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Chapter 6

Configurations of Gender, Class and Rurality
in Resource Affected Rural Australia

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Historically, class has been a key concern in studies of resource affected communities (e.g., Williamson 1982, Warwick and Littlejohn 1992). While work continues, particularly in Britain, today it reflects the rationalization of the British mining sector, and thus focuses largely on mining heritage (e.g., Strangleman et al. 1999, Dicks 2008). In contrast, this chapter examines class relations as manifest in a contemporary setting in rural Australia. This site, the Ravensthorpe Shire in the south west of Western Australia, relied largely on agriculture until 2004 when BHP Billiton commenced construction of a nickel mine in the area. This affected the entire Shire as well as the two rural communities of Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun. The mine, which was officially opened in June 2008, is one of a large number of new mineral and energy developments being established in non-metropolitan areas of the country as high international demand for resources fuels significant growth in the sector. In a single six month period in 2009, for example, 15 major minerals and energy projects were completed across the nation and a further 74 projects were at advanced stages (Australian Bureau of Agricultural Economics 2009). A number of these were, as was the case in Ravensthorpe, in what had been traditionally agricultural communities.

Drawing on interviews with 18 women associated either with farming or mining we explore how the contours of class are given expression in a shifting and reconfigured rural landscape. As such the chapter engages with the body of literature that has considered rural restructuring and class. This is a rich literature which dates back to Pahl's (1965a, 1965b) classic work on the movement of middle-class commuters into the rural urban fringes of northern London. However, it is also a literature which has been subject to criticisms which are of key relevance to our analysis. The first of these is that it has been gender blind. This is an issue addressed explicitly by Agg and Phillips (1998) who assert that much scholarship on the subject of rural change and class has focused at the level of the (male) individual and ignored the domestic economy. They demonstrate the importance of a gender analysis in drawing on studies of changing British rural communities which reveal that, compared with rural men, rural women are disadvantaged in the labour market in terms of promotion possibilities, work conditions and remuneration and also undertake the majority of unpaid household labour. The movement of middle-class people into rural areas may thus be experienced very

differently according to one's gender. A second concern raised about research on rurality, change and class and enumerated by Cloke and Thrift (1987, 1990), is that there has been a tendency to frame work in terms of an essentialized, singular external middle class imposing itself onto a similarly configured native working class. This has meant that attention to conflict within class fractions and the dynamism of class has been obscured. A related and final concern with the literature is that often class has been understood in fixed and predetermined ways. Phillips (1998a: 412) labels this a 'modernist legislative approach' and contrasts it with an 'interpretive' focus which he uses to interrogate data from studies of social change in rural communities in the United Kingdom. Phillips' (1998b) attention to affect and morality in ascriptions of class situate his work within the corpus of literature referred to as the 'culturalization of class' (Hebson 2009: 28), 'culturalist class analysis' (Bottero 2004: 988), or 'new cultural analyses of social class' (Reay 2006a: 289) which, by attending to the symbolic and affective in class production and reproduction, provides a rich addendum to a discussion of class focused solely on occupation.

This chapter attends to the criticisms that have been levelled at the literature on rurality, change and class by examining the influence of gender in changing class compositions and identities in the rural and exploring differences within class groups and indeed shifts across class categories. In addition, we engage with the literature on the cultural dimensions of class thus moving beyond an understanding of class as a 'system into which we are slotted' and instead as something that is 'done' (Lawler 2005: 804). We draw on the vibrant and growing body of work which has adopted this theoretical lens to examine class as lived and embodied and related to everyday practices and discourses (e.g., Lawler 1999, Reay 2003, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2001, Savage 2000; Skeggs 1997, 2004). In exploring the 'psychic landscape of social class' (Reay 2005: 911) we give particular attention to 'lay normativity, especially morality' (Sayer 2005: 948) as it is embedded in the descriptions, assumptions and beliefs of interview participants.

The chapter begins with an overview of the literature on gender and class in resource affected communities as well as an outline of the methodology informing the study. The data are then presented in three sections. The first section traverses territory that has dominated previous explorations of class in mining environments, that is, the associations between management and employees working for BHP Billiton. Following this we examine the emergence of a relatively new category of employee on mine sites in Australia, that is, 'the contractor', and delineate the classed hierarchies which inform how they are represented in the community. In the final section we describe how the groups 'mining women' and 'farming women' are characterized by each other highlighting the way in which these are mediated by beliefs, norms and practices about gender and rurality.

Gender, Class and Resource Affected Rural Communities

The limited contemporary attention that has been afforded to class is a theme taken up by Panelli (2006: 76) in reviewing the literature on studies of rural communities, and particularly gendered studies of rural communities. At the same time she notes important exceptions including the classic Australian works by Poiner (1990) and Dempsey (1992) which explored the ways in which gender relations are manifest in the labour market, voluntary work, community and leisure activities of rural men and women. What is particularly critical about these early studies is that they drew attention to the heterogeneity of the categories 'rural man' and 'rural woman'.

Informing the studies of both Poiner (1990) and Dempsey (1992) was earlier seminal sociological research by Claire Williams (1981). Drawing on data from case studies of two open cut coal mines in central Queensland between 1974 and 1975 Williams (1981) explored gender and class inequities. She claimed that while men struggled with class inequality as manifest, for example, in a lack of control over their jobs, women were equally struggling with gender inequities in their marital relationship as they typically undertake all domestic labour and have limited opportunities for paid work. Following Williams' (1981) work was another study of central Queensland coal communities by Gibson-Graham (1991, 1994, 1996) which focused on the union movement, industrial strategy and gender. The research centres on predominantly working-class spouses variously termed 'mining wife', 'mining town women' and 'miner's wife' and whom Gibson-Graham (1992) describe as living a 'feudal' existence at the intersections between patriarchy and capitalism. Also focusing on 'mining wives', but those from a middle-class background is Rhodes' (2005) *Two for the Price of One: the Lives of Mining Wives* which documents the experiences of Australian mining women across three generations: pre-1960, 1960–1985 and 1985–2000. In moving across these generations she tracks the relationships between broader societal and industry changes and the expectations for and of these middle-class mining wives. For example, she describes the ways in which generations one and two were more accepting of the dominant 'good wife' discourse that shaped and validated their contributions, whereas generation three emerges as seeking to variously renegotiate this discourse. Collectively, the three studies demonstrate both the difference that class makes for women in resource affected communities, as well as the salience of gender in such communities, in terms of access to employment (and by association, housing), and responsibility for domestic labour.

The noteworthy Australian studies by the above writers are part of a larger international literature on women and mining in industrialized economies (e.g., Shaw and Mundy 2005, Hall 2004, Gier-Viskovatoff and Porter 1998). As with the Australian work this broader literature has tended to focus on class as lived and experienced by those who inhabit the broad identity 'mining women' and thus not attended to how interactions with women not involved in the resource sector may also be shaped by class. In contrast, this chapter explores not only the classed relationships between women associated with the mine, but also between mining

and farming women. Before undertaking this task we provide a brief outline of the study's methodology.

Methodology

Ravensthorpe Shire in the south west of Western Australia has undergone rapid and profound social upheaval resulting from the arrival of a BHP Billiton nickel mine which commenced construction in 2004 and was officially opened in June 2008.¹ Though the Shire has a long history of mining this project was the first modern, large-scale mine in the area. In May 2008, upwards of 300 employees and their families were residing in the region making Ravensthorpe Shire one of Australia's fastest developing local government areas (Mayes 2007). Consisting of an open cut mine and hydrometallurgical process plant and requiring an operational work force of 650 staff the venture had an expected ore reserve lifespan of 25 years (Mayes 2007).

Data for this chapter were derived from 18 interviews with women in the town undertaken in 2008. No Indigenous people were in the sample which is reflective of the very small Indigenous mine related population residing in the area.² The mine boasted a large South African population, who typically congregated in management positions. The General Manager was South African as were five of the eight managerial men in the deputy positions. Two women who had emigrated from South Africa as a result of the Ravensthorpe mine were included in the sample. The remainder were all Australian born.

Of the 18 women four were involved in farming and were long term residents of the district. Ten women were associated with the mine. Of these ten, six were employed at the mine and two of the six in positions of management. Four of the women associated with BHP Billiton had husbands in managerial positions. The four remaining women in the sample had relationships with both mining and farming. In two cases husbands had sought employment at the mine to supplement their agricultural income while their wives took responsibility for the majority of farm labour. The final two cases were women who had been involved in agriculture but then took jobs at the mine. One was separated from her farming husband while the other remained on the farm where her husband continued to work. Two women from the sample were associated with contract labour at the mine through their own employment and/or the employment of their husbands.

Interviews covered a range of questions about community, inclusion, friendship, work and leisure as well as the more specific issue of class. In many respects class

¹ The mine subsequently closed unexpectedly in January 2009 and reopened again in 2010.

² According to Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census Data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007), the Indigenous population in the region at 1.7 per cent of the total population is lower than the Australian average.

was, a 'slippery' concept in interview narratives with participants demonstrating ambivalence and reticence in relation to the use of the term (Skeggs 1997, 2004). This was most pronounced in discussions about class relationships between BHP Billiton women as the following section explains.

Class Relations Amongst Women Associated with BHP Billiton

There were clear differences in the naming of class between participants. In the main, women associated with BHP Billiton, either through marriage or employment, were the most uncomfortable and ambivalent about class as manifest in relations between general staff and management. For the majority of women in the town connection to the mine was through their husband's own employment. There were few employment opportunities outside of the mine and it, like the majority of others in Australia, was disproportionately staffed by men (Mayes and Pini 2010).

While reluctant to name class relations as important to the contemporary BHP Billiton worksite and the surrounding town, a number of participants shared anecdotes of class based interactions from past experiences in mining communities. The geographic and emotional distance from these past communities and the immediacy and potential longevity of their lives in the current community no doubt mediated these responses. There was also a sense that class may have been more important in the past than it is in contemporary times. One woman recounted the story of being given a t-shirt by a family member which was in support of striking miners and her husband expressed embarrassment when she wore it saying, 'We're past all that now'. This type of conflation of the notion of class with industrial/union action was common in interviews with participants responding to questions about class with claims such as, 'The mine is deunionized'. It may be a further reason why there was such hesitancy in naming class as unions have been strongly maligned in the public sphere in recent years due to the veracity of campaigns against them by large corporations and the former federal conservative Coalition government led by John Howard (Oliver 2008).

Some participants who did refer to there being different 'groups' amongst the BHP Billiton women in the town sought to rationalize and legitimate this referring, for example, to the fact that people tend to mix with whom they have the most in common or with whom they shared shifts. It was also common for Australian born women associated with the mine to respond to a question about class by stating that it was not class which was problematic but racial identity. They labelled the South African women (and men) in a range of negative ways. That is, as spoilt, outspoken, uptight, rude and authoritarian and suggested that this was a result of having lived in a country which has a history of institutionalized and hierarchical racial inequality.

Linda: I know it's horrible. But I think mainly that is ... I mean I know a couple of the ladies because my girls go to school with their girls you know ... because they are South African, they have a very high-class difference in that way.

Julie: They [South African women] stay in their own little cliques. I mean the girls get invited to all the parties and stuff but the men ... their men won't talk to your men sort of thing if you went to a party so much.

Susan: I know for a friend of mine, she related a story to me when they were all out ... everyone was out having a breast cancer awareness morning tea or something. And it was this lady and only a couple of others that helped to clean up and she was quite frustrated because she felt that all the South African women were out and not helping and basically treating the women in the kitchen like servants.

The types of characterizations of South Africans asserted in the above quotations relies upon positioning Australians as having an essential core set of traits common to imaginings about the Australian nation. That is, as egalitarian, welcoming, open and antiauthoritarian. Clearly, it also relies upon a fiction of racialized equality in both contemporary and past constructions of the Australian nation. In the women's narratives it provided a widely engaged rationale for explaining any conflict or tension between BHP Billiton managers and employees indicating that it may be more acceptable to claim racial difference than class difference.

Those participants who did ruminate about class in terms of race or friendship groups punctuated their comments with repeated assertions that even if class did exist in the community they were indifferent to it. The following quotations from a senior female manager at the mine and a female mine employee are indicative of this positioning.

Kirsten: You're probably asking the wrong person because it doesn't bother me, I don't pick up on it ... But it's again probably, it's not to say it's not happening but in terms of my own personal frame of mind, it's not important who you belong to or you know what your husband would be doing. It's who you are, and it doesn't even matter what you do.

Tammy: I know that certain people will go and have barbeques at people's houses and other ones won't. And certain people will have tea with other people and other ones won't. But again, like I don't care [laughter].

In a further demonstration of the need to distance oneself from class a woman married to a mine employee noted that a good friend who had recently left the community had often remarked on the way class shaped relations between the BHP Billiton women. However, like others, she was less certain about the importance

of class as a social category and named class as simply friendships and shared histories. She stated:

Robina: I don't know. There may be something. Maybe they all [the wives of the managers] go to each other's houses, but maybe because they've got that common bond their husbands are managers. I don't know. I really don't know what it is. I don't know. Sometimes I think there is and then other days ... It depends on my mood. I think, "Oh yeah, they're all sticking together." Then, "No. It's just they've got that thing in common." But yeah there are a few managers wives that hang out together. You know their husbands' positions so you know. But yeah I don't seem to have a real problem with it. I don't know. I always say to my husband, "Don't you ever apply for a manager's job because I'm not management wife material type thing."

Interviewer: What would management wife material be?

Robina: I don't know. Like to me they're all educated whereas I never finished Year 12. I didn't even finish Year 11. You know, I only went to Year 10 and I'm not educated at all.

Robina's repeated, 'I don't know' highlights her struggle to name and explain class. She moves back and forth as she seeks to understand class relations in the community. Her response also highlights the way in which women's classed position in the community is closely tied to their husbands. We were told that women married to managerial staff are often introduced through reference to their husbands so their status is clearly signalled. Robina's quotation also resonates with urban based studies of working-class women for whom class is difficult, if not impossible, to leave behind. Many of these studies have been undertaken by feminist scholars and focus on the movement of women from working class to middle class either through marriage and/or education. Collectively, they have demonstrated the way in which class is deeply inscribed on our very beings and often embedded in painful emotions such as shame, relief, anxiety and sadness (e.g., Lawler 1999, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, Maguire 2005). Robina's husband had recently returned from an extended and successful stint at an international site for BHP Billiton and had been promoted to take up his position in Ravensthorpe. She was clearly proud of his success (and also clearly contributed to his success through her emotional and domestic labour), but she was anxious about a possible shift to a management position highlighting the powerful but often overlooked 'subjective and positional aspects of economic relations' (Hey 2003: 332).

A similar discomfort about class was enunciated by two BHP Billiton women as they spoke about housing. This was a stark material indicator of one's classed status in the town despite protestations about the lack of importance of one's position, or the position of one's husband, at the mine. While there was not a clearly

delineated segregation between employees and managers that characterized mining communities of the past, some areas of the community housed more managers than others. This spatial segregation was noted by participants who employed classed and racialized descriptors such as 'Snob Hill' and 'Captetoun' (a pun on Hopetoun) to describe the preponderance of managers/South Africans in particular areas of the community. Further, while it was the case, as one woman married to a superintendent argued that, 'people were all mixed up', the size of houses and blocks differed between employees and managerial staff. Earlier arrivals to the community had been afforded greater choice in housing and therefore some employees did live in larger houses and on larger blocks, but these were the exceptions to the norm. For two of the women interviewed the location of their houses generated a sense of unease. One commented, 'I wish my house could be picked up and taken to another part of town'. These women explained that their own class backgrounds meant they were uncomfortable in the surrounds of 'the corporates', and living in a space seen by the broader community for the more privileged and elite.

Class Relations and Women Associated with Mine Contract Work

Historical studies of class in mining communities examined class as manifest largely, or solely, in terms of the relationship between employees and management. However, our data reveal that in the contemporary mining sector there are new variegations in the category 'employee' that render such a singular analysis obsolete. In particular, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of temporary and contract labour and outsourcing as part of a broader agenda of deregulating and liberalizing labour relations in the sector (Bowden 2003). When asked about class women associated with mining were most vocal about distinctions and categorizations made about those who were employed by BHP Billiton and those who were contractors. Again, the nomenclature of class was not used; instead participants referred to there being 'divisions' or 'big differences' between BHP Billiton workers and non-BHP Billiton workers. Contract workers, like the managers and employers of BHP Billiton are easily identified by their housing. They are not entitled to the BHP Billiton company housing, and as a result of significant shortages in accommodation as well as exorbitant rental costs, many lived in temporary lodgings such as caravans and demountables in 'camps' surrounding the town. One female mine worker we interviewed who, along with her husband, contracted to BHP Billiton explained:

Libby: If you work for BHP then they give you housing and they give you this and they give you that. When we arrived housing was quite tight and contractors were living in really crappy houses and the rents were like \$400 to \$600 a week. And now they're probably double that you know. We knew some drillers ... it was a six man crew and they were living in a caravan for two weeks on.

This woman considered herself 'extremely lucky' as she had been able to obtain a rental property to house herself, husband and two children, but it was of a much poorer quality and condition than those allocated to BHP Billiton staff at a subsidized cost. Along with a second woman we interviewed whose husband was a contractor, there were other ways in which her contract status inflected daily life. Work related functions and communication and information channels for example, are typically reserved for BHP Billiton staff. Most pointedly, when the company hosted a weekend of festivities to celebrate at the opening of the mine only BHP Billiton staff were invited. Contractors who had been involved in the establishment of the mine and employed for periods of up to four years were excluded. This type of segregation, the women noted, spilt into their non-working lives and the lives of their children, even determining who would attend a child's birthday party:

Libby: With the kids we have birthday parties. There was a few that didn't come but there's a few that didn't stay and there's a few that just sort of came in and got their kids and left.

The women associated with contract work at the mine, either as employees or as partners of contractors, were highly conversant with negative stereotypes about contractors circulating in the town. Even the farming women who were much less cognizant of the nuances within the category 'mining women', had a sense of the contractors as undesirable residents. Women connected to BHP Billiton clearly articulated a typology of 'the contractor' as overpaid, alcohol and drug dependent, lacking familial and community ties and potentially violent. When asked about class in the town, for example, one woman whose husband worked for BHP Billiton stated:

Anna: During construction we had a lot of trouble because of the people that were employed as contractors; because they were just here to make big bucks. The workforce now is a lot more stable and they don't have that ruthless mentality. It's like we're part of the community. We want to be involved which is really good but, before, it was just shocking.

The BHP Billiton women we interviewed argued that any tensions in the shire between mining and farming people had resulted from the behaviour and actions of contractors, and that unable to distinguish between the two groups, the agricultural community had simply labelled everyone with a tie to the mine as abject.

Class Relations between BHP Billiton Women and Farming Women

The difficulties and potential limitations of reading class simply from occupation or income was highlighted in focusing on the relationships between the farming and mining women. The comparatively small size of the holdings of the Ravensthorpe

farms and the relatively recent acquisition of their farming land, in the 1960s, has the potential to negate claims to the higher class status that might traditionally be afforded to farmers. Further, the farming land in the shire of Ravensthorpe is not particularly rich, and has, in recent years, been badly affected by drought. Farming women talked of financial struggles and strains they were under, the need for off farm income to sustain the farm and large debts they retained. Many of the homes and farms we visited to undertake the interviews reflected this situation. In contrast, the mining women's homes were all modern, newly built and surrounded by landscaped native gardens. Interior furnishings and modern appliances all indicated wealth. Along with their homes, mining people in the town enjoyed very high incomes as a result of a severe skill shortage in the industry and the high demand for minerals for export. The disparity between mining and farming incomes was acknowledged by one interviewee who referred to the fact that the town's progress association required \$A700 for a new roof for a park toilet block. It was thought this was a small amount given the financial capacity of mining people in the community. One community member noted that for those involved in mining, 'You could put some more zeros on that and it's nothing'.

Despite their self acknowledged inferior financial status, it was the farming women who tended to judge the mining women negatively and, importantly, as morally deficient. In part, this relied upon familiar classed tropes about the superiority of individual ownership of property and self employment. A constant refrain in this regard was the assertion that farming people have a greater level of responsibility while mining people are cosseted and pampered. The farming women positioned themselves and their husbands as tough, industrious and self-directed and caricatured the mining women (and men) as indulged and lazy. Mining people were seen to be in receipt of significant amounts of money as a result of their relationship to the mine as well as afforded considerable largesse in terms of housing and other inducements, and yet lacking graciousness or industry. One farming woman summarized the thinking:

Norelle: I can hear people in my community saying, "They have absolutely nothing to do all day and they still have to hire a cleaner to come in and clean the house and they still have to have a day care centre to take care of their children after school, what the hell are they doing all day?"

The financial rewards of being involved in mining were viewed by the farming women as largely undeserved. They dismissed the work undertaken on a mine site as straightforward and undemanding, particularly in contrast to agricultural labour. Mining people were also seen to be extravagant and excessive in their consumption practices buying leisure-orientated vehicles such as jet skis, boats and trail bikes. In contrast, farming people were said to be careful with their money as well as more likely to direct it towards more morally appropriate purposes such as to benefit the farm enterprise. The caricature of the mining woman as pampered and cosseted was extended by the farming women to include mining

men. Similarly, their representation of themselves as tough, industrious and self directed also encompassed their designations of their farmer husbands. Indicative of the softness and fragility of the mining man compared to the farming man, was, according to two agricultural women, the high priority BHP Billiton gave to workplace health and safety. These women parodied the compulsory fluorescent reflective vests, the aerals on vehicles and the noises vehicles made on reversing as ridiculous and trivial. There were class dimensions to these discussions of occupational safety as mining men's position as employees was contrasted with that of the farming men's as self employed. The latter, it was asserted, are business owners and must therefore take responsibility for their own selves. As one woman commented, 'You know, on farming, we're the managers, we manage it, but we also own it. We don't report to anyone else'.

Tensions between the farming women and mining women erupted when the local council suggested that the community hall could be used by BHP Billiton as a temporary childcare centre. There was considerable consternation amongst farming women as numerous pre-mine community groups utilized the hall for meetings and activities. For those who had nursed concerns about the changes wrought by the presence of the mine and, in particular, the sense of a loss of community, the prospect of handing over the hall to the company was also highly symbolic and infused with emotion. On the other hand, for women who already worked at the mine and those who sought employment at the mine a childcare centre was a key priority. For these women feelings were strengthened by the fact that they had expected that a company childcare centre would be in operation when they arrived.

At a public meeting to discuss the issue discourses of gender, rurality and class were engaged by both the mining women and the farming women to legitimate their particular position about the use of the community hall. BHP Billiton women at the meeting, particularly those few who were in managerial positions, drew on notions of 'choice' and 'rights' as well as called upon their occupational identities, for example, as a lawyer or an accountant and educational status in arguing their case. In contrast, farming women characterized the childcare centre as unwarranted given that they themselves had never required such an amenity. One expressed the view that children required their mothers and that good mothers should be at home caring for children. More generally, however, the reconstitution of the community hall as a childcare centre was characterized by the farming women as indicative of mining women's lack of understanding of what constitutes rurality, a rural community and the identity rural women. This is encapsulated in the following recollection from a female farmer who attended the meeting.

Cheryl: And one woman stood up and said, "I want a movie theatre. I want an arcade, amusement arcade for the kids. I want to have Paddy's Market every month. I want this, this, this and this." And Louise said, "Are you saying you want people to entertain your children for you?" And she said, "Yes." And Louise said, "Well, I'm afraid in a country community, if you want something to

happen, you've got to get in, get involved and make it happen." And the woman said, "Well I'm not prepared to do that" and she sat down.

The view that a desire for a childcare centre was a breach of the norms and values of a rural community was similarly expressed by other farming women who recalled the heated discussions at the meeting. Particular contention circulated around the issue of sport, which, as in many country towns of Australia, is seen as central to 'community' (Tonts 2005). When one of the mining women suggested that she was looking forward to a childcare centre being in operation as it meant her children could be escorted to sport from school and she could simply pick them up when it was finished at the end of her shift a number of the long term agriculturally based women reacted angrily. One argued that, 'This was not sport', rather 'sport was mothers getting involved and helping'.

Given the morally charged descriptions the farming women used about the mining women it is important to give particular consideration to the group of four women who had relationships with both farming and mining. For two of these women, however, there was little tension as they identified themselves primarily as farming women and their husbands as farming men despite their partners' employment at the mine. Their involvement in the mine was seen as a short-term solution to address the financial security of the farm. In fact, these women were vocal in reiterating many of the allegedly morally defective aspects of mining employment, such as the excessive pay and limited need for industry, which they believed could be harnessed for the morally legitimate task of safeguarding the farm. They were clear that if given a choice their husbands would much prefer to be farming full time. For the other two women the situation was more complex as they themselves were employed at the mine. These women were extremely happy in their employment explaining that they had been much less fulfilled when working on the farm. They not only enjoyed the income, but the new social networks and personal and professional development. At the same time, they were highly aware of the negative discourses circulating about mining people in the community and cognizant of the fact that any shift in identity from 'farming woman' to 'mining woman' could result in them being situated within such discourses.

Tammy: When I first applied for this job [at the mine] I went to a Parents and Citizens meeting and had a mother say, "Oh gee, I hope we don't get any mining brats at our school when all the changes happen." And I was kind of sitting back thinking to myself, "Well, if I get this job does that then change my children to mining brats?"

In contrast to the 'farming women' the 'mining women' were much less vocal and certainly not disapproving as they spoke about the agricultural women in the community. Many stated that they did not socialize with farming women and could not comment on their experiences with them. Others made references to the 'farming women' being 'strong', 'hard working' and 'committed'. The only comment made

that was negative was that farming women tend to be 'conservative' but this was erased as it was claimed that this was understandable given their life trajectories. This unevenness is reflective of the key role farming has had as a signifier for rural communities, and the ongoing dominance of widely circulating discourses which associate moral value, such as honour, respectability and endurance, with being a farmer (Chavez 2005, Bryant 1999). Alongside farming people mining people are negatively assessed as 'other' and constructed as morally inferior (Gibson-Graham 1994: 207; Pini, Price and McDonald 2010).

Conclusion

In reporting on data from a study of the Ravensthorpe Shire in Western Australia this chapter has utilized contemporary cultural class theory to investigate class relations and rurality. Moreover, it has brought a gender lens to the analyses exploring how community members negotiate the intersecting discourses, practices, and assumptions about femininity and masculinity, rurality and class.

Three different classed categories were examined in the chapter. The first, the classed differences between women involved with BHP Billiton either through their husband's employment or their own. In stark contrast to past scholarship which has reported on the critical importance of collective notions of class in resource affected communities (e.g., Williams 1981, Gibson-Graham 1991, 1994, 1996) participants in this study minimized or dismissed the place of class in their lives. This is no doubt indicative of the broader 'disidentification of class' which has been found to be prominent today (Skeggs 2004: 59), a desire to establish oneself as 'ordinary' and 'outside class' (Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst 2001: 875) as well as representative of the declining influence and power of unions in what is now largely a deregulated sector (Ellem 2004). While collective understandings of class may have diminished in mining, class is not necessarily irrelevant amongst the women who have an association with BHP Billiton. For example, it was clear that class informed social and leisure groups outside the workplace and was often signalled when introductions were made between women.

The second classed categorization examined in the chapter was between the 'BHP Billiton women' and 'the contractors' while the third was between 'mining women' and 'farming women'. The analysis of interviews demonstrated that the BHP Billiton women positioned contractors as responsible for a range of antisocial behaviour. Viewed as central to the contractor's moral degeneracy was the fact that they were just in the community to obtain an income; an assertion that was also made by the farming women when talking about the mining women. In making such assertions interviewees dismissed the economic capital of these groups and drew attention to what they were seen to lack in terms of cultural, social and symbolic capital. The different groups engaged in 'moral boundary drawing' (Sayer 2005: 952) delineating particular people, practices and attitudes negatively and others positively and, importantly, marking some as belonging in the rural and

others as not belonging in the rural. This attribution of value, was, as this chapter has demonstrated, intrinsically gendered. It was, for example, not only that the women associated with mining were deemed by their agricultural counterparts as failing in their performance of normative middle-class rurality, but as failing in their performance of normative middle-class rural femininity. Integral to such a performance is an emphasis on home and family along with community and volunteer work.

Ravensthorpe provides a particularly rich case study for examining gender and class in the rural as it is a township which continues to undergo significant change. At the time of our interviews the classed and gendered conventions of this rural area were being opened up to challenge, debate and question by the presence of a new cohort of residents associated with the mine. It was, however, very early in the town's evolution from a predominantly farming community to a predominantly mining community, and as time has progressed it is likely that the story reported here has shifted considerably; such is the dynamic nature of gender and class.

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Chapter 7

Jobs for Women? Gender and Class
in Ontario’s Ruralized Automotive
Manufacturing Industry

Belinda Leach

Rural communities in many parts of Ontario, Canada have long been sustained by jobs in the manufacturing sector, contrary to the many depictions of rural communities as reliant solely on primary agriculture and resource extraction industries. The histories of manufacturing in these places, and the jobs and social relations that flowed from those histories have resulted in a particular class character for these communities, one shaped also by the ways that gender intervenes into the labour market practices of both employers and workers.

For most of a century women in Southwestern Ontario have found work in the automotive parts industry. This industry has been growing in Ontario and despite the recession of the past couple of years it continues to be very significant in many communities, including rural ones. It would seem reasonable to expect that the long history of women’s employment combined with the growth of the sector, would lead to expanded opportunities for women to obtain these relatively good rural jobs. This has not been the case. In this chapter I argue that volatility in the automotive industry, manifesting in the threat and reality of layoffs, combines with a powerful form of rural industrial masculinity, at the intersection of class and gender, to exclude women from the benefits of the best working-class jobs in rural Ontario communities. While previous scholarship has examined rural masculinities and industrial masculinity separately, rural Southwestern Ontario provides a context where elements of both combine to construct a locally specific form. The research contributes to debates on rural gender identities by treating rural masculinities and femininities as classed constructions. The question is what happens to entrenched gender identities when relatively well paid jobs in the automotive industry are available. The clashes that arise as these identities are pushed and pulled in different ways are the focus of my attention here.

The automotive sector’s current volatility is closely associated with the crisis in Canadian manufacturing that resulted from the combination of fierce international competition over several years; the more recent quite dramatic decline in strength of the United States (US) dollar and the concomitant rise of the Canadian dollar; and of course a US credit crisis with global consequences. This crisis has led to dramatic losses of manufacturing jobs. In Ontario, where most of Canada’s