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**Analysis of gender and class: gender relations between women and men in the context of an industrial setting in Ravenswood, West Virginia**

Victoria G. Allen

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Analysis of Gender and Class: Gender Relations Between Women and Men in the  
Context of an Industrial Setting in Ravenswood, West Virginia

Thesis submitted to  
The Graduate School of  
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
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By  
Victoria G. Allen  
Marshall University

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as meeting the research requirements for the master's degree.

Advisor Lynda Ann Ewen

Committee Member [Signature]

Committee Member Edwina Rindani

Department of Sociology

Ronald Deutch

Dean of Graduate College

I am grateful to the three women from Ravenswood, West Virginia who consented to share their work history with me. In the telling of their stories they helped me develop an understanding of work in an industrial setting, union struggles and life in a small Appalachian community.

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## **Analysis of Gender and Class: Gender Relations Between Women and Men in the Context of an Industrial Setting in Ravenswood, West Virginia**

### **Abstract:**

The purpose of my study was to reach an understanding of gender relationships between union members at the Ravenswood Aluminum Corporation Plant, Ravenswood, West Virginia after the initial hiring of women during the early 70s. Specifically, I am interested in analyzing these relationships from the beginning of the women's employment, during a period of work stoppage created by a company lockout, and in the years following the labor dispute.

When the study started it was hypothesized that the issues, tactics and resources used by the women were different than those of the men at the work site. The study of these female aluminum plant workers provided the chance to probe the interconnections between gender, work and protest for the women who stepped into occupations where jobs were highly classified by gender, race and ethnicity. I am finding the women upheld the same union attitudes, social and economic problems during the lockout as the men, who worked beside them at the plant. Both sexes stood side by side on the picket lines. The status of women at Ravenswood has strengthened since the 70s with women taking a more active role in union activities.

Ravenswood's rural Appalachian heritage lends itself to the stereotyping of uneducated, ill mannered and sexist men from the region. The study reveals caring, educated and hardworking males willing to stand side-by-side the women of Ravenswood during the good economical times and the strife of a labor dispute.

## **Introduction:**

The following is a qualitative analysis of three women's perceptions of gender relations in an aluminum plant in the small Appalachian town of Ravenswood, West Virginia. The purpose of my study was to reach an understanding of gender relationships between these three women and their male co-workers both member of the same union at Ravenswood Aluminum Corporation Plant, after the hiring of women during the early 70s. What impact did the union lockout have on the relationship between the men and women? What conditions united these three women during the lockout, and how did the relationship between the men and women change after the union victory?

The research was based on qualitative research using work history interviews of three female plant employees all hired during the 1970's. These three women reside in the community surrounding the factory and their stories are a study of work and gender relationships at an aluminum plant in rural West Virginia. Together with these interviews and what written material I could gather, I hope to call attention to Appalachian working-class women from small rural communities.

This research focused specifically on the relationship between the men and three women of Ravenswood before, during and after the lockout. Related to the central questions was the context of how did the Appalachian community affect the relationships of the laborers from RAC?

When the study was started it was presumed that the issues, tactics and resources used by the women of Ravenswood were different than those of the men at

the female employees. The study of female aluminum plant workers provided the chance to probe the interconnections between gender, work and protest for women who stepped into occupations where jobs were highly classified by gender, race and ethnicity. Because gender is a continuous part of society and within our social structure using, a gender analysis allows me to merge theoretical ideas from both cultural and structural approaches to the study of gender relationships.

### **Historical Context of the Strike**

The town of Ravenswood is a small rural Appalachian community located along the eastern side of the Ohio River in Jackson County, West Virginia. The West Virginia rolling hills flatten out as they reach the river. Ravenswood is an old community, whose land originally was Native American hunting grounds, claimed by Virginia colonists as their reward for fighting the British in the French and Indian war. George Washington claimed a large parcel of land, which included the area Ravenswood was built upon. For a long time this area was called Washington's woods (Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 4)

The aluminum plant lies south of the town, along Route 2 next to the bottomland of the river. Ravenswood Aluminum began its life as Kaiser Aluminum Plant built, by Henry J. Kaiser in 1954, and has supported the community for over 24 years. Ravenswood was chosen for the plant site due to its prime location near major waterways. "Alumina (bauxite that has been refined) could be inexpensively hauled by barge from Baton Rouge, where it arrived from around the world. The abundant local coal supplies could generate electricity to power the plant, and three-quarters of the



coal supplies could generate electricity to power the plant, and three-quarters of the nation's aluminum market was within a five hundred-mile radius of the town" (Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 5).

Women were first hired to work at RAC after the 1972 passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEO) (Affirmative Action, 571). New female employees took occupational assignments previously dominated by men. Women developed their job skills initially through on-the-job training (OJT). Therefore some women were assigned positions before male coworkers who had been waiting for an opportunity to apply for these particular jobs. These women were able to participate in union business alongside the men for the first time (Sass and Troyer 571). The three women I interviewed have been employed at RAC since the early 1970's and hired due to the Company's desire to comply with the new EEOC ruling.

The plant was renamed Ravenswood Aluminum Company (RAC) after it was sold to the Stanwich Partners in 1989 (Walker, iii). The new management was faced with negotiating its first contract with union local no. 5668 of the United Steel Workers of America in October 1990. After failing to settle with union arbitration Ravenswood Aluminum Company management locked the employees out of the plant resulting in a labor dispute that lasted for 18 months sending the community into an economic decline. The locked out workers, along with the citizens of the town suffered greatly during this time of strife. The once quiet town of Ravenswood became violent and experienced economic hardship during the 18-month labor dispute (Walker, iii).

During this work stoppage men and women worked alongside each other in the picket areas, developing a stronger relationship. Some male union members suggested the female employees work with the women's support group supplying meals and other basic needs of the locked out workers or share the union duties being carried out in the union hall. The final choice of where to serve was ultimately made by the employee involved. Picket duty was the most violent place for the union personnel to serve and some of the male picketers felt placing the women elsewhere would keep them safe.

Workers for RAC discovered international financier, metal trader, and fugitive from justice; Marc Rich owned their plant with his headquarters in Switzerland. Their struggles became a global issue. The steelworkers fought for almost two years to win their struggle over the Company, disregarding the precedent that emerged out of the 1980s of broken unions and divided communities. This triumph was not Ravenswood's alone it was also a result of one of the most compound and highly developed contract campaigns ever conducted by the American labor movement. The locked out workers had taken their campaign around the world (Juravich & Bronfenbrenner 1).

After the lockout was settled Ravenswood returned to the quiet community it once was but was still a divided neighborhood. Returning workers had to work side by side with employees hired to replace them during the labor dispute. Juravich and Bronfenbrenner described the workers uneasy acceptance of the idea some of the scabs might return to continuing jobs. These fears were attributed to the company's memo reforming its promise to find positions for all permanent replacements after the steelworkers returned to work. (195).

On June 29, 1992 the 500 workers scheduled for the first shift returned to the plant after almost two years of struggle. Women and men, who struggled side by side for their employment, now returned to their jobs with their working relationships taking new directions. In addition to a new work atmosphere was the issue of working with the scabs. Eight years later employees of Ravenswood still deal with matters relating to the labor dispute and gender interactions.

## **Literature Review**

Little has been written concerning the plight of women's struggle for equality during their employment in unionized labor, work stoppages or union strikes from the standpoint of Appalachian women. Most information concerning strikes comes from the male point of view. The biggest part of the literature reviewed concerned women in the workforce outside the Appalachian area and helped to conceive ideas and prototypes for my own methodology for the intersection of gender relationships and union activity at the Ravenswood Aluminum plant in the rural Appalachian community of Ravenswood, West Virginia. In addition, there are very few studies of the correlation between gender relationships in the steel industry. According to Mary Margaret Fonow, in her analysis of the participation of women in the 1985 Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel strike, wrote that by entering a production process that is already extremely gendered as masculine, women defy the cultural meanings that coordinate work, gender and protest (710). Fonow goes on to state, "Women who entered the steel industry were contesting normative notions of gender-appropriate behavior by the very act of seeking such employment. Furthermore, by protesting through their strike

activism the conditions of work for jobs that were 'not women'—they were again violating gender conventions that define political action as masculine" (710). Single working-class women working in male occupied areas could be said to sexually disrupt the work sites. Sexual insinuations, gossip, and rumors make it hard for women to gain respect, get promoted or be treated as equals in the work place (710).

Mary Fonow discussed how, "Gender differences do not have to be empirically valid in order for them to have ideological or material effects. For men, being steel workers signified conformity to the dominant-cultural script for working-class masculinity, while for working-class women the very act of seeking employment, in such a highly 'masculinized' occupation challenged cultural scripts for working-class femininity" (711). This appears to be the normal attitude towards all women seeking employment in all occupations classified as male and what I expected to find at Ravenswood.

In her discussion of the Pittsburgh Steel strike, Fonow described how gender division of labor could be witnessed with the assignment of strike duties. She explained, "Each day the picket captain organized members to staff the picket line for each of the three shifts while the kitchen captain organized the preparation of meals for the picketers; both captains were men. Although men and women were supposed to work both kitchen duty and picket duty, women were more likely to be assigned to kitchen duty (10)." During the Pittsburgh steelworkers strike men held the higher union positions while women had to fight just to be allowed to work picket duty alongside their union brothers. Some of the women protested these arrangements and declined to work in the kitchen. These women expressed their desire to work on the picket line

alongside the men (10). My research at Ravenswood revealed both groups of women had the same desire to work, picket, and protest as one unit with their male counterparts.

I did not find any cases of sexual harassment in my research of Ravenswood equal to that found at the Mitsubishi plant in 1996. In an article written by Camille Colatosti, she illustrated how the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission sued Mitsubishi in April 1996 in a meaningful class-action suit claiming that as many as 500 women workers had endured sexual harassment at their plant (Colatosti 36). The EEOC alleged that harassment at the Mitsubishi plant in Normal, Ill, was customary operating practice. According to the EEOC, women workers complained of groping, crude graffiti, and derogatory epithets. Male supervisors and line workers rubbed their genitals against female workers, and masturbated while staring at the women working beside them, the EEOC reported. The EEOC version also contends that managers coerced some women into performing sex act (36). Sexual-harassment issues continue for union women in part because the largest number of union officials continues to be male. Women make up a larger percentage of the unionized work force than ever before in the United States--37 percent--they put together only 8 percent of elected and appointed union officials (Colatosti 37).

Another issue facing union women is job discrimination, which is not a new problem. Women have been left out of economic growth, promotions to higher paying positions or even being hired for better jobs due to their gender since women left the fields and home to work in factories. Studies of the job market indicate that women have fallen behind men in the job market and monetary gain for centuries. After

twenty-five years of affirmative action, gender segregation in the workplace continues and women still earn less money than men. In the blue-collar jobs male coworkers and their unions are pointed out as two of the main reasons for women's slow progress in the direction of equality in the work place. Unions have the means, mechanisms, and legitimacy to represent women's issues through current industrial relations measures as illustrated in an article by Camille Colatosti (69).

In another study conducted by O'Farrell and Moore to determine union hiring and placement procedures they illustrated how some unions have left women out as members and some have strongly oppose efforts to integrate either jobs or membership. Seniority systems have been found to continue the effects of previous discrimination (73). Some unions have gone as far as to manipulate social legislation. O'Farrell and Moore's research revealed two important issues, which are related to the need for unions to take a constructive leadership role. Women members have learned to use the existing union structures to pursue their goals They emphasize the point that there is resistance and hostility on the part of male coworkers and union leaders which needs to be conquered, but are there are also supportive men who can be encouraged, as well as men with neutral attitudes who should become involved (74).

One problem pointed out by Sally Ward Maggard deals with the heritage of economic history as the model of men and women's involvement in the formal labor force. Maggard illustrates this point (see table 1) showing how the labor force participation rates compare in the United States with West Virginia for selected periods from 1900 to 1990. Both men and women's part in the total labor force in West Virginia has been lower than the countrywide average. West Virginia women's rates

are dramatically lower than men's. Maggard states these samples are linked to the makeup of occupational opportunity and to the rigidly sex segregated roles that have set apart West Virginia's economy (19).

Civilian Labor Force Participation Rates*				
For United States and West Virginia by sex, 1900-1990				
	Male		Female	
	United States	West Virginia	United States	West Virginia
1900	88.0%	80.0%	18.0%	90.0%
1930	84.1%	72.4%	21.9%	13.1%
1950	78.9%	74.6%	27.8%	19.6%
1960	83.3%	67.8%	37.7%	24.3%
1970	79.7%	66.0%	43.3%	29.4%
1980	77.4%	68.4%	51.5%	36.5%
1990	76.1%	64.6%	57.5%	42.6%

\*\*Rates are calculated for persons gainfully employed according to age thresholds which change over time. The census counted persons 10 years of age and above through 1930; persons 14 and above in 1940 and 1950; persons 16 and above since 1960" (20)

Source: U.S. Census of Population, U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Statistical Abstract of the U.S. for selected Years

A second bequest of West Virginia's economic history is the outline of employment across industrial areas. As late as 1970, the economy of Central Appalachia was less diversified than the nation as a whole in terms of population employed in different industries. Fewer people in the area worked in retail and wholesale trade, professional services, manufacturing, domestic and entertainment services, finance and real estate, business and repair services and construction than in the entire nation (Maggard 20). Small towns, such as Ravenswood, have little to offer women in the way of decent paying employment and it is hard for women to get good jobs to get ahead. Most jobs in the area come from restaurants, grocery stores and the educational field. Little wonder the Ravenswood women were so eager to join their male counterparts at the aluminum plant.

### **Standpoint Theory: Analysis from the experiences of women**

My own standpoint has been shaped by my work experience. During my career I have been employed with three different employers. One thing I observed at each place of employment was the many challenges women faced in order to reach the same economic level as men. Increasingly more women are stepping into the traditional male work roles to provide for their families. I can be counted among the ranks of women denied promotions due to their gender and still chastise myself to this day for not filing a lawsuit.

While exploring the relationship of women in the workplace feminist researchers become conscious of the intersection of gender with the blue-collar working class. Researchers are beginning to understand how individual women's



perspectives materialize from a feminist standpoint in their research. Women researchers work to defeat the male direction of cross-cultural materials used to study diverse groups of women within society. As sociologists we learn to understand how other women work, understand their pain and find joy as they emerge as a strong voice among their fellow union workers. All of our lives women have been told that they cannot accomplish what men have in the workforce; but women can do anything they set their minds to do.

According to Sandra Harding, "Women's different lives have been erroneously devalued and neglected as starting points for scientific research and as the generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims (121)." My experience and observations to support this claim by Harding came from the study of the three RAC women and their union activities. Some researchers often fail to recognize the value of women's experience when appraising their history in the workforce and in union history.

Women gain their knowledge from their experiences to pass on to others. Women's work often is inconceivable to men and left out of the male perspective. Therefore, passing on the knowledge falls on the shoulders of women and leads to a better understanding of issues concerning gender. Voice is given to those exploited and ideas are not lost or silenced through oppression. According to Sandra Harding in Feminism & Methodology, "it needs to be stressed that it is women who should be expected to be able to reveal for the first time what women's experiences are (7)." Harding explained, "White men's experiences lead to partial and even perverse understandings of social life (7)."

Harding argues that feminist standpoint theory challenges the ideas of gender-stratified culture, providing women with a particular knowledge base, which is grounded in the experience of those contested. These challenges are turned resources that are not used by typical researchers, which provides feminist scholars more accurate descriptions and stronger theoretical awareness than conventional research. Her argument is that research on women should start from women's lives and the circumstances that define the social condition of women. This method allows feminist scholars to correctly define objectivity in any given social situation (Harding 123-130).

Harding goes on to note how feminist standpoint theories have the distinctiveness of both traditional sociologies and conventional epistemologies (171). Harding explains how women want to know about their bodies, why men rape, which social forces keep women oppressed, and "how women can gain the power to improve their condition" (173). In a personal interview with Dr. Lynda Ann Ewen she stated "standpoint theory rests squarely within the conflict theory of sociology for it makes central the question of power and how we use this power."

Judith Lorber in, Gender Inequality Feminist Theories and Politics, argues that as "producers of children-out of bodies, motions, thought, and sheer physical labor-women are grounded in material reality in ways that men are not [...]. If women produced knowledge, it would be much more in touch with the everyday, material world and with the connectedness among people, because of what women experience (118). According to George Ritzer standpoint theories examine the social world from an explicit vantage point. (Ritzer 86) Ritzer wrote how these theories would empower

those who lack clout (86) Standpoint theory allows women and other minorities to have voice.

My standpoint in this study has been formulated in such a way that mirrors the values of women working in a patriarchal society. This position does not deny the role of men but instead emphasizes the importance of and, difference between gender experiences in the evaluation of social research.

### **Methodology:**

My study is from a feminist standpoint using qualitative methodology. It is a social analysis of gender related attitudinal development and change that highlights the knowledge of working-class women from the RAC in the western part of West Virginia. After studying the inquiries of previous researchers concerning the struggles of women in non-traditional union jobs I decided to use the qualitative method of in-depth interviews to develop a better understanding of the plight of other women in their daily struggle to achieve the same economic independence as men. I realized that there was so little research that valid hypothesis did not exist. Thus, this is exploratory research using three women as case studies. Hopefully, these in-depth analyses will lay the groundwork for more generalizable and systematic research. I was able to develop an intimate relationship between each of the respondents and myself by using qualitative methods. Elizabeth St. Pierre refers to this phenomenon in qualitative methods by saying that researchers work through their problems to gain the "richness and power of qualitative research" looking for harmless ways to make sense of people's lives (405).

Each of the respondents were referred to me by a woman I worked with who currently lives in Ravenswood. The interviews were semi-structured, in settings of the interviewee's choice, and lasting one hour or longer. The use of in-depth interviews allowed me to obtain the respondents perspective on women and union activities in a comfortable setting. I was able to become absorbed in the lives and experiences of the participants. Data analysis for this study began by probing the experiences of these women during their employment using their own words. The company was not informed of my interviews because I wanted to regard these relationships from the viewpoint of the women and so my respondents would not be intimidated by the idea that their management supported my study.

Two of the respondents elected to be interviewed in their homes while the third chose a restaurant. Follow up interviews were conducted by telephone. The participants were single, widowed or divorced and lifetime residents of the Ravenswood area. The only requirements for respondents were to be or have been employment at the Plant since women were first hired to work there. The questions asked during the interviews were open ended included but not limited to:

- Age?
- Marital Status?
- Describe the aluminum plant and the type of work you completed.
- Describe how you felt your first day of work.
- Describe your role during the work stoppage in the early 90's.
- What stands out most in your mind during your employment at Ravenswood?

## **Data Presentation: Women from Ravenswood**

### Respondent 1

And for I would say probably for the first 3 or 4 days I was there people were, I suppose it was the men seeing a woman coming to the department where there never has been a women before, they were trying to do too much to help me out and I was trying to get my 30 days in and so I had to tell them to let me alone let me do my job. I had to get my 30 days in, I knew that, you never know how your foreman or supervision how they are going to look at anybody helping you out.

So I don't know if I have been lucky through the years or if it has been a curse on me that I have always insisted on pulling my own weight. Because there have been times I really wished I had the help and didn't get it. I stayed in the same department for almost 20 years.

I saw the change from Kaiser Aluminum to Ravenswood Aluminum. I saw the change from Ravenswood Aluminum to Century Aluminum. Now the plant has split and one end of the plant, the reduction end, is still Century Aluminum. The part that I work in is Peachney Rolled Products a French company. I understand that very shortly we will be come APA which is a combination, merger of Alcan, Peachney, and Al group. So I don't know when that is going to happen but it is going to very soon. They supposedly have big plans to put a lot of money into our plant. Our plant is very old, it is 40 some years old and a lot of the equipment is out of date and they have big

plans to update everything. They have already started hiring. Things are looking good so far.

That's pretty much, other than I was being laid off, it seems like the first 10 years was probably laid off every year at Christmas time. For just a few weeks at a time and other than a lay off here and there when most of them were short. We did have one long lay off in 1981, I believe it was, and it lasted almost a year. Other than that the only time I was off was the lockout.

Of course, that is a very touchy subject. It was devastating, it threatened your livelihood, and you saw people coming in from all over the country taking your jobs. It was a hard situation to live with.

Did this change occur after the lockout?

This is after the lockout. Of course, they started bringing, in my words, the scabs. They started bringing them into the department that I worked in so I left and got a lot easier job. A lot better job, a lot cleaner job that is where I am today.

Did the men resent you? Did you get a lot of harassment?

Surprisingly no. I can remember only probably 2 people the whole time I have worked there that resented me because I am a woman, in their work place, their atmosphere. You know like I was invading them. But other than that I have not been harassed. I can't say, at least to my face, that I have been treated any differently than anybody else.

During my research, I read that at one time the Plant employed 1700 people with only 32 of those women. How many women work there now?

Well I would say probably close back to the 32 because we have lost a few due to medical but many are at the age to retire but we have a few who retired medically and that is about it and a couple hired.

Has the total employment changed from the 1700?

Oh my drastically, drastically.

You do not know how many are employed at the plant now?

No

Jerry Butcher, employee of the casting plant, was killed on May 13, 1994 in the plant. That morning, I was working midnight shift and he was working day shift and every morning he did this when I was on midnight shift. He would-- we had our little shacks, our little lunchrooms, and our workshops where we did out paper work. They had two doors, and he would come in one door and pat me on the shoulder and say, "good morning buddy" and go out the other door. He did that last morning and I had come home and was out working in the garden when my roommate called me and said, "Do you know Jerry Butcher?" And I said, "Yes, I just spoke to him a little bit before I came home." "Well he got killed."

They have had 2 guards that were killed in a basement, got gassed in a basement. They had a guy mowing grass and a tractor turned over on him. Apparently

the grass was wet and the tractor turned over. We had an electrician get electrocuted and Jimmy Rider, was the pot room employee, that they forced to work overtime, died from heat stress while working in the pot room.

Was one of the main issues of the Lock Out safety?

Yes, Yes, safety concerns was one of the biggest things from the very beginning. When you lose that many people in such a short time, a couple of years or whatever, safety was a big issue.

During the Lock Out did the women work alongside the men at the picket lines or did they work with the women's support group?

This is a very interesting question and I am glad you ask me. I served picket duty at least 5 days a week and I was a picket captain, also. I served two days a week on the picket line. I served 3 days a week as picket captain. A picket captain, what they did is they would assign people a gate to go to each day and then they would go around and check on them once in a while see if they were ok or if there were any problems, see if they needed anything or whatever. And so I served 2 different capacities there.

A lot of the women, I hope I don't step on anybody's toes here, a lot of the women served only at the assistant center. The assistant center was set up by the International Union plus donations from other people all over the country. It was a food bank, they gave Kroger coupons, and they set up a thing to help pay your bills, if necessary, house payments things like that not telephone bills but necessary things.



And a lot of the women chose as their duty to serve at the center. But me I felt I work in there with those men, I worked beside them all those years and they owed me as much as I owed them. I did not want them out there fighting my battle for me.

The women chose where they wanted to work, it was not delegated?

It was suggested in the beginning and I said no. I have to work with them inside the plant. I have to do the dirty jobs, I have bad days with them and I have good days with them and I wasn't going to do that. And we did have some women that maybe served once a week in that assistance center but they also went to the line and served once or twice a week.

Did all 32 women do the same jobs or equal jobs as the men who work at the plant?

Yes, because everything is by seniority. So if you are in a certain department, such as the casting department, you have a different job class, which means different rates of pay. The higher a job classification the higher the pay. So and here is just a made up name, here is Judy Smith over there and here's me and we both want this job and I have seniority over her and it is a big job class, so I get the job. No matter what the job is, man or woman it does not make any difference. When 2 or more persons are hired the same day seniority goes by your birthday and that senior person will most likely go to a department with the highest job classification. Pretty much if you go by seniority it is fair. When you are hired you go where the opening is.

Are there any women in union leadership at the plant?

Yes, one of our women was given an international job and she is gone now. Another lady is our worker's comprehensive representative and works at the union hall. We do have some women in the grievance sections and I was a safety representative for three years. One women-a couple of women hold offices at the union hall. Pretty high positions.

Was this the case before the lockout?

No. No it wasn't. I really believe that the women working during the lockout they opened some of the union representatives and other union people's eyes that women, care about these jobs too. I really think the lockout itself helped the union people that the women had something to offer. We started to become more active in the union, started going to more union meetings and some of us, them, didn't quit after the lock-out was over they kept going to the union meetings and stayed concerned.

After the lockout some people did not go back to their empathic ways? Just doing my job and going home attitudes?

Some of the people that were most active during the lockout you never see them anymore I mean except at work. There are some that were never active that are like some of the women that are real active now. Some of the men too.

Do other women in the community resent the women that work at Ravenswood?

Not that I have seen. Now when I first hired in, my very first day in that plant I was assigned to clean a small locker room specifically for the other lady that worked in the plant the one that was above me in seniority that is no longer there. I was assigned to clean out the locker room for her because she had nowhere to shower and she deserved a right to shower like everybody else and she worked a dirty job. And I did hear a lot, a foreman told me that one of the guard's wife was upset over giving her this shower but this was a guard's shower room and they never used it other than to maybe go in and change shoes or something like that, so they decided to clean it out and give it to her gave them some flak at the plant with phone calls about her showering with her husband and something like that.

I have read about women miners who had showers set up at a coal mine in West Virginia where the men drilled holes in the walls and watched the women take their showers, made lewd remarks and cat calls as they left the showers. Have you encountered such behavior at the plant?

You are probably going to talk to; hopefully you will get a chance to talk to some of my fellow workers, women that have different ideas on this because there are some that have had some trouble. Where as me having trouble with my fellow workers like that, I haven't. I can honestly say I haven't.

I wonder what the difference is?

I don't know if is the difference in people or if I have been lucky to work around different people you know cause all of us women work in different

departments. I don't know if it is the area you are working in or the people you are working with or yourself. I don't know what it is.

Were any of the scabs they brought in female?

I understand yes. I don't know for sure but I heard at least one crane operator was.

It would be interesting to talk to her and see how she was treated.

Yes it would because I have heard some tales on how she was treated. Promises of advancements and promises of this and that and not any coming true. I will say that the only time I had any trouble was after the lockout and we were forced to work with scabs. And on a shift we relieved, there were 3 on a shift, and the 3 of them were scabs and I guess there were some sexual comments or things written down in my work area but there were also comments written about my buddy I worked with about him being the gay and this and that and then the other buddy I worked with comments written about him and his wife and the kind of wife he had. This was the only trouble we had and it was after the lockout and we were trying to work together.

Would you describe the strike?

First, it was a lockout. The day that it happened I was on the nightshift and went into work and my shower at the time was across the parking lot from the men's shower room. The men's shower room was connected now here were the discrimination things that happen but it is not the union people doing this to me it is the company. Before the lockout they had built the shower room for the women who

worked in casting and it was connected to the men's shower room. During the lockout supervision started using that shower room and after the lockout they took it away from us and built us another one and we had to walk across this big parking lot to our shower room but anyway when I came into work for the midnight shift I left my shower room and when I walked into the \_\_\_\_\_ department I saw one person and he walked up to me and said "where is everybody?" Cause there is a board there that tells you where you are going to work that night where you are assigned.

We went to the board and there is nobody around and I said, "I don't know are they already not already gone to the job?" and he said, "I have already been in there and looked around and I don't see anybody." So we decided to stand there for a while and then I said "I saw all those union people out at the gate when we came in, our contract date was up something has happened." So we stood there for a while and then the whistle blew, time to start work, and all our people came out of the shower room, all the men came out of the shower room, they all came out the same time they came together. The foreman as they were walking out looked at myself and the guy I was talking to says, "ok, you can sweep this bay over here and you can sweep this bay over here and then all these guys came out of the shower room and the foreman says, " gee what is everybody doing here?" He didn't expect anybody to be there I guess. But see there were people at the gate telling us we needed to go to work, try to work tell them you want to work and we went into work.

The foreman said he didn't expect everybody to be there and just go to the lunchroom and I will go in later and find everybody. Well, he came in and he had another foreman with him and he told us, "Ok, here is the deal, you can work but there

is no contract, we got up to leave and one of our union representatives happened to be there and said, "wait a minute, wait a minute, let me call the union hall." So he called the union hall and before he could get back down to us the two foremen came back down to us and said "here is the deal, we have jobs for you but you will have to work with replacements." So we started to leave again. So he (union representative) came back down and said, "wait, don't just walk out." He left the room and started back up to make another telephone call and the 2 foremen came back in and said, "All of you are leaving the premises now and if you do not leave you will be escorted out." That is the honest to God's truth.

Therefore that is why I say; please it is a lockout not a strike. And we went out; the last person that went out that gate the locks went on. That is how it started. We went out and setup a picket line at the main gate of the plant and the next day, we were there all night, and the next day they told us that we had to leave out picket lines at the entrances on the road so we moved pickets lines out there, picket line at the north entrance, south entrance, one at the access road and I don't know how long it was but it was ruled that we could not have one at the access road any longer and then it was ruled we could only have so many people on a picket line then it was lowered again. Then things just progressed and then there was the night early in the picket line there came the guards marching down the road in riot gear. And I don't know if that was supposed to intimidate us or what. But they did they marched down the road in riot gear and from there on things really got bad.

They had, what we called goon guards, and they would come right across from the picket area and park their vehicles and yell rude things right out the windows. We

have at least one union woman that was. We all had CB's in our vehicles so we could yell back and forth, if any body got into trouble cause from that time on from the time the riot gear thing went on things got bad. Then there were jack rocks on the road, then there were people throwing rocks on the road, windows busted and it just kept getting worse.

Were union men were arrested?

We had one that spent time in prison and the other guy that was with him testified against him so he was freed. Of course, neither one of them have jobs at the plant anymore. That is what happened to them.

How would you describe the relationship between the female employees before during and after the strike?

That is a hard one for me to answer. Because when I work I rarely saw any of the other women. Very rarely saw them. Years ago yes but most of the women I work around years ago are no longer at the plant. When they had the big lay off in the 1980's they lost their seniority rights and never got to come back so the women I worked around never came back. I do believe that in the shower room or whenever we run into each other to this day that is something we can talk about, its a pain we all can discuss, that everyone of us can talk about. Some of those women had kids, some had grandkids that they were trying to help with and stuff like that and a lot of these women are single, most of them divorced. It has always been something we could talk about

and by talking about it and seeing each other in the shower room we got closer and to know each other better. Really it (lockout) strengthened us I think.

Why did you apply for a job at Ravenswood?

I graduated from high school in May and on the very day of graduation practice we got out of school at noon. My dad had let me have the car that day and I went over to the shopping center to get lunch and ran into the girl that was the oldest one in the plant. The one that was there before me and she stopped me and told me I had really ought to put my application in because they were going to hire minors and try to mix it all up. And I thought why not? Why shouldn't I make the money? I went down that day and it wasn't until August until they called. I have been there since I was 18 and right out of high school. I worked for an electrician for about 2 months before I graduated.

Is the Management diverse in hiring for the non-union staff?

I have known only one female direct supervisor that would direct us in the 29 years that I have been there. I never worked for her nor ever saw her and I don't know whatever happened to her.

What about any other diversity within the plant?

There are very few other minorities working there. Back when I hired I don't know if the law or whatever there was, getting their quotas in and I don't know how that was actually supposed to work or whatever. They just hired a bunch a couple of



weeks ago. They hired twenty some people and they hired one woman. Of course now when they hire, the Peachney part where I work you have to have 2 years of college. So they found one woman that had some college, and wanted a job they had to hire her.

When they have such jobs as plant work and they add the stipulation, requiring some college, does that work as a deterrent from to keep certain people from applying or are they trying to get people in to groom for management positions?

I think part of it is the grooming for management positions, I think the rest of it is simple modernization. The French, they have come here, they are very modern in their business dealings, I believe. They are looking at putting a person on a machine working that job and if that machine breaks down you can assist in fixing that machine. Instead of saying, "Ok, we have to get a maintenance crew from another part of the plant in here to fix this machine." I hate to admit it but the idea is very cost effective.

Would this also give you owner ship with the machine?

Sure would, beneficial both for the employee and the Company. The lady they just hired has a degree in welding, has taught college and taught welding and taught some electrical courses. So she could be very versatile.

What is interesting is that all of the 32 women employed at the plant doing non-traditional work are all doing well.

Yes. Being completely honest I used to think how have some of these women made it but then I think what am I asking myself here, how have some of these men made it? I don't know how some of the men I work with have made it. Some women get by with just a general knowledge of their jobs, they work in crews but other women want to know more, try harder, just like men. Some men don't care just let me get through the day and get my paycheck; let me fool the guy that is over me. But some men really care what they do.

Where any women involved with the negotiations during the lockout?

No, No. We the union people elect the negotiation committee, of course whomever runs, and you pick the people you want. I don't know of any women that ran for the negotiation committee.

Do you think they thought they did not have the experience or knowledge necessary? Or were they just insecure in their ability?

I would say that they didn't feel they had the experience to run for something like that but in the future I see it different. Because I have seen some women that have gotten really involved and learned a lot from being involved and I see it differently. Now we do have a couple of women had have run for minor positions, sometimes it might be a conference, so to learn stuff how the unions or companies are doing stuff, to learn whatever it is. We have one woman that works at the union hall now who has won elections and could probably could win, do quite well in a major election if she chose to run.

If a person would say something good came out of the lockout, would it be the advancement of women?

Yes. We are talking originally 32 women and I am saying, lets say, four of them have advanced with their union knowledge and union participation and just four of them, yes I would say that is one good thing to come out of it. Because we still have women in the plant that say "Yes I am union but I do not want to do this or that." Just like church or any other organizations. I want to be a part of it but I do not want to do anything.

If there had not been a lockout, would these advancements been possible?

I doubt it, I doubt it, because the women were not involved until the lockout came and they saw their jobs threatened and other jobs of other people they had worked with for years threatened. Like me, there have been opportunities to get to know them and their families and came pretty close with a lot of them. I hurt for them.

Do you believe good relationships have evolved since the beginning of your employment?

I can only speak for myself and I say yes. I have very good relationships. But I do know of some women that have had some problems. Some of these women tell me things the men they work with have said, comments they have made, they call them chauvinist or they hate women or they just can't accept women being here after all these years. They don't like women being here. But I can work around these same

men or be around the same man and they are not like that at all. So it just must be a clash between that man and woman. There just has to be a clash that is all. Some of them though, giving women a hard time I have never worked around. So it may be there.

Do you enjoy your job?

Yes I like my job. I will tell you that the in the years I worked at the plant, I hired in there a young kid, when I was 18 years old. I learned my job and that is what I knew. I was still young and I was scared to death to go anywhere else, I didn't think I could learn anything else. It is a terrible job, it is hot, it is heavy, it is dirty, it's hard, it is filthy, I mean filthy, it is loud, it is so loud in there. When I was out of there for 6 months I when over to check on one of my buddies that had been sick and couldn't stand it. The dirt, the dust flying everywhere you could taste it and I wonder why I spent so much time there, I didn't have to I had enough seniority to get out of there a long time ago, but I was scared to learn another job. The job has affected my lungs and hearing.

Does any of your family work in the plant?

My one brother worked at the plant.

What did your father do when you told him you were going to work at Ravenswood?

Well, I will tell you what, my dad has always been one of those guys that said, "I know you can make it, I don't like it but I know you can make it." Now my mother it was, "oh please, don't go in there."

At that point in your life or time women were expected to be a teacher. be a nurse then get married and have a family. With the Cultural attitude at that time, did you receive a lot of flack from people when you stepped out of the traditional female role?

I heard it most from my long time family organization. I grew up in this family organization and it is called the Grange, if that matters, patrons of husbandry. It started by 7 members of a Masonic lodge a 100 years or so ago and it was organized for the whole families to get to gather. I got most of the flack from the people there "why do you want to do that and why do you want to go in there it is dirty and heavy work." To make money. If I can't do it then I can't do it but why not give it a shot.

You are a small woman that must have been hard work for you?

And when I started I was a lot smaller but it was really hard. I tell you what there were times, especially at first, I would come home and I would just barely make it in the door. My lunch bucket would be by the door and I would be on the couch I was so tired. But I was so determined that all I do was do it for a while then I would be used to it and I would build myself up and could do it. A lot of the women at the plant right now are in maintenance and do not have to work over the hot furnaces and things like that. But I am sure they have been in situations where their head had to tell them I

can do it. After a couple of years there were days I came home dragging. Then you got used to doing this, and doing that, it became nature to be doing some of those things. After I began to get a little age on me, I was getting tired doing it. The new job is easier, cleaner and quieter.

Did all of the women go back to work after the lock out?

Yes.

The lock out did not cause the women to seek other employment?

I am not real sure about this but I believe we had one maybe more that got other jobs but on the days off they still served on the picket line or served in the assistance center. They came back to their jobs in the plant after the lock out and none of them crossed the picket line. We did have some of our men to cross the picket line.

### Respondent 2

As far as my employment with the plant, when I was first hired in there I was treated very well. Probably too well for me, I know one guy said, "shit" and he apologized for 2 hours. He was so sorry for saying that in front of me. Of course, that was 24 years ago. But, I would have to say that over all I have been treated very well down there and as far as sexually if I was ever, ever had any sexual advances made at me I was too dumb to know. As far as our work, I feel I do my part. I do not do the hard parts but I do the things I can do, the things somebody

has to.

Tell me about your first day at work. How it felt to walk into the plant for the 1<sup>st</sup> time?

Scary, Scary! For the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 weeks I was lost. Consequently, there was a colored guy who drove a flat-bed truck who must have known I was lost because every time I turned around he pointed in the direction I was supposed to go. He knew where I was supposed to be. Every time I went to the bathroom I was lost that was a big place, I don't know if you have ever been there, but that is a big place. I had no sense of direction and you could turn me around; just aisles and aisles and everything just looked the same. Probably if that colored guy had not been there pointing, I would still be in that plant trying to figure how to get out.

How many women were working at the plant when you started?

Out on the floor, probably 10 or 12, I mean I am just guessing.

Tell me about your job and training.

Pretty much what I did when I started was sweep the floors. That was 60 days worth of sweeping the floors. As far as the training goes, I guess it was pretty much a hands on thing. The day I hired in there was 283 people hired and everyday I went in I wonder what they were going to do with us and if I would have a job today because most everybody was sweeping the floors like they don't need us why am I here.

Almost a year to the day they offered a OJT (on-the-job training) and they said they wanted so many blacks and so many women and I went into it. And they said a lot of men were a little hard feeling about that. They said they didn't think a woman ought to be there and maybe they are right, I don't know. But –and some of them I think it did leave a bad taste in their mouth because they wanted to be in the program and could not because they were not black or female. But I explained to them that I can't help it I was born this way, sorry that is your luck.

But anyway I was there about a year and went into that. Had I not have gone into OJT I would have been laid off and probably not been back. They had a big lay off and I can't remember what year. But a lot of production people were laid off and have never been called back. And the maintenance people have been laid off and called back, back and forth. But I have kept my job.

What do you work on in your job? Motors?

No I mostly work on the equipment, the electricians' work on the motors. The mills that run the metal or any of the equipment that breaks down. Anything that has a nut and bolt in it, pretty much.

Are things different now?



It is a lot different now, it is a lot different and it is a lot of younger people. I am one of the older ones now. Now when I was one of the younger ones and the older men—the new generation is not taught to respect like our generation was—I don't pay attention to it. When you go into the lunchroom and the guys you don't know what they are going to say or do. I don't pay any attention to it. It is different now 'cause it is a younger group over there now because it is a younger group now. I am one of the old people.

They still hiring women?

Yes, they just hired one here a few months ago. She has already taken on the job of discrimination suites or if women have problem-equal rights that kind of thing. This is a union position.

When you started how many women were in that group?

I can only think that there were only 5 probably but 2 quit and went somewhere else.

At the time of the lock out there 1700 employees and 32 of those were women.

Since there is now fewer employees are there still only 32 women?

Through retirement and stuff they have not replaced employees. A couple of the women have retired. I don't really know the number since they have sold the production to Century. A lot of the women are in production and we are not

and tried to figure out how many women worked at the plant.

Did you work with the women's auxiliary during the lockout?

Not a whole lot. I worked at the Union Hall and I worked the picket line. But I did do my day at the hall and usually my night on the picket line. They had an assistance center in Ravenswood to provide help for the workers. At the union hall they mostly answered the telephone, which I can assure you they did not stop. The rumors flew and every time a new rumor got out they started calling. They had 4 phones that continually rang with people wanting to know what was going on. I said that if you want to know you should come in. The girls that worked the Assistance Center pretty much stayed there.

Were the women working at the Assistant Center union employees?

Yes, they wanted to work there and –well there is no other way for me to say this. Everywhere you work there are clicks. And this group was a click. I probably should have stayed and work there but they were already established there. And it about the same one you read about in this book (Ravenswood) is the ones that were at the Assistance Center.

One thing I have started to realize about the plant is the sense of community at the plant. Like a little community within its self.

Are you talking about before of after the lockout?

Are you talking about before of after the lockout?

Both

More so after then before. People that you worked with everyday before and didn't know. Everybody knows everybody now. It really put a close bond with everybody. If the lockout didn't accomplish anything else it really put togetherness with us.

So if there were any body struggling with the male and female issues, were these feeling put aside after the lockout and the feelings of community began to take place?

I can't really talk there because I never had a problem with male or female wise. I have always gotten along with everybody. There probably were a few incidents but I don't know.

I discovered while reading about the Pittsburgh Steel strike there was a lot of animosity from the men towards the women coming to work at their plant and would do mean things to the women. But I am not finding this at Ravenswood.

I never saw that there and I have heard some pretty wild tales about that place but I have never seen that. You know you heard these sex things but you go into the place and see the men in their greasy pants and steel-toed boots so how could there be anything sexual with that! I mean --!

When I mention sexual things I am talking about sexual harassment.

I have never had anything like that happen to me. I hired in with some girls and we were chummy. We kind of stuck more together. My dad was here about 6 months ago said, and he never said this before, "how do the men treat you there?" And I said they treat me good, I have to say that they treat me good. They know and respect me as being a female and I do jobs that are probably easier, but it is jobs that someone has to do. He said that a friend of his at the livestock market told him that he had been to the plant to do some repair work and that there were more condoms there on the roof than tar. And I said, "Dad there ain't nothing like that going on there. Why don't you go back and tell that you talked to your daughter and I said that he ought to go back because now we had little teepees up there all over the place with heaters in them so we would not get too cold." It really bothered my dad and it dumbfounded me that people would go out and say something like that.

I think if you want respect, and it is a man's plant I mean when you go into a plant and there are 1500 men and 30 women it is a man's plant, and if you want respect you get it. I do. But I have always made it a practice even 20 years ago when I was built a little better and I went to Shoney's or somewhere and a man was there with his wife if he spoke I spoke and if he didn't I didn't either. And then I would get to work the next day they would say "are you to stuck up to speak" and I would tell them that no I figured if you wanted to speak you would and I didn't have a husband and you had a wife.

Why did you apply for a job at Ravenswood?

All I ever did was waitress work. Most of all the women I know that work there have a history of hard work. Some kind of a job, I don't know if you have ever done waitress work but it is hard work. And about all the women they have hired have a history of doing hard work. Somebody told me they were going to hire women and that they had to hire so many. The Government said they had to hire so many and I went to job services and applied.

And they called me. It was kind of funny. I was in a restaurant working and they had two phones one in the lobby and one in the kitchen. I went to the phone in the lobby. Someone told me I was wanted on the phone and it was the plant calling asking me if I wanted to come in for an interview. I got so excited I hung up on them I didn't know what day I was supposed to be there or anything. I was making, I think, I was getting something from Social Security and was getting \$2,200.00 a year income whenever they called me and I hung up. I had to call them back and ask where to go. My boss was in the kitchen eavesdropping and she came out and said "\_\_\_\_\_ you are not going to quit, are you?" And I said, "What do you think?" I think my first paycheck was \$197.00 or \$297.00, I can't remember which one it was, but I remember looking at that paycheck trying to figure out what I was going to do with that money. I had 2 boys and it didn't take me long to figure out what I was going to do with the money.

What stands out most in your mind about your job?

I can't think of anything. I don't really like my job but then most everyone dislikes his or her job..... And we have been together for years. We are just a big family actually. If you come to think of it I spend more prime time with the men than their wives do. I mean 8 to 4 or 7 to 3 everyday. But we just kind of a family.

Do they still take care of you, like they did in the beginning?

Well, they do take care of me. But I do my part..... in essence they are trying to take care of me but I am still doing the jobs somebody has to do. But probably if they didn't like me or we didn't get along they could make it hard on me.

Did you have any adverse reactions from the women in the community concerning your job at the plant?

Oh yes, I can tell you exactly. You may not want this on your tape. I used to work at the \_\_\_\_\_ in Ripley and an older woman was the \_\_\_\_\_ there and I worked there for 3 years. I thought we were pretty good friends and when she found out I was going to work at the plant she said, "I don't want you or any of the other bitches over there to call me." And she said, " my husband works over there and if I find out he talk to you he will find his clothes sitting out on \_\_\_\_\_ Street when he gets home from work." And this was a quote. I didn't know her husband but when I went to work I made it a point to find out who he was because I wanted to make sure I didn't bother him.

Did their attitudes change after the lockout?

I would have to say the bond got better between everyone after the lockout. 'Cause a lot of the women that didn't know the women from the plant thought they were a threat to them but during the lockout we always had little rallies on the hill. We always cooked big pots of beans and everyone joined in, had anybody that played music come up and play music. It was just a get together and everybody got to know each other better and that solved a lot of problems. I am not saying that if I was married, I am not saying I would not wonder about it myself. Especially whenever you hear the stuff you hear.

Especially during a time when women were stepping outside the traditional working rolls set for women. But now women would not think twice about applying for non-traditional jobs and people do not think anything about women working there.

I don't know I think there that would have something to say maybe some of the older generation.

We are talking about generations of women expected to stay home and raise families and their men support them. In the 70's women were still part of that generation but women had to go to work and wanted to make the same amount of money as men did so we stepped outside the traditional roles set aside for us to be

able to accomplish what men have done.

You are exactly right and I guess if you are a female now you do not have to be a schoolteacher or a secretary, or waitress. I guess men need help and do not want to admit it.

Are there any other minorities working at the plant now.

I can only think of only one black boy working there now and he came during the lockout. He is one of their replacement workers. There was when I hired in one Blackman and like I said that if he didn't point I would have been lost. He is either retired or something. Like I said there is only one black boy there and I don't talk to him or anything. I don't talk to any of them. They (scabs) took my job and as far as I am concerned and I have no use for them. They are not replacement workers they are scabs. It is kind of funny they know who they can or cannot talk to and they don't talk to me.

Do the new employees that are replacing the older workers that worked during the lockout, as they retire, have the same attitude towards the replacement workers?

Oh no, no my son works there now and he talks to them and I guess they have shot pool together, I said son that is totally up to you but they took my job, your livelihood but I can understand that you were not out there on the picket line with me. I can see where it does not bother him like it bothered me.



Where you working the night the Company locked the gates?

We were to but the union hall told us to stay in there but the plant told us to leave. I was on the last shift that left and then there was another shift that came in. Actually I wasn't there. I guess I wasn't actually there; I was there but in the parking lot. I guess the midnight shift had gone in and the plant had told them to leave. So I didn't really experience being told to leave. I know we, probably a month before the lockout they were getting prepared.

I would have like to have been there that last night because-like they brought in doublewides. One doublewide had TV's and chairs in it I guess for their lounge room and then they brought in another doublewide with kitchen tables and chairs in it and anyway they made maintenance run the plumbing. The maintenance department had to run the waterlines and sewer lines and everything. Well they did it they ran all the lines but didn't put any glue or anything on them and I would have liked to have been there when they turned the water on. They did what they were told to do, kind of.

Do you see a change in the relationship between the male and female employees before, during and after the lockout?

Better, better and better. After the lockout we seemed more united. We got to know each other sitting around the union hall.

If anything good came out of the lockout would it be the advancement of women?

I know I would say myself-good one to answer-other than getting closer I would not say anymore, maybe more respect. I was always respected but on the whole more respect for the women.

If there had not been a lockout would there have been advancement for the women?

I don't know. Over all for some there has been advancement but not for me. One works on the hill now organizing, one stays in the union hall work on such things as workers comp. Issues. I guess the men learn we were not a bunch of dummies.

### Respondent 3

He was sitting way over there at another table, there were 3, he was sitting at the other one and I said it loud enough for him to hear, some women can be office workers, I do all kinds of stuff...his wife made good money at her job, I said I was never smart enough for that and I came in here rather than go sling hash where I would not make anything it would not even pay me to work. They were going to hire me here, I took advantage of an opportunity and I think it is wrong when a person holds that person against me 'cause if it weren't me it would be another women.

How many women were there at time you were hired?

Let's see, there had been 7 or 8 hired but there were only 3 still there.

What made you decide to work at Ravenswood?

Mostly on a bet. Somebody said they would never hire a woman if her husband was working there. So I just put my application in, knowing it was good money, to see if they would call me.

Describe your first day at work.

I started out midnights my first shift, which I was never used to staying up all night. I was too excited to sleep through the day, that day; so I know I was going to be worn out. They assigned us to go to the storeroom and they would pick us up from there to show us where our jobs were.

All I did all night was walk the floor and if there was any trash anywhere I picked it up. After the last break I swept the lunchrooms and around the canteen area. The next night I got farmed there again and the 3<sup>rd</sup> night I worked in I&L and it was just sweeping. Skids (pallets) were stacked 5 or 6 high with aluminum coils or with sheet metal on those. We had to sweep all around those between them little scraps of wood and dirt. That is all I did the first couple of weeks Then they started assigning us to assist the inspectors to run the packaging line, which was to wrap and band all the metal plus put the labels on them as to where they were to be shipped. On the flat sheet you did it just walking around it. The coil line it was a conveyer line and you ran the metal

to you and you batched it and banded it and put a weight ticket on it and sent it on. That is what you did all night and all day.

Most of the guys were friendly enough; but there were a few who gave you a hard time, but once they found out that you would not put up with any funny stuff they just left you alone. They played jokes on you that kind of stuff did go on and the more it bothered you the more it went on so you didn't let them know it bothered you. And I worked one month as a janitor and then I got laid off and I was off until sometime in May again.

I went back in to an OJT (on the job training) program for maintenance. The training was for \_\_\_\_\_, which was the job classification, we had classrooms for 2 weeks then we went out onto the floor and started working as pipe fitters, electricians or mechanics, whichever classification you were in for 4 days a week with classes one day. This lasted for 18-months and we got pay raises every 6 months until we graduated they we went up in classification. It was interesting to learn, we weren't supposed to work and take one of their places. We either sat backed and watched or we did it with their instructions but two of us could not work together. If it was a 2-person job they had to send two that were already on the craft because we could not replace them. We moved from department to department a month at a time and this gave us knowledge of everything in the plant. This was a great advantage since some men had been there for years that didn't know as much as we didn't when we finished the OJT.

How was your relationship with the men before, during and after the lockout?

A lot of the men's who's wives, for some reason didn't trust us and thought we were there for one reason only, during the lockout learn about us and our personalities that we were human beings just trying to make a living like everybody else. That made them and the men realized we were willing to work as hard to keep the union going as anybody else. It was a whole lot different afterwards. We were equals after.

But not before?

There was some that before that lock out would never have accepted us.

During the lock out did you work on the picket line or at the assistance center?

I worked the picket lines until they opened the assistance center and then I went to the assistance center and worked everyday 5 days a week until the lock out was over. Even stayed to help the ones who still needed assistance for one week after the lock out was over and everyone went back to work. The assistance center provided sugar, flour, cereal, can goods and shortening that was given to everyone every 2 weeks along with their electric bills, water bills, gas bills and things that had to be paid. Our insurance jumped after one month and big doctor bills the union took care of that. There was never any money given to anybody it was that they brought the bills in and the union paid them. That was one thing that allowed us to stick out the lock out.

There was some discussion in the book Ravenswood concerning safety issues at the plant, how do you relate to this subject?

Safety was a big factor with the lock out. If you felt a job was unsafe and the foreman insisted you do it you ask a safety. If you saw something that was unsafe and the foreman didn't do anything about it you ask for a safety. The union, plant and safety went to a school to see what to do about plant safety because there was a lot of bitterness concerning safety after the lock out. It was hard to communicate we had to learn to deal with that.

What were the working relations between the women working at the plant?

Most of the time it was like anywhere else you would go you have some that you can get along with and some you can't for some reason. But in general it was really good. A little bit of jealousy sometimes but nothing serious.

What stands out most in your mind during your employment at the plant?

The friends that I made while I was working there. They will always be my friends. I still see them; I still get hugs from them and it means a lot.

How did it feel the first day you walked into the plant?

Most of it felt real good but men can be mischievous they want to see just what they can get by with in joking ways, hide your lunch bucket or maybe fill it full of paper towels before you take it home. It was kept light.

After the lock out did the relationship change between the men and women who work there?

I think it was about the same because women generally did not have any problems. There are some women who just do not like other women. That didn't change I think we could communicate a bit better but other than that it didn't change.

Are women included in the higher union positions?

No, one of the women has been at the plant almost since the day it open had been recording secretary, for several years there were not women there, but women have worked in the lab since day one and were union members but as far as getting out into the plant working that didn't happen until 1972.

It was mandatory that they hire women due to working on government contracts. They had to hire women and other minorities to keep their government contracts. They were all just people to me. I know there was a French boy because I would not have been able to pronounce the name of the new company that took over Ravenswood if it had not been for him helping me.

I got into some chlorine gas one time and when the guy I was working with came back to the shop for lunch it made his nose bleed. I went to the bathroom and hung my head down as low as I could get it and took deep breaths to get rid of as much of it as I could. The foreman walked out and asked what happened and I said "I told him to keep his hands where they belonged." I got teased about that for a long time but they knew I was just teasing. I think a lot of them knew my husband worked there, so they left me alone.

### **Analysis:**

One thing I found during my interviews was the initiative and active role of the three women I interviewed at RAC; as opposed to a passive, supportive role women have played, during their careers at Ravenswood. Instead they worked as full partners alongside men during good times and bad. During the lockout Respondent one served on the picket line at least five days a week and served as a picket captain three days a week. As captain, she assigned workers a gate to picket, checked on them at regular intervals, and solved any problems that surfaced. Her decision to work the picket line came from her loyalty to her fellow workers. She stated "I felt I worked in there with those men, I worked beside them all those years and they owed me as much as I owed them. I did not want them out there fighting my battle for me." During the lockout the women were allowed to choose between working in the assistance center or on picket lines. At first it was suggested that the female workers work in the assistance center but only for their protection. Respondent one, also said, "I have to



work with them inside the plant and I have to do the dirty jobs. So I have bad days with them and I have good days with them and I wasn't going to do that (work the assistance center)." Some women did work the assistance center but they also worked the picket lines one or two days a week.

Respondent two had a two-month old child at home but still managed to divide her time between picket line duty and working at the union hall. She recollected "I did do my day at the hall and usually my night on the picket line. Women worked where they wanted to." Respondent three reported, "that a lot of the men's wives didn't trust us and thought we were there for only one reason. During the lockout they learned our personalities, that we were human beings just trying to make a living like everybody else. That made them and the men realize we were willing to work as hard to keep the union going as anybody else. It was a whole lot different afterwards, we were equals afterwards."

In her book, Women, Development, and Communities for Empowerment in Appalachia, Virginia Seitz discusses how her respondents spoke of "being trivialized by male coworkers, being given the easiest jobs, or, in the case of coal-mining women, being given the most physically demanding yet lowest paid jobs underground. Management, male workers, and female workers in traditional jobs formed cross-class and cross-gender ideology that women did not belong, that women were weak, that women, not management, were to be opposed" (81). That was not the case in Ravenswood, according to the three participants in my study. One of my respondents reported,

“probably for the first three or four days I was there people were- I suppose it was the men seeing a woman coming to the department and never a women in that part of the plant before they were trying to do too much to help me out, and I was trying to get my 30 days in and so I had to tell them to let me alone, let me do my job. I had to get my 30 days in, I knew that, you never know how your foreman or supervision how they are going to look at anybody helping you out.”

My second respondent echoed her sentiments with her account “As far as my employment with the plant, when I was first hired in there I was treated very well. Probably too well for me, I know one guy said, “shit” and he apologized for two hours. He was so sorry for saying that in front of me.” The men who worked with these women did not display the stereotypical image portrayed of Appalachian men.

Appalachian stereotyping depicts men as stupid, inconsiderate mountain men and women’s experiences as obscured. These misconceptions are related to the poverty of the region with the links to the past intensely rooted in family life (Seitz 101). In her article “Disorderly Women”, Jacquelyn Hall discussed the isolation of the Appalachian region caused mountain people to be “romanticized as our contemporary ancestors or belittled as “later-day white barbarians who like to hunt, fish or make moonshine” (Ruiz and DuBois 350). Hall noted there have not been any studies of gender in preindustrial

Appalachia or sexuality, and debates on the subject have been restricted for the most part to a defense against malicious stereotypes (360).

Hall observed, "Mountain women, who people in nineteenth-century travel accounts, novels, and social surveys tend to be portrayed drudges who married young and aged early, burdened by frequent pregnancies and good-for-nothing men. Alongside that predominant image is another: the promiscuous mountain girl, responsible for the supposed high rate of illegitimacy in the region" (p360-361). While the same stereotypical opinion views married women as "drudges is analogous to white observations of Indian life...unproductive" (361). In my study of Ravenswood, I did not find any evidence to support such type casting of Appalachian individuals. The Appalachian women I interviewed at the plant were productive members of the community even after being offered few opportunities to get ahead from the region. After being asked why she applied for work at the plant respondent two stated: "All I ever did was waitress work. Most of all the women I know that work there have a history of hard work. Some kind of a job, I don't know if you have ever done waitress work but it is hard work..."

Based on the information I gathered from my interviews I found the men from RAC more than willing to help new female workers with their new jobs without the traditional image portrayed by those outside Appalachia. I attribute the men's strong family ties in influencing the way they treated the women they work along side. Close-knit community life supplied the support services or interactions men needed to understand why women choose to work

in non-traditional jobs. The same need to feed, cloth and house their families drives both sexes. These workers male and female shopped in the same stores, attended the same churches and send their children to the same schools. One respondent felt the plant became a closer community after the lockout as shown in her statement, "everybody knows everybody now. It really put a close bond with everybody. If the lockout didn't accomplish anything else it really put togetherness with us."

The idea of communities may be thought of as collection of people with a particular social structure. While Appalachian communities have been described as "a hand-woven fabric, politics would be the warp and religion the woof. In many parts of the region one county encompasses several hundred square miles of land, which made for unwieldy governance before the days of paved roads and automobiles (Shackelford and Weinberg 43)." During the early 1900's neighbors helped each other out in times of need, worked as teams to gather the crops, and lived a simpler life. When the employees of Ravenswood lost their jobs some members of the community stepped in to help the workers with their needs.

While researching the work history of these three women, who began their work careers in the early 70's, and their relationship to the men they worked with I began to unravel the influence of the Appalachian region in this mix. I started my research with the idea of finding sexual wage and job discrimination at the Ravenswood plant. Instead I found women and men working for solidarity in an industrial plant and functioning as a small

community within itself providing a better understanding of how gender relations develop in rural communities.

In her book Women Development, and Communities for Empowerment in Appalachia, Seitz discusses how feminist research argues for a connection in the position which provides another source of data in observer comments that are grounded in the observer's own understanding as a woman (23). My observations and experience provided a lens to better understand these women while applying feminist standpoint research methods. Studying the works of Seitz and other feminist researchers I was better able to understand how to use feminist methods.

All interviews were taped and I completed the verbatim transcriptions in order stay involved in the interaction. Field notes were taken during the interviews also. One reoccurring theme in these interviews was how the men went out of their way to help the women with their jobs even in the beginning when it was such a controversy having women in non-traditional jobs.

The lockout seemed to pull these three woman and men together. The enemy was the scabs not the men. None of the women I interview felt the men they worked with were insensitive and the longer they fought the Company to save their jobs the stronger the relationships grew. The women knew that the real strength in saving their jobs was working together with the men. At the same time the men realized they needed the women.

None of the three women interviewed appeared to feel that they were discriminated against due to their gender. All appeared to be accepted as equal workers, especially after the lockout. The lockout was the variable that allowed a close, binding, and friendlier relationship develop between the workers at the plant that still continues to this day.

The data suggest that the three women from Ravenswood faced fewer job and wage discrimination, and sexual harassment than women from the other studies discussed here and I attribute this to the Appalachian region. The very isolation that has led to the stereotyping of our region has also protected Ravenswood women from the problems of women outside the area. The community of Ravenswood and the aluminum plant where most of the residents worked to support their families could be described as a patriarchal society, where men are venerated as the leaders and fathers. While capitalism outlines work, patriarchy influences families (Seitz 71).

According to Karl Marx the proletariat must trade their time and labor to the capitalist in order to continue to exist. People are reduced to wanting to make money to hold the possessions they desire to own. The driving force is not the "expression of human potential" but the ownership (Ritzer 161). The bourgeoisie use these desires to take advantage of the worker. Marx discusses the "power of capital 'as a power endowed by Nature—a productive power that is immanent in Capital'. Thus people tend to reify capital by believing that it is natural for the capitalist system to be external to, and coercive of them (172)" The owners cut workers wages to make profit

at labor resulting in exploitation of the workers. During my study of Ravenswood my research witness this manipulation of workers demonstrating Marx's theory. Plant owners were more interested in the return on their investment than in the safety of the workers.

Another factor in Marx's writings was his interest in social structure and social class, especially the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie were a class by itself and the proletariats also were a status group (Ritzer 175). The employees of the plant were subjected to the awareness of being in a class with the men and women union workers in different classes from the managers and owners. The three woman of Ravenswood fought alongside the men for better jobs, working conditions and secure employment. The employees put aside any gender issues to stand as one unit against the plant owners.

### **Conclusion:**

Since the early 1970's the three women, in my study, hired at RAC functioned together as one unit with the men, struggled with economic loss together, and during their time on the picket lines the work solidarity bonds grew stronger without gender barriers. From the beginning in the 1970's, when three woman were first hired the men went out of their way to help the new female workers, tried to protect them during the company lockout from their jobs only to find the women wanted to be united as workers and not to be

protected. If someone did make a comment to one of the women and she stood up to him another comment was never made again.

After the lockout interactions between the genders grew stronger, working relations better and even the relationships between the three women became closer all due to fighting for the same cause. The workers perceive themselves as one unit and ready to accept the challenges of the work environment as one. As Respondent 3 said:

“During the lockout they learned us and our personalities that we were human beings just trying to make a living like everyone else that made them (the wives) and the men realize we were willing to work as hard to keep the union going as anybody else. It was a whole lot different afterwards, we were equals afterwards.”

Respondent 2 said the relationships between the genders before, during and after the lockout were “better, better and better. After the lockout we were more united. We got to know each other sitting around the Union hall.”

Each of the Respondents stated they were treated well during their careers at the plant. The participants perceived the men as going out of their way to be helpful contradicting the image of the typical Appalachian man from modern white barbarians who like to hunt, fish or make moonshine or abuse their wives and families. Seitz refers to this negative image of the rugged mountaineer or hillbilly secluded from modern-day urban ideals in her book Women, Development, and Communities for Empowerment in Appalachia (100). My interviews with the participants revealed strong, intelligent and hard-



working women striving to support themselves and their families not the accepted cartoon images like Daisy Mae, television representation of Granny Clampett, and the forgotten, ignorant, and shy hill women discussed in the article "Will the Real Daisy Mae Please Stand Up?" by Sally Maggard (137)

Strong family ties help influence the treatment of the first women employees of the plant along with close-knit community life in the small Appalachian town of Ravenswood. The spirit of mountain communities are echoed in an interview with Jim Byrd found in a book of oral histories edited by Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg called Our Appalachia. Mr. Byrd said, "People had to take care of their neighbors. There was nobody else to do it. No funeral homes, no doctors.... (18)" This same quality remains within stable rural mountain communities today. Rural communities present a sense of belonging or community spirit. All of the daily activities take place within the Ravenswood area and without a sharply divided population.

### **Suggestions for Further Research:**

This study suggests that gender relations in this small rural community are not as strained as in larger urban areas. Some adjustments to the study could prove advantageous to future institutional or individual research. The first of which is sample size. In order to better understand gender relations at Ravenswood, a quantitative method measuring attitudes from a larger sample would be helpful to supplement the findings of this study. This

would allow more women to be surveyed and variables like their socioeconomic status to be controlled.

Further studies should include men to determine how their roles differ from women in the workplace in rural communities, more data on how women were empowered, and how leadership emerges among women would be useful. Another point from further studies would be how much Appalachia culture controls men's attitudes towards women. It would take a larger sample to determine the answers to these questions.

## Appendix

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to become actively involved with my respondents. Open-ended questions allowed for free interaction between the respondents and myself with maximization of discovery and description. My results were nonstandardized information to allow for full use of the differences between the respondents. Some of my questions are listed below:

Describe your first days of work.

Describe the type of work you do.

How did the men you work with treat you?

Describe your role in the 1990 lockout.

During the lockout did the women work along side the men?

Where women allowed a choice of where they worked during the lockout?

Do the women have the same or equal jobs as the men at the plant?

How do the women in the community feel concerning women working at the plant?

Would you describe the lockout?

Would you say one of the out comes of the lockout was the advancement of women?

How do you feel the relationships between the men and women working at the plant have developed since the lockout?

Do you enjoy your job?

What stands out most in your mind concerning your employment at Ravenswood?

What is your age?

What is your marital status?

What is the composition of your household?

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