1984) found that a woman's identity as a good housewife and her own evaluation of self was tied up with cleanliness and tidiness in the house. Cleanliness was also an important tool by which to measure other women's worth (Gullestad 1984:104-105). The majority of women involved in my study maintained the main responsibility for managing home and children, even when they were engaged in paid work. Men generally saw their most important role as being the 'breadwinner', thus maintaining the conventional division of labour in which men have come to be associated with the 'outside world' and home has become a 'female universe' (term borrowed from Gullestad 1992:71). The association between men's identity and paid employment and women's identity and domestic activities will be discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

1.4 Flexible Work Conditions

In order to explore notions of gender identity as they relate to the domains of work, home and family, I believe it is necessary to analyse the economic and political structures that influence the contemporary life of people within the resources industry.

Capitalism, an economic system characterised by private ownership of the means of production and the accumulation of capital plays a significant role in the lives of people in the resources industry. There are a number of small independent companies operating in this industry, but the resources industry is dominated by a few large multi/transnational companies. These companies operate in a global market characterised by fluctuating commodity prices which impact on the availability of employment and result in unpredictable work conditions for employees.

Increased speed in the variation of commodity prices coupled with changes in industrial relations has resulted in demands for a more flexible labour force, including the expectation of increased mobility. One example of increased mobility is seen in the use of transporting employees to work on minesites and oilfields thousands of kilometres away from their homes and families. Expatriates are also expected to be mobile and generally move at frequent intervals across the world to places of work where their skills are required. The change in most mining operations in recent years from 8 to 12 hour shifts is indicative of this new work arrangement. The increased use of fly-in/fly-

out in which employees travel to generally remote regions and stay away from their home base for up to several weeks at a time is another example of a relatively new work arrangement. Changing work patterns and increased mobility are not limited to the resources industry. These patterns are evident elsewhere in contemporary post-industrial societies and, as in Australia, has resulted in less secure job arrangements for many employees.

For Australian workers recent changes in industrial relations have had an added impact on their work conditions. In the last few years trade unions powers have been curtailed as a result of an increased use of individual contracts in the resources industry and non-union workplace agreements[14] have become more commonplace. Hutton suggests that in an environment in which unions are weaker and workers are threatened by the strong 'shareholder-value-driven capitalism and its demands for intensifying work effort', jobs become more insecure (Hutton 2000:22). In my research I found that managers in the oil, gas and mining industry often regarded unions as impediments to fast change and increased flexibility.[15]

It is generally known that in their quest for profit maximisation resource companies seek primarily to protect the interests of their investors and shareholders and that the job security and welfare of the employees is secondary to this objective. Hutton also points to the growing inequality that modern capitalism produces (2000:17). In my experience of the resources industry, as in other industries, great inequality exists between those engaged in traditional 'blue collar' occupations and those in senior and management positions, and between men and women. The majority of employees in the resources industry are only able to influence their work conditions to a small extent. However, as I show in my discussion of the change from a union based workforce to individual contracts at Red Rocks mining company in Chapter 3, this does not mean that they do not have any agency in relation to their work conditions. A large number of Red Rocks employees consciously chose to give up their union membership for the less secure

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[14] These contracts are also referred to as individual workplace agreements.

[15] BHP (Broken Hill Petroleum) recently offered their iron-ore workers in the Pilbara non-union workplace agreements. Prior to this BHP was regarded as one of the most union friendly resource companies in Australia. A leaked internal memo from BHP's meeting of executives in July 2000 provides a glimpse into the reason why the contracts were offered: 'BHP Iron Ore could not reach its full potential with a unionised workforce. It could improve, but unions would always force a compromise which prevented the best outcome' (taken from a newspaper article by Long 2001).

individual contracts in exchange for a higher income. While I believe that flexible work arrangements and increased expectations of worker mobility in the resources industry make it difficult for both partners to be engaged in full-time work, it is couples who themselves choose to make the husband the family's main breadwinner, thus reinforcing stereotypical gender relations.

Williams (1981) considers 'capitalism and patriarchy. . . [as] mutually dependent on each other, not least because production is organised around the sexual division of labour' (Williams 1981:171). Though it may no longer be appropriate to speak of patriarchy as an all-encompassing term of men's dominance over women, I still find it a useful analytical tool provided that the analysis of patriarchal structures are specified in each instance. Rather than seeing patriarchy in terms of 'what oppresses women' Lorber (1994) suggest an alternative point of view: 'more than all men's individual actions, patriarchy is simultaneously the process, structure, and ideology of women's subordination' (Lorber 1994:3). Her definition allows me to view women, not only as exploited by men, but also to take into account women's own compliance to patriarchal structures.

The issues regarding the relationship between the unequal distribution of power and people's gender, positions in the employment hierarchy, and access to information and knowledge will be explored further in Chapter 3.

1.5 The Construction of Identity

In the last decade a new trend of writing that emphasises the autonomy of the individual has emerged in the social sciences. Authors such as Beck (1992, 1998, 2000), Bauman (1992, 1997) and Gergen (1991) suggest that individuals construct their own biographies by freely choosing identities from a global menu that consists of exposure to a multitude of ways of living and that the infinite numbers of possibilities and the absence of guidelines sometimes lead to confusion and fragmented identities. According to Beck (1998), the experience of loss of certainty is characteristic of our modern world and a society.

The circumstances in which we define our identities are always changing, but I challenge the conclusions of Beck (1992, 1998, 2000), Bauman (1992, 1997) and

Gergen (1991) who suggest that an individual is a free agent in the construction of their own identity. Instead I argue that social expectations, norms and practices govern many facets of our behaviour and that it is impossible to understand a person's identity without acknowledging 'the very powerful constraints of the system within which they are operating' (Ortner 1984:159). Larger historical, economic and political conditions influence an individual's sense of self, their identity and their perception of the world. However, I must emphasise that I do not regard individuals as being completely dominated by these structures, rather I view them as being able, through their actions, to transform or reinforce these structures.

Mills (1970) suggested that by analysing the world through the mindset of the 'sociological imagination' we have the potential to understand the relationships between individuals and the larger social realities of which they are part. The promise of this perspective lies in the knowledge produced when analysing 'the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals' (Mills 1970:5). Similarly, practice theory, as described by Ortner (1989), is 'a theory of history... of how social beings, with their diverse motives and their diverse intentions, make and transform the world in which they live' (Ortner 1989:193).[16] Thus, for this reason, I have found Ortner's 'practice theory'[17] a useful tool in seeking to understand and analyse my ethnographic data.

Giddens (1979, 1984, 1991) and Bourdieu (1977) have both made significant contributions to the debate between structure and agency.[18] In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) Bourdieu examines the dialectical relationship between objective structures (such as economy and language) on one hand, and cognitive and motivating

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[16] Practice theory seeks to find a middle ground between the viewpoints of functionalists and symbolic interactionists and other theorists such as structuralists and Marxists, to the relationship between individuals and social structure.

[17] Ortner prefers to speak of practice as a 'key symbol' of a theoretical orientation, rather than of a theory, in which 'a variety of theories and methods are being developed' (Ortner 1984:127). This orientation lacks two characteristics of social theory; 'an underlying narrative…, and an underlying norm of the social order…There is only as it were an argument – that human action is made by "structure", and at the same time always makes and potentially unmakes it' (Ortner 1996:2).

[18] Neither Ortner, Giddens nor Bourdieu can be credited for being the first theorists to seek to understand how humans act within the structures of society. One of the first social theorists who successfully attempted to do so was Weber (1991). He regarded religion and culture as important in shaping human actions, but in contrast to functionalists, emphasised individual's choices within these structures.

structures (habitus)[19] on the other hand. He is concerned with the relationship between social practices and human action and believes we have to analyse the 'dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality' (Bourdieu 1977:72, original emphasis) in order to understand how humans act. In the same way that Ortner emphasises the reciprocal relationship between practice and structure, Bourdieu views human action as the product of collective practices, and practices as the products of human action. A person's understanding and embodiment of social structure is related to their upbringing and class position within the social hierarchy, and Bourdieu recognises that power relationships are part of everyday transactions between individuals. Bourdieu regards individuals as constrained by objective structures and collective practices, but his model of human action also leaves room for individuals to act independently.

Giddens' (1979) theory of structuration is an account of the process whereby social actors create structures while simultaneously being limited in their actions by them. These structures, in Giddens view, have no existence independent of actors.[20] Giddens introduced the concept 'duality of structures' to help explain how the fabric of everyday life is produced and reproduced. He defines this as 'the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices' (Giddens 1979:5). Further, he proposes that individuals are 'knowledgeable about the social systems which they constitute and reproduce in their action' (1979:5). In order to understand individual's actions, he argues, one has to see 'how the practices followed in a given range of contexts are embedded in wider reaches of time and space – in brief, we have to attempt to discover their relation to institutionalized practices' (Giddens 1984:298).

Even though Giddens recognises the larger structures that influence people's lives, in my view he grants people too much choice. The knowledge that people in the resources

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[19] Habitus, is according to Webb 'a concept which explains the durability of people's patterns of lifestyles, tastes, beliefs and social practices on the basis of their personal history as it is embedded within a social context' (Webb 1996:260). Habitus refers to social dispositions and practices that are the foundation of all action. Bourdieu emphasises that the products of habitus are actions that are 'collectively orchestrated without being the product of orchestrating actions of a conductor' (Bourdieu 1977:72).

[20] In contrast, functionalists viewed society as an 'objective' reality which existed separately from the actions of humans.

industry hold about the larger structures that make up their lives, is unevenly distributed according to factors such as job level and gender. This uneven distribution of knowledge leads to inequality in relations of power. In contrast to Giddens who appears to view people as being in control of their destiny, I, like Ortner, place emphasis on the larger social, historical, economic and political conditions which constrain the construction of identity. Following Bourdieu, Giddens and Ortner who seek to understand the relationship between objective structures and human action, I analyse the actions of women and men involved in the resources industry in light of the particular work conditions they experience and the dominant gender ideologies that intersect with these conditions.

Practice, according to Ortner, is human activity that is 'considered in terms of its "political" implications and considered in the context of "structure"' (1989:193-194). The political aspect refers to relationships, either between individuals or between individuals and institutions that involve differential relations of power.[21] Power relations take place within structures. Structure refers to the 'cultural forms, social relations, and historical processes' (Ortner 1989:12) in which human activity is constructed and organised. Structure in fact, is 'the organisation of human existence itself' (Ortner 1996:14). Structures are reproduced or transformed through the actions of individuals, but the significance of these actions can only be grasped when they are structurally framed. Ortner proposes that 'practice emerges from structure, it reproduces structure, and it has the capacity to transform structure' (Ortner 1989:12). Practice and structure can thus only be understood in relation to one another.

Central to my argument is that structural conditions such as flexible working arrangements have a significant impact on the construction and maintenance of gender identity among women and men in the resources industry. Work arrangements such as long distance commuting, 12-hour working shifts and frequent relocations of employees makes it difficult for both husband and wife engaged in full-time paid work. Long distance commuters face the challenges related to the intermittent absence by one partner, mining town couples have to deal with the impact that 12-hour shifts impose on their life, while partners of expatriate employees find it difficult to restart their careers

in a new place every few years. These effects are even more pronounced when children are involved. I found that the majority of married women in my study were engaged either in part-time paid employment or working as unpaid homemakers. Though I did interview some women in mining towns who were employed as professionals in their own right, the wives of a number of commuters explained that it was impossible to combine a full-time job with their husband's unusual work arrangements. Difficulties relating to childcare were among the most frequently cited reasons, but quite a few women also indicated that their husbands' would rather not see them take up paid work so that they instead could keep them company during their 'home period'.[22] Many women chose to stay at home, not only because of their husband's expectations, but because they considered it 'the right thing to do'. In the case of expatriate wives, most women cited the frequent moves of their husbands as a hindrance to a career of their own. Expatriate wives who were engaged in (mainly part-time) paid work typically had a company of their own (often with themselves as the only employee). Self-employment allowed them flexibility both in terms of the hours they worked and the opportunity to shift their business when their husband was sent to another posting. Women who followed their husband's career to remote mining towns in Western Australia generally found few employment opportunities outside the mining industry. The actions taken and the choices made by women and men in the resources industry will be more fully explored in this thesis.

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[21] Following Poiner's definition I take power to denote 'the effective control that people (as individuals, or collectives – formally or informally constituted) have or seek to have over their own affairs and those of others' (Poiner 1990:21).

[22] Interesting to note here is that none of the female commuters in my sample have young children. In fact, only one of the women currently employed as a commuter had children (and they were both grown up and no longer living at home). One of the women who had previously worked as a commuter was an unpaid homemaker with a young baby at the time of the interview. None of the men who were partners of female commuters saw their work as being an obstacle in terms of their own full-time work in Perth.

2 GENDER IDENTITY

Home is not where we were born and where our family is;

it is the place we return to at the end of the day,

a place where we express our taste, style and values in pictures and furnishings

and the food that we cook,

because everything outside those four walls has been chosen for us.

By E.J.F, in "Life Now", published by the Shell Ladies' Project (1996:136).

In this chapter I situate my research within debates surrounding gender and gender identity in the social sciences. I discuss how the traditional gender ideology among people in the resources industry is similar to the functional model of the nuclear family proposed by Parsons and Bales (1956). I consider the importance of theories concerning male dominance and the subordination of women. I examine the role of capitalism when seeking to explain the higher valuation of men's work compared to women's unpaid labour. Finally, I also discuss and draw on the work of Mead (1934), Ashmore (1990) and Sökefeld (1999) to help understand the external and internal processes and constraints that help shape the gender identity of people in the resources industry.

Gender appears to be central to how people in the resources industry organise their everyday life. Gender relations are influenced by notions that fundamental and innate differences exist between women and men. This, for most couples in the resources industry, means that they adhere to a 'traditional' sexual division of labour. The belief that women and men are biologically different, and therefore better suited to different types of labour, has resulted in the conceptualisation of the sexual division of labour as being 'natural' and 'correct'. Women are seen as being more competent at tasks relating to the household and childcare, while men, to a large degree, are regarded as being more capable of carrying out work outside the home.

The dominant gender ideology in the resources industry that prescribes different roles for women and men based on their physiological differences is similar to the models of the nuclear family put forward by functionalists such as Parsons and Bales (1956)

almost fifty years ago. Their presentation of women and men's skills as dichotomous and complementary is similar to the views that people currently involved in the resources industry hold about gender. However, Parsons and Bales accorded more weight to the importance of socialisation than do many of the people involved in this study. Many people in the resources industry believe that women and men are predisposed by biology to perform certain tasks better than would a person of the opposite gender. Rather than engage in the question of whether or not biology actually determines women and men's actions, I am more interested in the fact that people *believe* that biology is a significant determinant for action and that this influences their agency in powerful ways.

Social theories concerning the relationship between women and men have changed considerably since Parsons, Bales (1956) and Murdoch (1947) suggested that the sexual division of labour was beneficial for both families and society in general. During the 'second wave' of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s many anthropologists sought to address what they perceived as being a male bias in the discipline. Many of the subsequent debates were concerned with women's universal subordination and its relationship to biology. The discussions on women's status in society entered a new stage during the late 1970s and early 1980s when many feminist anthropologists challenged the idea that women's status was based on experiences of 'sameness'. Instead they argued that gender was to be analysed in conjunction with other parts of a person's identity such as race, class, ethnicity and others (Moore 1988, Newton and Stacey 1995). However, recent debates surrounding the concepts of self and identity have focused on the conditions of uncertainty that supposedly characterise the modern world. Several postmodern and post-structuralist writers argue that individuals struggle to maintain a coherent self in the face of exposure to the multiple identities available in a globalised world (Bauman 1992, 1997, Beck 1992, 1998, 2000, Gergen 1991). In contrast, this study indicates that there are powerful constraints that influence an individual's experience of gender and other forms of identity. Though explanations that concentrate on the similarities of women's experiences (albeit not on a universal scale) may no longer be fashionable, I nonetheless will focus in this thesis on the numerous constraints that women and men in the resources industry experience in relation to their gender identity. I will also analyse the different women and men's sense of fairness and entitlement and the subsequent allocation of different rights according to people's

contribution to the household, whether financial or emotional, and how this creates a power imbalance between married couples in the resources industry.

Before I engage in the discussion regarding gender identity in the resources industry, I will provide a brief overview of the development and understanding of gender and gender identity in the social sciences in the past century.

2.1 Gender in the Social Sciences

Theories of gender have changed in the last decades from models which 'emphasize sex roles and socialization to those that describe processes of categorization and stratification by gender' (Ferree 1990:866). Sex role theory is rooted in the functionalist paradigm of the 1950s. Breines (1986) refers to this period as a paradoxical time in regards to gender. In the optimism following the post-war years, women in North America[23] were seen as experiencing a degree of liberation in regards to education, equality in the family and sexuality. But there were also conservative forces at play, and this according to Breines, was something social scientists of this period tended to minimise. By focusing on the modernising forces which affected family and gender at the time, they were 'ignoring or downplaying conventional and conservative indicators' (Breines 1986:70). The work of social scientists such as Parsons and Murdock[24] had a major impact on sociological theories of the time, and 'helped shape the terms of discourse about American society, not only in the 1950s but for decades to come' (1986:70).

Parsons can be described as one of the most influential sociologists of the 1950s. He viewed the nuclear family as having a highly specialised function in modern industrial society, namely to socialise children into members of society and to provide for the emotional needs of family members.[25] He suggested that the needs of individuals in industrial society could only be met if women and men played different roles. Parsons discusses how women and men in American society were experiencing increasingly identical treatment in the middle of the century, while at the same time encountering a

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[23] America was at the time an important source of gender theory in anthropology and sociology.

[24] For a thorough discussion, see Breines' (1986) article in which she provides a detailed analysis of the works of sociologists such as Henry, Parsons, Riesman and others.

strong segregation of sex roles (Parsons 1949:193). While he questions the role of the family and sees it as 'responsible for serious limitations on the ideal of equality of opportunity' (1949:200), he nonetheless regards it as providing a 'highly appropriate pattern and environment of life' (1949:201). The model of the nuclear family put forward by Parsons and Bales (1956) in which the sexual division of labour is conceptualised as natural and correct, still exists as a powerful ideology among many of the people in the resources industry who were involved in my study.

Women, in the view of Parsons, are more 'expressive' (Parsons 1956a:23, 1956b:151) and thus better suited to be homemakers. Their role involves taking care of the emotional needs of the family, while men display more 'instrumental' (1956a:23, 1956b:151) qualities and are engaged in occupational structures as the 'breadwinner' of his family. As a result of this, Parsons writes, men are less engaged than their wives in the 'internal affairs of the household. Consequently, "housekeeping" and the care of children is still the primary functional content of the adult feminine role in the "utilitarian" division of labor' (Parsons 1954:191). Even though some women were engaged in paid work at this time, Parsons viewed their role as different from men, as they only held a 'job' in contrast to men having a 'career' (1954:192). This division of labour has a functional aspect for Parsons, namely it 'shields spouses from competition with each other in the occupational sphere' (Parsons 1949:193). Elsewhere he suggests this competition 'might be disruptive of the solidarity of marriage' (Parsons 1954:192). Women married to men working in the resources industry often choose to work only part-time or as an unpaid homemaker, rather than having a career and possibly having to compete with their husband. Their reasons for doing so are varied, but in my view women who choose to curtail their employment do so partly because of expectations in the resources industry that women, based on their 'natural' ability to nurture, should be responsible for providing the main care of family members and the household.

Parsons was particularly concerned with how equilibrium could be maintained in industrial society. One of the important contributions that Parsons made to social science was his conceptualisation of the interdependence between families and the rest of society. In his opinion the arrangement which saw men engaged in a public role and

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[25] It is worth noting here that in his model, individuals are socialised not only through the family, but also by educational, religious and occupational institutions.

women occupied with domestic tasks was one that best suited the functional 'needs' of modern society. The sex role specialisation which was occurring at the level of the nuclear family, was being paralleled in the public sphere where jobs were becoming increasingly specialised at this time (Breines 1986). Parsons regarded the relationship between modern households, consisting of the nuclear family, and larger economic structures as functional for society.

In his opinion, the job of the husband and father links the family to the wider spheres of society. As the family is an isolated 'conjugal unit' (Parsons 1949:179), the roles of the husband and father in the family and occupational sphere are 'sharply segregated from each other' (1949:191). A family's status is 'overwhelmingly bound to the occupational status of the husband and father' (1949:192). The isolation of the family and the emphasis on the husband's job in Parsons' model suggests that the family has to be able to adjust to its demands. The functional aspect of the smaller sized modern households, in Parsons' view, means that they can be shifted easily geographically when the husband's job requires him to shift place of residence (1949:192). It is possible to draw parallels between Parsons' sex role model and the lives of Petroleum Wives of Perth expatriates. Members of the Petroleum Wives of Perth, to a large extent, depend on their husband's occupational status for the creation of their own identity, especially in their role as club members. The expatriate husband, like the husband and father in Parsons' model, is generally responsible for bringing in the family income. And finally, expatriate families are prepared to move around the world if (or rather, when) the husband's career requires it (though this is not, as in Parsons' model, related to the size of the household). While I do not advocate Parsons' view that sex role specialisation is a 'functional' arrangement for modern society, I am suggesting that the traditional gender ideology that dominates many families in the resource industry is similar to Parsons' model of the nuclear family in which sexual division of labour is conceptualised as 'natural' and 'correct'.

Rather than relying on a biological model to explain the differences between sexes, Parsons acknowledged that gender is a social and cultural construct. But Parsons, like other social theorists of his time, failed to consider what Breines refers to as 'the conflict between equality and convergence and the emphasis on traditional femininity, the only acceptable female goals of being a wife and mother' (Breines 1986:77).

Parsons' representation of women and men as functional members of a nuclear family gives little scope for analysis of other important aspects of identity such as class and race. His perception of men and women is linked to a model of the 'ideal' roles they may hold in relation to family and marriage, and as such Parson's work can to a certain extent be said to distort women and men's identities. Though women and men in the resources industry currently have numerous identities available to them, gender identity takes on an overriding importance in an environment where the dominant gender ideology prescribes different roles for men and women based primarily on their biology.

Another influential sociologist writing at the middle of last century was George Peter Murdock. He was also concerned with the nuclear family and its 'usefulness' for society. Having analysed numerous societies around the world, Murdock asserted the 'nuclear family' to be universal. One of the central arguments regarding the universality of this institution is related to its division of labour. His argument centres on a biological explanation with references to the differences in physical strength in men and women:

> Man, with his superior physical strength, can better undertake more strenuous tasks… Not handicapped, as is woman, by the physiological burdens of pregnancy and nursing, he can range farther afield… Woman is at no disadvantage, however, in lighter tasks which can be performed near or in the home' (Murdock 1949:7).

Murdock's thesis is similar to Parsons' in that it presents the family as fulfilling functions for society. He presents four functions which he sees as fundamental to social life: sexual, economic, reproductive and educational (1949:10). He emphasised that these are not the only functions the nuclear family fulfils, others may be related to religion, land holding and social status.

Although Murdock presented a functionalist argument himself, he was critical of functional anthropologists. He criticised functionalists for not accounting for social change in their theoretical models: 'so strongly have they emphasized the internal integration of social systems that they have made almost no theoretical provisions for change' (1949:197). Murdock's own model of the nuclear family has been criticised on

similar grounds. Morgan (1975) writes that Murdock's four functions 'are linked to a particular institution (the family) in a way that appears to be inevitable and unchangeable' (Morgan 1975:21). Morgan also notes the lack of conflict and power relationships in his presentation of the nuclear family. He criticises Murdock for presenting the family as a 'remarkably harmonious institution. Husband and wife have an integrated division of labour and have a good time in bed' (1975:21).

The short but central text; 'A Note on the Division of Labor by Sex' by Brown (1970) was one of the first publications in which the debate regarding the sexual division of labour was not reduced to a discussion concerned with the 'innate' differences in the capacities of women and men. Theorists such as Malinowski (1922), Mead (1949) and Murdock (1949) had previously put forward arguments that presented the assignment of tasks by sex as being based on physical and psychological differences. Not denying the existence of such differences, in her discussion of this issue Brown only accords them a minor role. Her main thesis is that women and men take different roles in the division of labour due to their differing relationship to child care: 'Nowhere in the world is the rearing of children primarily the responsibility of men' (1970:1075). Brown argues that women's contribution to subsistence is determined by the compatibility of the particular society's major subsistence activity to child care. In those societies that do not have child care centres or schools or special 'minders' to take care of children, the economic pursuits of mothers are generally 'repetitive, interruptible, non-dangerous tasks that do not require extensive excursions' (1970:1077) so that they may be able to simultaneously look after their children. Brown's explanation of women's contribution to subsistence does not focus on biological or physical constraints, but instead she argues that their contributions must be understood in regards to their roles as caretakers.

Women and men in the resources industry often legitimise the different 'rights' accorded to men and women with reference to 'essential' biological models. Their models are similar to the one put forward by Murdock, especially with regards to the differences between women and men in terms of their physical strength. Male 'blue collar' workers in the resources industry often referred to women's perceived lack of strength when explaining that 'strenuous' mining work would not be suitable for females. Instead the perception of a woman's role is seen, much in the same way that Murdock defined it, as better equipped to perform domestic duties, especially those

related to childcare. I will analyse the relationship between gender and biology in the resources industry in more depth in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

2.2 Anthropology of Women

In the late 1960s and early 1970s 'second wave' feminist anthropologists questioned the representation of women in the discipline. Women as a category were present in traditional ethnographic accounts of kinship, family and marriage as these were regarded as important organising principles of society, but the importance of their contribution to community life was often neglected. Moore (1988) points out that part of this neglect was related to a male bias in anthropology in which 'Western' researchers saw the relationship between men and women in the society they studied in light of the assymetrical relationship that existed between men and women in their own society (Moore 1988:2).[26] In order to correct this male bias, feminist anthropologists wanted to include women's activities and perceptions of the world in the process of collecting data, but more importantly the 'anthropology of women'[27] sought to incorporate this information at a 'theoretical and analytical level' (1988:2).

One of the main concerns of feminist anthropologists working in the early 1970s was the apparent universal subordination of women. Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) echo de Beauvoir (1953) in the introduction to their famous work on 'Woman, Culture and Society' when they question 'why is Woman "The Other"? *Are* women universally the "second sex"' (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974:1). In answering this question they point out that although 'the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human social life' (1974:3). While

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[26] One of the most famous examples of the inherent male bias in anthropology is Malinowski's (1922) study of the Trobrianders. Malinowski focused on the social importance of the distribution of yams and shells (kula) in this society. He found that in both these types of exchange men gained prestige. When Weiner (1988) arrived in the Trobriander Islands some sixty years later she found that she had to revise many of Malinowski's assumptions about the roles of men and women. She writes that Malinowski did not 'systematically investigate the women's productive activities' (Weiner 1988:5) and as a result he did not understand the importance of women's wealth among the Trobrianders. The significance of the distribution of banana leaf bundles and banana fibre skirts at funerals and other important rituals is an activity 'central to women's position and power' (1988:27). Weiner explains that Malinowski's neglect of the 'women's point of view' was related to the perception anthropologists of his time held about women as 'living in the shadows of men – occupying the private rather than the public sectors of society, rearing children rather than engaging in economic and political pursuits' (1988:7).
[27] Moore (1988) describes the 'anthropology of women' as the first phase of feminist anthropology in which the feminists set out to correct the male bias within the discipline.

they recognise that the meanings ascribed to biology differ according to culture, their model of explanation ultimately sees biological functions, such as women's role as reproducers and nurturers of children, as determining for universal male dominance. Rosaldo makes a link between women in their role as mothers to the domestic sphere and between men and trade, political and ritual activities and the public sphere. In the same volume Ortner (1974) discusses the cultural significance of the biological differences between men and women. She recognises that the meanings attributed to these differences are culturally and historically variable and that they must be explored and not presumed (Ortner 1974:71). Ortner's main argument is that because women are associated with reproduction they are universally regarded as closer to nature, while men on the other hand are associated with culture. Culture is seen as more powerful than nature, and in charge of controlling nature, hence women are seen as inferior to men. Ortner (1996) has since declared that it was wrong to assume a hierarchical relationship where culture was regarded as more important than nature. This relationship 'is not always constructed – as the paper may seem to imply – as a relationship of cultural "dominance" or even "superiority" over nature' (Ortner 1996:178). Returning to Rosaldo's case, she argues that women's contributions toward economic and political activities are limited by their frequent childbirths and responsibilities for childcare (Rosaldo 1974:24). She claims that the public realm that is associated with men is universally more highly valued than the private realm associated with women. While a discussion of whether the view that men's work is seen as being more valuable than women's work is a universal phenomenon is beyond the scope of this thesis, this line of argument rings true for many of the couples involved in my study who regard men's financial contribution to the household as being more valuable than women's unpaid work.

Yanagisako (1979) argued in the late seventies that the oppositional pair of domestic and public were 'analytically unproductive and empirically unfounded. Too many studies of women's "domestic" activities have disclosed that these have political as well as reproductive consequences' (Yanagisako 1979:191). Ortner (1996) shares this point of view and claims that seeing the world through this opposition is unproductive as 'it leads to an emphasis of "difference" between women and men, rather than on "relations"' (Ortner 1996:40). Moore (1988) takes a more pragmatic approach and instead of dismissing this dichotomy emphasises the importance of looking specifically

at what men and women do in different societies as the gendered division of labour varies according to culture. In seeking to understand the meaning and consequences of gender for people involved in the resources industry, I analyse their actions not only in relation to the 'public' or 'private' sphere (though I do consider these as being important structures in identity formation), but within a framework of the wider social, political and historical structures that impact on their lives.

There are numerous theories concerning the emergence of the public/private split in social theory. One of the most enduring is Marx and Engels' analysis of the origins of the subordination of women which in their view was linked to the development of industrial capitalistic society in which men gained control of the means of production and women's work in the house became devalued. Although their work has been criticised from many angles it is clear that their contribution in linking the private sphere with the political, social and economic system of a society, has had an enormous influence in social theory. Their thesis that the material world is an objective reality that exists outside of people's consciousness, but influences our thoughts and ideas, is one of the foundations of historical materialism. Marx (1963) emphasises the importance of analysing people's relationship to the modes and relations of production when seeking to fully understand society.

My aim for this thesis is not only to analyse how material conditions influence women and men differently, but also to situate my analysis within a broader framework of historical and global trends. Engels' (1990) work on the development of the nuclear family in capitalistic society is a useful tool for analysing the family's relationship to the wider social and economic system.

Both Marx and Engles emphasise that material conditions are formative in humans' lives. Engels suggests that the development of the family is related to numerous changes in the material foundations of society. In his analysis of the transformation of family structure, he attributes the cause of the change from the extended family to the nuclear family to the industrial revolution. He argues that the invention and introduction of machinery and new techniques in agriculture led to the establishment of private property which divided not only members of society, but women and men within the same family. Engels links the subordination of women within capitalistic society to the

domestication of livestock when men came to control private property. He argues that 'gaining a livelihood had always been the business of the man' (Engels 1990:261), but because the control of the surplus produced by owning livestock fell to men, women came to take a second place in society:

> Division of labour in the family had regulated the distribution of property between man and wife. This division of labour remained unchanged, and yet it now turned the former domestic relationship upside down simply because the division of labour outside the family had changed. The very cause that had formerly ensured the woman supremacy in the house, namely, her being confined to domestic work, now ensured supremacy in the house for the man: the woman's housework lost its significance compared with the man's work in obtaining a livelihood; the latter was everything, the former an insignificant addition (Engels 1990:261-262).

Although Marx and Engels theory of the origins of the nuclear family has since been dismissed by many,[28] and the conceptualisation of a public and private dichotomy has since been challenged in anthropology, I find it interesting that the unequal sexual division of labour, and the devaluation of women's work, as described by Marx and Engels, still persists among women and men in the resources industry more than a century later. The gradual transition from communally owned land to private ownership brought about changes in the structure of the family. There was a change from 'pairing' marriage[29] to monogamy. 'The individual family started to become the economic unit of society' (Engels 1990:263). Engels argues that at the same time men came to control private property, they sought to find ways to pass it on to their children. By introducing monogamy they were able to control the sexuality of women, hence ensuring that their offspring were their own and not those of some other man. By overthrowing the 'mother right' (descent counted through the female line) (1990:164) and assuring

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[28] Laslett, for example, is one of the theorists who claims to have found evidence of the existence of the nuclear family prior to industrialisation through his discovery of early census material (Yanagisako 1979:178). Murdock also suggests that the nuclear family, with its division of labour between men and women, existed prior to 'modern industrial civilization' (Murdock 1949:11).

[29] Engels describes pairing marriage as a unit in which one man lives with one woman, but where men have the freedom to practice polygamy, while infidelity on women's part is strongly penalised. Although, he argues; 'the marriage bond can, however, be easily dissolved by either side, and the children still belong solely to the mother' (1984:156).

patrilineal inheritance, women became subordinated economically as men gained control of the means of production (1990:158-166).[30]

Marx and Engels further argue that the nuclear family was a necessary unit for the successful reproduction of the labour force. In the words of Engels:

> According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is again of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the implements required for this; on the other, the production of human being themselves, the propagation of the species (1990:131-132).

Capitalism, in Engels view, relied on women to reproduce the labour force. Because they were responsible for the household, including cleaning and cooking for both husband and children, men were able to spend long hours away from the home. Men currently employed in the resources industry are also able to spend long periods of time away from the home as result of women's unpaid labour. Women have also been described as reproducing the labour force in the sense that they give birth to and raise children whom the capitalists are dependent on in order to maintain their control of the means of production.[31] The shift from women and men working together on farms to the transfer of the modes of production (raw materials, tools and workers that produce

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[30] Sacks (1974), one of the contributors to 'Woman, Culture and Society' (Rosaldo and Lamphere, (eds)) wrote in her contribution that she did not see property ownership by males as the 'basis for male supremacy in class societies' (Sacks 1974:219). Although she agrees with Engels that women's status in classless societies was more equal to men compared to class societies, she suggests that women's position is determined by their status as adults, especially in class societies. 'Social adulthood' is in her view obtained through 'participation in social production' (1974:222). Moore (1988) writes in her analysis of Sack's contribution that although she is in broad agreement with Engels, she brings a new insight to Marxist anthropology as she 'does not assume the equal and autonomous status of women in 'pre-class' societies… and therefore allows for the possibility of examining variability in women's position in these societies' (Moore 1988:33).

[31] Referring to women by a technical term such as 'reproducers' in regard to their status as mothers, masks the depth and complexity of work and family relations. Elshtain (1981) criticises what she sees as a reduction of the value of work of women: 'The most compelling example I can think of against Marxist feminism's infusion of econometric terms into the sphere of family ties and relationships would be to ask any mother whether she would accept "producing the future commodity labour power" as an apt characterization of what she is doing. One's fears and love for children are drained of their meaning, their

goods) from home to a workplace eventually saw the majority of men move into this sphere. The work that was performed by women in the 'private' realm was, according to Engels, increasingly less valued than the labour carried out by men.

2.3 From 'Sameness' to 'Difference'

I now return to the discussion of women's biological functions. Anthropologists such as Rosaldo, Lamphere (1974) and Ortner (1974) categorised women universally as oppressed and subordinate to men because of their role as mothers. In doing so, it can be argued, they were further developing de Beauvoir's concept of woman as 'the other'. In de Beauvoir's view the analytical concept of gender 'transcended national, historical, and cultural boundaries and… [as a result] women were everywhere the subject of patriarchal oppression' (Lewin 1995:324). De Beauvoir was concerned with rejecting biology as a determining factor in the oppression of women and argued that women are not born different from men,[32] but rather they become 'the other' through their socialisation and upbringing. Biological facts, in her view, can never explain how women become subordinate to men, but rather one must analyse 'the facts of biology in the light of an ontological, economic, social, and psychological context' (de Beauvoir 1953:69). However, in spite of de Beauvoir's insistence on attributing social and cultural meanings to biological facts, she has already told us that woman is weaker, less stable and more fragile than man, in sum; 'her individual life is less rich than man's' (1953:66). The contradictions inherent in her work are illustrated by her view of woman as the 'victim of the species' (1953:52), while at the same time insisting that biology is not destiny.

An adherence to biological models of explanation despite a rejection of biological essentialism is also present in Rosaldo's (1980) work in which she argues that 'certain biological facts—women's role in reproduction and, perhaps, male strength—have operated in a nonnecessary way to shape and reproduce male dominance' (Rosaldo 1980:396). Visweswaran (1997) points out that while Rosaldo emphasised that 'universal facts were not reducible to biology… [and she] initiated a critique of gender

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emotional significance, when they are recast as relations between "reproducers" and "future labour power" (Elshtain 1981:253).

[32] de Beauvoir's arguably most famous quote from 'The Second Sex' is the one that illustrates this argument: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (de Beauvoir 1953:295)

essentialism she was ultimately unable to achieve it because of her insistence that "'brute' biological facts have everywhere been shaped by social logics" [Rosaldo 1980:399]' (Visweswaran 1997:611).

Feminist anthropologists working in the late 1970s and early 1980s shifted their focus from the universality of sexual asymmetry and attacked the idea that women's experience was based on 'sameness'. From this time on there has been an emphasis on the notion of 'difference' (Moore 1988:9).

Women's experiences are no longer regarded only in light of their gendered identity, but also as they intersect with class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and other markers of identity. It is no longer adequate to view the relationship between man and woman 'as a universal, self-producing binary opposition – fixed always in the same way' (Scott 1986:1065). Newton and Stacey (1995) summarize the changes that have taken place within academic feminism since the 1980s:

> Unified categories like "women" have come into question; gender has come
> to be seen as multiple and various, as coconstructed with race, class, and
> sexual and national identity. Identity politics, as the politics of the "same,"
> has given way, as a dominant mode of conceptualizing feminist community,
> to a politics involving multiple alliances, alliances across identities,
> alliances with those whose lives and identities are in a sense "wrong"
> (Newton and Stacey 1995:289).

A new trend of writing has emerged in the social sciences in the last decade that portrays women and men as disintegrated subjects who are left to themselves to construct their self and identity from a global menu (see Bauman 1992, 1997, Beck 1992, 1998, 2000 and Gergen 1991). This menu supposedly consists of exposure to a multitude of ways of living from which individuals construct their own biographies. By actively shaping their own lives, women and men are ultimately responsible for their own fate. Postmodern and post-structuralist theorists have not only focused on the construction of self, but have actively sought to deconstruct the dualism of sex difference by challenging the notion of male dominance, arguing instead that power exists in a multiplicity of relationships. Ramazanoglu (1993) questions the pluralism

and relativism that signifies postmodern thought. In her view it 'ignores gender, disempowers women and diminishes difference' (1993:8). For example, in analysing the work of Foucault she notes that his view of power as omnipresent and available to all neglects the systematic subordination of women, both by other women and by men.

While power may be present in numerous forms, strategies and relationships, the resources industry is clearly an arena where men hold more power. Collis (1999) illustrates the continuing existence of unequal power relationships between women and men in an Australian mining town. While claiming that women make use of a variety of influence strategies to resist the structures of male power, Collis finds that 'the outcomes of their agency at an individual level are limited by the social, economic and ideological structures of male power at the community level' (1999:60). Collis accords these women agency, but highlights the importance of understanding agency within the structural constraints of marriage and patriarchy. The power relationship that exists within the private sphere of marriage is, according to Collis, closely related to and supported by;

> … a system of male power in the public sphere. This is nowhere more evident than in Mineton [fictional name for study town], where the specific form of patriarchal culture is closely related to its economic base and the fact that mining is still very much men's work (1999:64).

The gender ideology that informs women and men's sense of self is closely associated with the patriarchal structures of the resources industry. Acknowledging the presence of multiple identities, I nonetheless contend that a gender ideology based on beliefs about innate and fundamental differences between women and men takes an overriding importance for people's identity in the resources industry.

2.4 Self and Identity

Sökefeld (1999) explores the changing meanings of the concepts self and identity in Western discourse.[33] He claims that our understanding of identity has changed

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[33] Sökefeld's analyses both the 'folk concepts' and the 'scientific concepts' of self and identity in Western history. Western anthropologists have, in his view, been guilty of 'othering': 'positing a basic

significantly only in the past few decades. Originally, he writes, 'identity was understood as a disposition of basic personality features acquired mostly during childhood and, once integrated, more or less fixed' (Sökefeld 1999:417). He traces the development of the idea of a unified and bounded self back to Descartes. Descartes viewed individuals in light of their ability to remain reflexive, philosophical and unaffected by the changing circumstances of the world.[34] Transformation in this view of self came about by 'poststructuralist deconstruction' in recent decades in which the idea of 'sameness and unity… have given way to difference and plurality' (Sökefeld 1999:417). Rather than focusing on a single identity, we now think of people as having multiple identities.

Sökefeld's contribution to this discussion resides in his proposal of a singular self. In his opinion we cannot speak of people as having multiple and conflicting identities unless we are dealing with a singular self. One of the important aspects of the self, according to Sökefeld, is its 'ability to manage different identities… [and] difference' (1999:424). This management requires a self with agency. His self is a reflexive and active one which 'enables the person to distinguish self-consciously between him- or herself and everything else' (1999:424). People, are in his view, 'not bound to a cultural consensus but exposed to a plurality of conflicting perspectives and interests and musts' (1999:430). Individuals are allocated agency in their transactions with others, and as such Sökefeld's self is different from the way that Beck and Gergen view self and identity. Sökefeld, unlike Beck and Gergen, recognizes the structural constraints on the self. In his words, people 'are always members of society, engaged in an ongoing process of mutual structuration and transformation' (1999:428).[35]

difference between anthropologists and those they study' (Sökefeld 1999:418). As a result non-Western selves have been viewed as 'dependent on their cultural/social group… [and] behave according to the prescriptions and interests of that group' (1999:419). Challenging these notions with references to ethnographic material from Pakistan, Sökefeld suggests that it is time that the discipline acknowledge 'that there is no human being without a self and that it is indispensable to anthropological practice to be attentive to these actual selves' (1999:429). He continues his argument by pointing to the fact that not long ago anthropologists discussed 'whether all humans "posessed" culture' (1999:429), while it is now generally acknowledged that 'culture is a definitional characteristic of the human being' (1999:429). In the same way that culture has been, and still is, a concept of dispute, the self could and should attain a similar status in anthropology. Lutz also makes a case for a 'universal distinction between self and other' (Lutz 1988:86) without which she claims, 'the creation, perception, and enactment of a human social and moral order would be impossible' (1988:84). Like Sökefeld, she suggests that the construction of self is culturally and historically variable (1988:84).

[34] Decartes famous quote 'cogito, ergo sum' - I think, therefore I exist - illustrates his view of the self.

[35] Here he is drawing on Giddens' theory of structuration (1979).

Mead's work on the self, even if problematic at times, provides an important contribution to the debate between agency and structure.[36] Parallels can be drawn between Sökefeld's self and Mead's work on the reflexive self. Mead's (1934) theories concerning the relationship between individual and society can be regarded as an alternative to functionalist models. Not content with viewing individuals as shaped by forces that reside in the larger structures of society, theorists such as Mead, Goffman and Barth offer an alternative approach. Society, in the view of symbolic interactionists, cannot be understood independently from the transactions of individuals. Society, in their view, is nothing more than the sum of individuals' actions. An orientation that is only concerned with processes and interactions that take place between individuals cannot adequately address issues of power and social conflict. Though most symbolic interactionists fail to recognise external structures, Mead did in fact regard society as having an objective existence. However, rather than focusing on the restrictions that structures place on human action, he regarded them as resources that individuals can build upon.

There is little agreement about the extent of the role that biological differences play in distinguishing males from females, but most social scientists would agree that stereotypes associated with biological differences are instilled in children through the process of socialisation. Mead's acknowledgement of social structures is present in his thesis that our selves are products of our socialisation and surroundings (Mead 1934:135). The self, according to Mead, 'arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process' (1934:135). He presents the developing self as going through two phases. The first step is when children play out the role of parents or teachers, or "significant others", as Mead refers to them. By relating to others and playing various roles a child develops a self-consciousness and concept of self (1934:151-159,366). The next step occurs when a child takes part in an organised game. In order to successfully play a part, the child must 'be ready to take the attitude of everyone else involved in that game' (1934:151). By taking on the attitude of

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[36] Even in the face of Giddens (1979) criticism on Mead's work on the self which he sees as 'lack[ing] an understanding of the broader society as differentiated and historically located formation' (Giddens 1979:254). In the light of Mead's focus on small-scale interaction and microstructures, Giddens criticism can be said to make sense.

the other participants of the game, the child is responding to how others view themselves. Mead refers to this 'organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self' as the generalized other (1934:154). The second stage can be referred to as the 'objectification' of self and makes it possible for people to view themselves from the 'outside' and thus reflect upon themselves (1934:154-155,171). In Mead's view humans are able to interact because we share common symbols. Through communication and interaction with others, people learn attitudes and viewpoints and subsequently gain knowledge of appropriate ways of acting according to the situation (1934:143). Mead suggests that the second stage of the development of the self is the most crucial as this is the time when our awareness of being a member of a larger society is born. In his eyes one has to be a member of a community in order to be a self; 'the individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group' (1934:164).

The generalized other is what Mead conceives as the 'me'. But, as Morris (1934) writes in the introduction to Mead's famous work on the self, 'if this were all that there is to the self [the me]… [there would be] no place for creative and reconstructive activity; the self would merely reflect the social structure' (Morris 1934:xxiv-xxv). In order to complete the self, Mead introduced the concept of 'I'. The 'I' is the part of the self which allows a person freedom to act independently (Mead 1934:177-178). The 'I' and the 'me' stand in a dialectical relationship to one another symbolising the (often) conflicting interests between individual and society. The introduction of the 'I' contributes agency to individuals within social structures and makes it possible for both agents and society to change. For my purposes a comparison of Mead's model to those of Ortner, Giddens and Sökefeld is useful. Mead regards the self as transforming the world while simultaneously responding to it. Similarly Sökefeld proposes that an individual has numerous identities, but only one self, while Mead suggests that a person may hold numerous selves. These selves might be read as Sökefeld's multiple identities, as they similarly emerge through an individual's relationship to different people and situations. These selves are what Mead refers to as 'elementary selves' and together they make up the 'complete self' (Mead 1934:142-144).

2.5 Gender Identity in the Resources Industry

The focus of postmodern and post-structuralist theorists on diversity and difference is valuable, but it does not lend itself to explaining how gender remains such a persistent marker of identity for people in the resources industry. I agree that there are numerous other markers of difference, such as class, race, ethnicity, age and sexuality, and that there is no such thing as a 'universal womanhood'. However, it is important to note that the construction of identity does not take place in a vacuum, but is formed within the constraints of powerful societal structures. People in the resources industry do not choose their gender identities at random, as there are both external and internal constraints that shape their identity.

Gender identity is concerned with the way people organise and understand their selves based on their gender. It is a central component of a person's self-concept, though the understanding of oneself as male or female is likely to vary according to relationship, situation and across the life stages. As mentioned in the introduction, there are several theories concerned with how gender identity is created and maintained, but for the purpose of this thesis I choose to analyse gender identity from an integrated perspective. An integrated theoretical perspective on gender identity is made up of components of several theoretical approaches, including cultural, social, socialisation, biological and psychological explanations of gender identity. Ashmore (1990) is one theorist that seeks to analyse gender identity by making use of an integrated approach.

Ashmore identifies several components that influence a person's gender identity, among them biological, material and physical factors. He also attributes weight to "contact with culture" which includes 'exposure to the media, educational system, and other sources of societal messages about maleness and femaleness' (1990:515). Other factors that he regards as influencing a person's gender identity include 'relationship with specific men and women… [from which] people learn about sex and gender'. [They do so] by watching specific people around them and by forming and maintaining relationships with some of these individuals' (1990:516). The last set of factors that contributes to gendered identities is what Ashmore terms 'self-guided activities'. These include work and leisure activities; what girls and boys and women and men do, and how they do it, influences the way that people think about themselves and others as gendered beings.

Ashmore's understanding of the formation and maintenance of gender identity recognises how societal structures help shape a person's sense of self, while simultaneously allowing individuals room for agency. This approach is similar to practice theorists' understanding of the construction of a person's identity whereby larger social structures are seen to constrain individual's choices in regards to the formation of self-identity, while at the same time leaving room for individuals to create their selves independently.

Ashmore acknowledges the heterogeneous and multifaceted nature of gender identity. His definition goes beyond the simple dualism that situates nature on one side of the debate and nurture on the other. Instead it incorporates a multitude of factors from which gender emerges: 'gender identity [is] the structured set of gendered personal identities that results when the individual takes the social construction of gender and the biological "facts" of sex and incorporates these into an overall self-concept' (1990:512).

Gender is central to how people in the resource industry perceive themselves and others. The way that women and men view themselves and others is strongly influenced by an ideology that prescribes certain ways of being and acting according to one's gender. Women are generally responsible for tasks related to caretaking and the household, while men are in charge of bringing home a family income. This sexual division of labour is rooted in beliefs related to the 'natural' biological difference between men and women that prescribe each sex feminine or masculine roles 'according to which the place of each sex is clearly and differently defined' (Oakley 1974a:185).

The ideology that stipulates that women and men conform to certain gendered behaviours is based on beliefs about fundamental biological differences between women and men, and helps shape the perceptions that people in the resources industry hold about themselves and the world. People need not necessarily fully conform to these gender roles in order for them to provide powerful stereotypical representations that women and men to some degree believe they should think, feel and act like.

It is essential that social, cultural and historical factors are analysed when seeking to understand how these influence and constrain the formation and maintenance of gender identity. However, I believe that it is only possible to arrive at an understanding of the process of women and men's conceptualisation of their sense of self and gender identity by acknowledging that individuals have some agency and choice in matters relating to the construction and maintenance of gender identity. As Ashmore points out, people do not passively absorb messages about what it means to be a woman or a man, and even if that were the case, there is always a variety of models to choose from; 'multiple definitions are portrayed in the mass media, and children are exposed to the media and in their everyday relationships to a wide variety of "models" of maleness and femaleness (1990:512-513). People in the resources industry experience powerful constraints on their gender identity and these constraints will be dealt with in the following chapters. In order to better understand people's relationship to gender identity, I believe it is paramount to search for information about the intentions and meanings of these actions from individuals themselves. To do this in conjunction with an analysis of the structural frameworks in question is an approach advocated by Ortner (1989).

3   NEW LABOUR RELATIONS

This place has changed for good

Your economic theory said it would

It's hard for us to understand

We can't give up our jobs the way we should

Our blood has stained the coal

We tunneled deep inside the nation's soul

We matter more than pounds and pence

Your economic theory makes no sense.

From "We Work the Black Seam" by Sting (1985)

In this chapter I outline some of the global economic and political trends that have contributed towards new labour relations in the resources industry. I examine how fluctuating commodity prices, increased expectations of flexibility and mobility combined with a lack of long-term job security impact on employees and local community life in mining towns. I investigate the processes which have led to a weakening of trade union powers, and analyse women's role in the union movement in Australia. I consider how a person's gender, education and job level influence the level of agency an employee is able to display with regards to their work situation.

Increased expectations that employees be flexible and mobile has resulted in several alternative work arrangements in the resources industry. The agency of women and men in the resources industry is limited by events and trends in the international marketplace as well as by powerful multinational corporations. Such corporations typically employ few women and are dominated by a masculinised management culture (Wajcman 1999). With few exceptions, women working in the mining, oil and gas industry are predominantly employed in traditionally 'feminine' roles.

Employees working in the resources industry and their families may be more or less conscious of the effects that these global trends in the international marketplace have on their personal relationships and daily affairs. However, I am not suggesting that individuals in the resources industry suffer from 'false consciousness'. Rather I wish to propose that they the have ability, albeit limited, to make choices and act within this structural context.

3.1 New and Flexible Labour Relations

In this section I briefly describe some of the global economic and political trends that have contributed towards the application of unconventional work patterns such as long distance commuting, expatriate relocations and 12-hour shifts in the resources industry.

Demands for increased labour flexibility in recent decades have resulted in a change in work patterns for many employees. Calls by employers in the resources industry for more flexibility has seen an increased utilisation of working arrangements that are different from the standard working week of approximately 37.5 hours, from Monday to Friday. Long distance commutes to minesites and oil platforms, 12-hour working shifts, as well as international relocations of employees are all examples of unconventional work patterns that exist in the resources industry.

The flexibility demanded of employees working in the resources industry is not unique at a time where economic rationalism is dominating relations in the business world. In an increasingly global economy, employees in many businesses are expected to have a flexible approach to their work. This transformation of labour markets is changing the nature of work, as Carnoy (1999) observes 'globalization produces work arrangements that are less secure and more geographically dispersed than did earlier styles of production organization' (1999:413).

Flexibility has become a 'buzz' word in the resources industry, and throughout my fieldwork I encountered numerous managers and industry representatives who spoke with urgency about the need for companies and their employees to become more

flexible. At a conference[37] in 1996 organised by bodies that represent the resources industry, the address by the President of the Chamber for Minerals and Energy of Western Australia was centred around the 'key forces' of change such as globalisation, deregulation and technology. In order to deal with these 'forces of change' Mr Cusack suggested that 'the Australian minerals industry will require a culture which adapts to change, uncertainty, newness, complexity, and is creative and innovative' (Cusack 1996). Flexibility, in his view, was necessary for the industry to remain competitive and included a redefinition of how people view work.

Addressing an audience of employees of Red Rocks, the multinational corporation that employed the majority of residents in the mining towns of my research, a manager conveyed a similar message, saying that the ability of the company, as well as employees, to be flexible was essential for its survival in an increasingly competitive market situation. He added:

> In a global climate, change is inevitable as the company adapts to global conditions. It is important for us to continue to maintain our efficiency, only then can we position ourselves for growth and do well. Increasingly, the company's role in the community will diminish and we will no longer be the "paternalistic provider" [in the mining towns].

The increased use of fly-in/fly-out to mining sites and platforms is one example of the increased flexibility and mobility expected of the employees. Commuters are often expected to travel thousands of miles away from their homes and families in order to get to work, and stay away for up to several weeks at a time. Fly-in/fly-out sites were originally developed as an alternative to mining towns. Compared to a mining town where workers live in permanent houses with their families, these are highly portable structures where accommodation[38] and personnel can easily be shifted if price fluctuations occur and the operation is not making a profit. The invention of flying

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[37] The Tram (Training Resources Applied to Minerals and Energy) Conference 13-15 November 1996 was hosted by The Australian Mineral Foundation in association with The Chamber of Minerals and Energy Western Australia in Perth, Western Australia.

[38] Accommodation at these sites consists of cabins that can easily be transported elsewhere. Most mining companies do not own, but only lease these temporary buildings.

employees to and from remote minesites was based on models of commuting in the oil industry.[39] Platforms situated in the oceans do not provide an alternative to transporting the workers to and from their place of work on a regular basis.

The first company in Western Australia to fly their workers to and from a land based oil installation, was WAPET (West Australian Petroleum). When production first started at Barrow Island off the North West Coast in 1968, employees were sent to work for 7 weeks at a time, with only a week's leave in Perth. After a few years of operation the commute changed to 4 weeks on with one week off. In the late seventies a two weeks on/one week off roster was implemented and currently employees work on a 2 weeks on/ 2 weeks off roster (the rotational schedule is often referred to as a 'roster'). Mining industry employees usually work on a different rotation pattern that generally sees them spend a greater proportion of time at work than at home.[40] Employees in the mining industry hired on a fly-in/fly-out contract work on a wide variety of rosters, with fourteen days on/seven days off, and five days on/two days off (with four days on/three days off every three weeks) being two of the more common rosters.[41]

Another work pattern sees expatriates, generally employed in the oil and gas industry, move with their families at frequent intervals across the world to where their labour is required. These moves are in part due to the fluctuating prices of oil and gas and partly due to the expansion of construction projects for new oil and gas developments. These employees are paid generously for their labour, receiving numerous financial benefits for applying their expertise in countries different from their country of origin. When oil and gas prices are low, companies apply cost saving measures that often see employees being relocated to their home base (the country where they were originally hired).

The change to 12-hour shifts in many mining towns is yet another example of the use of alternative work arrangement in the resources industry. The change from 8 to 12-hour

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[39] Houghton (1993) claims that the use of long distance commuting in the oil and gas industry go back to the 1940s (Houghton 1993:281).

[40] Workers for oil and gas companies are usually employed on rosters of symmetrical rotation patterns, which means that they spend equal days at work and home (Shrimpton, Storey and Husberg 1998). Mining companies commonly make use of an asymmetrical work rotation pattern, where a greater proportion of time is spent working compared to the time an employee has off work.

shifts in Red Rocks mining communities shortly before I did my fieldwork had a number of effects on community life. Mining town residents complained that there had been reduced participation in community activities and many said they had found it more difficult to fit in extra curricular activities. However, there was no uniform response to how families had adjusted to the new shifts. Some said they preferred them, as it gave them extended periods of time away from work, while others found that the new shifts made it difficult to co-ordinate aspects of social and family life. Those who found these shifts most disruptive were families with young children. Many women told me that the challenges they encountered, such as keeping children quiet while the shift-worker (who was usually a male) rested, were exacerbated when employees worked night shifts or weekends. In comparison the majority of employees working at fly-in/fly-out mines and oil platforms said they preferred the longer shifts. These workers are away from their families and social networks and have 'nothing better to do anyway'.

Oil and gas expatriates move from country to country, and a similar trend is evident among employees working in mining towns. During the period of my fieldwork I came across a number of mining town residents, current and past ones, who had moved from mining town to mining town for a period of several of years. People gave a number of explanations for their multiple moves. Some said they had been encouraged by the promise of a better career opportunity in another town, while several people cited reasons of boredom after becoming familiar with the company, the town and its residents. Yet others said they became 'restless' after living in the same place for a period of time. For the majority of residents the original motivation for the move to a mining town is related to a substantial increase in their income. While employees working in mining towns are not paid as handsomely as oil and gas expatriates, people usually find that an increased salary combined with numerous subsidies results in a greatly improved financial situation. These financial rewards often come at a cost for the women in the family. It is usually women who 'follow' their husbands to mining towns, as it is most commonly men's jobs that take them there. Women sometimes leave behind successful careers in the city for unemployment in the mining town. Women who are not engaged in paid work often find that they have to work harder at

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[41] Employees in management and 'office based' positions in the mining industry increasingly work on shorter rosters, such as the five days on/two days off roster. This roster enables them to spend most

building networks in the mining towns than men who automatically get access to others through their work. One housewife explained the challenges she faced when she arrived as a newcomer in one of the Red Rocks mining towns:

> I was really lonely when we first arrived. Someone showed us our house, and then they took my husband away for work. He met new people at work and had a good time. I was alone with the kids in a new house waiting for our furniture to arrive.

Some women commented that the 12-hour shifts intensified the feelings of loneliness they experienced upon arrival in a new town. Long working hours combined with a lack of a support network (family and friends usually live far way) contribute to female newcomers having difficulty 'finding their feet' in the new community. Many women expressed a sense of frustration because often, soon after they had established new friendships, those friends left town.

A transient population, lack of support networks and employment are issues that impact differently upon women and men. The shortage of relevant employment for women is part of the reason why families in mining towns commonly organise themselves in a 'traditional' manner that sees the husband being responsible for providing the family income, and the wife in charge of matters related to house and children. A lack of employment for most women combined with the requirement that their partners/husbands work long hours means the company plays a different role in the lives of women and men in the resources industry.

3.2 Structural Conditions: Capitalism and Patriarchy

In this section I discuss studies by Williams (1981) and Metcalfe (1988) that seek to analyse the relationship between capitalism and workers in the Australian mining industry. Both of these highlight the importance of social, historical, political and economic factors in understanding how people act within the confines of capitalism and patriarchy.

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business days on site.

The move towards a more flexible workforce in the resources industry has its roots in a capitalistic system of production,[42] which is characterised by inequality and unequal power relationships. While these inequalities and those between women and men in the resources industry cannot be adequately described with reference to analytical concepts such as 'exploitation of labour' or 'patriarchy', I believe that such concepts provide a starting point for discussing capitalistic labour relations. While it is not sufficient to look only to macro structures in order to understand the complex power relationships that exist between people in the resources industry, I believe these are useful analytical tools when seeking to analyse why women tend to take on stereotypical gender roles.

In seeking to understand how unequal power relationships affect the lives of working class families, Williams (1981) conducted a sociological study in a mining town in Queensland, Australia making use of concepts such as patriarchy, oppression and exploitation. Employing a feminist Marxist analysis she highlighted the inequality that exists between people from different classes, as well as between women and men in the town. Her focus on the relationship between the employers (Utah mining company) and its employees combined with an analysis of the exploitation of women's domestic labour within marriage, emphasise the inter-dependence of capitalism and patriarchy.

Williams makes use of Gramsci's concepts of bourgeois hegemony and false consciousness in her analysis, but is wary of explanations that rely too much on the idea of false consciousness as this, in her view, 'denies that people have the capacity to resist exploitation and to perceive the contradictions between their interests and the interests of their superordinates, be they men or capitalists' (1981:18).[43] The unequal power relationship that exists between trade union members and their employers is also paralleled in the relationship between the working class man and his wife. As

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[42] See Marx (1859), Smith (1910), Wallerstein (1979), Weber (1991) and Wolf (1982) for discussions regarding the origins and workings of capitalism.

[43] I am not suggesting that individuals in the resources industry suffer from 'false consciousness'. Rather I wish to propose that they the have ability, albeit limited, to make choices and act within this structural context. As Collis suggests (1999) there is room for agency for women within the patriarchal structures of 'Mineton'. Indeed, she found that women in this mining town had multiple strategies to resist the structures of male power. Similarly men (and women) have the ability to resist and challenge the capitalistic structures of the industry they work within. Some of the men involved in this study had done so overtly by participating in trade union strikes in the past, while others sought to protest against` management and company practices in less noticeable ways (for example by taking longer to complete a task that necessarily required).

previously discussed, it is important to keep in mind that people do have the ability to act within these structures. The agency that people in one mining town demonstrated in regards to trade union membership is discussed later in this chapter.

The early 1990s saw an increased influence of neo-liberal labour market policies in Western Australia that resulted in a reduction in the power of trade unions. This, combined with the invention of new technologies, has resulted in increased speed of communication and an increase in the speed at which capital is moved around the world, all of which have had a significant impact on labour relations in the resources industry.

These changes are what Appadurai (1990a) refers to when he argues that models such as Wallerstein's (1979) 'world system theory'[44] cannot explain the complexity of transactions and interactions that take place at a global level in modern society. Instead he emphasises the importance of analysing the interplay between politics, culture, technology, labour and finance in order to understand how individuals navigate within these conditions.

Another Australian mining town study that is concerned with the relationship between agency and structure is Metcalfe's (1988) anthropological and historical examination of the struggle of miners against mine owners in the coalfields of New South Wales. His work is an example of a study that situates the actions of individuals within the framework of processes that take place at a global level. Like Appadurai (1990b), Metcalfe (1988) is dissatisfied with models of human behaviour as offered by structuralists and individualists[45] who 'ignore the dialectic between power and structure' (1988:11-12). According to Metcalfe these models are not able to offer an understanding of social change. His critique of these perspectives is similar to my own criticisms against functionalist and interactionist models of explanation, as discussed in Chapter 2.

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[44] Wallerstein's (1979) thesis of the emergence and expansion of capitalism has been much debated (see for example Wolf 1982). However, one of his important contributions towards understanding the world economy has been his insistence that it is not possible to examine nation states in isolation because any developments internally, be they political or economic, are related to the 'whole', the 'world system' (Wallerstein 1979:53-54).

[45] Those whom Metcalfe refer to as individualists are theorists that I refer to as symbolic interactionists, such as Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959).

Metcalfe suggests that in order to understand social history it is necessary to have a 'more rigorous examination of the social relationships and processes which occupy the conceptual space between social structure and individual agency' (Metcalfe 1988:15). His theoretical framework, which resembles Ortner's practice theory, successfully captures the tensions that exist in the relationship between people's agency and the larger social structures that are part of their lives. Like Metcalfe's study which centres on the class divisions that dominate the relationship between capitalist owners and wage labourers, my study is concerned with the unequal power relationship that exists between employers and employees. However, I also analyse how the larger capitalistic structures influence the power relationships between men and women.

3.3 A Globalised Economy

In this section I explore how global economic and political structures influence the lives of mining town residents and other employees in the resources industry. I do this by discussing factors such as fluctuating commodity prices and the power that multinational companies have in the lives of employees and their families.

Companies in the resources industry are engaged in exploring, developing and processing minerals, oil and gas. Even though there are a number of small independent companies operating out of Perth, the industry is dominated by a few very large corporations. Some of these are Australian owned, but many are either a subsidiary of a larger multinational company or operate on behalf of a conglomerate of companies of different national origins. These companies are referred to as 'transnational' and/or 'multinational', without people necessarily making a distinction between the two.

Multinational and transnational corporations share similar characteristics, such as having investments and operations in a number of countries throughout the world, but the main difference is related to their geographical base (Seymour-Smith 1986:202). A multinational company has their home base in one country (e.g. Shell has their main office in The Hague, Netherlands), but their production takes place both at the home base as well as in other countries. A transnational company usually has a shifting home base and their operations transcend national boundaries. By constantly shifting base, they often avoid paying taxes and adhering to nation based regulations and thereby

increase their profit. One such multinational mining company is Red Rocks. This company is the main employer in the three mining towns where I conducted fieldwork. Red Rocks is influential in the lives of employees not only by the virtue of providing them with their main income, but it also makes available the houses that they live in. If employment is terminated, these people are left not only without an income, but also without a home. There are usually not many rental properties on the housing market in these settlements, so people tend to leave town when their contract comes to an end.

Some of the features that characterise the resources industry are large investments,[46] an expectation by investors and shareholders of high returns, a finite life of the resource extracted and fluctuating commodity prices. The prices of oil, gold, nickel or iron ore are all determined by supply and demand in the global market. Fluctuating prices influence when management decides whether to downsize or increase the number of staff.

During the period of my fieldwork the resources sector in Australia and the majority of countries with resource reserves world-wide went through a period of low investment. This was principally due to low commodity prices. In the case of the oil and gas industry, the overproduction of oil resulted in an oil price in 1998 that was less than a third of the price in mid 2000. The Asian financial crisis which occurred in the same period led to a lowering in the demand for gas and the postponement of several large gas developments in Australia.

The financial crisis in Asia also had an impact on the commodity prices of a number of minerals extracted in Australia. As a result of the lower commodity prices for gold, a large number of employees were retrenched from Goldmine not long after I interviewed 8 people who worked there. Iron ore producers in the North West of Western Australia lowered their prices and output due to a decrease in demand from their main customers, Japanese steel mills. The decline in the commodity price of iron ore was also part of the reason why the mining company Red Rocks in 1997/98 made redundant 180 workers (about 8 percent of the total workforce) who lived in mining towns in the North West of Western Australia. World market prices of iron ore, expectations from shareholders,

and the size of the ore body to a large extent determine the life span of many mining towns in the North West of Western Australia.

Two years prior to my research there had been a change of ownership of Red Rocks. Red Rocks 'parent company' at the time, Big Rocks, merged with another 'mining giant', Giant Rocks, and together they formed the new company Mega Rocks. As a result of this merger Red Rocks became part of one of the largest resources companies in the world.[47] Decisions and directives that had previously come from Big Rocks head office in an Australian capital city, now came from the headquarters of Mega Rocks which is located in a European city. Many interviewees, especially those in blue-collar positions, expressed frustration about this move as it increased the distance between themselves and the centre of decision making even further. One man who worked as a trade person and was about to move to Perth shortly after the interview (after eleven years of residence in the one of the Red Rocks mining towns) put it this way:

> Before when they had the main office in Australia you at least had the chance to meet some of the bosses every now and then. We used to feel like we meant something to the company back then. Now I think people feel that they are seen as just a number, not a person of flesh and blood. Those people in Europe don't really care about us, all they care about is the profits we make. They are so far away from here, they probably couldn't even locate us on a map.

Many people expressed similar sentiments about the new company structure. Managers did not seek to console the residents but stated that they were running a business, not a town and their aim was to increase productivity and profit margins. The change from 8 to 12-hour shifts was one of the ways the company tried to reach this goal. A few years prior to my fieldwork, rumours had circulated about the possibility of the operations in one of the mining towns becoming a fly-in/fly-out operation. If this had happened it

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[46] The largest energy resource project currently in Australia is the North West Shelf Project (located in Karratha and offshore north of the Pilbara). This is a joint venture company formed by Woodside, BP, Chevron, BHP, Mimi and Shell, operated by Woodside Petroleum (which again is owned 34% by Shell).

[47] The merger between Big Rocks and the other mining company is not a unique phenomenon in the resources industry. In the past few years a number of large companies have either merged (one example

would have meant a certain death for the community in question. People expressed frustration about their lack of knowledge about the future business plans of the mining operations in these towns, but management did not seek to extinguish rumours like the one mentioned above. In fact the managers themselves were unclear about the future. One manager told me that they could not predict the future as the successful operation of the mine depended not only on world market prices, but also on the speed at which they removed the resource coupled with shareholder expectations and management decisions.

Lack of long-term job security has always been something that employees in the resources industry, especially those that are classified as 'blue collar' workers, have had to deal with. A combination of fluctuating prices and consequently unpredictable availability of work and changing working conditions typify this industry. According to Harris (1998/99) changes on a global scale in the manufacturing industry such as increased flexibility and the movement of factories to places of cheaper production, will result in a 'weakening of unions and the strengthening of capital' (1998/99:27). This type of restructuring renders the labour force a 'disposable pool of workers [that] allows capital to respond more quickly to its own needs' (1998/99:28). While Harris seems to regard capital as an independently acting body, I prefer to view individuals and companies as the being main agents of change. Nevertheless, I find that his observation with regards to the weakening powers of trade unions can be applied accurately to the resources industry. In the following section I explore the historical development that led to the introduction of individual contracts which consequently saw the role of trade unions being diminished in Red Rocks mining towns. I also discuss women's perceptions of these changes, and the role they have played in regard to trade unions.

3.4 The Changing Role of Trade Unions in Red Rocks Communities

In Australia over the last decade the role of trade unions has weakened and membership numbers have fallen (Pocock 1997:14). One explanation of the decline in membership is almost certainly related to the increased use of individual contracts in the resources sector. When a company signs an employee on such a contract, they gain more control

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of this is the new company Total Fina Elf that previously used to be three independent companies) or been taken over by another operator (BP (British Petroleum) bought Amoco and Esso bought Mobil).

over the working conditions than if that person had been engaged on a union contract. Companies have complete flexibility in implementing changes to the working conditions of employees on individual contracts. Observers from the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT) take a sceptical view of these contracts and argue that in 'moving ordinary workers onto "salaried staff" … large mining corporations… [are] attempting to weaken trade unions' (ACIRRT 1999:7). Although a company is not allowed to ask whether or not an employee is a member of a union, the employee effectively signs away the right to bargain collectively when employed on an individual contract.

One major benefit of going on an individual contract for an employee is an increase in pay. If employed on the award system, an individual's pay packet is set according to union rates. This wage is most commonly negotiated directly between the union (or a number of unions) and the company, particularly if negotiations are concerned with issues only relevant to a particular company. Otherwise unions negotiate collectively on behalf of their workers with the relevant industry body, such as The Gold Association of Australia.[48]

The salary of employees on individual contracts is performance based and set by market place parameters which usually means that it is higher than the union wage. However, an increased salary comes at a cost. A number of employees I spoke to during fieldwork said they had little influence in matters relating to working conditions. If a company decides to change their shifts from 8 to 12 hours, employees have to comply or else leave (although some companies will consult their workers about the structure of these new shifts). Most mining companies have in the last few years changed their operating shifts from 8 to 12-hours in order to achieve more efficiency. However, the oil and gas industry has operated with these longer shifts throughout most its history.

Prior to individual contracts most 'blue collar' workers in the mining towns where I did research were union members, whereas management and office workers, then referred to as 'staff', were usually not. There was a clear division between the two groups, and

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[48] According to ACIRRT 'regulation of wages [in Australia] became institutionalised in the Award system – a set of industrial instruments with the force of the law, which covered occupations and industries, and prescribed not only wages and conditions of work, but also aspects of vocational training, such as apprenticeships' (ACIRRT 1999:13).

some of the residents of the mining towns clearly recalled how the social structure of the towns was divided along these lines. For example, the players of the two main football teams in one mining town used to come from each side of this divide. One woman who in the past decade had lived in two of these mining towns commented on these divisions and on how the new working conditions had changed social relationships:

> We still have the different social groups like the teachers, the police and the different shifts. It's not that they consciously exclude others, but there is a bit of the mentality of "sticking to your own". It used to be a lot worse before when there was a clear division between managers and workers. Even the wives of the managers had their own little social group. But a lot of these people have since left town and things have changed. Though there is still a division, whether you like it or not, between "who is someone and who's not". If you are the supervisor there is a barrier between you and the rest of the workers, that's just the way it is.

Not everyone was of the same opinion, but most agreed that there had been a clear division between 'blue collar' workers and office or management employees in the days prior to a two week strike in 1992 that ultimately led to Red Rocks offering all their employees individual contracts.[49] It is interesting to note that most of the interviewees who still viewed the towns as being 'divided' between workers and management were amongst the group that could be classified as traditional 'blue collar' workers. People who had lived in the community for a long period also expressed this sentiment more often.

The 1992 strike had its origins in a conflict in which a mechanical fitter employed by Red Rocks was discovered to not be a member of the metal workers union. When asked to join, he declined. As a result union officials made demands to the company to make him join or dismiss him. Red Rocks responded that it was illegal according to Western Australian law to discriminate against employees according to their union status and

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[49] During this period there was a change of State Government in WA from the Labor Party to the Liberal National Party. The new government passed legislation that enabled companies to offer individual workplace agreements.

refused to comply with the demands from the union (Way 1997:24). The strike following this conflict in which 16 workers decided to cross the picket line was regarded as particularly divisive and bitter. The strike started in one of the mining towns where the picket lines were set up and crossed, but as the conflict escalated workers in all three towns went on strike. Looking back, employees who had worked for Red Rocks at this time agreed it had been a distressing period that had resulted in deep divisions amongst the residents according to whether or not they supported the strike.

Wives of these employees told me about the difficulties associated with their divided loyalties in this situation. On one hand they wanted to be supportive of their husbands, and many stood next to them on the picket line but many were keen for the strikes to come to an end. In fact, it seemed there were a substantial number of women who were keen for their husbands to sign the new contracts. When I enquired as to why they had changed from being keen supporters of the union movement to advising their husbands to sign the new contract, many replied that they offered a better alternative for their family. Prior to the introduction of individual contracts, they felt there had been no real alternative to the union and they had seen it as being in their interest to support the union's battles with the company. One woman said she thought women were generally more pragmatic about employment issues than were men. She explained:

> My husband was quite reluctant to take Red Rocks up on the offer [of individual contracts], he was thinking about his mates and what they would do. I told him that this was much better for us as we would have more money. We were spending a lot more on basic necessities than in the city, you know how everything is much more expensive up here, and I thought the money would come in handy. I was also sick of him spending money on beer at the pub everytime there was a strike. But in the end it wasn't me that convinced him, only when he found out that his mates were going to sign it did he think it was a good idea.

Unions, though not necessarily supportive of issues relevant to women, have always counted on their support. As William explains: 'Working-class male politics relies heavily on the surplus time created by women's domestic production. Women care for

the couples' children… while the husbands attend political meetings and organise union and political activities' (William 1981:31).

Despite the fact that many women were active participants of union movements in the early days, they 'appeared to suffer a kind of institutional death when these movements became more formal and bureaucratic' (Pocock 1997:10). In Pocock's view, the history of women's lower wages and the extreme segmentation of the labour market by sex in Australia ('one of the most extreme in the industrialised world' (1997:10)) is a legacy of trade union practices and their collaborations with employers and the government. Pocock writes that male advantage not only permeates the workplace, but also plays a central role in union politics. One may ask what female workers may gain from membership to a union where the majority of members have often resisted their inclusion? Despite the rise of the number of female members in unions,[50] there has not been a corresponding increase in union structures 'which remain largely bastions of male position and decisive power' (1997:13). There is no denying that class politics and unions, have been shaped by men, in the interests of men and have, according to Crompton (1993), offered women little in terms of bettering their position (Crompton 1993:17). So why then do women take up union membership? Pocock believes that they do so based mainly on practical necessity; 'this is the only form of protection available to them' (1997:23).

The mining industry has the lowest representations of female union members in Australia. In 1994 only 6.1 percent of women who were working in the mining industry held union membership (ABS 1995, quoted in Pocock 1997:15). In contrast, 49 percent of men employed in the mining industry in 1994 were union members. Less than a handful of the women whom I interviewed who were employed in oil, gas or mining industry were members of a trade union. When I asked female workers about their relationship to trade unions, the majority responded that unions had little to offer them, while others had never even considered becoming members. The few who held membership did not put a lot of faith in the abilities of unions to protect them against retrenchments or other significant threats to their employment, but seemed to have acquired their membership mainly for political purposes (sympathetic to the labour

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[50] The number of female members in unions in Australia increased from 35 percent of the membership in 1986 to 40 percent in 1994 (Pocock 1997:16).

movement). It is likely that the hegemonic ideologies and patriarchal culture of unions, as explained by Pocock, significantly influences women's decision not to take up union membership.

While it is obvious that trade unions often have little to offer female employees yet rely on women's labour and support, it is less clear how resource companies rely heavily on women's efforts. By taking on the main responsibility for tasks related to raising children, running the household and establishing social networks, women make it possible for men to devote a large amount of time to paid work. It is not only mining town wives who choose to be homemakers, or work part-time in order to deal with the demands of running a household. Expatriate and commuter wives also make similar choices, thus enabling men to concentrate their full efforts on work. Women and men sometimes explained the division of labour in their household by reference to men's superior earning capacity, thus reinforcing men's role as the family breadwinner. People also suggested that women were better suited to housework and childcare, often with reference to women's alleged ability to being better able to deal with monotonous tasks and their child caring abilities. Men were said to be better at more physically demanding work, although many recognised that the majority of jobs in the resources industry no longer required physical strength. The status and authority which men in the resources industry acquire when fulfilling the traditional provider role accords them benefits and rights which women do not get.

Both Crompton (1993) and Williams (1981) remind us that unequal power relationships exist not only between the capitalists (mine owners) and workers, but also within the marriage of a working class family. A number of women and men in Red Rocks mining towns described them as being 'men's towns' or alternatively as 'a bloke's town'. When asked to elaborate some said that the towns catered for men's interests, especially in terms of leisure activities. I was told that 'life in these townships revolve, to a large degree, around sports and the pub'. Others emphasised the masculine hegemony in terms of men's dominance in the mining industry; 'It's the men that come here for their jobs and the women sort of just tag along'. Dempsey (1992) describes a rural Victorian (Australia) community in which he analysed gender relations in the 1970s and 1980s, where women are subordinate to men, as being 'a man's town'. Similar to the mining towns of my study, Dempsey's rural community was dominated by a male ideology that

saw men exert a great deal of influence on the choices women made about their leisure activities, social relationships and whether they engaged in paid or unpaid work. Collis (1999) also found in her analysis of power relations in 'Mineton', a New South Wales mining town, that women perceived the town as being a 'masculine town' that catered primarily for the employment and leisure of men. However, not all interviewees in the mining towns agreed with the description of these communities as being 'men's towns', arguing instead that they had changed character in the last decade, becoming more family oriented.

3.5 Structure and Agency in Mining Towns

People's perceptions of the changes that have taken place in the mining towns after the introduction of individual contracts and 12-hour shifts, vary according to their gender and where they are placed in the company hierarchy. Their levels of agency and 'choice' with regards to company decisions are also influenced by such factors.

Some of the previous blue-collar union members that I spoke to expressed regret that they had accepted individual contracts. Only when the company began a period of restructuring and downsizing did the implications of their choice dawn on them. In their current position, they felt that their working arrangements were less stable than they had been when they were working on the award. A few employees that I spoke to regarded the trend towards less secure employment coupled with a more flexible labour market as not being unique to Red Rocks, but saw it as being part of a global restructuring of the labour force.

It was not only the new shifts that brought about changes in the mining communities. People who had been living in the Red Rocks mining towns for a long period of time[51] also saw a change in the role of the company in the community. While they previously regarded Red Rocks as something of a 'paternalistic provider' that not only gave the majority of the working population their employment, but also contributed economically towards the 'running' of the towns, this was no longer the case. Part of

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[51] Although I did interview some (less than 20) residents who had lived in one, two or all three of the towns over the last fifteen years, many people stay for only three to four years. Only one of the towns, located near a regional centre, had a handful of retired residents. Many people said about the two other towns that 'no one comes here to stay' and saw them as having only transient populations.

the reason for this was related to a process that started in the early 1980s in which the company entered negotiations about a 'normalisation agreement' with local shires. When the towns were established in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the mining company was responsible for granting accommodation, recreation and sporting facilities and health services to the population. Currently local shires are responsible for providing an increasing number of these services, but Red Rocks still injects finances into many community projects.

While people in Red Rocks mining towns[52] seem prepared to accept that labour had become less secure on a global scale, they are less willing to accept the changes that had taken place in their own lives as a result of Red Rocks new management strategies. Though some employees acknowledged that they were partly responsible for contributing to some of these changes, others cherished their new-found wealth and seemed to view their improved financial situation as contributing towards a feeling of security, if only for a limited time.

The financial benefits associated with working for Red Rocks in a remote region are many. Employees receive subsidised housing, an allowance on electricity and water, free airfares for the employee and family twice a year to Perth and a much higher salary than if they had been doing the same job in the city. But at the same time as some employees spoke with confidence about the future, they also lamented what they perceived to be the loss of job security. Referring to the safety net of the union, they sometimes argued that their work situation had been better previously, though they also admitted that they had never been so well off financially as union members.

Speaking from a company viewpoint, many managers were relieved to get rid of the 'dinosaurs' (referring to unions) which they viewed as being 'out of touch with reality'. One middle manager told me that unions had 'imposed archaic working systems' on the company. He said Red Rocks had been made into a 'industrial relations villain' by the media, but in his opinion the company provided workers with a choice and most had

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[52] The Red Rocks mining towns are what I would refer to as single industry towns. These are towns where a single company provides almost all employment (directly or indirectly), as well as housing and other subsidies to the community. If employees are made redundant from their position, they (and their families) usually have to relocate to another place as the opportunities for finding alternative work are usually limited.

taken this opportunity to 'free themselves from the unions'. This notion of choice was one that was repeated frequently throughout my fieldwork, mainly by management, but also by some employees. One could argue that company management provides employees only with a semblance of choice, as they really are forcing people to comply with the decisions and regulations that they make. The balance of power is strongly in favour of the company, but it is nonetheless important to recognise the view of some employees who consider these work relations to be favourable not only for the company, but also themselves. This is especially true for men with higher education who generally have the choice to move on to other positions that offer alternative work arrangements, if they decide to do so. It is also true that Red Rocks, before implementing the 12-hour shifts, conducted extensive surveys with employees to assess their preferences for the type of shift they preferred. Some employees were sceptical of the validity of these, and said that the company had already decided upon their preference for 12-hour shifts prior to collecting employees' opinions. But there were others that I interviewed who said that their personal preference was for these new shifts, and that the implementation of these had been in accordance with the views stated by many of their colleagues.

One of the consequences of the introduction of the new shifts was, according to many residents, a reduced participation in community activities. Some said they felt that people were less committed to the community after the implementation of 12-hour shifts and others commented that people seemed to socialise less. They explained the reduced social interaction with reference to the difficulties associated with co-ordinating activities with people who were on different shift schedules. When people socialised, they often did so with the people who worked on the same shifts as themselves. Some women commented that they found it tiresome when their husbands, after finishing their shift, brought home colleagues for a BBQ. It was particularly disruptive, said women who had children, to have a big group of people who had just finished a night shift, many consuming alcohol, gathered in the house while they were trying to get children ready for school.

Some people perceived the shifts arrangements as having brought about new social divisions in town. One employee said 'it is not possible to talk about people being divided along lines of class any longer, but instead people's loyalties sit with those they

work closely together with'. In my experience, people do not necessarily hold loyalties to all their shift colleagues, but more precisely their loyalties sit with those who are in similar positions to themselves in the company hierarchy. It is important to recognise that the level of agency that employees are able to display with regards to their work situation varies according to their gender, education and job level within the company. While recognising that people's position within the hierarchy is influential in *how* decisions made by Red Rocks affect them differently, all employees did in fact have the choice to decline or sign the individual contracts when they were offered in 1992. The decision made by the majority of employees to accept these contracts has had different consequences for different groups of employees and their families.

A handful of people who had worked for Red Rocks for a decade or longer told me that when they started working for the company there was always a shortage of workers and no one ever got retrenched. This was probably related to the different labour relations that existed at the time between the company and unions, but it was also associated with the fact that it had been more difficult for the company to attract labour to these remote towns in the past.

While people felt that previously the decision of when to leave their position lay in their own hands, there was a perception that this had changed with the introduction of new labour relations between employees and employer. Now job security was generally perceived as low, and traditional blue-collar workers with little or no formal education beyond high school expressed these feelings more often, especially those who were middle-aged and had families to support. This group saw the opportunities for employment outside the mining industry, or even outside the company, as limited. This was particularly relevant to those who had worked on the Red Rocks mines for the majority of their working life.

In interviews with young, university educated employees who were single (or in a childless relationship) I sensed a marked difference in attitude towards the community and company. These people, as well as employees at management level, did not worry much about whether they would have a job with the company in the near future as they were confident that their skills would be needed elsewhere. Nor did they have plans to stay in the community for very long, and as such they were in a more powerful position

than those who felt dependent on Red Rocks for their continued income. Most people came to these communities with the intention of staying for as long as it would take them to save enough money for a deposit on a house elsewhere. Although their income improved substantially once they had moved from the city, they often found themselves spending more money and consequently it took them longer to reach their goal.

3.6 Knowledge and Power in Mining Towns

The unequal distribution of knowledge and power in mining towns is to a large degree influenced by level of education. The amount of agency that an employee/resident is able to display is related to their ability to access information. I will make use of Giddens (1979, 1984, 1991) and Foucault's (1977, 1978) analysis of agency and power to discuss the degree to which individuals are able to shape their circumstances.

In the last ten years the workforce in the mining industry has generally become smaller, partly as a result of technological innovations that have seen machines taking over many of the jobs that workers previously performed. Those who are most vulnerable to losing their job as a result of technological efficiency are those with less education. In addition there has been a trend in the industrialised world towards jobs being increasingly 'organized around knowledge rather than around physical skills' (Carnoy 1999:422). Carnoy claims that in our current economic climate workers need more and better education in order to adjust to the changes a flexible labour market require. Although there will always be a need for 'unskilled' labour in the resources industry, employees such as drillers and geological assistants have little chance of finding employment in their area of expertise in the city compared to those employed in senior positions such as engineers and geologists. Those with educational qualifications are less easily replaced than those without these assets.

People are, as Giddens (1991) suggests, reflective about the larger processes that impact on their lives. The workers who decided to accept individual contracts were willing to sacrifice the safety net unions could provide them with for an improved financial situation. Whether or not unions would have been able to make a significant change to the current circumstances in which workers see their jobs as less secure, is uncertain. Seeking to understand individuals' actions in light of the larger structures Giddens suggests that individuals living in current times are not passively accepting external

influences, but actively taking a part in shaping their own destiny. Furthermore, he argues, 'in forging their self- identities, no matter how local their specific context of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications (Giddens 1991:2). As my findings indicate, agency acts may have unforeseen consequences. Knowledge will always be limited. It is not possible for the workers, or anyone else for that matter, to foresee exactly what will happen in the global marketplace. Workers at Red Rocks complained that they found it difficult to plan their lives as they did not have access to information regarding numerous issues pertinent to the future of the company and the community. In his works on structure and agency Giddens (1979, 1984, 1991) puts little emphasis on the fact that not all people have the same access to information.

Knowledge in Red Rocks is unequally distributed according to a hierarchy that favours those at higher job levels over traditional 'blue collar' workers. Although it is not considered fruitful to speak of manual labourers as if they belonged to a bounded, homogenous and integrated working class, it is useful to point to the unequal power relationships that exist in terms of the employment hierarchy. The change from work arrangements where trade unions negotiated on behalf of the workers to a system of individual contracts where each worker negotiates his or her working conditions and position in the company hierarchy, have blurred the lines of difference between the 'working class' and 'managerial/professional class'. Previously workers shared a consciousness and identification as a group. This was especially evident at times of conflict, such as during the strike in Red Rocks towns in 1992. The conditions of employment have altered since, and there is some disagreement as to whether the traditional separation between 'workers' and 'managers' still exists. Many of the people I interviewed who may be classified as 'workers' argued that divisions, whether subtle or obvious, were still part of the social reality in these mining towns. Most managers and office workers maintained that the divide that existed prior to the 1992 strike had long since disappeared.

Foucault's (1978) work on control and power calls attention to the fact that power is not necessarily set in a clear-cut hierarchy. He argues that there is 'no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled' (Foucault 1978:94), but power is part of all relationships. If I were to apply his insights to the employment situation in

Red Rocks mining towns I would argue that all residents have a degree of power and as such they should be able to influence their own life situation. However, power is not equally distributed among these residents and I argue that the level of influence a person is able to exert is partly related to factors such as their gender and rank in the employment hierarchy. Those engaged in blue-collar occupations stand in an unequal relationship to those in management positions. Managers have more power and better access to information and as such increased opportunities to determine the course of their lives. There are women employed as engineers, geologists and other positions of occupational prestige at Red Rocks, but they are in a minority. The majority of women residing in Red Rocks communities are either homemakers or engaged in part-time 'manual' work. While women in professional positions have more opportunity to exercise control over their working life than women in administrative positions or homemakers I argue that they have less power to do so than men. Female employment in the resources industry will be discussed more closely in the following chapter.

3.7 Conclusion

The lives of residents in Red Rocks communities are to a large degree influenced by global economic and political trends and decisions made by the multinational mining company. These larger structural forces impact differently on employees according to their gender, level of education and placement within the company hierarchy. Though recognising that all employees, and their families, take part in shaping these structures, it is also important to acknowledge that the level of agency is limited by these same factors. In summary, there is an unequal distribution of knowledge and power in the resources industry.

4   PAID WORK AND IDENTITY

> She runs the house like clockwork, her home is her domain
>
> And at times he feels a little like a stranger
>
> But on his office desk a family photo in a frame
>
> Tells him he wouldn't lift a finger now to change her
>
> He'd say that he was working just to keep the family fed
>
> But his life is in his job if he were honest
>
> And home is for his comfort, a haven she has made
>
> The bargain struck, they've both kept their parts as promised.
>
> From 'Planning for the Future' by Judy Small (1986)

This chapter is concerned with the construction of masculinity and femininity within the workplaces of the resources industry. I analyse prevalent notions of what constitutes 'men's work' in the oil, gas and mining industry and discuss how traditional gender stereotypes influence the labelling of what is perceived as being 'women's work' at minesites and platforms. I then consider how women's presence in these masculine environments is viewed as being both an advantage and an obstacle to male employees. I look at how men's employment as commuters influences women's attitude to paid work and discuss the different attitudes that male and female commuters have to their time at home. Finally I reflect on the impact of a husband's job on the gender identity of expatriate women.

Workplaces in the resources industry are shaped by beliefs about innate fundamental differences between women and men. The presence of ideas about women and men being more or less suited for certain types of work depending on their gender help shape the way that employees see themselves and others in the workplace. Stereotypes, as described by Parsons and Bales (1956), that prescribe women and men different tasks according to beliefs relating to innate biological differences, have changed little over

the past 50 years in the resources industry. Women and men's skills and abilities are usually presented as being diametrically opposed to one another.

Women are currently making inroads in all areas of employment in the resources industry, though the belief that most work in the resources industry is 'men's work' is still widespread, among both women and men. In terms of women's presence, only 4,921 employees of a total of 28,771 people registered as working in the Western Australian mining industry were female (17.1 percent of the workforce) (ABS 2001). Australia wide this figure is as low as 13.6 percent (ABS 2001). Female employees constitute 45.2 percent of the total number of employees across all industries in Australia (ABS 2003). It is evident that male workers far outweigh the number of female employees in the mining, oil and gas industry in Australia. The majority of men in this industry consider women in much the same way that Murdock (1949) did when he suggested that they were better suited to taking care of home and family, rather than strenuous physical work. Physical strength is presently only called for in a few positions in the resources industry, however beliefs about the necessity of strength and power still remain powerful parts of the masculine working identity. The majority of men interviewed for this thesis were (or had been) employed in blue-collar positions, though office workers, managers and executives also form part of the study. Women were employed in a variety of positions; some in 'traditional' female occupations (as cleaners or secretaries) and others who were working in positions that had previously been the stronghold of men (in positions such as geologists or engineers).

Powerful discourses about masculinity and femininity exist in the resources industry that influence how men and women conduct and think about themselves. The accepted model to which men are expected to conform is the 'traditional' male role that prescribes a heterosexual preference, and if married, an ability to provide financially for one's family. Men are expected to display characteristics of strength (and to a degree fearlessness) and less emotional involvement in most matters than women. The most 'masculinised' types of behaviours are generally associated with men employed in blue-collar work. If these men wish to be seen as 'one of the boys' they have to behave in ways that are socially acceptable to this particular setting. One example of acceptable behaviour is to consume large amounts of alcohol together with mates. Those employed in management or office-based positions are not necessarily exempt from such

expectations, but do not generally have to abide by the same 'standards' of 'manhood'. Women are generally viewed as unsuited to undertake work in 'dirty and dangerous' conditions of the resources industry. However, the relatively recent arrival of female workers in the resources industry is often considered to benefit men as their presence is seen as 'normalising' the workplace and thereby making it a more pleasant environment for men.

4.1 "It's more dangerous, but it's more exciting"

> On the drilling ships and semi-submersibles you are doing exploration work which is always fun because you never know what you are going to hit. It's more dangerous, but it's more exciting. Whereas with platform drilling you know exactly where things are and what's going to happen – when you're drilling blind on exploration you have to look out for everything. I thought it was boring drilling on the platforms. You can stay in the same spot for twenty years if you are working on a platform. I just couldn't do that, with exploration, you move on constantly.

Ross was one of many men who spoke with a sense of excitement about the dangers associated with his job. In fact, numerous men took pride in the fact that their employment brought a degree of risk to their lives. Many men spoke about the fun and excitement that employment in the resources industry provided, and emphasised that they worked not only to make a living, but because they enjoyed it. Women in the resources industry, in contrast, did not speak much about the excitement of their work, though a few of those interviewed were employed in positions that could be categorised as providing interesting and stimulating work. Overall there are a number of 'unexciting' jobs in the resources industry, but positions which consist of mainly monotonous and repetitive tasks did not necessarily prevent the majority of men from conveying a certain sense of pride in their work.

Ross' employment history (13 years in the industry) reads like an account of the stereotypical male offshore worker. His first job was as a 'roughneck', a position he described as being 'at the bottom of the heap' in the drilling process. From this position

he had progressed to becoming the 'derrickman', a person who previously 'climbed up the derrick on a rig to pull out the pipes, nowadays it's all automatic though'. Following this he was employed as an 'assistant driller', then as a 'driller' and finally he was employed as a 'tool pusher'. The 'tool pusher', he informed me, is the person responsible for the drilling process and his role is similar to that of a supervisor or foreman. According to Ross his work has always been more than 'just a job' to him:

> It's a lifestyle, more than just a profession. When people working in the oil industry get together, they will always end up talking work. People are interested in what kind of new equipment that new rig has got… I tend to be very focused when I'm at work and don't think about home that much. Until I'm lying in my bed and that's when I'm really earning my money. Cause what I do during the day, that's almost just good fun and interesting. It never gets boring.

Though admitting to missing his family, Ross said he never spoke about 'that kind of stuff' with his colleagues. The fact that I was a female clearly influenced what Ross, and other male interviewees, shared with me. Ross told me that he did not share information of an emotional nature with colleagues. He disclosed only a few details of his private life to them, and said he only had limited knowledge of the family arrangements of some of the men he was working together with. In the same way that he did not engage in conversations about the details of his feelings with colleagues, the main part of the interview focused on the features of his job and work environment. Ross spent some time describing the dangers associated with work, particularly in the 'early days'. He told me that he had witnessed death at work: 'I've seen two people killed, one guy was electrocuted, and the other broke his neck. You have to keep the rig working, even when those things happen. You didn't really talk about accidents'.

Ross said that in hindsight, he realised he had done 'crazy things' in his past. For example, during storms helicopters can often not land on the platform or drilling ship. This sometimes meant that workers were unable to leave the platform even though they were scheduled to go leave for their period of R&R (rest and recreation). Ross said that when they were desperate to get home, he and other colleagues went from ship to ship in high waves, obviously at a high risk of injury. Though admitting to being

irresponsible, men always conveyed a certain sense of pride when telling me about such incidences. While Ross acknowledged that he had become more aware of the dangers involved with his job and that his feelings of responsibility for his family increased with age, he had a pragmatic attitude to the dangerous conditions of his place of work. While some of the men I interviewed did not explicitly refer to the risks associated with their work, they often made references similar to those expressed by Ross by saying that 'when bad things happen, you don't dwell on it, you just get on with the work'. Men did not allow themselves to get engaged in what they often referred to as 'touchy, feely stuff', and instead choose to concentrate on the tasks at hand.

Ross was not the only man who had witnessed death or serious injury through his work. Many of those who had been part of exploration in the 'early days' (this generally refers to the period prior to the mid-eighties), in particular tool pushers and drillers, shared similar stories. James worked as a tool pusher on a land rig at the time of the interview, but had previously been employed on rigs operating offshore. He told me that he had seen four people die during his time working at platforms, and had seen many more seriously injured. Though he chose not to spend much time thinking about these events, instead focussing much of the conversation on the thrill that work brought him, especially in comparison to an office job. While James' job as a tool pusher involves a certain amount of paperwork ('there is a lot more paperwork now than before'), he stated his preference for 'outside' work several times during the interview.

> I probably do more things on the rig than I need to do, but I don't like sitting in the office for too long. I like to be in the outdoors. I tend to zip through the paperwork, which might take three to four hours in any one day. Sometimes I do have to spend the full day just pushing a pen, making faxes and receiving faxes, researching bits and pieces and compile information. Sometimes the job as a tool-pusher can be very much desk based. But I like to be out of the office.

Blue-collar workers often compared the type of work that they perform to office-based work. They perceived their own work as holding more thrills and dangers than a 'desk job'. However, men working in offices also reported great satisfaction from their work, especially those engaged in projects related to exploration (of metals or minerals). Not

only did blue-collar workers think of themselves as having the more exciting jobs, many also claimed that the type of work performed by those working in office or management positions was less important. Men employed in manual labour positions often referred to colleagues working in offices as 'pen pushers'. The 'real work', according to these men, is performed in the outdoors.[53] One man engaged as an assistant driller at Mt Nickel said that he would never want to work in an office; 'The reason I have not taken an office job is that when you are in there your whole body and soul belongs to the company'. Many other blue-collar workers expressed similar sentiments to this.

Education was perceived as less important (the majority of these men did not hold any tertiary qualifications), instead experience in the field and knowledge of the industry were the only things that mattered to them. Blue-collar workers thought that employees needed to 'start at the bottom', as Ross put it, 'and work their way up'. In the interview with James he made a point of saying that it is not possible to go to university to learn his job: 'You can't do a course at any kind of institute to become a tool pusher. You just have to get out there and get practice'. Sandra, the wife of Robert who works on a drilling rig in the Middle East, put it this way: 'Robert can't stand those university educated idiots who come out to the rigs and think they know everything. They really need experience more than education'.

Sandra, a member of the Petroleum Wives of Perth, and one of the few members who had a husband engaged in blue-collar work, was 'defending' his choice of work by emphasising his enjoyment:

> 'My husband does the drilling for a contractor. He could change over [to work for an oil company] if he wanted to, but he actually loves what he's doing. He's a "hands on" person. A lot of the others, the ones working for the oil companies, they've come from a tertiary background, they're on the management side, whereas Robert is very much on the practical side even though he probably knows more than the people from university do. Those other people out there are looking after the oil companies' interests. There's

[53] There is a similar relationship between 'site' and 'city office'. Those working at remote locations, be it platforms, mining towns or a fly-in/fly-out minesite often complain about people working in the

very much a hierarchy between the two [the oil company and the drilling company]. What my husband is doing is seen as very much a blue-collar job'.

Not necessarily embarrassed by Robert's work, Sandra obviously felt the need to explain that he had in fact chosen this type of work and that he could have had the job of any manager if only he wanted to. Other wives (of commuters) often spoke about the need for thrill and excitement in their husbands' work. Two women (interviewed at the same time) believed that a city-based job would be too boring for their husbands. Even though they both disliked living on their own, they agreed that they would not want to run the risk of having their husbands' lose interest in their work for the sake of having them close by. In an interview with Margaret, married to Jack (who previously worked as a commuter) she said that she had 'allowed' him to return to work at the rigs after he had worked for two years in Perth. In 1980, with three young children in the house, they had both looked upon Jack's transfer to an office job as an ideal opportunity for the whole family.

> He was at home for a two-year period between 80 and 82. You know, he tried to stay at home, but it didn't work out. He was clearly unhappy working in an office environment and did not seem able to "turn off" from work when he came home in the evening. Even though there were lots of things that he could do, he would just come home and sit and "mope" in a chair. It was obvious that he was unhappy, he wasn't used to this lifestyle. He was used to going away and focus fully on work. I knew there were going to be problems in our relationship if he was to stay at home, so I told him that if he got the chance to work away again, he should take the opportunity.

Most wives (of men working in the resources industry) placed high priority on their husband's job satisfaction. Female partners who were engaged in paid work of their own generally spent less time (during the interview) discussing their husbands' work. An interview with Robyn and Martin (a commuter working for Goldmine in a

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company's city offices not having a 'clue' about 'what really goes on'.

management position) illustrates the dilemma of women who want to make sure that their husbands are satisfied with their job situation while trying to find an arrangement they can live with themselves.

> Martin: I really enjoy the job, there's a lot of satisfaction because I can get things done, I can make them better…It's great to supervise people, I'm among the decision makers and I've got an impact on what is happening, it's very satisfying. But there is a lot of stress involved. But unless it wasn't interesting I would leave.
>
> Robyn: But it's not long term, you're not looking at long time, are you?
>
> Martin: Ah, no, I guess not…
>
> Robyn: I don't know, I think three years is plenty, but if it's something Martin wants to keep doing… I don't like it, I can cope with it, but I get scared at nights sometimes and can't go to sleep.

It is not unusual for women to agree to work arrangements for their husband that are less than satisfactory for themselves. A few women hinted that their husbands were more concerned with their own welfare than that of their family, but said they were still willing to 'excuse' this type of behaviour. One wife expressed what many others conveyed during interviews when discussing the difficulties associated with being on their own with the children; 'you know, I guess I'm kind of lucky. After all he's the one who has to do the hard work and bring in the money. I shouldn't really complain'. Instead of seeing their own contribution to the family and household as equitable to that of their husband's, the majority of women choose to emphasise and focus on the needs of their husband. A member of the Petroleum Wives of Perth, Shirley, whose husband is employed by a multinational company, spoke extensively about the need for her husband to have a challenging job (she never juxtaposed her husbands needs with her own in terms of her lack of opportunities to work in her chosen field because of the constant movement of her husband).

> My husband really enjoys doing challenging things. If there is something he knows how to do, he really doesn't want to do it. He is at his best when he is

trying to figure out how to do something. This job has its very own set of challenges that which are very different to his last job, so he's enjoying this.

Jerry's employment requires him to move, usually to a new city or country, on a regular basis. Though Shirley emphasised that she takes part in making the decisions about whether or not Jerry should accept a new position, her decision is usually based on how well her son and husband's needs will be met in the new posting. Thus, in effect, she leaves the decision of whether to take the job to Jerry. Jerry's previous posting to a remote location in Asia meant that Shirley and their son had to do without many of the comforts they were used to in America. But instead of focusing on the sacrifices she had to make, she spoke instead of the excitement and satisfaction her husband had felt while working at this posting. Making sure their partners are happy with their work situations is only an issue for the women, the majority of whom have given up their own careers, or schedule their (paid) working hours so that they fit in with their husband's employment. On the other hand, male partners of women employed in the resources industry do not generally worry about the level of job satisfaction experienced by their partners. Neither are they expected to give up paid employment in order to take care of the household. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

4.2 "They thought I was doing something wrong".

> The attitude was that the men working up there, if they are married, they are there working for the family and doing it for them. Their families would not be able to sustain the lifestyle they have if it wasn't for them earning this big money. But with me, they assumed my marriage was in trouble since I was there. The split between my husband and me had nothing to do with me being away, but that was the first thing everybody assumed. They thought I was doing something wrong.

Despite their presence in most areas of the resources industry, women such as Karen are questioned about their presence. Female commuters, and especially those who are married, challenge traditional stereotypes when they choose to work in a male dominated environment. The majority of their male colleagues view their work as

interfering with their domestic duties. Karen said that many of her male colleagues at Goldmine assumed that her marriage was in trouble because she was working away from home. One of her colleagues, Angela, said she had similar responses from men who wanted to know why she had chosen work at a minesite:

> A lot of the older guys up there ask me "what does your husband think about you working away"? My answer to that is "what does your wife think about you working away"? And they get caught a bit off guard then; "Oh, I hadn't thought about it like that".

Other female commuters indicated that such reactions were not unusual. Men are seen to have the 'right', by virtue of their gender, to choose the conditions of their work, while women are questioned on their right to work if it is seen as interfering with their duties as a woman. Women are thus deemed, in the words of Eveline (1989) 'unequal to men… by virtue of their sex' (1989:76).

Solheim, Heen and Holter suggest that married women who work on platforms are sometimes regarded as being 'unfaithful' because they are seen to be neglecting their role as the caregiver to both their husband and children (1986a:99). In Western Australia women who work in the resources industry are also, to some degree, regarded as being 'unfaithful'. Married male commuters, as Karen pointed out, are not criticised for leaving their families behind when going away to work. In fact, they are seen as fulfilling their obligations of providing financially for their families. On the other hand, married female commuters are often regarded as neglecting their primary duties as women; that of taking care of home and family. Another aspect of being 'unfaithful' is the sexual one. It is widely believed by people working at commuter mines that a high percentage of employees are unfaithful to their partners. Many said they knew of people who had 'site partners'. Many female commuters spoke about being objects of unwanted sexual attention, though most agreed that it was not a 'big problem'. Angela said that the fact that she is a woman, even if married, contributed to men seeing her in a different light to their male colleagues.

> A lot of the guys up there assume that because I'm a woman working away from her husband that we must have a bad marriage and that I must be a fair

game. The solution to that was to just tell them about my husband, and that I wasn't interested. But you can have misunderstandings 'cause you drink with them, dance with them and sometimes they want something more. They're married too, but that's not my business. As long as they don't try to involve me in something [laughing].

Although women's presence on minesites is sometimes viewed as generating problems, many men view their company as a welcome contribution to the previously all-male environment. Those who had worked in the resources industry prior to the arrival of women often commented that having women at the mine/platform changed the way men interacted with each other and improved their behaviour. Thus women's employment is seen to benefit men by virtue of their domesticating presence (Eveline 1998:96). Women are sometimes portrayed as bringing about a more 'civilised' environment. According to one man I interviewed at Mt Nickel, the presence of female workers created a better environment overall; 'there is less swearing and fighting going on now with the women on board, they keep us on our toes a bit'.

When analysing the effects of the implementation of Affirmative Action legislation at a minesite in Western Australia, Eveline (1989) found that the consensus among male employees was that only women had gained as a result of this legislation. However, Eveline suggests, men have also gained from an increased participation of females in the workforce. They now have the opportunity to work in a more 'normal' and 'harmonious' work environment, and as such they provide valuable assistance to the employer and male employees by virtue of their presence. Women's employment can thus be seen in terms of its benefits to men. In addition, Eveline found that 'discourses of equal opportunities and practical considerations interact[ed] with those of male supremacy and male satisfaction' (1989:81). Male satisfaction may be one reason why men like to see women at workplaces in the resources industry. However, as my interviews show this argument may also be interpreted in another way whereby male satisfaction dictates that women should not be seen in these places.

Women's presence in these traditionally masculine strongholds caused one man, employed as a supervisor at a minesite, to argue that women were impinging on the rights of men:

I really disagree when guys at a workplace have to take down posters of nude women because a female employee object to it. It has been a male environment for years and years, and in the canteen there are posters of women, it has always been like that. I think it's not right that just because a woman gets there, they should change that. It's impinging on the rights of men.

Rather than recognising the privilege and dominance of men in this male dominated culture, this man saw women's demands for a work environment free of pornography as being their own problem. Some men suggested that women should learn to deal with the male culture at work, and if they could not cope with it, they should, according to an employee at Mt Nickel; 'leave us to get on with it'.

Some men, particularly those employed in a supervisory or management role, were often sceptical, and sometimes downright hostile, towards the idea of having female employees at the site or platform. They regarded women as 'temptresses' who lure male employees into being unfaithful. One manager stated that women were the cause of 'all kinds of trouble'; 'I'm not that happy about seeing women out there, so many things can go wrong. The relationship of one of the guys working for me was put at risk because he had an affair with one of the ladies working there'. The woman in this story was thus made responsible for her male colleague's adultery and safety, as if the man did not have any agency.

Whether or not men like or dislike having female colleagues, women will remain working in the resources industry. However, their duties are seen very much in the light of being 'women's work'. Eveline (1995) notes that when women move into non-traditional workplaces 'demarcations that belittle women's contributions are invented' (1995:11). Not all work performed by women is necessarily seen as inferior to men's work, but the view prevails that women (and men) are better suited to different types of work. One type of work that in recent years has become 'women's work' is truck driving. Since about the early nineties an increasing number of women have been employed to drive the large trucks that are used to move the ore and waste rock material in inderground and open pit minesites. Truck drivers usually spend their 12-hour shift

(interrupted only by a few short breaks) driving the vehicles in and out of the pit, the routine only broken by the 'dumping' of the waste rock on mullock heaps (also referred to as waste stock piles) or ore on stock piles for further processing. Trucks, like other machinery and technical equipment, were traditionally the domain of men. However, as the shift to female truck drivers occurred, so did the rhetoric surrounding the job. Now women are seen, in the view of the majority of male and female employees as better suited to this kind of work. Interestingly, the explanations of why this is so rely on traditional gender stereotypes. Some suggested that women are better at driving trucks 'because they are better suited to dealing with monotonous tasks', and because 'they are more patient'. Employees and managers alike indicated that mining companies benefit from having women employed in these positions 'because they are more careful, they don't easily trash the equipment like men often do'.

The perceived fit between women's nature and the task of driving trucks was one of Eveline's findings (1998). She notes that such explanations were also applied to menial jobs like cleaning, hosing down and acting as assistants, all jobs that men usually felt should be left to women and trainees (Eveline 1998:96). The desirability of the position for men is thus a major factor in whether it is defined as being a man or woman's job. The differentiation of 'women's work' and 'men's work' is also closely related to whether it is portrayed as being more or less demanding. Eveline argues that 'portraying the jobs men do as inherently more demanding than the jobs women do is "part of the very ideological framework that stigmatises women as marginal workers"' (Eveline 1998:92 quoting Schultz 1992:333). Female employees still remain unequal to men, in terms of status and payment, even though they are performing tasks that were previously the domain of their male colleagues. Probert (1989) found that inequality in terms of value of work is related to power. When women move into what has previously been considered a male domain, men generally leave these jobs, their status decreases and as a result wages (often) fall. This process is described as the feminisation of occupations.

The cultural hegemony in the resources industry ensures that men's interests are seen as the norm and men are consequently privileged. The sexual division of labour that prescribes for men the role of the breadwinner is part of the reason why men's needs and interests take precedence in the resources industry. However, not all men are

comfortable with living up to the 'traditional' understanding of masculinity. One example that clearly illustrates the unease that some men felt about living up to the male role model is related to going to the pub. Some of the men employed at fly-in/fly-out mines spoke about the pressures of having to go to the pub.[54] In some instances, men went along occasionally in order to be 'seen to be one of the boys'. Collis (1999) found that male miners experienced 'considerable peer pressure from other miners to conform to the norms of mateship, crew solidarity and the "macho image"' (Collis 1999:65). Her research in a mining town found that men often spent a significant proportion of their leisure time drinking together with their mates. She observed that close relationships between male colleagues were important markers of male identity. By choosing not to partake in this 'bonding ritual' (drinking together) men run the risk of being made fun of, ridiculed or excluded from social interaction.

One man, Derek, chose to risk the social sanctions of not participating in this 'bonding ritual'. He preferred to spend his leisure time either at the gym or in his room, but admitted that his colleagues would often 'have a go' at him for not participating in their drinking sessions; 'the other guys in the crew always give me a hard time about not going to the pub, but I think it's a waste of time and money and would rather spend the night in my room studying'. In his own view he was different from the majority of other men;

> Most people who socialise tend to go to the pub, and I want to steer clear of that sort of scene. I don't fit into the mould of the average fly-in/fly-out worker who would go to the pub and drink. I tend just to socialise with my shift on the one day between shifts [he works nightshift the first seven days on site then has a 24 hour break before he starts a period of working dayshift], and if there is a special event on; like someone leaving – I'll go along to that.

Blue-collar workers, as I mentioned earlier, experience more pressure to conform to traditional 'macho' standards of masculinity. The majority of those who spend most of

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[54] Platforms or 'camps' associated with the oil and gas industry have always been 'dry'. However, men working in the oil and gas industry, especially young ones and older men when referring to their youth often spoke about getting 'blasted' (drunk) when on their 'R&R' (rest and recreation).

their leisure time at the pub at fly-in/fly-out sites are contract workers doing some kind of manual labour. Contractors are often away from home for lengthy periods of time (I spoke to men who were regularly working away from home for up to 10 weeks at a time). The general perception of these men across the industry was that they 'drink heavily and party hard'. A group of men I came across in the pub during my visit to Mt Nickel had a carton[55] of VB[56] sitting between the four of them on the table said that they tried to make the most of their life on site. In response to my question on whether they frequented the pub regularly, one of them replied: 'We have to, this is our social life, it's all we've got. Everything else we do here is work, sleep and eat. We go here in order to survive'. Their presence at the pub is probably also related to peer pressure and the need to conform to what Collis (1999) refers to as the 'macho image'.

Women also went to the pub, but usually less often than men. Women often said they spent more visiting and receiving girlfriends in their rooms. Many of the women were part of small cliques, and if they went to the pub, they usually did so in the company of some of their girlfriends. Women were not 'expected' to go to the pub on a regular basis, and if they did so their sexual propriety was questioned. Women thus found themselves in a double bind situation where they experienced restrictions on their attendance at social events, yet at the same time they were risking their morality by attending these same places or events. This will be further explored in the next chapter.

Managers and office workers were subject to similar expectations to those of blue-collar workers, though probably to a lesser degree. One of the managers at Mt Nickel told me that he would rather spend time at the gym or reading in his room, but he felt that he should spend time with his team outside work hours so he went to the pub at regular intervals. Many men spend long hours in the pub because there are not many appropriate places on site where people can socialise. Apart from the dining room and sporting facilities such as the gym and the pool, the pub is one of the few places were groups regularly congregate.

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[55] A carton contains 24 cans of beer (375 ml each).

[56] Hamilton (1989) notes that VB, or Victoria Bitter, is a brand of beer associated with strength and masculinity, and in contrast 'low alcohol beers are… seen as effeminate' (1989:20). I often heard men in the mining industry refer to 'light' beers as 'beer for a wuss'. A 'wuss' is word used to describe someone who is perceived to be effeminate.

4.3 "I can't just sit at home behind closed doors and wait for him. . ."

> In a way I guess I have a separate life when he is not here, because I can't just sit at home behind closed doors and wait for him. One of the reasons that I'm working is the social contact, and it gives me some sort of identity and contact and sanity as well. And also because I have a life too, I have a career, my work is important to me. My peer group at work has become close to me, and my type of work is very social. I get in touch with a lot of people. Whereas if I didn't work it would be that much harder to fit into this community, other than through your children. So I've established my own identity out here. And I think for women who don't work, yes, they are home when their husband comes home. But what do they do when he's away?

When men with families choose to take up work as a commuter, their wives or partners generally have fewer options available to them in terms of their own work opportunities. As a result, women married to male commuters generally take a flexible attitude to paid work. Some choose not to work at all, while others maintain their employment, often on a part-time basis.[57] Kirsty worked part-time, but emphasised the importance of having her own career. Her work as a part-time teacher did not contribute much to the family income, and even though they could 'afford to have [her] staying at home', Kirsty preferred to work. She said that some of the other commuter wives that she knew about spent most of their leisure time participating in sports and activities organised for their children. 'I could do that as well, but I find it important to have my own identity. I was working before I got married and had a career. *I was somebody in my own right* (my emphasis). So in a way I'm doing the same thing here, I've established myself through my work'. However, Kirsty's most important commitment was to her family. She said that she would not be able to work full-time due to Derek's work commitment as the welfare and nurturing of their children was mainly her responsibility.

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[57] Of a total of 19 commuter wives (or long term partners) that I interviewed, five women were engaged in full-time paid work and seven were employed on a part-time basis at the time of their interview.

> I could not work full-time with him in that position. I work part-time, someone has to be at the house for the children when they come home from school. Someone has to be here to handle the day to day stuff, and if one of the children are sick, I'm the one that has to take care of them. Every family has to make a decision of what their priorities are, and right from the start when we decided to have children, I decided to be there for them.

Derek generally picked up the children from school and chauffeured them to after-school activities during his week at home. But Kirsty did not rely on his contribution to childcare, instead she saw it more as a welcome relief from her duties. The majority of other women involved in the study viewed children as being their main responsibility, regardless of whether they were engaged in paid work or not. Kirsty's decision to work part-time was not only related to their children, but also her husband's work schedule. 'I like to work part-time actually, because when he's home, I'm often home as well'.

In fact, being able to spend time together with partners during their leave is one of the main reasons why women do not take up paid work, or work only part-time. Many commuter wives said their husbands had expressed views to the effect that they would rather not see them take up paid work, as this would interfere with the time they spend together when away from work. Similarly, Norwegian studies concerned with commuting and seafaring families found that commuter wives often found it difficult to take up paid work (Sørhaug and Aamot 1980:197, Heen and Solheim 1982: 37, Borchgrevink and Melhuus 1985:56, Solberg 1985a:9, Solheim, Heen and Holter 1986b:53, Solheim 1988: 148-149). Solheim, Heen and Holter (1986b) emphasised that a husband's presence in the home, more than his absence, curtailed women's employment outside the home (1986b:53). According to Solheim (1988), the demands, explicit or implicit, which men placed on their wives during their time at home, were often at odds with the need that most women had for 'relief from the responsibility of household and family duties after [their] solitary existence as a caretaker' (1988:157).

Giesen's (1995) study of coal miners' wives in West Virginia found that women, to a large degree, organised their lives around the demands of their husband, his work and their families. Women with grown children often took up paid work outside home, but husbands of younger women often 'reacted negatively to their wives' outside

employment' (Giesen 1995:29). Even when men were not able to provide economically for their families, ue to frequent strikes, layoffs and shutdowns, they did not approve of women's paid work.

An example of a woman who had a flexible attitude to paid work is Sandra. She, like some other members of the Petroleum Wives of Perth members, ran her own company. Being the only employee meant that she was able to organise her work around Robert's comings and goings.

> We decided a long time ago that I should work, but it is hard and I know that's why a lot of the women don't work. My husband couldn't stand it if he came home and I was going to work nine to five, and I couldn't bear that either. You'd feel like you didn't see him. I understand why women don't work. But for my own benefit, I really like doing this, I really like getting out and meeting new people. And I can ease off when I want to, so it's pretty good really, pretty flexible.

Sandra incorporated Robert's working schedule by planning her work according to his roster. She said she worked more during his absence, but that she did not want to put her life 'on hold' as some women do. Sandra that was not willing to change her family's routines upon Robert's return.

> I don't actually change my life when he comes home. I know of a lot of casualties in the oil field, but I think it's to do with them not having anything in common when he does come home. I look forward to him coming home because we can get into golf together and we have always got so much to do. He also helps me with my business [bookkeeping and deliveries]. I need him at home when he's home, I think it's really good. Whereas people who have problems in their relationship, it's always a matter of being paranoid about what the house looks like when the husband is coming home. And the idea that they can't go out and do things because their husband is coming home. I don't do that, I don't knock back a lunch because he's home, he quite often drives me to them in fact. So I don't actually have these stop/start months, but instead it just flows.

Wives of commuters, like Kirsty and Sandra, who have established themselves in the community not only as wives and mothers, but as paid employees, seem to manage better in their husband's absence than those who are not engaged in paid work. Women who continue doing the things they would normally do in their husband's absence (whether or not engaged in paid work) also reported less problems than women who spent all their time with partners during home leave. These women said they often felt lonely and bored during their husband's absence. One example of this was Vicki who had stopped working when her daughter was born. She often made references to suffering from 'cabin fever' during Warren's absence. In the three days preceding his homecoming she cooked and cleaned the house, but most of the rest of the time she spent waiting for him to return.

> When I'm at home with my daughter I get so bored sometimes. I go and spend four hours at the shopping center, just for my sanity, it's a way to get out and see other people. We don't have many friends with children, and most of them work during daytime. I get bored sitting at home, and end up watching a lot of cable TV. I also do clock watching, you know, just watching the time go by, counting the hours till it's time to go to bed or whatever.

Her friend Sally, who also had a young child, said that she also did a lot of 'clock watching' and spent time in shopping centres 'just to see other people really'. Her husband Paul worked as a driller for exploration companies in the mining industry.[58] His work often took him away from home for long periods (up to seven weeks at a time). Towards the end of the period that I was in contact with Sally she started working part-time as a secretary for a mining company.[59] Even though her employment meant that she was not able to spend the same amount of time with Paul when he was back in Perth, she said she was glad she had made the decision to start working again: 'I was going mad staying at home. My life revolved around cooking, cleaning and changing diapers. I had to start work for the sake of my sanity'.

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[58] Paul worked for three different companies during the period I was in contact with Sally.

[59] Sally used to work as a secretary for a number of mining companies in a regional mining town prior the birth of her son and her and her husband's move to Perth.

Some women had no desire to take up paid work (all of the commuter wives had been involved in paid work prior to getting married or having children). A member of the Petroleum Wives of Perth member Gabriella (previously a commuter wife) had worked in day-care centers for eight years prior to getting married. She said she was happy to stay at home and felt there was 'no need for me to go back to work. Graham earns more than enough for us to manage well'. When replying to people who asked her if she had considered going back to work after her children had started school, Gabriella told them 'that's the last thing I want to do, to go and take care of a bunch of other children, mine are more than enough'. Julie, who is married to Scott who is a consultant to mining companies and who commutes intermittently called attention to the financial benefits of her husband's work, but highlighted the difficulties of being on her own with their one year old daughter.

> Financially we're well off because of what we've done, we've already paid for the house and we don't have to worry about him not working for a few days. He's a very traditional family man and feels he has to work hard. He can't relax enough and take time out and be at home with Joy. I sometimes wish we'd live a simple lifestyle and I'd have the support when I needed it. But, we'll get there.

Julie said that looking after Joy was a full-time job. She had considered studying part-time, but she had put it on hold because it would mean that Joy would have to go to childcare: 'We've got a babysitter for when we go out, and I have looked into childcare, but Scott doesn't really like it, so I'll wait and see what happens'. When I asked whether Scott contributed to the housework or looking after Joy, she replied:

> No… I get a cleaner in every week to do the basics. And I sort of figure that's Scott's part, the part he's never, ever gonna do. He's not really a hands-on sort of person. He will do the dishes occasionally and put some washing out. He's gotten better since Joy's been born. But it's not really something he's ever had to deal with because he's been living in [mining] camps, and it's only a couple of years since we moved in here'.

Julie had in fact been a commuter to a minesite herself prior to meeting Scott, and she had also been a resident of a mining town for a three-year period. During her stay in the mining town she had lived in a camp in which the mining company provided food and accommodation. One could argue that she, like Scott, was also not used to cleaning and cooking. But because she is a woman, everyone, including herself, expects her to be able to fulfil household and child caring duties. Apart from domestic duties, women are also seen and largely see themselves as responsible for the emotional well-being of their families. These topics will be explored further in Chapter 5.

4.4 "He was tired, jetlagged and generally unhappy. . ."

> He was tired, jetlagged and generally unhappy when he first got back from work.[60] He would be unhappy with everyone and everything for the first couple of days. A couple of times I got so upset with him I told him if this was the way things were going to be, he might as well check into a hotel for the first couple of days he was back in town. It was difficult for me and the kids to accept that he only wanted to sit around the house and 'vege', when we'd rather go out and do things with him. The emotional side was also difficult. He was withdrawn, he had still not switched off from work mode and I found it hard to accept that he was not as excited to see me as I was to see him. I guess he probably was, but he didn't show it.

A lot of commuter wives talked about experiences similar to Margaret's. Even though most families looked forward to the commuters return to the household, there was often a clash between expectations and reality. Margaret said she felt frustrated by the fact that Jack expected to be in charge of everything when he came back home. In his absence she had run the household independently, yet on his return she found that: 'some of my independence was taken away, especially in regards to issues related to bringing up the children, we didn't always agree on that'.

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[60] Jack had stopped working as a commuter two years prior to the interview. His employment in the oil and gas industry spanned a period of twenty years. At the beginning of his career he worked away for seven weeks at a time and had only one week at home. At the end of his period as a commuter, his roster saw him spend two weeks at work and two weeks at home.

Heen and Solheim (1982) and Solheim (1988) discuss the 'transition period' that offshore workers go through in making the move from the work sphere to the home sphere. This period can last for several days, and some commuters take a whole week to 'get into the new rhythm' (Solheim 1988:147). Solheim calls attention to the fact that these adjustments require a complete change of mindset for the commuter: 'a total reorientation of the person from one state of being to another – from "being ordered" to "creating one's own order", from routine actions and personal withdrawal to active participation and personal involvement' (Solheim 1988:147). A large number of commuters in my study reported similar difficulties related to the shift from 'work mode' to 'private mode' that was required upon their return home. One male commuter said he found it difficult to communicate emotions to his wife when he first got home: 'I think working at the mine affects my communication skills. I spend a lot of time on my own during the 12 hour shifts, and I don't socialise much up there anyway'.

Lisa,[61] a woman in her mid-thirties who used to commute to Goldmine, was the only female commuter who mentioned having any difficulties coping with the transition from work to home.

> I think you do get very selfish up there. I felt very independent up there, I could eat dinner when I wanted and I could just do my things. You are very restrained in some ways in that you have to eat dinner at a particular hour and there is only one place you can eat, but it's only you up there, and there is no one else to take into consideration regardless of whether you are in a relationship or not. You can stay at work as long as you'd like to, you can go for a walk if you want. And sometimes it can be hard to come back to your family. It's hard to change your mindset, and you keep having to go through these changes every couple of weeks.

James drew attention to the fact that commuting meant that not only did he have to deal with a transition from work to home, but similarly a change of mindset is required when

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[61] When Lisa worked at Goldmine she was been married to a man who also worked in the mining industry. During the time of their marriage they lived in two mining towns, and her husband worked at a fly-in/fly-out mine for a short period of time. She was divorced at the time of the interview.

leaving home and going to work: 'I need three to four days to settle in and "get things out of my system" when I return home. I start anticipating going back to work two to three days prior to actually leaving home, so I guess that takes up some of my spare time'. He looked forward to going back home from site, usually with pleasure, but sometimes he worried about problems that might have occurred in his absence: 'Mishaps tend to happen while I'm away. I might have detected it if something was wrong with the car or an electric fault in the house, so instead of it being a minor fault it becomes a major one because it's not attended to'. Not only was James in charge of many technical tasks at work, he also saw himself as being responsible for the maintenance of cars, electrical equipment, chopping wood and other traditionally male tasks in the household.

There is a general impression among wives and commuters themselves that because men carry out hard work and work long days during their time away they need to rest (for a period) upon their return. In contrast, on their return home female commuters do all the housework and shopping. The different expectations placed on women and men in regards to housework will be further explored in Chapter 5. Women tend to have a lot of empathy for the exhaustion that their commuter husbands experience on their return to the household, even though this might impact negatively on themselves. Louise, wife of James, gave a clear example of this:

> He is usually very tired when he comes back. They also wake him up at night there if anything is wrong. The operation is going 24 hours a day. So even though he's on 12 hour shifts, they will get him up in the night if anything is going wrong. This last time he says it's been quite a lot, so he really feels it. So when he comes in, it takes him a good week really, to come around. Cause he's got into a routine at work, he gets up, he starts early and gets up at half past five, he does the same here. It drives me absolutely batty! I have to get up at 6 anyway, but it's just that extra half an hour, and then I will wake, and then I think I have to get back to sleep. I don't think he can get out of it.

Graham, Gabriella's husband, had in the early days of their marriage commuted between Texas and an oilrig off the African shore on a 28 days on/28 day off roster.

Gabriella said the long trip home, on 'top of the exhaustion after working hard for 28 days, took its toll on him'. She did not expect him to contribute towards any domestic work during his period at home, but admitted that she was frustrated by his refusal to leave the house during his first days at home.

> He would come home and you'd think "Two days or three days of rest, and then its time to get going and do something". But not Graham, he used to come home and he would be on the couch for four days. And it would drive me nuts, because I wasn't allowed to do whatever I wanted. He didn't make that rule for me, that was just my own rule, and I had to act like I was happy to see him. But after four days of that I would just say "I'm sorry, I've just got to get out of here". Eventually he'd get up and get moving around.

In contrast to Heen and Solheim's (1982) study of Norwegian commuters in which they claim that men are expected to contribute to chores and activities around the house after their initial period of rest, the majority of commuter wives in Australia said that they did not wish to place any explicit expectations[62] on their husband during his time at home.[63] Part of the reason why women in Australia are less willing to place such expectations upon their partners may be related to the different commuting rosters in Norway and Australia. Commuters to minesites (who make up approximately seventy percent of my sample) in Australia generally spend about two-thirds of the year away at work,[64] while Norwegian offshore workers in fact spend more time at home than at work. During the period that most of the Norwegian studies[65] were conducted, North Sea commuters commonly spent two weeks at work, followed by a three week period at home (Solheim 1988:143). Nowadays Norwegian commuters usually spend two weeks at work and four weeks at home. Heen and Solheim's comments regarding the male offshore workers time at home, which in Norway is regarded as being 'too long a period to legitimately be seen as 'free time' without any obligations towards… family'

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[62] In regards to chores and activities around the household.

[63] There were some women who made lists of tasks (usually related to larger maintenance projects) that needed doing in the house, but these seemed to serve more as a 'guidance' for activities, rather than being rigorous expectations.

[64] Employees in the oil and gas industry in Australia usually enjoy equal time at work and at home. Rosters of four weeks on/four weeks off, and two weeks on/two weeks off are common.

[65] These are the Norwegian studies that I refer to throughout this thesis.

(1982:29, my translation from Norwegian) must therefore be seen in light of the Norwegian rosters.

Heen, Solheim (1982) and Solberg (1983) argue that the prolonged period of 'free' time that Norwegian commuters enjoy opens up the possibility for a more equal distribution of chores between husband and wife. In his period at home the male commuter is exposed to tasks that his wife normally performs during daytime (that he would not be able to witness if he were employed in a 'nine to five' job). They maintain that the prolonged presence in the household makes it easier for the male commuter to take on chores that would normally be performed by his wife (Heen and Solheim 1982:29, Solberg 1983:19). The male commuters' accessibility and constant presence in the household, claims Solberg, makes him similar to the 'traditional housewife'. Norwegian commuters with children are able to take part in their children's lives in a different way from the 'traditional dad' who returns home late in the afternoon on weekdays.[66] Many of the male commuters in my study said they enjoyed being able to take part of their children's daily routines. Kirsty spoke about the advantages for the children of having Derek around during daytime:

> In most families the dad comes home at the end of the day and sees the children for a few minutes before they're off to bed. When Derek is home for a week, he's there when they come home from school and you try to do something with them every day, don't you [speaking to Derek], not just on the weekend. In that sense he spends more time with them than the average dad does. But on the other hand, he's always gone for the next two weeks. So it's checks and balances. But I think you have developed quite a good relationship with them [speaking to Derek].

Men who spend more time with their children do not necessarily increase their participation in regards to household chores to any great extent. Commuter wives are, at the end of the day, responsible for tasks related to both children and household, while

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[66] Robyn justified Martin's absence from the children by saying that it would not have made much of a difference to her daily routines: 'if Martin was working in Perth he wouldn't be home till 6.30 at night anyway and all the hard part of having the four kids is the picking up from school and dinner time and all that. That's how we justified it, Martin would miss out on that anyway if he was in Perth'.

men are generally seen as 'helping out'. The topic of men's participation in domestic affairs will be explored further in Chapter 5.

4.5 "What you do is who you are…"

> There is a difference with the women that go overseas now, a lot of them are college educated and a lot of them have left good jobs of their own to follow their husbands into this time from the past that expatriate women are living in. Because we are superfluous, there is no reason for us to be there. The job requires the husband, who's here to work. It's like going back to the 50's where the husband is the breadwinner and the wife stays at home and does the cooking and the entertaining, looking beautiful and everything else. So most of these young women have had to give up, what in America is considered your identity, which is what you do. What you do is who you are for most people there. So how do you measure your worth then? The old standard of measuring your worth is by the standard of your husband.

The quote above is taken from an interview with Shirley, an American member of the Petroleum Wives of Perth. At the time of the interview she had been in Perth for only four months, having moved here with her husband and son from California. Both Shirley and her husband Jerry were in their mid-forties, and well accustomed to moving. During his career with an American oil company Jerry had been transferred to seven different postings. On average that meant a move for the family every four years. Four of these moves had been within America and three overseas (including the last move to Perth). Shirley had been at home with her son when she was young, but had done part-time studies and some part-time work when they had lived in America. She had not worked when living overseas, partly because of visa restrictions and partly because she had not felt that she had the energy to take on a new job in a new country. I find her reflections on the role of expatriate women very pertinent. Although she referred to herself as an 'untraditional' wife[67] she spoke about being 'locked' into the role of an expat wife. By choosing to marry an 'oil man' she had 'in some ways… given

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[67] Shirley saw herself as being different to the other wives, mainly because she had a husband who took an active part in performing some of the chores around the house.

up [her] own identity'. However, she made a point of resisting categorisation by other expat women as the 'wife of…': 'It would have been easy to play that game, and there have been a few women who have tried to play that game with me, as far as according me my husband's status. I just don't respond to it'. Shirley said that other women were suspicious when she said she did not have much knowledge about the projects her husband were working on ('My husband doesn't talk much about work at home'), and thought she was consciously holding back information.

The impact of a husband's job on the life of expatriate women is exacerbated by their frequent moves. The unequal power relationship between expatriate husbands and wives manifests itself through their multiple moves around the world. Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999) write, with reference to Aldrich's (1989) work on women's networks, that 'women are more likely to move with their husbands' work opportunities than men are to move with their wives' job changes'. They also claim that women are generally 'more supportive of their husbands' networks than husbands are of their wives'' (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999:194-195). In the case of resource industry expatriates, the husband's career is always prioritized because it is he who brings in the family income, even if that means moving to a place where the rest of the family would rather not go. At many postings, particularly in less developed countries, expatriate wives rely upon each other for social contact. Many of these women called attention to the fact that it is a lot easier for their husbands to move to a new place. In contrast to women, who generally have to create new networks and relationships at each new posting, men have access to a network of colleagues and friends at their new place of employment. In addition, men are paid good salaries and provided an immediate role and status through their position at work.

The lack of control over their life that these women often experience is one aspect of this asymmetry. Through my involvement with the Petroleum Wives of Perth I heard of women whose opinion was not taken into account by their husbands were making decisions concerning their next career move. Shirley elaborated on the lack of control that many expat women experience:

> Some women, their husbands tell them "look, this is what we are doing".
> Our relationship is not like that, my husband does really not want to go

somewhere where I absolutely refuse to go. We have made known our one condition, which is no boarding school for our son. But of course he will be finishing high school,[68] hopefully here now, and then will be off to college. And then everything will change for us.[69]

Even though these women, in many cases, do not have much of a choice in regards to relocations, they usually end up doing most of the work associated with a move. During the interview, Shirley mentioned that she had participated in a study in which her husband's company had looked at the impact of frequent moves on spouses. She explained that one of the main complaints that this study had identified was related to women not being able to plan a move in advance. The company had decided to try to change their practices as a result of these findings.

> They try and give people a little more warning, so that there is, perhaps not more control in their life, but more time to accept. The company generally gives people a weekend to decide whether they are going to be going to Nigeria or not. Here I am, making a decision where we will be living there for a long period of time, and my child will have to be going to school and everything else. Generally, everyone I have spoken with in the expatriate spouse network feels that you are not given enough time to make a decision. If you ask, you can get a week, but that is not a lot of time, especially if you are going to a place where there is a war going on or things are unsettled.

The lack of control that many expatriate women experience is exaggerated by the fact that they often rely on the wives of their husband's colleagues for company and support.

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[68] In the end Shirley and her husband were transferred back to the US when their son had one year left at high school in Australia. Jerry went back four months earlier than Shirley and their son, as he was required to change jobs with only two weeks notice. Shirley decided to stay in Perth for the next four months in order for their son to finish year 11.

[69] Though Shirley and Jerry always make a joint decision on whether they will take up the next posting, they feel it is difficult to refuse the offer from the company: 'It is very difficult, because as women we are powerless in these situations. I can say that we are going to be here for three years, so that my son can finish high school. But I have no assurances of that, nor do I have any reasons to think that if the company wants my husband somewhere else, they won't move him. We can say no. Well, we can always say no, but there is this undercurrent that there will be fewer and fewer choices and the few that are left might not be palatable ones at all. So, how much longer can we play this game? My husband believes that

Shirley pointed to the difficulties associated with complaining about her life situation to the wife of her husband's boss. As a result of this, she remarked, conversations between expatriate women often focus on 'small' complaints, in areas where they can exert some control.

It becomes important to you to be able to get a food that belongs to you. When we get together we talk about "were you able to find canned American pumpkin" to make pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving. *This is the only thing we have power over* (my emphasis). We can't complain about the fact that we have no power over our lives and destinies here, that the company pays for your housing, sends your children to school, wants to know how much you are spending on your bills, have to have receipts for your airplane tickets… In the States the company does not play a big part of your life, it's not in your back pocket. Your friends are not the people your husband works with necessarily, unless you have something else in common. Here they are your friends and there is very little power. So complaining about no mayonnaise and no American canned pumpkin, is a way I think, of getting back a little something. You can't complain about the fact that life is really awful, and it can be, even in a place like this. It can be very difficult to be an expatriate person. But you can complain about the fact the aluminum foil here is flimsy and you can't make it cling. This is given a lot of importance, as compared to when you are back home. You can talk about these difficulties, cause it's almost taboo to talk about the larger difficulties, especially when there is this hierarchy. I mean, you can't really go to a mixed group of women, one of whom is the wife of the managing director and complain about how awful it is here. That can be very tough, cause who is your group but this very same group of women?

The hierarchy that Shirley is referring to does not only exist among women whose husbands work for the same company, but it is to a certain degree part of the social relations among members of the Petroleum Wives of Perth. The majority women who belong to this club have husbands who are employed in some form of management

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if you let it be know what you want, people will try very hard to give you what it is that you want. But, it's not always very easy'.

position, or else have been brought to Perth (or any other posting they might be sent to) to provide some form of expertise that is not available locally. With their large pay packages and generally high-ranking positions, these men often belong to the top layers of their respective organisations. During luncheons and other activities with the Petroleum Wives of Perth I overheard women speaking about at what 'level' a new members' husband is employed.[70] Sandra, who was mentioned earlier in this chapter and whose husband is a superintendent at an oil rig, said she felt that there was a status difference associated with having a husband working for an oil company as opposed to a contractor, the latter being seen as the less attractive option. In her view, other people made a clear distinction between 'white-collar' work and 'blue-collar' work.

> My husband doesn't actually do anything physically, he just works on the computer all day. I think the other guys are working in a cleaner environment, and that's the difference. I don't know, I find it difficult to put into words. I guess I'm really the exception, there aren't many other women in the club whose husbands are working at the drilling rigs.[71]

But there are also women who would deny any existence of a hierarchy within the club (one might argue that their own immersion in this hierarchy prevents them from acknowledging its presence). Gabriella was one of those. Her husband was employed in an influential position in a multinational oil company during their time in Perth. My query about whether there was an informal ranking of PWP members according to their husband's status, elicited this response:

> I don't think the other women [referring to PWP members] care about what my husband do[es]. I think some of us don't even know and we'd rather keep it that way. It's a hard question to answer because most of the people I

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[70] Both of the times I have listened to such conversations, the women talking about these matters have husbands who work for the same company as the husband of the new member.

[71] Sandra said she had noticed that most members portray themselves as successful, and that this makes it difficult for women to 'open up, because they are frightened they might not be approved up. There's very much keeping up appearances'. She also made references to the existence of a hierarchy in the club: 'I've heard people having conversations were they talk about someone from the same company, and then they go "they've only got such and such a house". So they are very aware that there is a system within their companies. And even though they all come from different companies and countries they are all aware of the structure of where they have been sent and what allowances they get and where they fit into the hierarchy'.

socialise with on a regular basis, all of their husbands work at about the same level, so I guess we don't really question it.

Although Shirley (unlike Gabriella) was one of the members who actively sought to resist categorisation as the 'wife of' her husband, she nonetheless saw herself as being closely connected to the company. This is illustrated by her constant referrals to the company as both her and her husband's employer: 'when I was first with the company…'. In effect these women are the unpaid workers of the oil and gas companies, for without them their husbands would not be able to spend as much of their time and energy devoted to their job. That is not to say that single men do not manage without a wife, but for the majority of middle-aged men life as an expatriate without their wives would be filled with chores. Not only are these women responsible for tasks related to moving such as finding a new house, a school for the children and cooking, cleaning and raising children. The burden of less tangible chores, such as creating new social networks and recreating the feeling of 'home' for the family in a new and usually foreign setting, falls on them. Richards found, when examining people's experience of community in a new housing estate in Australia, that both men and women implied that 'the work of belonging was done by women' (Richards 1990:56).

In the situation of women married to expatriates we see clearly what Williams (1981) refers to as the inter-dependence of capitalism and patriarchy. Companies do not pay these women for their efforts, but in the same way as their husbands and families, rely on their labour. The traditional division of labour between expatriate couples means that women are financially dependent on men (see section 4.3 for a discussion on expatriate women and paid work). Many of these women consider their husband's earnings to belong to him, and receive only an 'allowance' to cover the household and private expenses.[72]

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[72] Sandra observed that a lot of PWP members seem to be very dependent on their husbands. She made references to the fact that some women receive an allowance from their husband: 'This is astonishing, but it is actually very common. I heard one of them say something about how she needed this and that, but she had to wait for her next allowance that her husband gives her. Isn't that dreadful? We couldn't function if I didn't have control of money, I have to pay the bills. I just can't believe that a couple would divide their expenses like that. We've never ever had separate accounts. We've always looked upon his earnings as our money'.

In some cases the unequal power relationship, in which the husband carries the decision of whether, when and where his family will move, continues into retirement. Brines (1994), Dempsey (1988) and Kynaston (1996) argue that the unequal relationship between men and women, exemplified in the division of household labour, is especially visible among couples where the husband is retired or unemployed. Kynaston writes: 'Retired men and unemployed men are singularly well placed to make substantial contributions to housework, but the fact that they choose not to do so highlights, all to clearly, the fundamentally exploitative nature of the sexual division of domestic labour' (Kynaston 1996:229). Baxter (2002) suggests that the lack of involvement by unemployed and retired men in domestic labour can be explained by looking at the challenges that these roles pose to their 'masculine identity as the family breadwinner' (2002:401). It is thus less likely that men in these positions will increase their involvement in household activities, as this will further challenge their identity.

The majority of the members of Petroleum Wives of Perth are middle-aged women who have been relocated by their husband's company a number of times during their married life. They seem resigned to the fact that they cannot stay in one place very long. In 1999 and 2000 a substantial number of members had to leave Perth due to a downturn in oil prices. Many women said they would have preferred to stay longer, but accepted that they had to move.[73] At a Petroleum Wives of Perth workshop on making flower decorations, I came across a French woman who was married to a man who had recently retired from the oil and gas industry. During the last years of his employment they had been posted to the Netherlands. This woman had felt at home there, and told us that she would have liked to continue living there after her husband retired. But, she said, 'he wanted to move to Perth, and there was nothing I could do to convince him to think otherwise'. She made it clear that she was not happy here, and the other women present tried to comfort her, saying things would get better as she got settled in to life here. No one questioned her husband's right to make the decision to move here, and neither did the wife. Although she was clearly unhappy about the move, it appeared that

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[73] When cost cutting, resource companies often send their expatriate staff to their 'home base'. Expatriates are commonly offered a 'package' when going overseas. This package includes a higher salary than in the home country (compensation for living abroad), accommodation expenses (usually including expenses like electricity, gas, telephone), expenses related to moving furniture, free return airfares for all family members to home country once or twice a year as well as private school fees for children.

she saw adhering to her husband's needs and desires as part of her duty as a 'good wife'.[74]

In comparison, I have found that the wives of long distance commuters do not hold the same relationship to their husband's work position as do expatriate wives. However, it is obvious that some of the commuter wives, particularly those who are married to men who are employed in management positions, have a lot of respect and admiration for their husband's work. But as a general rule, commuter wives have less knowledge about their husband's work and are not as interested as most expatriate wives seem to be.[75]

Some of the male commuters whom I interviewed remarked that it was nice to see a female taking interest in what they do (or did), indirectly suggesting that their wives did not take enough interest in their work. I was regularly presented with photos, maps and memorabilia from their place of work during interviews with male commuters.[76] Often large parts of an interview with a male commuter were devoted to discussions of the

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[74] Here I am making use of the term 'a good wife' in the way that I have heard it used among PWP members. In order to illustrate the use of the term, I want to share a story from a fieldwork event. At a gathering of members at the home of Valerie the discussion turned to divorce. Valerie told us about some friends of hers from Texas where the husband had recently left his wife for a younger woman. In my fieldnotes I've written down her comments: 'You know, she didn't deserve that treatment, she was such a *good* wife. She worshipped the earth he walked on, and she would always agree with him. Maybe it all became too much for him? If she said she loved blue, and he said he hated it, she would think about it and eventually tell herself that "no, blue is not a good colour"'(original emphasis). The other members present nodded and expressed their sympathy for Valerie's friend. It is possible to infer from her sentiments that Valerie would have thought that it was acceptable for this man to leave his wife had she not been a 'good wife'. The notion of a good wife among the PWP refers partly the respect women hold for their husband's work and position, and also to the willingness of these women to put his needs and requirements ahead of their own, and follow him around the world if necessary.

[75] This may be related to the fact that more fly-in/fly-out wives hold paid jobs than expatriate wives. Another factor that contributes to the close connection between expatriate women and their husband's work position is the fact that they move around the world as a result of his job. Finally, when presenting themselves (for example at social gatherings of the PWP) they often refer to themselves as "the wife of X who works for…'. One of the first things I became aware of at gatherings with other PWP wives was that upon introduction I was almost always asked about what company my husband worked for. This information was collected, I believe, in order to find out whether our respective husbands were colleagues or had some other connection. The link between the company and PWP women is so strong that on the official PWP nametags the husband's company name is listed under the name of the member (these nametags are worn at all 'official' functions, such as the monthly luncheons).

[76] Some of the things I had the opportunity to look at included samples of the first oil that was brought up from a new well (owned by a person working at a drilling rig), small parts of drilling equipment, stones and rocks, diplomas, and a decorated bronze safety helmet made in Indonesia in the 1970s.

technical aspects of their work, and to general descriptions of their work environment.[77] It was evident that many men took a great pride in their job, and the memorabilia they displayed often bore testimony to their area of expertise. In contrast only one female commuter brought out photos from her workplace during the interview. Despite the fact that some female commuters also displayed pride in their work, the pride was never as noticeable as it was with men. Interviews with women would, as I have remarked previously, generally be more concerned with themes relating to their personal life, such as family, friends, home and housework.

When seeking to find out how commuters cope with being away from families, I discovered that men and women take a different approach to work. Whereas most female commuters were concerned with keeping in close touch with their partners in Perth, and talked about their families to colleagues, men often regarded the two environments (of work and home) as very separate.[78] In an interview with James who worked on a roster that took him away from his wife and four children for three weeks at a time, I asked if he talked about his family with colleagues at work.

> No… but then that's a typical 'bloky' thing. Men don't discuss their family life. Well, I know which guys are married and which aren't, but you don't know much more than that. I don't keep any photos of my family in my office, but every now and then you see a little one. Sometimes when you have a long conversation with someone, you show them a photo of your kids. But you'd only do that after a period of time. That's just the way blokes are.

The perceived lack of interest in other colleagues' personal life, I suggest, is tied to ideas about masculinity. James sought to explain this difference by making reference to

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[77] It was usually during discussions concerning the work environment that photos and maps came out. It was only when I interviewed men on their own (as opposed to in couples) that memorabilia and/or maps and photos became a part of the discussion.

[78] My claims that male and female commuters regard work and home differently stems from the numerous conversations in which men and women generally talked about their relationship to these spheres in a contrasting manner. Anthropologists often experience difficulties in identifying whether claims made in interviews are related to a level of appearance or experience. My analysis of this topic is not only related to the questions I asked interviewees regarding their relationship to work and home, but also to the references they made to work and home throughout the interview.

essential traits of male nature. Topics of discussion are usually related to sports, money or news. Derek said that he had very little in common with his younger colleagues. Trying to find common ground, apart from work, he said 'I find myself being forced into reading about sport even though I don't have much interest in it, but it's something to talk about, a way of having something in common with the other guys'. He said he knows who on his crew is married, divorced or in a relationship, but would not ask for this information directly from the person concerned.

> It's not something we talk much about, you may hear from somebody else. If you're on the same crew, if you don't know much about somebody, generally you ask others. People don't share problems, not unless you need to get time off to go home and it's to your advantage to let somebody know [laughing]. I think that's the way with blokes, we tend not to get too personal.

In the early days of commuting in the oil and gas industry those who wanted to contact their families had little privacy when doing so. Ross who had worked in the oil and gas industry for a period of more than thirteen years[79] said had few opportunities to keep in touch with his family during the first few years of his employment offshore.

> In Malaysia when we started off there was no way you could call home, I think it was a time thing though – because communication got better, in the 80's you could call home without too much difficulty. You had to pay for your own calls. When you wanted to call you had to go to the radioroom where everyone else were listening, and there was not a lot you could say. But it was good just being able to talk. But from a personal point of view, I was thinking, *I'm out here to do a job, I'm not at home with my family* (my emphasis). I would make a phone call once a week and write a bit of a letter each day.

These days communications technology has improved greatly with better access to phones and computers (for email contact) on mine sites and platforms. However, for the

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[79] He had stopped working as a commuter a few years prior to the interview.

majority of people[80] phone calls are still regarded as a bit of a luxury that they will only treat themselves to about once every week. Many commuters, both male and female, emphasised that during their working hours (usually 12 hours every day) they are usually too busy to think much about family and home. They assumed that their absence from home was probably more difficult for their families, who had more time on their hands to notice the lack of their presence. James was reluctant to talk much about his family to other colleagues and said he usually only thought about them late at night after he had finished for the day.

> When I really get paid, when I feel like I'm making my salary is when I'm finished for the day and I'm in my own room. When I finish for the day I have a shower, have a bit of a read, then get into bed. And that's when I want be at home. It would be ideal, it would be absolutely ideal if I could leave the house in the morning, go out and take care of the rig and come back home in the evening. But of course that's not possible.

Men in general seem to spend less time missing, thinking and talking about their families than female commuters do. However, they sometimes confide in other women, especially in those who are deemed appropriate for such purposes (nurses and human resource (HR) officers). Karen, a woman in her early twenties who worked at Goldmine as a HR officer, had her own theory about the gender difference in relation to communication.

> I think a lot of the men, the way they cope with having the two lives, they forget about… no, they don't forget, but they switch off and they get together with their mates and they don't talk about their private lives and about their families, it's very separate. Whereas the women, they cope with it by talking about it all. You can very much tell the difference between the women who have a partner on site and the ones who don't. They tend to go to the pub more often – they are out and about more. You can almost guess without knowing the situation of the women, but the guys all seem the same because they do seem to detach from their family when they are up there.

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[80] Those who work in an office environment can access computers and phones for free (and can also be contacted more easily).

I interviewed eight commuters from Goldmine mine during and after a period in which the mining company retrenched a large number of employees. Karen, in her role as an HR officer, was one of the people who had to tell employees that they had been made redundant. In her opinion, men, particularly those with families, seemed most affected by the loss of their job. She spoke about the particular difficulties associated with losing one's job when away on site.

> It's also hard when you make someone redundant in Perth, but when you make someone redundant at Goldmine, say, they are a long way from their family, they are devastated and there they are on their own. When you move from a place like that, when you leave your job, you're not only changing your job, but you're also changing your home. It's all that moving away from where you are living, especially for those who have been living there for a while. And you get very close to some of the people there. And when you do leave you don't just leave your job.

Everyone I interviewed from Goldmine said that the retrenchments had an impact on morale on site. Angela, a woman in her mid-thirties, spoke about how the redundancies affected people.

> There has been a lot of people who have been retrenched and people don't feel secure in their jobs. But that's a company-wide thing, rather than being specific to Goldmine people, employees are feeling the pinch all over the place at the moment. The concern about whether you have a job in three months time affects morale. When the retrenchments finally happened morale just hit rock bottom. A lot of people got very upset, those who didn't have any other work to go to were just devastated. Apart from one, who was in his twenties, all of them were above forty-five. But quite a few of them have actually been re-employed, some of them by contractors and one guy actually got work with a contractor at Goldmine.

Lance was one of the employees who lost his job (a month after I had interviewed him). When I spoke to him on the phone shortly after he had been retrenched he

said he was more upset about the way they had made him go (he had to leave on the day, and did not have the opportunity to say good-bye to many of his colleagues) than about losing his job. He was certain that he would find another job in the mining industry. His wife was not as confident as him, reminding him that the last time he had lost his job it had taken a year to find a new one. She also thought his age (mid-forties) would make it more difficult for him to get re-employed.[81] Lance was unusual in that he did not seem very upset about his retrenchment.[82]

Loosing one's job will usually have a greater impact on men than women as they are commonly the breadwinners of their families. Men's identity is closely related to their employment status, while women usually identify more closely with their caring and nurturing abilities, even when they are employed in paid work. A man without a job is, according to Gullestad (1992) is less respected than a woman in the same position.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated the presence of male hegemony in the resources industry. The gendered practices of women and men here must be analysed within the framework of a global economy in which patriarchal ideologies define men and women's work as being different. The privileging of men's work and the subsequent

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[81] When I called Lance again nine months after he had been made redundant he told me that he had applied for 34 different jobs (and had been to four interviews) in the mining industry, but had not been successful in obtaining a new job so far. When I expressed my sympathy, he replied: 'We are surviving. There is no use whinging about it, you just have to carry on'. He said he was not interested in applying for jobs in Perth, as the pay, in his view is 'too low' (for the type of jobs that he can apply for). He also said that he would not return to the mining town where he used to live and work a few years prior to our interview 'unless I'm really desperate. If I did go back it would probably be on my own' (Lance was married with two children of school age).

[82] Warren, a commuter in his mid-thirties, with a wife and a young daughter also lost his job in the mining industry only a couple of months following the interview. When I spoke to him on the phone he said he did not think he would find a permanent job in the city, although he would prefer to live here with his family. Having worked as a mill operator in the mining industry for the last seven years, the skills he had aquired in his original trade as an electrician, were 'outdated'. The only work he had found at the time that I talked to him, was casual labour as a bricklayer. This, he said, did not bring in enough money for the family. Not only did he earn less than half of what he would earn working at a mine, but there was also no guarantee that he would get work the following day. Luckily, he said, his wife Vicki had been able to find temporary work as a secretary.

devaluation of women's work has resulted in an unequal power relationship between women and men. However, not all work performed by males is regarded as 'proper men's work' and men experience pressures to conform to certain models of manhood. Discourses about the suitability of women and men to different types of work help reinforce beliefs about the existence of 'natural' gender differences. The impact of the presence of widespread beliefs about biological differences between women and men will be further explored in the next chapter.

5 HOUSEWORK AND IDENTITY

> Nora: I must stand on my own feet if I'm to get to know myself and the world outside. That's why I can't stay here with you any longer…
>
> Helmer: But to leave your home – your husband and your children… this is disgraceful. Is this the way you neglect your most sacred duties?
>
> Nora: What do you consider my most sacred duty?
>
> Helmer: Do I have to tell you that? Isn't your duty to your husband and children?
>
> Nora: I have another duty, just as sacred.
>
> Helmer: You can't have. What duty do you mean?
>
> Nora: My duty to myself.
>
> Helmer: Before everything else, you're a wife and a mother…
>
> From Ibsen's (1965:227-228) "A Doll's House"

In this chapter I explore the connection between femininity and domesticity among people in the resources industry. First I examine the different relationship that male and female commuters have to home, and analyse how this is influenced by perceptions of fairness and people's sense of entitlement. Secondly I look at the different relationship that women and men have to their rooms on minesites. I then discuss the meaning of housework for women and seek to shed light on the continuous link between women, housework and caregiving. Finally I examine the role that commuting wives play in providing a link between their husband and home.

Women and men in the resources industry are deeply embedded in traditional ideologies of marriage and the sexual division of labour. The gender ideology which informs their sense of self generally sees women identifying with their caring and nurturing abilities, while men see themselves as better suited to be the family breadwinner. In the models to which this ideology bears similarity housework is regarded as something that comes naturally to women, as if it were an inherent part of their biology. In contrast to men, who according to Heen (1995), are seen as containing

mainly instrumental qualifications, 'women are perceived as encapsulating caring and emotional capabilities' (Heen 1995:92).

The sexual division of labour and the close association between women and the private sphere and men and the public sphere has been the subject of analysis of many academic studies since the 1970s. Though there have been significant changes in women's economic situation in the past decades (the increased participation of women in the labour market has seen more women gain economic independence from men), the link between women and the household proves to be resilient. As noted by Heen (1995), women are still the main caretakers of family and children and as a result of this 'their life centres around maintaining the well-being of others' (1995:73). Time use surveys (in which respondents are asked to complete a diary of their daily activities) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1987, 1992 and 1997 clearly illustrate the continued existence of 'women's jobs' and 'men's jobs' in the household:

> Australian women, on the whole, are responsible for 'indoor' housework such as cooking, laundry, cleaning and the physical care of children, while men are responsible for the 'outdoor' tasks like lawn, garden, pool and petcare and for maintaining the home and the car' (Bittman 1995:8).

It is important to note here that women spend a lot more time doing unpaid work which is classified as 'women's work' than men do in their specialised tasks in and around the household (1995:9).[83] When comparing these findings to previous time use surveys, Bittman found that even though women have partly reduced the time they allocate to 'women's jobs', they have intensified their activities in other areas. He notes that 'the increased significance of women as a "breadwinner" has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in men's contribution to "homemaking"' (1995:34).

5.1 "In Perth I'm a bit of an unpaid housekeeper. . ."

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[83] 'In 1997, married women spent an average of 1hr:47mins per day more on domestic work than men. This difference, however, was smaller (1hr:16mins) for couples who spent similar time on paid work' (ABS 1999:119).

Well… I don't know. Now I have the freedom of going back, it's probably a bit selfish as well, but in Perth I'm a bit of an unpaid housekeeper. It just sort of falls on my head whether I like it or not. When I'm at work I do my shift and after I've finished, that's my own time, I don't need to answer to anyone else then.

Sandy, a commuter in her mid-forties, was replying to my question as to whether she would take up a position in Perth if she were offered one. At the time of the interview she was working on a four weeks on/one week off roster. Sandy is the oldest female commuter in my sample, and the only one with children.[84] She is engaged in preparing meals for the workers and/or cleaning rooms and facilities on minesites. Her work in the catering industry spans a period of twenty years, of which ten have been spent in the mining industry. During these ten years Sandy has spent six years working in two mining towns, and four years preceding the interview working at a variety of fly-in/fly-out sites. I met Sandy when she was doing temporary work at a remote fly-in/fly-out site while I was on a tour of several minesites in Western Australia, organised for academics by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy.

Two years prior to the interview she had met her current partner, Kevin, when working at a minesite in the Northern Territory. About a year after they met Kevin had an accident at work. As a result of the injuries he sustained, he was unable to continue his job on the minesite and was transferred to a desk-based position in the main office in Perth. Following his transfer to Perth he was, according to Sandy, less understanding towards her needs upon returning from working away.

He's thinking "great, Sandy's home, she can start dinner, clean up the house, do the shopping…". I don't mind a lot, but I suppose it bugs me a bit. If I were a guy he would never expect me to clean up, do all the shopping and everything. I guess he does keep it clean when I'm away, but thinks he can have time off when I'm back. You know, we plan all these things we'll do when I'm in the city. But then I come home and I don't have time to do anything. I suppose it does take a little while to get used to him again. When I'm back I've got to get up and make breakfast and all that sort of stuff.

Whereas if it wasn't for him, I'd probably stay in bed till nine. So in my week off, I'm still regimented. I know, it sounds silly. I guess I could tell him to get his own food, but it would be hard to say that it's my week off…

Sandy kept repeating throughout the interview that she did not want to complain about her situation when referring to the amount of housework she did during her period of leave. By deliberately choosing to not question the gendered division of tasks in her household (albeit struggling not to do so), her comments regarding housework reinforces the 'naturalness' of the link between femininity and domesticity. Sandy, like many other female commuters that I came into contact with during my fieldwork, spoke frankly about their awareness of the different expectations placed on women compared to men with regards to housework and childcare. However, the majority of women did not question why different expectations existed for women and men. A handful of women commented that the existence of two different sets of expectations may be considered unfair, but surprisingly few regarded the division of unpaid work in their own relationship as being inequitable.

Dempsey has written extensively about women's perceptions of fairness in regards to housework. He argues that women have a lesser sense of entitlement than men and are thus less likely to perceive a situation as unjust 'even when in objective terms they have made the same contribution as males' (1997b:158). He refers to a study by DeMaris and Longmore (1996) which found that wives were less likely to say that the division of unpaid work was unfair when their husbands spend longer hours than them doing paid work (Demspey 1997b:158). This may partly explain why women in my study who are not engaged in paid work, or work part-time, do not perceive the distribution of labour in their household as being unfair even though they are responsible for the lion's share of domestic work.

The majority of people who are engaged in employment associated with production in the resources industry in Australia generally work 12 hour shifts, and thus have longer working days than the majority of workers in Australia who are employed in full-time positions (a standard working day is 7.5 hours). Commuters often spend weeks in a row working at least 12 hours every day, though safety regulations require workers to take

[84] Sandy has two daughters, both were in their early twenties at the time of the interview.

one day's break every two weeks.[85] However, during these short breaks most employees are unable to leave the camp and as such they cannot get away from the environment that they associate with work. According to my estimates, when comparing a 'city worker' to a commuter, we find that in the course of a year (including 4 weeks annual leave), a person employed on a two weeks on/one week off roster works about 2,575 hours. In comparison a worker employed in a 'standard' 9 to 5 job works 1,800 hours in the course of a year. The commuter thus spends 43% more time working than the city worker (keeping in mind that this does not include the time that commuters spend on site when they are not working). Following Dempsey's line of reasoning it should come as no surprise then that most women married to commuters in this study perceive their load of domestic labour as being fair.

According to Baxter (2000), 'fairness is not calculated in terms of an equal distribution of time and tasks' (2000:625). Instead, Baxter proposes that it is men's participation in what is perceived to be traditional women's tasks which is central to the perception of fairness. In her view the 'symbolic value' of men's participation is more important than their actual contribution to the household. Baxter has done extensive research on the relationship between gender and household labour in Australia and though she found that the amount of time spent doing domestic labour is of importance when women calculate fairness, it is less important to them than 'who does what around the home' (2000:609). Baxter maintains that the division of labour in the household 'is not a rational allocation of labour based on attitudinal variations, time availability or economic power. It is a much more fundamental system of producing and reproducing differences between men and women' (Baxter 1998:65). In other words, housework and caretaking form an essential part of feminine identity.

Dempsey also highlights that a woman's sense of identity plays an important role in how women perceive the distribution of labour at home. In his view, there is a clear connection between the feeling of control that women often experience within the domestic sphere (which they are unlikely to encounter elsewhere) and their self-

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[85] A new trend, at the time of completion of this thesis (beginning of 2004), seems to have emerged among many mining companies. They tend to send their fly-in/fly-out employees away for shorter periods of time, which means that many employees are away on site on weekdays only and spending weekends at home. This trend was becoming evident at the time of my fieldwork, but at that time it was mainly managers and some office staff who were employed on such rosters.

confidence and sense of worth (1997b:152-154). In my experience there is a clear link between women's identity and domesticity. Women in this study, whether engaged in paid work or not, repeatedly called attention to their roles as wives, partners, caretakers and keepers of the household. Many women cherished their identity as wives and mothers (in particular the members of the Petroleum Wives of Perth) and emphasised that they would not want the division of labour in their household to be any different. Other women were less enthusiastic about having sole responsibility for children and household, but they did not seek to change the state of affairs. Instead they usually explained their husband's lack of involvement in domestic affairs by making references to men not being very good at performing chores that are usually perceived as being 'women's work', such as cooking, cleaning and shopping. As a wife in one of the Red Rocks' mining towns remarked, women are perceived as being predisposed to deal with feminine tasks: 'If I send him to do the shopping he usually comes back with all kinds of things we don't need. Things are expensive up here and I don't want him wasting money. He usually takes twice as long to do some of the things that I do around the place, and even then I have to go back and do many of them again'. When I suggested that he might not do every task to perfection because he lacks the training, she was clear in her response: 'No, it's not really about that. Men have a different way of doing housework because they see things differently. They are not concerned with the small details at home, like us, and that's why they don't do it as well'. To emphasise the similarities between women and our differences to men, she jokingly asked me whether my husband was able to make the bed as well as me.

In Sandy's situation, she spent long hours at work, yet upon her return to Perth, there was no reversal of gender roles. She was still responsible for attending to Kevin's needs and looking after the household. While Sandy expressed an awareness of the unequal distribution of domestic labour in her household, she did not seek to change this situation. Initially I was surprised to learn that female commuters with male partners in Perth were in charge of housework. I had expected that women such as Sandy, who usually earn as much as their male partners, and sometimes even more, would not accept having to do the bulk of work at home. Yet I found that these women saw it as natural that they should spend their leisure time looking after the house and their partners. This might be explained by the close relationship between women's identity and domestic activities (Solheim 1995).

Melhuus and Borchgrevink (1984) suggest that women who are engaged in paid work, in fact often 'intensify their contribution towards housework in order to maintain their gender identity' (1984:335, my translation from Norwegian). Female commuters are often perceived, especially by their male colleagues, as forsaking their 'duties' as 'good wives'[86] by leaving home to go away to work (see Chapter 4 for a discussion on this). Drawing on Melhuus and Borchgrevink's model we may view the actions of female commuters as a way of reaffirming their identities as women and wives. Household labour may thus be regarded as an expression of women's identity and as a symbol of their love (Melhuus and Borchgrevink 1984:334-339, Borchgrevink and Melhuus 1985:35. See also Dempsey 1997a, 1997b, 1999, Ferree 1990, Thompson 1991). Many female commuters seek to live up to the image of a successful and loving partner by having a neat and tidy house, a well-stocked fridge and a contented husband, even though they might exhaust themselves in the process of doing all this.

I believe that it is possible to shed light on the social constructions of femininity and masculinity in the resources industry by comparing the period of R&R (rest and recreation) for both male and female commuters. When I asked interviewees about the transition between work and home, almost all male commuters emphasised how tired they were upon their return to the city, while female commuters had to be prompted to talk about this topic. One female commuter said that a good night's sleep was really all that she required upon coming home, while most female commuters did not mention any special requests, instead they spoke about going straight back into 'normal' routines. Men, on the other hand, told me that they often needed days to recuperate in order to feel rested and ready to face the world again. A Norwegian study of commuters also found that female commuters who are married do not expect to enjoy a period of extended rest and relaxation upon their return home. Heen (1988) observed that most female commuters 'enter the role of the housewife and [take] over the main responsibility for the family when [they get] home… Thus, the women workers' period onshore is not "free time" in the same sense as that of the male oil worker' (Heen 1988:80).

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[86] I have made use of the term a 'good wife' when describing PWP members' relationship to their husbands, and use it here in a similar way. See Chapter 4 for a more thorough discussion.

An ideology which locates housework as a feminine activity where men only 'help' ensures that domestic activities remain the prime responsibility of women. When home is seen as the woman's domain, men are not expected to contribute equally to housework and other activities associated with home. Thus, when a man actually 'helps out' around the house, his female partner is expected to be grateful for his 'favours'. Her own domestic work is part of her 'duty' as a woman, a 'natural' extension of herself and as such it is rendered invisible. Housework, according to Ferree (1990) can in some ways be regarded as flowing out of a woman's '"natural" desire to care for her family, a woman may feel guilty about every unmet "need", while a man's contributions, however small, are a favour to her' (Ferree 1990:876). Female commuters are not praised or thanked for their efforts, and nor do they expect to be. When I asked Karen, one of the female commuters at Goldmine, about the distribution of housework in her household, she spoke about having higher standards of cleanliness than her husband, thus justifying her partner's lack of involvement. Notwithstanding the fact that Karen spent most of her time away from the house, her husband did not increase his participation in domestic affairs after she started commuting.

> I was just so tired. I was away all week working, and then I'd come home on the weekend and I'd still have to do all the shopping. During the time we were together [at the time of the interview they were in the process of getting a divorce], I've always had a full-time job and I also did all the work around the house, and that didn't change when I went fly-in/fly-out. It was easier when I did the five and two [days] roster because then I could come home and mostly ignore it because I'd only be back a couple of days, and he was the one who had to live with it. But when I was on a nine and five roster, I'd be home for five days and I'd have to clean up and do the shopping as well. I could not face living in the mess.

Karen was not alone in taking responsibility for the domestic environment. All female commuters, to varying degrees, were in charge of the household upon their return. Instead of resting and recuperating for the greater part of their stay at home, as most male commuters do, they are involved in an extended 'second shift'. Male commuters participate, to varying degrees in the day to day chores during their period at home, but

their involvement in traditional female household activities remains non-essential and they never have to take full responsibility for the domestic workload.

The link between women's identity and the house is so powerful that men are often seen as unable to manage on their own in this environment. For commuters, this is particularly evident during female commuters' absence, when relatives, friends and neighbours often 'take care of' men who are left at home, as if they were not able to look after themselves. A previous Goldmine commuter, Angela, told me about how her neighbours would invite her husband Pete around for dinner several times while she was on site. Wives of male commuters, on the other hand, do not usually receive such invitations but are expected to manage on their own. In fact, many women commented that they found that they actually received fewer invitations to dinners and parties during their husband's absence, as if it was not appropriate for a woman to go out on her own.

Borchgrevink and Melhuus (1985) found when studying the lives of seamen and their families that the movements of women who were living in small communities was, to some degree, constrained by the expectations of other residents. If they attended parties and social functions during their husband's absence they were viewed partly with distrust and suspicion. While the wives of seamen living in cities had fewer restrictions placed upon them, Borchgrevink and Melhuus found that they often put constraints on themselves. These women would often decline invitations to social events, because as one informant said, they felt less comfortable on their own: 'I do not accept invitations when he is away… I feel more able to be myself [because I get less attention from other men] and safer in his company' (1985:119, my translation from Norwegian). Borchgrevink and Melhuus propose that women's lack of appearance at social events during the period in which their husband is away may signify that they are viewed as being socially incomplete without their men. A couple's togetherness is seen as being a 'confirmation of the marriage' (1985:120, my translation from Norwegian). Thus, participation in social events by a woman whose husband is away can be interpreted as being 'a negation of the marriage' (1985:121, my translation from Norwegian).

Returning to the situation of commuters, it is interesting to note the mixed feelings which some women held in regard to the different treatment that women and men

received when they were on their own. Gabriella, a member of the Petroleum Wives of Perth observed, with some annoyance, that when she and her husband lived in Nigeria (and her husband commuted back and forward between a platform and the capital) she was not perceived as having the same social needs as men who were on their own.

> Most people there don't work rotational, and my husband was a manager, but out in the field [he worked on a one week on/ one week off roster]. I can recall one thing that bothered me. When men would come in for a temporary assignment without their families, people would make a point of having dinner parties and would invite all these men over because they were lonely, those poor things didn't have their spouses with them. Do you think anyone ever invited me when my husband was gone? They don't even think of you, they just take it for granted that you manage.

While Gabriella expressed frustration regarding the fact that she did not receive the same treatment as men who were on their own, she nonetheless appreciated the efforts of those who 'took care of' her husband during her own absence. 'I must say I am grateful to Graham's colleagues and their wives for taking care of him during his first three months in Perth. I was back in the US with the kids trying to get visas. These people had him over a lot, because he was pretty miserable being all by himself'. Graham's example is a clear illustration of the perceived association between women and the house among people in the resources industry. Men who inhabit houses where women are not present are seen as being in need of being looked after and cared for. This job falls on other women, usually the wives of colleagues or friends of the man in question.

Another interesting comparison regarding the perceived difference in caretaking and emotional abilities of women and men can be made between male partners of female commuters and female partners of male commuters. As I have already mentioned, male partners do not vary their contribution to housework according to the female commuters' presence in the household. In contrast, wives and partners of male commuters usually make a special effort to treat their husbands to home-cooked meals and a clean house upon their return from work. Once again it is useful to draw on the social construction of femininity and masculinity in order to understand the uneven

division of housework and caretaking. Women are seen as responsible for nurturing and caring for their children and men, and emotional work remains an integral part of women's identity. Not only do (most) women who stay at home listen closely to the tales that male partners bring home from work, they also fuss over their wellbeing and spoil them with special treats. In contrast, most male partners do not take a close interest in the work and working environment of female commuters (this will be discussed in more detail in the next section).

Returning to the situation of female commuters, it may come as no surprise that both Karen and Sandy regarded their period at work as a welcome break from domestic chores. Much has been written about how home is perceived to be a haven for men from the pressures of work (Williams 2000:24), but the opposite is also true, as the workplace can offer peace and orderliness in comparison to the relative 'chaos' of home. Hochschild's (1997) study of the impact of women's increased participation in the workforce on families found that work can be a haven for women too. She presents a scenario in which workers, male and female, 'flee the world of unresolved quarrels and unwashed laundry for the reliable orderliness, harmony, and managed cheer of work' (1997:44). While none of the female commuters in this study expressed a need to escape from home, it was evident that time at work provided a degree of freedom from expectations (their own and others) associated with domestic affairs. This is well illustrated in Karen's comment about the difference between male and female commuters in regard to their appreciation of catering services on site.

> The food and that… all the blokes used to whinge [complain] about the food. You know, we were fed on site, our dongas [the accommodation units] were cleaned for us, our bed was made and you never, ever heard the women complain about the food or the way the rooms were cleaned, because we all felt like we were in heaven. I didn't have to cook! I could go in at night after working all day and didn't have to worry about all those things. But the blokes would whine and carry on, they would never think there was enough to choose from on the menu, the food was awful…blah, blah, blah. Probably at home they would have some sort of control over what is being cooked by asking or demanding something – they are used to being given exactly what they want on a plate.

Male commuters felt entitled to complain about the standard of cleanliness and the quality and selection of food available on site. Female commuters, on the other hand, saw themselves as privileged to receive such services. While it is true that women do the majority of catering work at mining sites and on platforms, the difference is that these women are paid for their efforts. There was a strong resemblance between the activities that Sandy engaged in at work and at home, but what set them apart (aside from earning money at work) was the fact that she was able to relax and unwind upon completion of her workday on site. When at home she found herself structuring her day around meeting Kevin's needs.

Heen's (1988) study of Norwegian catering personnel on oil platforms in the North Sea found numerous similarities between housework and catering work: 'if we compare the platform to a home, catering work is analogous to the work of the housewife' (1988:76).[87] The work of caterers' is essential for an operation to run smoothly, but because their work is mainly concerned with servicing the needs of others, it is perceived as having 'no direct economic impact' (1988:76) in terms of the production oil, gas or minerals (though one could argue that if workers were not fed, it would have a huge impact on production!). Similarities can be drawn to the housewife, whose work is also regarded as belonging outside the sphere of economics, but on which the family relies in order to function efficiently. In Heen's view, catering work is generally accorded a low status (and hence low pay) partly because it is perceived as not contributing directly to production, but also because this type of work 'tends to belong to the category of reproductive labour which is generally poorly rewarded and poorly regarded' (1988:76).

For Sandy, the pay she received for her work at mining sites (albeit less than what most other non-catering workers on site earned) provided her with a degree of financial independence which she was not willing to give up on even though Kevin made it clear that he would rather see her work in the city.

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[87] Heen's (1988) case study is concerned with commuters to platforms in the North Sea. Though the geographic setting is different, there are many similarities between catering workers at platforms and at mining sites in Australia.

I did make a half-hearted attempt to look around for jobs in Perth not long ago, but even though I'd be earning about $10 an hour in the city, like I do on site, they only work 8 hours a day here, five days a week. I've sort of got used to the money now. If I want to send my daughter a cheque of $500, I can do that without… Well, I liked the idea that I could do it without having to answer to anyone before, whereas I bought my daughter a fridge a couple of weeks ago, Kevin went off his face [the fridge cost $1000]. Why shouldn't I be able to do that, I'm earning it. I think it was maybe because I keep saying I work up north because we need things for the house and then I go and spend $1000 that we could have used ourselves.

Many of the female commuters that I was in contact with during fieldwork who had partners in Perth spoke about the freedom and independence they experienced when they were working away from the city. For Sandy there was a clear connection between paid work and independence. Paid work had always offered her a degree of freedom, but she emphasised that this was exacerbated in the case of commuting; 'Well if I have to be really honest, I really enjoy having the freedom of choice and I won't have that if I go to live here [as her partner Kevin wanted her to do]. I've always worked, also when I was married'. While there have been improvements in many women's economic position in the last 25-30 years, the link between women's sense of self and housework has proven to be more constant (Brines 1994). As long as women and men continue to be devoted to a model of the nuclear family similar to the one presented by Parsons and Bales (1956) almost fifty years ago, in which women and men's skills and abilities are presented as dichotomous and complementary, there will be few changes to the sexual division of labour.

5.2 "[I would] feel guilty that I was setting up another home away…"

I couldn't make my room personal. Some of the advice when I went up there from people in the industry was: "Don't do anything different from what you do at home when you're up there. Don't do without what you normally have". Like I always have a Tim-Tam before I go to bed, and I would bring a packet of those with me and have that there as well. They are

the little things that can break it. People told me to make my room my own, to live there while I'm there, not just kill time to get home. I tried it, but… because I had a husband and a home in Perth, I found it very difficult to settle into that room and not feel guilty that I was setting up another home away. It's still hard to explain, it was very much a guilt thing, like it was too sacred. I felt that this had to remain my home [home in Perth], and that I was away from home for a while. Not that I was away from work to be here. I used to bring all my washing home. Once I was finished with something up there, I'd bring it back. Like a book, once I'd read it I'd bring it back because my bookshelf was here. While some people there have a full bookshelf. I don't know if it was conscious or not, but I always felt uncomfortable bringing stuff up there. But one day when a friend walked into my room she said "My god, you've got nothing in here. Why is your room so bare?" and it made me realise, it was just a funny feeling, it just didn't feel right. I guess I did something, I put up a couple of cheap dolphin posters from K-mart, and I had a few photos just by my bed. Then there was my TV, my video and my alarm clock, but that was it. There were no ornaments or wind chimes that people bring up – those small things that make a big difference to the room.

The close association between women and private space is present when they are on the minesite. In refusing to make a home away from home, Karen was different from the majority of female commuters. It is obvious that, in her mind, a powerful symbolic connection existed between her home and her husband. By seeing home as being distinctly separated from the world of work, Karen displays a similar view to the majority of married male commuters. Male commuters usually made a clear distinction between their place of work and home, and consequently they did not generally devote much time and energy to decorating their rooms. Interior decoration and the creation of a comfortable and inviting space is, in most instances on minesites, a female activity. Sandy's work as a cleaner meant that she had access to the private rooms on site. She observed that female commuters generally made their room a 'nice and cosy place'.

I make my own room my personal space. I have pictures on the wall, I have my books there, an oil burner and other things. I see a lot of the other girls

do that, they make a home away from home. Sometimes we go and visit each other in our rooms. Guys mostly have photos if they have families, and some music. Some have computers and a lot of people have TVs.

Women's rooms on site are clearly female domains which in many instances signal perceived female qualities such as friendliness and hospitality. The 'home-centeredness' of female commuters is in part a response to the fact that women are not able to spend as much time in one of the main public meeting places on site, the pub, without their morality being called into doubt. Thus they tend to spend a lot of time in their room which in part explains their need to make it a comfortable space. Home-centeredness may also be understood, as Gullestad (1992) refers to it, as creating symbolic boundaries between home and the outside world. By 'establish[ing] symbolic fences between oneself and other people' (1992:181), one is, according to Gullestand, able to 'control one's accessibility' (1992:181). Women on minesites, especially those who are married, need to signal their inaccessibility to men on site. In contrast, their rooms remain open and accessible to girlfriends who often, as Sandy commented, visit each other in their rooms.

The majority of accommodation available on minesites and oil and gas facilities is currently in single rooms. Minesites commonly offer dedicated rooms to each person, which means that rooms remain vacant while the person is not on site. In the case of offshore oil and gas facilities rooms are usually shared between employees when they are not at work. Only a couple of decades ago most people working at offshore installations shared a room with several other people which made for very different social interactions and relations. I found that commuters who share a room with someone else are generally reluctant to make it into a personal space. John, who worked at a remote minesite in Queensland said that someone else used his room when he went back to Perth. But according to John, it would not have made a difference him if he had a room to himself, as he would not have 'bothered' decorating it anyway: 'I've got two drawers that are there where I keep my work clothes and some technical literature. I haven't got any posters or pictures in my room. You don't get the guys leaving personal stuff behind'.

John called attention to the importance of keeping the two domains of work and home separate by saying that 'one should not mix the two or else you start getting confused'. The only bit of 'home' that he allowed himself to bring to work were family photos: 'I travel very light. In the briefcase I carry with me I keep my little writing pad and some family photographs. I carry an alarm clock and a toilet bag with my shaving gear, that's the only personal stuff I've got'. Another married male from Goldmine, Derek, commented that he enjoys the privilege of having a room to himself, but the allocation of a private space did not bring about an urge to make the room his own personal space. During an interview with Derek and his wife Kirsty, he told us that he was not interested in 'doing anything to the room'. This despite the fact that he spent a lot of time in his room studying and 'playing on the stockmarket'. He was, as I referred to in the previous chapter, different from the majority of male commuters in that he preferred not to spend much time or money at the pub.

> Derek: I haven't really made it personal up there, this is home [in Perth]. I've got the old computer up there, which is not really good for anything now. I've also got the charts of the share price indexes up on the walls, and my brewing kit in the room.
>
> Kirsty: Don't you have pictures put up on the walls?
>
> Derek: Not really.
>
> Kirsty: But, we sent you pictures to put up…
>
> Derek: Well, I put the little ones of the kids up [laughing].

The exception to the rule of the typical gender division in terms of interior decoration on site was male contractors, in particular single male contractors. Contractors usually spent longer periods on site (compared to employees of the operating mining company) before flying back to their homebase. In addition to contractors, some single male commuters who were employed by the mining company also transformed their rooms into a little 'home'. I never saw any of these rooms, but almost all female commuters had a story or two about male colleagues who had nice rooms. Karen commented on the male contractors with whom she worked at Goldmine:

Mostly the mining contractors were on a six weeks on and a week off roster. So to a lot of them, that [the room on site] was their house. Some of them didn't even have homes in Perth, as it would be cheaper to stay in a motel in Perth for the week than to maintain a house for only one week out of every seven. They had all their stuff in there; their donga was just like a little house. There were a few married couples on site. They got a room each, often next to each other, and often they made one into the living room and the other the bedroom. Both them and the contractors would be very well 'set up'. The ones who know they are going to be there for a while do seem to settle in and do that extra decoration.

During my fieldwork I only once came across one married contractor who said that he had spent some time and energy decorating his room (he commuted to see his family who lived interstate for one week about every ten weeks), while almost all other married male commuters spent very little time, if any at all, enhancing the interior of their room. Their lack of interest in interior decoration may partly be explained by the fact that most men kept a clear distinction between work and home. For male commuters, the realms of home and family stand in a stark contrast to the demands and routines of work. To return home has, as I discussed in the previous section, a different meaning for male commuters. They generally return to enjoy privileges such as rest, relaxation and sometimes even pampering. In contrast homecoming for female commuters, who do not have a wife at home to relieve them of domestic activities, is not associated with putting their feet up. Instead they busily engage in the business of maintaining their female identity by doing the shopping, housework and other associated domestic activities.

As I have mentioned, female commuters often make their room on site into their own little haven. Here they can seek refuge from the demands of work and husbands. It is a place in which girlfriends spend time together, away from the almost exclusively male environment that they are part of at work. Angela, who had previously worked at Goldmine (at the time of the interview she was commuting to another minesite), had devoted a lot of energy to decorating her room on site. She had good memories of this room and the friendships she forged on site.

I had that room for two and a half years and I was really quite sorry to leave it. I was the first person to move into it, and it was very much mine. I had it quite well set up, I had my stereo, TV, my pictures up on the walls, some of my books, my keyboard and everything I wanted was there. I also had a kettle and cups. And yes, it was another home. I found that whichever end I was of the plane ride, the other end was home. Which sometimes can get me into trouble. I'm chatting away with my husband and sometimes he would ask me if I brought such and such home. And I would say I left it at home, no – I always have to correct myself – at the camp…"that's not home he says, *this* is home". He's never been out there to visit, so he doesn't know what it looks like (original emphasis).

It was obvious that her husband Pete felt threatened by the close relationships Angela had established to her colleagues and the site. Angela said she had told Pete numerous times that home for her was the place that they both shared, but tension arose whenever she forgot herself and referred to the site as being 'home' as well. Pete and Angela's situation illustrate well the difference between male and female partners in relation to the interest they take in the commuter's work life. As I mentioned in the previous section, the majority of male partners do not take a great interest in learning about the commuter's work and lifestyle. Pete, however, was particularly reluctant to learn about Angela's occupation and her working environment.

While working at Goldmine Angela had an option, like other employees, to fly her partner (or another close family member) for a short visit to site at her own cost. Most employees saw this as a great opportunity as only a small number of minesites and onshore oil and gas installations allow employees to receive visitors. In the course of the fieldwork I came across a few wives of male commuters who had been able to visit their partners at work. These women, without exception, spoke about these trips with excitement and enthusiasm. It provided them with an opportunity to learn about and visualise the environment in which their partner worked, ate and slept. However, I did not come across any male partners who had visited female commuters at work (though this might not be very significant, as there are relatively few female employees working in the resources industry). Pete remained unenthusiastic about the prospect of visiting Angela on site: 'I've tried to get him up there for Christmas, our wedding anniversary,

his birthday… but every time he's supposed to be coming, he's backed out. I've got no idea why he didn't come to see me'. Neither did he pay any attention to the photos and videos which she brought back from camp. While Angela was somewhat frustrated at Pete's lack of interest in her work and living environment on site, she also accepted this without too much complaint.

Male partners' lack of interest in female commuter's work and environment may in part be explained by their financial independence. Almost all female partners of this study paid at least some degree of attention to their male partner's work environment, level of satisfaction and other work related issues. In particular, members of the Petroleum Wives of Perth (PWP), who were almost exclusively fully dependent on their spouse's income, spent much time and energy thinking and talking about their husband's employment situation, both privately and at social gatherings. Wives and female partners of mining town employees and commuters also spent time discussing such concerns in interviews, though generally not to the same extent as PWP members. However, women's economic dependence (the great majority of women in this study were financially dependent on their partner) does not fully explain why women take a stronger interest in men's work. As Baxter (1998) noted, the enduring relationship between women and housework cannot fully be explained by men's economic power over women. It is not necessarily the case that the spouse with the highest income always does the least amount of household work; 'empirical studies of this relationship produce quite varied findings' (1998:63). If this was the case, women's increased participation in the labour market should have been 'accompanied by a corresponding increase in men's contribution to "homemaking"' (Bittman 1995:34). This has not been the case. Male partners of female commuters, who earn as much, or more than them, do not increase their participation in domestic labour, nor do they take more of an interest in their work circumstances.

Another perhaps more significant explanation for the lack of concern shown by Perth based male partners lies in the potential threat that female commuters pose to their masculine identity as a breadwinner, especially if they bring in a higher income than they do. The reality is, in present-day Australia, that most women still earn a lot less than men. Women's financial disadvantage in the labour market is partly explained by their concentration in 'low-paid, part-time work in specific sectors of the labour market'

(Baxter 1998:61). But the inequitable allocation of economic resources can only be fully understood, according to Heen (1995), with reference to ideas about masculinity and femininity. The connection between women and the domestic sphere, and men and the labour market is closely associated with beliefs about fundamental biological differences between the sexes. Families who adhere to a 'traditional' gender ideology are less likely to place as much (if any) emphasis on the female's career and earning capacities as they do on the male's livelihood. Consequently, men in the resources industry are almost without exception, in a much better financial situation than the women are.

5.3 "It takes a lot of pressure off me having the cleaner come"

> Something Martin strongly encouraged me to do was to get a cleaner to come every Tuesday. It's fantastic! Now we don't have to fill up our weekends with cleaning the house. We do tidy up and all that, but it's not so much work. It takes a lot of pressure off me, having the cleaner come.

Martin was one of the few male commuters which I interviewed who participated, upon his return to Perth every weekend, in what is usually perceived as being 'women's work'. He was engaged in domestic activities such as cleaning, laundry and cooking, tasks which usually only women perform. Martin told me that since he started commuting he had encouraged his wife Robyn to get a cleaner to come to their house. He was at a loss when seeking to understand why Robyn had remained opposed to this idea for a long period of time. Martin said he had always taken an active part in housework, but had found that he was less enthusiastic about participating in household chores after he started commuting. 'It is so unsatisfying to have gone through a weekend scrubbing floors and vacuuming, do this, do that and then you don't even finish. After the weekend you don't really feel you've achieved anything'. When Martin first started commuting he always felt tired and all he ever wanted to do was to 'spend time at home resting'. This stood in stark contrast to the needs of Robyn who found herself, in the first months after Martin started working at Goldmine, 'desperate to get out of the house'.

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It was really hard to begin with, cause he would be really tired and I would feel closed in staying at home all the time with the kids. So when he came home I would go out and shop, do my groceries… and we tended to live separate lives on the weekends. But I just couldn't stay at home, I couldn't stand it for a while.

Robyn speculated that her need to get out was related to her relative social isolation in his absence. Though she interacted briefly with the mothers of her two school age children, she was not able to spend much time socialising as she was busy looking after their two youngest ones who were not yet at school. Robyn, who was trained as a nurse, had stopped working full-time when she got married, though she had worked shifts intermittently for many years. In the three years preceding the interview, from the time that Martin was employed at Goldmine, she had committed herself to looking after their four children and the household full-time. Though Martin actively participated in household activities and childcare, it was clear that both he and Robyn viewed these tasks as belonging to her domain. This is particularly evident in the quote above where she refers to Martin urging *her* to find a cleaner, rather than him taking the task upon himself, and also by her saying that having someone else doing the housework takes pressure away from *her*. Martin's 'help' with the housework and his suggestion of having a cleaner come to their house may thus be viewed as his 'gift' to Robyn, as the majority of chores related to the household remain her responsibility.

By analysing the sexual division of labour in light of a gift exchange we may be able to shed some light on the continuous link between women, housework and care giving. Two decades ago, Borchgrevink and Melhuus (1984, 1985) discussed the centrality of 'gifts' when they examined the role of housework in the social construction of women's identity. Gifts play an important part in the creation and maintenance of social relationships in which givers and receivers have obligations towards one another to give, receive and repay gifts. They may play a strategic, practical or symbolic role in a relationship. Regardless of the role they play, the exchange of gifts ties people together in mutual commitment and obligation (Mauss 1954). Thus, when analysing the role that gifts play within a household, be they symbolic or pragmatic, one may view the contributions of members of a household towards the wellbeing of other members' as gifts that cement their relationships. However, the gifts of women and men, according

to Borchgrevink and Melhuus, are different. While the salary a man brings home may be viewed as his gift to the household, it is often not possible to measure women's contributions in the same economic terms. Women's contributions are usually related to the emotional and physical well-being of members of their household and may not easily be traded in the marketplace. As such, these gifts have personal aspects in which women give of themselves and so they can be said to be represented by these gifts (Heen 1995). The gifts of husbands and wives are thus not gender neutral, but instead they are closely associated with the gender identity of the giver (Borchgrevink and Melhuus 1985:11).

Hochschild (1989) refers to this symbolic gift exchange between husband and wife as 'the economy of gratitude' (1989:18). Women who seek to live up to the image of a 'perfect housewife' and 'good mother' are likely to view any contribution to the marriage and household, apart from bringing home a salary, as a bonus and as something they should be grateful for. Men, on the other hand, feel entitled to gratitude when taking part in activities that normally belong to the domain of women, such as cooking, tidying and cleaning. Hochschild remarks that struggles between couples are not often about who does what in the household, instead this struggle is more often about the 'giving and receiving of gratitude' (1989:18).

Returning to Robyn and Martin's domestic situation, it may be possible to explain Robyn's initial reluctance to accepting Martin's 'gift' because of the threat it posed to her identity as a woman. As I have provided evidence for in this thesis, there is no doubt that, as in the words of Baxter (1998) 'housework and taking care of children… [remain] an integral part of femininity' (1998:58). Even though Robyn willingly agreed to let Martin participate in housework, having a stranger take responsibility for some of the tasks that signify her love and care for her family is a different scenario altogether. Women's understanding of their sense of self, according to Oakley (1974b) 'as a housewife (or not) is a deeply rooted facet of self-identity as feminine' (1974b:185). Women are 'perceived as encapsulating caring and emotional capabilities' (Heen 1995:92), and these female qualities are 'seen as being inherent in all women' (1995:93), and as such they are not skills and abilities that require financial reward.

Indeed, to reward personal qualities like caregiving is seen as inappropriate.[88] On the other hand, men's contributions which are mainly seen as being instrumental, do not imply such personal connotations. Martin, as the family breadwinner may legitimately suggest that they pay for a cleaner to do some of the domestic chores. However, this relationship may not be simply reversed, as women, as indicated by Heen, are not able to let money represent themselves in personal relationships. If Robyn had suggested getting a cleaner, her motives and ability to care for her family may have been called into question. In general terms, the proximity of women to money seems to create an uneasy moral entity, while the proximity of women to other human beings and their needs provides for an identity which is safely and recognizably feminine' (Borchgrevink and Holter 1995:8).

In most commuter families, financial planning, paying the bills and other economic matters were seen as the responsibility of men. Women were generally happy to leave such traditionally masculine tasks to their husbands. In fact, many wives did not know exactly how much their husbands earned. One of Derek's tasks was to look after the family's finances. Though Kirsty emphasised that she could easily have dealt with this herself, she instead made a conscious effort not to become 'too independent' from Derek.

> I was very independent before I met Derek, and I ran my life the way I
> wanted to. Some friends of ours, when the husband started doing fly-in/fly-
> out, she ran everything, but their marriage just fell apart. And I just didn't
> want that to happen to us. Derek handles all the finances, even though he's

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[88] However, in the late 1990s the Norwegian government introduced a form of payment called 'kontantstøtte' for parents staying at home with children of 0 to 2 years of age. This is a form of salary for the work involved in looking after one's own children (be it either the mother or the father who looks after them). Although the hourly wage for this work is very low, it challenges the traditional notions of the impossibility of paying someone for work which is performed out of love for others. There have been numerous debates in Norway concerning the 'kontantstøtte'. Some women claim it is a step backwards for women in some segments of the population as it is being used against them as an argument for not seeking work outside the home. Immigrant women for example, have sometimes found that the 'kontantstøtte' have been used by their families as an argument to get them to stay home, because they might not earn a whole lot more if they were to seek part-time employment. Never mind that paid work could lessen the sense of social isolation many immigrant women endure. 'Kontantstøtten' also excludes the fact that a number of children grow up in other types of families than the traditional 'nuclear family'. Single parent families, for example, are not eligible to receive this form 'payment'.

away. That is something I don't even think about [Derek comments that he is able to do this because of his access to phone and Internet banking].

Many commuter wives make a special effort to include men in the every day running of the household upon their return from site (female commuters, as I have already discussed, who are perceived as being closely associated to the house, need no help in being re-introduced to the household). The returning men are usually allocated traditional 'men's work', which commonly includes household maintenance and repair, garden work and financial matters. Other tasks which male commuters engage in involve looking after pets and driving children to school or other activities. By making a conscious effort to think of tasks that male commuters may engage in upon their return, women assist them in re-entering and becoming a part of the family and household again. Women, as pointed out by Solheim (1995) (in Chapter 1), who successfully manage the household in the absence of their husbands in some ways prove that the male commuter is not indispensable. Making lists of projects that need to be done or setting aside certain tasks and activities may be interpreted as attempts to commuter wives assist their partners in making sure that male commuters feel that they are still needed. Setting aside certain projects and tasks exclusively for men is relatively unproblematic when the commuter is only away for a week or two at a time. When their husbands are absent for longer periods women sometimes call on the assistance of male friends to help out with urgent projects which they cannot easily manage on their own (such as a leaking roof or removing a tree that has fallen over). Robyn, like Kirsty, also emphasised that she did not want to become too self-sufficient in Martin's absence.

I still rely on Martin for quite a few things. It's not like we are out of contact [when he is on site]. Martin is often able to organise a lot of things from up there. I don't want to be totally independent. We get that regular contact because Martin is home every weekend, and I think that is really important. And small things like if something breaks, I could probably fix it, but I just wait till he comes back. I suppose I don't want to become too independent because I think it's important for him to feel that he's needed. I think our lives would have been very different if I was working full-time. Because when you're in a work situation you think differently, you behave differently – well you've another life and you do easily become independent

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from each other. And that's not always a bad thing, but it can be in some cases.

Male commuters are usually not expected to spend much time doing their allocated chores (Martin, prior to the arrival of the cleaner, may have been an exception to this), and they have plenty of time to rest and do activities of their choice. In fact, some male commuters complained about feeling a little bored during their period at home. Derek, on the other hand, relished the break from the structures and routines of work: 'I normally spend some time surfing on the Internet, go to the local gym and then do some things around the house. But as I said, nothing is ever structured, I just hang around'. James also enjoyed his break from work and the opportunity to spend hours reading newspapers, walking their dogs and spending time in the garden. But the shift, according to his wife Louise, to spending extended periods of time at home on his own (she worked full-time and their children were all at school during the day) had not come easily. 'I think at first he felt it was very different [to be at home], and didn't really know what to do. He hates it when it's wet weather, because he likes being outside. If it's raining, he's a bit stuck with what to do. But he's always got lots of projects going, and usually he just gets ahead with that'. James was usually engaged in traditional masculine activities at home and did not do much cleaning and cooking. Though Louise said that she had on a few occasions been surprised with home-made dinners upon her return from work.

> I have had a few warm meals waiting when I come back from work, which is wonderful. But he's never really done that kind of thing, so it doesn't come easy to him, he just doesn't think about it. He will do it if I ask him, he would do it willingly, but he wouldn't think to do it himself.

Because James is never responsible for cooking the evening meal, his willingness to prepare it may be viewed as being his gift to Louise (although one may question whether a gift is a gift if it is something that has to be asked for). When I asked James what his contribution to housework commonly consisted of, he emphasised that he was unaccustomed to these types of tasks.

Well, yes, [I do] bits and pieces. I scrubbed the cooker down yesterday, got it all gleamy and polished. That's my job now. Later on today, I'm going to light the BBQ and have dinner ready. Well, Louise tells me what to cook. I ask her what she wants me to get ready. Today I'll just roast some potatoes and I'll get the vegies ready and I'll BBQ the chops. And I like doing that too. But I don't do a lot of housework. I keep it tidy, but I expect everybody to contribute to the housework, because when I'm away, who's going to do it?

In some families, male commuters are simply not 'allowed' to participate in any traditionally feminine domestic chores during their time at home. Both Vicki and Sally declared that they did not want their respective husbands to do any housework while on leave. Even though both women spoke about being exhausted after looking after young children on their own for 'weeks on end', they did not expect Warren or Paul to take on any of their own tasks and responsibilities. Their refusal to 'extend to their spouses a joint responsibility for domestic duties' (Solheim 1995:54) may be explained by the higher valuation they place on their husband's work compared to their own work at home. These men were engaged in highly paid positions, which according to Sally were also 'highly stressful'. Vicki reasoned that Warren was 'in need of a well-earned rest after spending weeks working at least 12 hour days'.

On a visit to Sally's house, I found her busy cooking meals for Paul's return: 'I stack up the freezer before he gets home. He likes to have home cooked meals when he comes back, he gets really sick of the camp food'. In preparation for his return, Sally cooked most of the meals that they would eat during his leave, did all the necessary shopping and cleaned the house in order to enable them to enjoy each other's company without any 'interruptions'. When I asked her whether Paul actually expected her to do all this work prior to his return, it became clear that her preparations were not only related to practical matters: 'I think he has some expectations that I will do these things for him, but that's not the only reason why I do it. I like to do things that make him happy, and I think he deserves some time off where he doesn't have to worry about anything'.

It is appropriate to recall Solheim's work (1995) (cited in Chapter 1) here on the connection between housework, love and women's identity. The symbolic link between

femininity and domesticity is grounded in 'a deeply rooted symbolic language about *the gifts of marriage.* The structure of this gift exchange seems to place the husband as the legitimate receiver of particular products and services of his wife, *without* reciprocity in kind (1995:54, original emphasis). Sandy prepares food that she knows Paul will enjoy and creates a homely and welcoming environment to which he can return to unwind and relax. Through these actions she is expressing her love and care for him. In return Paul is only expected to love her and provide for the family financially.

Frances, a member of the Petroleum Wives of Perth (PWP) also took great pride in looking after the family home and caring for her husband. I was introduced to Frances at one of PWP's monthly luncheons. At the time when we met she and her husband had been in Perth for a year and a half. Both of their children were attending college in the US, and this was their first overseas posting without them. Throughout our conversation the topic of housework came up, and it became evident that Frances' identity closely correlated to the cleanliness and tidiness of her home. The state of the house can be seen as being closely linked to women's identity: 'the quality of good housework can be a symbolic reaffirmation of women as "good" wives and mothers, as our culture defines these roles' (Ferree 1990:876). Frances told me that she enjoyed doing housework and that she would never employ anyone else to clean her house (as some members of the PWP do). Neither would she extend any responsibility for domestic tasks to her husband. 'I vacuum about three times a week and I clean the bathroom every day. I enjoy keeping our place clean… I would never let my husband near a vacuum cleaner'. When I questioned Frances on whether she could imagine reversing the roles in her marriage by taking up paid work and making her husband responsible everything associated with the domestic sphere, her response was one of disbelief. Such a project, in her view, was completely unrealistic: 'We all know what men are like, they just don't think about all the little things that need special attention. They are not very practical around the house'. When I suggested that many men may not know what needs to be done because they had never had to be responsible for tasks related to the household, Frances interrupted me by saying 'it's not about that. Men are simply not made to do these things'.

By referring to the inherent different abilities of women and men Frances was able to view the gendered division of labour in her marriage as natural and fair. Her sense of

self was closely tied up to her ability to look after the needs of her husband. 'He has such long days in the office, and the least I can do for him when he comes home is to cook and make sure he is comfortable'. Her care for her husband extends to not even letting him get off the couch for his nightly helping of ice cream.

Cleanliness and caring abilities were tools by which Frances measured other women's worth (Gullestand 1984a). She was highly critical of women who did not take 'proper' care of their respective homes and husbands. This was apparent when she shared an anecdote about a fellow PWP member which she had recently visited. During this visit the woman who had invited her to her house had asked Frances to give her advice on whether she thought a dress that she had recently bought would be appropriate for a formal occasion. The woman had invited Frances into the bedroom where Frances discovered, much to her dismay, that the bed had not been made: 'Can you imagine! Asking me into that room without even having made the bed'. Frances was shocked to have been asked to enter a room which she perceived as being in an unacceptable state for receiving visitors. Yet she was even more offended by the fact that she had not apologised for the untidy state of the room. Frances' identity is closely tied up to her responsibility as a wife, housewife and mother. Her dedication towards providing a haven for her husband at home may be viewed as being her gifts to marriage.

5.4 "So what happens is that you come home as a stranger"

> So really, we [referring to men on site] don't have a life, we just work. That's all we do. So it's a bit unfair to us that we come home to a family that is running without us. So what happens is that you come home as a stranger.

Mark, a commuter to Goldmine, spent a lot of the interview talking about feeling alienated from his family. It was evident that he considered his wife Catherine to have failed to live up to her 'duties' as a wife and mother. Their relationship is an example which illustrates well what can happen when the commuter wife does not spend a lot of time and energy to assist her husband in the process of re-entering the family and the household. At the time of the interview Martin had spent six months commuting to

Goldmine. He had initially worked on a nine days on/five days off schedule that had changed a short time prior to the interview to a roster that saw him return to Perth every weekend. Catherine had recently started her own business venture which saw her working weekdays and weekends. During the interview she received numerous phone calls from business contacts and associates. Though she worked long hours and struggled to manage all her responsibilities, it was evident that her new enterprise brought her lots of excitement and satisfaction. In relation to Mark's commuting, Catherine said she was still getting used to him being away on site, but she felt that the disadvantages of his absence from the family were outweighed by the benefits of his job:

> It's very nice not to have to worry about financial issues at the moment. Before he went away, we really struggled financially, even though I worked almost full-time. It was always a great effort to pay all the bills. The decision for him to go away was based more on income and necessity. It wasn't a case of thinking "do I do this or not?". It was really a necessity thing.

Prior to starting at Goldmine Mark had run his own consulting business (consulting to the mining industry) for seven years. In the seven years preceding this Mark had lived and worked, together with his family, in several mining towns. Towards the end of the period in which he had run his own company, computers had superseded his area of expertise, and there had not been much work to be had. In a separate interview with Mark, he also stated that their financial situation had been the main impetus for him taking the position at Goldmine. Though when speaking about the future he made it clear that his work at Goldmine was 'only as a short move, a means to an end'. It was his goal to gain enough experience in new computer programs in his field so that he could return to Perth in a year or two to start up a new consulting business. He made a point of saying that he did not think the financial rewards were worth the 'costs of this lifestyle' (referring to fly-in/fly-out employment). Catherine held a different view of Mark's employment and his future at Goldmine. It was her impression that Mark enjoyed his work and that he had not decided on when he would return to Perth; 'he does not have any definite plans for how long he's going to work there'.

In my interview with Catherine (I interviewed her first) I did not sense that Mark's commuting had brought about any major challenges to their relationship. Her only complaints were related to a couple of issues that she did not elaborate much on. One of these was that she sometimes got irritated with Mark because of his 'interference' with her decisions related to children or the household: 'He's not involved in the day to day running of the household, and when he comes back there are a lot of things he wants to have a say in, but then I think "what would you know, you're not even here most of the time"'. The only other source of tension seemed to be related to her social involvement with friends. Catherine felt that Mark was jealous that she spent more time with some of her friends than she did with him. However, she had made it clear that it was unrealistic of him to expect anything different: 'I'm not going to sit around and wait for him. I go to the gym three mornings a week and on Tuesday nights I go to aerobics, and we go for a coffee afterwards. And often I go to a lot of work-related things on Friday and Saturday nights'.

Martin, on the other hand, spent most of the interview discussing the negative effects of commuting and the tensions that this new lifestyle had brought about in his relationship to Catherine and their children. Mark felt that he, in many ways, had become superfluous to his own family. During his time at home Catherine spent most of her time together with the children at sporting activities, or at work functions (she also said, in her interview, that she did not spend much time at home on weekends). Catherine did not, as the majority of commuter wives did, make it her responsibility to 'effect the transformation between these [home and away] periods' (Solheim 1995:50), and was thus unable to provide a link between Mark and the household. Mark not only struggled with feelings of alienation and loneliness, he was also unhappy about changes which had taken place in Catherine.

> You tend to come home and find that the family is functioning quite well without you. Your own relation with your wife has been completely turned up, she's changed and become more decisive. And you come home to this person that almost, not like a stranger, but… different. And she acts differently. And because you haven't been considered, they can actually organize their social life and not put you in the equation, even though you're in town. And all of a sudden you've become isolated. When you're at work,

you're isolated from your family, and when come home, your isolated by the lifestyle that has taken your place.

Mark was visibly upset about Catherine's new-found independence in relation to decision making. Her refusal, in his view, to put a premium on her time together with him, made him feel unwanted to the extent that he found it difficult to spend time at home. He said he was relieved when his roster changed as this meant he had to spend less time at home: 'in that way I only have to put up with that empty feeling for a short period of time'. As discussed in the previous section, the majority of commuter wives are available to assist their partners in making the transition between work and home as effortless as possible (by setting aside certain tasks for them and making sure they are included in family activities). When I pointed out that commuter wives find themselves in a difficult situation where they on one hand have to manage independently in their husband's absence, yet ensure that he has a role to play upon his return home, Mark was not sympathetic to their predicament:

> But it's not fair on the husbands. They're missing their families. But they can't do anything about it. All they know it that they are there earning some good money, and that money is going to keep the family going and give them a better lifestyle. But they are not part of that lifestyle. There is nothing good about this lifestyle.

We may interpret Mark's view of his relationship to Catherine as lacking in reciprocity. He was, in his own view, fulfilling his duty to the family by bringing in a good income. Catherine's income was of less importance to him (she earned less). In fact, he said he would have preferred it if she did not work now that he was bringing home a good salary. Yet it was her refusal to engage in the traditional female role (i.e. place less importance and value on her own work and put her husband's needs ahead of her own) that upset him the most. Consequently Mark was not able to exercise the power to which he believed he was entitled in his role as the breadwinner.

> You're not in the equation anymore. You know, your marriage has never been easy, but you've strung through it but all of a sudden you're not part of it anymore, and that's what hurts. And you really don't have anywhere to

go, except back to work again. And that's the sad part about the whole scenario, a place like that becomes home. It's not a place you really want to be, but that's the way it goes. But by the same token, they are tied to the pay package that you bring in. So it's like "I still want to stay married, but you stay at Goldmine". That's the attitude and it's hard for me to understand. Because you are there, and that's where you work and you can't be where you want to be, with your family. And then you find that your family is growing away from you, it's just drifting away. Yet you are still the main supporter financially of this group of people. It's a very hard thing.

Mark said he felt trapped; he wanted to leave his job, but could not do so without compromising his role as the main breadwinner of the family. They relied on the income he brought back to pay for household expenses and private school fees, yet he felt he was no longer part of this family. The sacrifices he made for his family were not, in his view, appreciated or reciprocated. Mark's assessment of Catherine can be likened to what Solheim (1988, 1995) describes as 'the deserting wife'. Male commuters, in Australia and Norway, seem to be under the impression that incidences of divorce and relationship problems are much higher among commuters than the rest of the population. James believed that divorce was widespread in the oil and gas industry.

There are a lot of marriages that come to grief in the oilfield. A lot. For the guys that aren't attached, it's difficult for them to establish a relationship with a woman, because they don't have the time. You can tell when something shaky is going on at the domestic front, the guys come into the office and want to use the phone or they are waiting for a letter to arrive. But I don't want to know about it, it's not my business. Which is entirely the opposite of a woman, they want to know what is wrong. From a female perspective, you're getting information, but you are also giving help. Sometimes I get a guy unburden himself a little, but there will never be an in-depth discussion of it.

It is not only men who believe that divorce is widespread among their colleagues. Some commuting wives spoke about friends who had experienced relationship problems as a result of commuting. Commuting, in Margaret's view (she was married to Jack who

used to commute to oilrigs), brought with it its own set of challenges: 'Most of the people our age that have been in the industry for as long as Jack [her husband] are no longer couples…we know of quite a few people who are divorced. I think there is a very high rate of divorce in the industry'. Yet, the topic of divorce was more frequently raised in conversations with male commuters. Mark was certain that there was a strong correlation between commuting and higher rates of divorce.

> There is a higher rate of divorce and fragmented relationships in society today, but I think the worrying aspect is that in a small community like that [referring to Goldmine], I would say, every second person has problems. It's a classic case, I've heard it so many times with married couples. Guys can tell you this scenario, and you know it before they even tell you, you've heard it so many times. One of them is that the men come here to work, cause that's where the money is. You work long hours…And what happens is that while he works for the family, the wife sets up her own life at home, and they've become independent people.

As I have been unable to locate any statistics in Western Australia which can provide evidence of whether or not there is a higher rate of divorce among commuters, it is useful to look at Norwegian research in this area. Norwegian studies from the 1980s established that divorce was no more rampant among male offshore workers than the rest of the Norwegian population (Holter 1982, Solheim, Heen and Holter 1986a, 1986b, Solheim 1988). Norwegian male commuters, like the men of my study, also believed that divorce was endemic among themselves. Solheim, Heen and Holter (1986b) found that the 'divorce myth' is partly based on distrust of wives and partly on the lack of control commuters experience by being far away from home. Solheim, Heen and Holter suggest that it also reflects 'men's lack of knowledge of the home situation of their wives, and their anxiety and vulnerability in relation to their family (1986b:98, my translation from Norwegian). The existence of myths about deserting women 'contribute to the creation of an image of the man as a victim' (1986b:99, my translation from Norwegian).

Mark had plenty of stories of men who had been abandoned by their wives, but it was particularly the story about one of his older colleagues who had recently attempted

suicide that made an impression on him. According to Mark, his colleague had been married for a period of more than twenty years when one day his wife, out of the blue, called him at work to announce that their relationship was over. 'While this man's marriage might not have been without its problems the news from the wife came as a surprise to him'. This news, that he 'no longer had a family' had been such a shock to him that he attempted to commit suicide.

> He's always worked hard, and he did the hard work for the family. But in doing that hard work, like all men who work away and work hard, they don't tend to get close to their kids. So the only person they are close to is their spouse. So really his wife was his whole world type of thing. The kids knew their dad, and he felt like he knew them. But it was his wife and him… That is a guy whose whole world has dissolved. The thing is that one day he has home, and he might not have a great relationship with his wife, but he's got home, you know, somewhere to go to. Now he's got nothing. And Goldmine is not a place you call home. Goldmine is just a place you work. So really, once you've lost that family or that home, not so much family, but home, and that woman that was part of his life for years, there was nothing there for him, it was all gone. They are the casualties of this sort of work.

His colleague was another 'victim' of the commuting lifestyle. He had, similar to Mark, 'sacrificed' his life for the benefit of his family. The burden of his responsibility had not been recognised by his wife, who acted, in Mark's opinion, 'selfishly'. Order had only been restored in this man's life when a female colleague entered his life. She had made her house available to him, and taken it upon herself to assist him in his recovery.

> She was a strength for him and supported him. And now they've got a relationship going. And he didn't have anywhere to go, so she opened up her house to him. So that kept him together for a while. It's nice to see he's got some happiness in his life, cause it was really a terrible thing what happened to him.

Once again Mark called on the link between domesticity and femininity. He was hurt and disappointed that his wife did not make more of an effort to create a connection between himself and home. He felt that he had fulfilled his part of the bargain, while Catherine, in his view, had not and was neglecting her duties as a wife. He refused to acknowledge that commuting brought with it its own set of challenges for her as well. Instead Mark chose to concentrate on his own sacrifices and losses, and in the process of doing so he painted a picture of his wife as self-centered and without concern for his welfare. Whether relationship problems existed prior to Mark started commuting is impossible for me to speculate upon, though Mark certainly felt that his new lifestyle impacted negatively on his life. It is not my role to make comments about who is getting the worst deal here, but it was evident that Mark experienced difficulties as a result of his new position.

There were other men that I came across in this research who also expressed dissatisfaction with their 'lot'. Some working class men spoke about the frustration they experienced as a result of their inability to influence high level economic decisions and political processes that impacted directly on their lives. I also met a few men who felt disadvantaged when they compared themselves to their wives who, in the words of one commuter 'have a much better deal than us'. One mining town employee whose family actually lived in Perth (he commuted to see them every month at his own cost) felt that he had 'put [his] life on hold' for his family: 'She's definitely in a better position than I am. Even though she has to look after the kids, she can see her friends, go to the beach and generally live a good life. Though it's not good for any of us to be apart like this'. The reason why they had ended up living in different places was, as for so many couples who choose to organise their lives around the demands of a flexible working schedule, primarily financial. Sam's family had previously resided in Red Rocks, but when his oldest daughter was ready to enter high school, his wife and their two daughters had moved to Perth so that they could attend a private school. Usually when children reach high school age mining town families either send their children to private schools where they board during school terms, or the whole family leaves the mining towns and move to a larger metropolitan centre. It is less common (albeit not unheard of) for families to separate into two households, though Sam's accommodation is probably not best described as a household. When his family moved south (about a year prior to the time that I met him) he moved into the popularly termed 'single men's

quarters' where he had his own room and bathroom, and access to a 'mess' (dining hall) for his meals. This arrangement was, in his own view, cheaper and easier than if he was living in a house by himself.

Sam held what he described as a relatively 'boring and mundane job' which gave him little satisfaction, but a lot of money in his pocket. He said he was unable to find a position in Perth that would pay as much as his current occupation. Employees in mining towns are generally awarded higher salaries, and together with the benefits (tax breaks and allowances) associated with living above the '28th parallel' in Australia, many workers find that their earnings decrease by about half when they move to Perth. To choose to live with a much smaller income was not an option for Sam and his family at the time I interviewed him. He said he was uncertain of how long he was able to continue to live with the current arrangement, but he could not see another viable option on the horizon. Timothy, a man I met when I did fieldwork at Mt Nickel, was another husband who experienced disadvantage as a result of the financial expectations that were placed on him because of his role as the 'breadwinner'. During our conversations on the minesite he told me he would have preferred to work in the city where he would be able to return to his family every night. It was obvious that he missed his wife Denise and their baby daughter Penny (who was about 10 months old at the time I met him). He had several photos of Penny at his desk, and told me that the walls of his room (on site) were filled with photos of Penny and Denise.

Timothy was in his mid-twenties and at the beginning of his career. He was committed to upgrading his qualifications in the occupational health and safety area, and spent most of his spare time on site studying. He was glad to have the opportunity to gain valuable experience in his field of expertise and grateful for the financial rewards which his current position afforded him, but hoped that he would be able to find a good job in Perth in the next year or two. When I interviewed Denise, it was evident that she had a different idea of Timothy's future employment.

In her view, Timothy's position at Mt Nickel was not a temporary career move. When I asked whether she thought he was missing out on seeing their daughter grow up, Denise responded by citing a number of benefits associated with fly-in/fly-out. By being able to spend time at home during daytime 'he gets to see more of Penny because she is awake

a lot of the time he is home'. They were also, she said, able to spend 'quality time' together during his week at home. Other advantages associated with commuting were the time he had available to engage in house renovation activities (though the reality was, according to Timothy, that he never got around to doing much of this), but the most important benefit was the financial one. Prior to the birth of Penny, Denise had worked as a teacher. She was in no hurry to return to her profession, and instead she said they were hoping to have another child soon. She emphasised the importance of financial security for her family: 'We decided to start having a family when he held a secure job and we felt financially stable. I would not have wanted to have children unless he was earning good money'. So another benefit associated with Timothy's position, for Denise, was that she did not have to take up paid work, something she said she was reluctant to do while Penny was young. She acknowledged that she was currently in the most advantageous position of the two of them.

> It's more of a disadvantage to him than myself. You could say that hadn't Timothy got the job up there, we wouldn't have started a family and I would still be working. So a good thing about his work at Mt Nickel is that Penny is here because he is up there.

Her expectations that Timothy should provide financially for the family made it difficult for him to consider taking up a position in the city in which he would earn less. Denise said that she did not think Timothy would leave Mt Nickel until he had found a job that paid the equivalent of what he was earning in his current position. Although I have argued throughout this thesis that the great majority of men in the resources industry have access to more power than most women, an argument which I still maintain, it is important to recognise that power is not equally distributed among all men (class is an important marker of authority among people in this industry). Some men do not have access to the advantages that the majority of men experience in relation to their status as a breadwinner.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided evidence of the importance of unpaid work in the domestic sphere to women's identity. Housework and caregiving remain central

components of women's identity. Women in the resources industry, whether engaged in paid work or not, are generally seen to be responsible for most domestic activities, while men's role at home is generally to 'help' with such tasks. The sexual division of labour that posits women as 'natural' caregivers in charge of the domestic arena and men as belonging to the 'outside' world is founded on beliefs about biological differences between women and men. Women and men locate themselves 'within the context of a general view of feminine and masculine roles, according to which place each sex is clearly and differently defined' (Oakley 1974a:185). By positing gender as an inherent property of each individual, women and men in the resources industry 'naturalise' the sexual division of labour. Though my thesis is only concerned with the resources industry, the 'gender[ed] division of labour in the home appears to be one of the most enduring patterns in modern social life' (Baxter 2002:419).

6   CONCLUSION

> '[Dorothy promises] never to look any further for her "heart's desire" than
> in her own "backyard", [she] chooses home, thus fulfilling patriarchy's
> prescription for her. By repeating the "lesson" she has learned, "There is no
> place like home; there is no place like home"… a symbolic patriarchal
> catechism for woman – the once rebellious Kansas farm girl becomes
> initiated as yet another angel in the house' (Paige 1996:152).

Paige claims in her analysis of 'The Wizard of Oz' that Dorothy chooses poorly when
she makes use of the powers she has found in herself to seek the security and familiarity
of home instead of continuing her travels in the unfamiliar world which she initially set
out to explore (Paige 1996:147,152). Paige's condemnation of Dorothy's choice echoes
the response and sentiments which I originally had about the results of my own
research. I had expected to find women rejecting the patriarchal ideologies of the
resources industry and to have established themselves as equal to, and independent of
men.

This expectation was partly based on the findings of the Norwegian studies of
commuters to the North Sea that seemed to hold a promise of a more egalitarian
division of labour among husbands and wives. The research of Norwegian commuters
was conducted in the early 1980s and I was confident that gender relations would have
progressed even further since that time. In addition, I was partly influenced by post-
modern ideas about the world and self in which individuals are accorded more agency
and choice than they had been by academics operating within 1970s feminist and
Marxist paradigms.

But rather than finding evidence of new gender roles and more equal gender relations, I
discovered that women were constrained by gender in their relations, roles and
practices. Though these are dynamic terrains and constantly evolving, gender remains

one of the most important forms of dominance of women in the resources industry. The imbalance in access to power between women and men in the resources industry has its roots in the sexual division of labour. The majority of those involved in this study are embedded in traditional ideologies of marriage and the division of labour. Increasingly diverse family and domestic arrangements are found in current Western societies, yet the model of the traditional nuclear family in which the husband and wife divide their labour according to gender, is one that has proved remarkably resilient in the resources industry. In order to offer insights into the persistent inequality between women and men, I examined some of the historical processes which led to the division of the private and public sphere.

The modern family system has its roots in industrialisation and capitalism. The industrial revolution brought about a separation of the place of residence from the place of work. The division of the public and private sphere was accompanied by, as noted by Baxter (1998:57), 'new ideologies of gender'. These saw women as being connected to the household and men to the outside world and resulted in 'women [becoming] increasingly economically and socially dependent upon men' (1998:57). The allocation of different rights for women and men was founded on beliefs about fundamental and innate differences between the sexes. Women, because of their smaller physique, were regarded as being better suited to carrying out domestic activities (Moore 1988), while men's strength and intellect were viewed as being better put to use in the public sphere.

The model of the nuclear family, similar to the one put forward by functionalists Parsons and Bales (1956), in which the sexual division of labour is conceptualised as natural and correct, still exists as a powerful ideology among people in the resources industry. Parsons and Bales regarded women and men's skills as being dichotomous and complementary. Women were seen as being more 'expressive', while men, in their view, displayed more 'instrumental' functions and qualities. These different qualities, according to Parsons and Bales, meant that women were better able to take care of the domestic and emotional needs of the family while men were best suited to taking on the 'breadwinner' role.

Patriarchal and capitalistic ideologies which define the roles and responsibilities of women and men as different and unequal still influence the lives of people in the

resources industry. The perceived distinction between feminine and masculine traits, qualities and abilities has consequences in terms of the roles available to women and men. The gender ideology which prescribes certain ways of being and acting according to one's gender influence how women and men in the resources industry perceive themselves and others. 'Traditional' gender roles provide powerful stereotypical representations of how women and men should think, feel and act. Though people do not always conform to these stereotypes, they provide powerful constraints on the formation of their gender identity. By utilising practice theory approaches, as outlined by Ortner (1984, 1989) and Giddens (1979, 1984, 1991), I have sought to offer insights into how a person's gender identity is formed and maintained in the tensions that exist between practice and structure.

It has been my claim throughout this thesis that the mobile and flexible working arrangements of the resources industry exaggerate and reinforce differences in gender identity. Work patterns that see long distance commuters being away from their homes and families for up to several weeks at a time, expatriates and their families having to relocate at frequent intervals and the 12 hour shifts worked by mining town employees affect women and men differently, particularly in terms of life chances, roles and access to power. Though structures of power in this industry are based on numerous characteristics, including education, class and job level, gender stands out as the single most important denominator. Both women and men are pressured to conform to traditional gender roles, but women experience more disadvantages due to their gender.

The lower status of women employed in the resources industry is closely linked to ideas about the suitability of women and men to different types of work. As Eveline (1989) so clearly illustrates, the discourse of male supremacy in the mining industry positions women as inferior to men. Their 'inferior ability (to men) is [regarded as] natural' (1989:85). The perception that women are less able to perform certain tasks, and are better at others (which attract a lower status) is rooted in beliefs about inherent biological differences between the sexes. The privileging of men's work and the subsequent devaluation of women's work situate the majority of female employees in a hierarchical and unequal relationship to their male colleagues.

Beliefs about innate fundamental differences between women and men influence not only the construction of masculinity and femininity within the workplaces of the resources industry, but extend to the families of those employed in the industry. The sexual division of labour that posits women as 'natural' caregivers in charge of domestic activities and men as belonging to the 'outside' world generally see women, regardless of whether they are employed in paid work or not, take the main responsibility for tasks relating to the household as well as nurturing and caring for family members. This is clearly illustrated in the case of female employees who, despite working full-time and being at home only intermittently, still fulfil the traditional stereotype of a woman who nurtures and looks after the needs of others. The resources industry rely on women's unpaid efforts to carry out their 'duties' as women by looking after children, establishing social networks and running the household so that their husbands may devote large amounts of time to their paid work. While some of the women in this study were engaged in paid work, most found it impossible to combine a full-time paid job with their husband's unusual work arrangements.

The majority of wives of long distance commuters choose either to work part-time or be homemakers. In families with children, the father's absence from the household leaves mothers in charge of looking after their children 24 hours a day for extended periods of time. The lack of respite during their husband's absence sees some women, especially those with young children, keen to escape the house upon his return. Though many other women experience similar challenges to those who are married to commuters, the difference is the level of intensity commuter wives endure while being on their own for prolonged periods of time. Commuter wives have to be more organised than most women when arranging childcare or babysitters if they want to be able to go to work. Consequently many women choose not to engage in paid work, especially while the children are young.

There are a number of reasons why women married to men employed in the resources industry choose to curtail their own employment. Men's superior earning capacity was often cited as the main reasons for the family choosing to promote his career. However, the expectation that women, based on their 'natural' ability to nurture should be responsible for providing the main care of the family members and household plays a key role in the decision by many commuter wives not to take up paid work. Mining

town women also experience pressures to conform to the traditional stereotypical role of wife and mother. Though there are some women who are employed as professionals in their own right, the majority of women in mining towns are not engaged in paid work. This is partly explained by the fact that there are not many positions available to those not engaged in the mining industry. Shiftwork, and particularly the introduction of 12 hour shifts, also affects women's opportunities to engage in paid work if they have children. Men working on these shifts often have irregular working schedules which means that it is difficult to coordinate their work with childcare and paid employment for their wives. There are also expectations, from women and men in the three different groups, that the couple and their children should spend 'quality time' together when the husband is not working. Women's paid employment interferes with this.

Women married to men employed on expatriate contracts for oil and gas companies generally do not have many opportunities to further their careers. They move with their husbands to different postings around the world at three to four to 4 year intervals. While many countries do not provide working visas for wives, most expatriate wives choose not to take up paid work even when they have the opportunity to do so. Their choice to stay at home and take care of the family can only be understood when analysing the broader context of social, economic and political structures and relations in the resources industry. The agency of both women and men in the resources industry is limited by events and trends in the international marketplace and by multinational corporations.

More research is needed in order to get a comprehensive overview of the relationship between gender, power, agency and structure in the resources industry. My research has established that gender identity and gender relations are central to the way that women and men experience themselves and others. However, further research on how gender intersects with other aspects of identity, such as class and ethnicity might provide useful insights into the lives of women and men in the resources industry. A comparative study between the resources industry in Australia and Norway that explores similarities and differences in work culture and conditions, union movements and social policies might be worthy of ethnographic investigation. I hope that this thesis provides some valuable insights about the complexities of gender and gender identity in the resources industry on which other researchers can continue to contribute.

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APPENDIX 1:   INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interviews were semi-structured and interviewees were encouraged to speak at length about their general life situation and experience of the industry. The following list of questions is a broad outline and does not necessarily indicate the order of topics discussed. Separate interview 'schedules' were prepared for the following groups of informants:

- Long distance commuters
- Long distance commuters' partners
- Mining town residents
- Expatriates in Perth
- Representatives (managers) of mining or oil companies

SYPNOSIS

(A) Background information
(B) Family
(C) Work history
(D) Home and Identity
(E) Lifestyle
(F) Community
(G) Workplace

(A) BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Age
2. Place of birth and other places of residence throughout life
3. Education

(B) FAMILY

1. Marital history. Age, education, occupation and residential history of partner.

2. Number and age and education of children if any. For residents of mining towns and expatriates: How have the children coped with your move(s)? For commuters: How do the children cope with one parent being away on a frequent basis? Has your relationship to the children changed since you started commuting – if so, in what way?

3. Do you have any relatives living in the same town/community as yourself? If so, do they assist in looking after children or in any other tasks related to your household?

4. For residents of mining towns and expatriates: What are the effects of living far away from your extended family? Do you have an alternative support network (to relatives)? Have your children been sent to boarding school? Did you and/or your partner grow up in a 'mobile' family (did your family move frequently in your childhood)?

(C) WORK HISTORY

1. What company do you or your partner work for (the person working for the mining or oil and gas company)? How long have you or your partner worked for the current employer? What is your or your partner's position within the company?

2. Which companies, if any, have you worked for previously? What country/countries have you worked in? How long have you stayed with each company? If relevant, what was the reason you decided to quit?

3. Why did you choose to work for a mining or oil/gas company (by chance, career possibilities, economic benefits, long periods of leisure time?).

4. Are you a union member, or have you been in the past? What to you perceive as the benefits or disadvantages of being a union member? Are you employed on an award or individual contract?

5. What is your annual income? Apart from your salary, do you receive any other financial benefits from your employer (free rent, airfares, payment of certain bills)? For expatriates: Do you pay local taxes or does your employer pay them for you?

6. For commuters: What rosters do you work on? Have there been any changes to the roster since you started working for your current employer? Do you have a preference for a particular roster?

7. For mining town employees: What kind of shift do you work on? Have there been any changes to the shift arrangement since you started working for your current employer?

8. How do you find your work environment? How many colleagues do you have? Are you member of any union? Is job satisfaction important to you? Do you have any worries regarding safety issues at your workplace?

9. Do you have access to a phone during your working hours, if so, is the phone located in a place which is private or shared by many people? Can your family and friends contact your during your time at work?

10. Do you socialise with your colleagues in your spare time? For commuters: How do you spend your free hours (time that you are not working) on site? How much time do you spend in your room? Have you made your room a personal space (decorated it)?

(D) HOME AND IDENTITY

1. How long have you lived at your current place of residence? How long do you plan to continue living there? For residents of mining towns and expatriates: Do you regard your stay here as temporary? Do you own a house elsewhere? Have you moved your furniture to your current place of residence? Is it important for you to be able to decorate your place of residence with personal belongings? If so, why? For people with partners: Who is responsible for the home decoration?

2. Who does the housework (yourself, your partner or do you pay someone else)? For people with partners: What household tasks are you responsible for, and what is your partner responsible for? Who spends most time doing domestic activities? Do you perceive the division of labour in your household to be fair? If not, what would you like to change?

3. What do you regard to be your home (as in a house or place)? Do you have multiple homes or do you regard only one place as your home? What do you think your children regard as their home/home country?

4. If moving to a new place, do you make an emotional as well as a physical attachment to the house and place which you live in?

5. If you move on a frequent basis, how do you find it every time you move (are you apprehensive or excited)? How long does it usually take to settle in a new location?

If living away from what you consider to be your hometown and/or country, how often do you make return visits? How important do you regard it to make such visits, as well as stay in touch with relatives and friends living elsewhere? Have relatives or friends visited you where you live now, or in any other locations? Do you keep in touch with people when they or you leave from the place you met? How do you keep in touch with family and friends (via phone, letters, e-mail, Christmas cards)?

5. For expatriates: Who looks for/makes the decision of where your new house will be when you move to a new location? Have you received any assistance from relocation companies? How long does it take the family to settle in a new location? How many more years do you think you will keep moving on a regular basis?

(E) LIFESTYLE

1. For commuters: What do you regard as being the positive aspects of commuting? What do you regard as being the negative aspects of commuting? For partners staying at home: Do you worry about your partner's safety while they are away at work? If so, why and how do you cope with it? For commuters: How do you deal with the transition from work to home? During your time at home, what do you or your partner spend your time doing? Who do you or your partner spend most your time with in this period? Are you (the commuter) involved in any activities in your local community (sports, band, politics)? If so, do you face any particular difficulties due to your regular absences? For the partner staying at home: Do you change your schedule for social activities when your partner returns home from work? If so, in what way?

2. For members of the Petroleum Wives of Perth: How long have you been a member? What activities do you partake in? What does the PWP mean to you? Have you been a member of a similar club when living in other locations? Have you made any friends through the club? Do you believe there is a hierarchy in the PWP in relation to the positions the husbands hold?

3. For mining town residents: How does life in this town compare to the town you lived in previously? What differences do you experience in lifestyle (to place of residence prior to living in any mining town)? Where would you choose to live if you had the choice between a mining town and any other type of community? Are

you engaged in any activities in the community, if so, which ones? Have you found it easy or difficult to make friends?

4. For partners who are not engaged in paid work: What do you spend your days doing?

(F) COMMUNITY

1. What is your relationship to your neighbours and other people in the community?

2. For residents of mining towns and expatriates: Have you made a special effort in trying to get to know your neighbours and getting involved in local community activities? Do you usually make close friends when you move to new places?

3. For residents of mining towns: What brought you here? How long are you planning to stay here? How do you regard the future of the town? What are the positives and negatives or living here? How do you perceive the mining company's involvement in the community? Do you think there is a division between mining company employees and others not working for the mining company?

(G) WORKPLACE

1. How many employees in total at the mine or platform?

2. How many are women?

3. What is the percentage of contractors to company employees?

4. How many women work for contractors?

5. What rosters do employees work on? (give an outline of the variety of rosters, are contractors on different rosters)? Has there been a change in rosters during the time the mine or platform has been in operation? If so, what were the reasons for changing to other roster(s)?

6. What shift arrangements are employees working on? Do they change from one shift to another (e.g. from nightshift to dayshift) during their roster?

7. Are there any other pickup points (for travelling to work) apart from Perth? For mining operations: Do employees have the option of driving to site?

8. What is the current lifespan for the mine or platform?

9. What is the turnover of employees per year?

10. Are there any unions present at the mine or platform?

11. Are you a member of a union?

12. For mining operations: Was building a mining town ever considered as an alternative to fly-in/fly-out?

13. What are the accommodation arrangements (share bathroom, other people use room when away, phones in rooms)? Are contractors and company employees offered the same type of accommodation?

14. What recreational facilities do employees have access to?

15. For mining operations: What is your alcohol policy? What are the opening hours of the wet mess?

16. Does the company seek to arrange social events in Perth which include family members of employees?

APPENDIX 2:   COMMUNICATIONS

The letter below, asking permission to visit mine sites, was delivered to a number of mining companies through a Chamber of Minerals and Energy representative.

Project outline for Marianne Yrke for Master by Research in Anthropology

Topic: A study of fly-in/fly-out operations in Western Australia investigating the social impact on family life and local communities of the employees.

I am currently enrolled as a Masters by Research student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia (UWA). I am interested in doing research on the social impact of fly-in/fly-out (FI/FO) operations. I have been studying at UWA for the past year and during this time I have taken units in anthropology, history and women's studies. These studies formed part of my four year Norwegian undergraduate degree. In Norway I studied sociology and social anthropology at the University of Bergen and the University of Oslo.

I am currently in the preliminary stages of designing my project proposal, and I do not anticipate completing my proposal for another two months. At this stage I am only making initial inquiries in order to see if my ideas are feasible, and I would be very interested in feedback from the mining industry. I have not yet made any final decisions concerning the nature of my research.

What follows is a presentation of my ideas and an introduction to the nature of the study. As an anthropology student, the aim of my research is to learn how to study and describe human relationships in social and cultural contexts different from my own. For my Masters I would like to undertake a study of one or more FI/FO operations and the unique lifestyle that these promote.

This research will involve conducting a first-hand study of a community by observing modes of behaviour and participating in the social life of people enabling the interpretation and recording of their way of life. By describing the adjustments the people involved with FI/FO operations make to their organisation of life, I will be able

to understand some aspects of the experiences people make within this particular social and cultural context.

My study will mainly be conducted in Perth, but I hope to be able to visit one or more FI/FO operation site(s) in order to meet with the employees both at home and in a work environment. I am therefore seeking one or several companies who would:

- grant me access to one or more minesites
- provide me with a tour and induction to the minesite and its operations in order for me to gain an understanding of the nature of the workplace
- introduce me to their employees so that contact may be established with those interested in sharing their experiences with me through subsequent interviews, individually and with their families. I anticipate interviewing 15-20 employees in total.

The identity of all people interviewed will be fully disguised in all publications of my research.

As a student my available funds are limited. I would therefore also be seeking subsidised travel to the mine sites (e.g. using available seats on your charter flights) and accommodation on the site itself, preferably using the same lodging as the employees. The initial visit will probably need to be for at least two weeks. More than one visit may be required.

Formalised schedules for visits and more detailed information of the contents of the interviews will need to be developed, in co-operation with the mining companies, closer to the time of the fieldwork.

At this initial stage I am trying to make contacts with mining personnel and I am surveying the literature found in the area. I plan to conduct my fieldwork from mid-March next year for about half a year. Apart from the fieldwork I will also do a literature review on FI/FO operations and its impacts on family life and social structure. Much of the research in this area originated in Canada, Britain and Norway. In Canada FI/FO has been practised in the mining and offshore industry for the last fifteen years. In Britain and Norway comparative literature is found in the practice of FI/FO at offshore installations in the North Sea. Yet very little research has been done in Australia. I believe it would be useful for Western Australian companies to gain access

to a study of the social impact of FI/FO operations specific to this state given that it is a growing feature of the mining industry. This research program is dependent on the co-operation of one or more mining companies.

I would like to stress again that I am only in the preliminary stage of my research, and I am interested in direction and feedback from mining companies. If you have any comments or suggestions about my proposed research, or would like to have more information about it, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would greatly appreciate your feedback. I am particularly interested to know if my proposed visit to a site and the proposed interviews are acceptable to you. I look forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEWEE STATISTICS

CATEGORY	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
Overall			
Total number of interviews conducted [#]	52		
Total number of people interviewed	45	17	28
Total number of <u>repeat</u> interviews	11	0	11[*]
Commuters			
Number of commuters, total	25	16	9
employed at Goldmine	8	5	3
employed elsewhere	9	5	4
currently not employed in industry	8	6	2
Married (or in de facto relationships)	18	13	5
Single commuters, total	7	3	4
never married	4	2	2
divorced	3	1	2
Commuters with children at time of interview	14	13	1
Partners (of commuters)			
Total number of partners interviewed	20	1	19
Partners with children at time of interview	18	0	18
Partners involved in paid work, total	13	1	12
full time	6	1	5
part time	7	0	7

[*] With 6 different women

[#] Of these, 9 interviews were conducted with more than one person present: 6 of them with couples, and 3 with groups of two or three friends.