Caution! Men at Work: Women in Male Dominated Workforces

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Abstract

Though companies emphasize non-discrimination and diversity in their applicant pools and employee populations, women are still often met with roadblocks and gender bias when they enter a male-dominated workforce such as the construction industry, engineering, or finance. Many studies currently point out the challenges women face in the workplace, especially in male dominated workforces, but there seems to be a lack of research that gives insight into how their identities and workplace environment plays a part in shaping their perceptions and reactions to gender discrimination. This study combines personal ethnographic experience in the heavy equipment operation occupational field along with interviews of women in several male dominated fields including geology, engineering and construction. It seeks to evaluate personal reflections and reactions to experiences of gender bias in the workplace. Previous research suggests women feel powerless in male dominated work forces. The interviews and evidence in this study suggest a more nuanced perception of their place in a male-dominated workforce.

Literature Review

Women have made strides in fighting for equitable treatment in what was once an entirely male-dominated workforce. The expectations of women until the mid to late 1900s were that they were to be the homemakers; stay-at-home mothers who would raise the children, cook, clean and tend to the housework. While women were once considered the weaker sex and confined to performing domestic labor, the stereotype that women cannot handle physical labor or intellectually taxing responsibilities has drastically changed. Numbers of women in the workforce have increased drastically, as have numbers of women in higher education; not just earning four-year degrees, but masters and Ph.D. degrees as well. More American mothers have

held the role of main income provider than ever before (Wang, Parker & Taylor 2012). Some may argue that women are now being treated equally; after all, they are allowed to attend traditional colleges, earn advanced degrees, and some even have high-prestige, high-paying careers. Women, however, are still not treated or viewed as being equal in the workplace, especially in male dominated workforces. Women throughout the world remain underrepresented and underpaid in the workforce as compared to men (International Labour Organization 2014, World Economic Forum 2015). Women are more likely than men to be responsible for taking care of children and elders, and for housekeeping activities such as meal preparation, laundry and cleaning, demonstrating that gender roles still remain intact (World Bank 2013). However, the extent to which gender roles have changed has been disproportionate in that more women have entered male dominated workforces than men have entered female-dominated workforces (Croft, Schmader & Block 2015). Despite moving toward gender equity in United States educational attainment, hiring, and career advancement, a large number of occupations continue to be highly gender segregated (International Labor Organization 2013). Figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that men are twice as likely as women to be employed in computing and mathematics professions, three times as likely to be employed in architecture and engineering, and five times as likely to be employed in construction occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011).

Though there are multiple explanations for the underrepresentation of women in some fields, one prevailing theory is the impact of gender role socialization, or the process by which children learn to behave in accordance with norms that result in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes (Bronstein 2006; Bussey and Bandura 2004). This socialization begins as early as birth, and it has been argued that girls begin to view and interpret their worlds through a

gendered lens at an early age, through role-playing games and "sexualized" toys, such as Barbie dolls (Powlishta 2004). During early childhood, certain roles, activities, behaviors and dress are considered to be appropriate for boys or girls specifically (Powlishta 2004). The effects of this type of socialization can be seen throughout adolescence and into a girl's adulthood. A survey in the UK found that 32% of female teenage respondents wanted to be models, 29% wanted to be actors, but only 4% wanted to be engineers and 14% wanted to be scientists, suggesting that sexualized and appearance-based careers are seen by girls as being more desirable than those based on intelligence or academic achievement (Gould 2008). In the United States, girls are exposed to sexualizing and objectification messages as early as three years old, with toys such as Barbie dolls that are dressed and physically formed to communicate messages of appearance-focus and sexualization (Turkel 1998). This can be especially damaging to young girls, because the self-concept, which includes ideas about future career options, develops rapidly in middle and early childhood (Harter 1999, 2003). Despite the "I can be…anything" marketing campaign launched by Mattel in 2009 Barbies continue to be sexualized and enforce gender roles and stereotypes that have a lasting impact on young girls. In addition to their unrealistic appearance, the "professional" dolls are marketed in ways that demean and sexualize the professions that they depict. "Veterinarian Barbie" and Dentist Barbie" are sold wearing tight satin mini dresses and skinny pink glitter jeans, not professional clothing.

In a 2014 study by Sherman and Zurbriggen, girls who played with Barbie dolls as opposed to a control toy (Mrs. Potato Head) reported fewer careers as future possibilities for themselves than they reported were possible for boys. Girls who played with Mrs. Potato Head had little reduction in the options they saw for themselves in regards to a future career (Sherman and Zurbriggen 2014). The results showed a reduction in overall career possibilities that girls

saw for themselves after playing with the Barbies, not just a reduction in male dominated career possibilities (Sherman and Zurbriggen 2014). And despite advertising stressing the aspirational nature of Barbie and the many career possibilities for women, (Mattel 2009) playing with a "Doctor Barbie" was not any better than playing with a "Fashion Model Barbie." There was still reduction in options that girls perceived themselves as having for future careers no matter which Barbie doll they had played with (Sherman and Zurbriggen 2014). These effects are widespread, as 99% of girls aged 3-10 in the United States have been reported to own at least one Barbie doll, and the sales are not slowing (Roger 1999). Worldwide sales are estimated at two dolls sold every second of every day (Schor 2004). Overall, the girls in the study reported more occupations as being options for boys than they did for themselves, illustrating the deeply engrained gender roles and effects of gendered play, such as Barbie dolls (Sherman and Zurbriggen 2014). Girls did not just report more male dominated occupations as possible for boys rather than themselves, but also did the same with female-dominated occupations (Sherman and Zurbriggen 2014). This study illustrates the harmful effects of gendering and sexualizing of toys for girls at such young ages, and the effects on their possible future careers.

Like the Barbie dolls that are dressed sexually even in professional roles, women in the professional world are not treated as true professionals either. Sandler (1999) outlines some of these subtle yet damaging ways women are often treated differently in workplaces and schools. She outlines behaviors and generalizations that often devalue and discourage women in the workplace, such as communicating lower expectations for women, describing and defining them by their physical characteristics instead of valuing what they bring to the workplace, and giving way to the influence of internalized stereotypes about gender. Sandler (1999) also points out some ways in which women are held back or excluded; such as allowing women to be

interrupted and spoken over during meetings, attributing women's achievements to their physical attributes and not their abilities, and viewing marriage and parental status as a disadvantage for women, but not for men. Sandler (1999) also defines a more subtle way that women are discouraged or held back in the workplace: through politeness. She gives examples of women being held to lower standards, males doing hand-on tasks for women instead of helping them to learn, and shifting from intellectual conversation to social conversation when women are present.

This "Chilly Climate" is all but theoretical. A study by Maume (1999) found that women who work with large numbers of male colleagues are more likely to suffer from performance pressure, isolation, and harassment, leading to increased rates of job departure. Maume (1999) found that women in male dominated occupations leave their jobs the fastest, and his study also supported the theory that white men monopolize the highest paying, highest prestige jobs and resent women as coworkers. Women who enter male dominated jobs will earn more, but are more likely to leave their jobs due to isolation and other challenges faced in that kind of workplace, such as harassment and sabotage in an effort by the men to protect their privileged positions (Jurik 1985; Reskin 1988; Swerdlow 1989). Sandoff (1992) found that executive women were harassed at higher rates than non-executive women, and this was attributed to the executive women's employment at male dominated companies.

Ely (1995) detailed women's social construction of gender identity at work in his study of women who work at law firms, both male dominated and sex-integrated. Ely (1995) found that women in male dominated firms rated professional women higher on attributes related to sexuality, such as sexual involvement with coworkers and flirtation. However, women in sex-integrated firms more often rated professional women higher in qualities related to masculinity, such as aggressiveness and the ability to promote oneself. Ely's (1995) hypothesis that women in

male dominated firms will perceive greater psychological and behavioral differences between the sexes than women in sex integrated firms was also supported. Women in male dominated firms more often defined those differences along gender stereotypical lines (Ely 1995). Her study also supported the hypothesis that women who work in male dominated firms attribute masculine characteristics as the most important to success, and view feminine characteristics as unimportant and sometimes even detrimental. Women who worked in male dominated firms rated themselves as more flirtatious and attractively dressed and emphasized the role of women as sexual objects in order to gain the favor of men in the firm, further emphasizing the gender segregation in the professional workplace (Ely 1995).

Gender segregation is also evident in the modern workplace as shown by "The Glass Ceiling" phenomena. Referring to the invisible, yet unsurpassable barriers women face while trying to advance in their careers, the glass ceiling is a concept that recognizes women have the ambition, motivation and competence for positions of leadership and esteem, but invisible barriers keep them from getting there (Lorber 1994). The U.S. Department of Labor defines the glass ceiling as: artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing in their careers. A study conducted in Sweeden by Hultin (2003) found that this situation is just the opposite for men. Specifically, males who enter female-dominated workforces have advantages due to their minority status that allow them to move into leadership positions faster, a phenomenon known as the "glass escalator" (Hultin 2003). The results suggested that men who work in typically female-dominated occupations have substantially better internal promotion chances than their equally qualified female coworkers (Hultin 2003). These results suggest that a career in a female-dominated field is a stepping-stone for men, but an obstacle for women (Hultin 2003).

Lorber (1994) explains that the ways that people move up in their careers is through networking, mentoring and sponsorship; those whom one works with pave the pathway to the top. Women are routinely left out of important workplace interactions and relationships that form among men in the workplace, such as the informal organizations within the workplace among men known as “bands of brothers” (Lorber 1994). These relationships, based on trust, loyalty, and reciprocal favors are often the key to the gates that unlock promotions and upper-level positions. In current business models, these relationships are based on homo-sociality; the bonding of men who are of the same race, age group, and social class (Lorber 1994). This homosociality starts early; boys separate themselves from girls in childhood play games, a segregation effect attributed to boys’ need to establish their masculinity (Lorber 1994). These relationships help men to advance in the workplace, but at the cost of women; women comprise only 30% of all managers, but less than 5% of executive managers in the United States (Bell, McLaughlin, and Sequeira 2002).

Gender stereotypes and roles in the workplace are still present in the United States, with careers in law enforcement being a perfect example of this phenomenon. Things that are stereotypically masculine characterize law enforcement in the United States: driving fast cars, shooting guns, and the use of force (Barratt, Bergman, and Thompson 2014). It is demographically dominated by men, and stereotyped as a job that women would not be qualified or successful in (Barratt et. al 2014). This is shown in the demography of law enforcement relevant to the population; women make up 51% of the U.S. population, and 46% of the country’s workforce, (U.S. Census Bureau 2003) but they make up only 31.3% of its law enforcement positions (National Center for Women and Policing 2000). Barratt et al. (2014) found that female officers who displayed masculine characteristics received higher levels of

career mentoring, that is, they were more welcomed into the inner circle of men in the workplace, what Lorber (1994) calls the "band of brothers" (Barratt et. al. 2014).

Men in the workplace are expected to be rational, objective, and calm under pressure; all traits commonly associated with masculinity (Lorber 1994). The expectations of women in the workplace are parallel to what is expected of them in the home; being friendly, smiling, taking care of and looking out for others; thus keeping them out of highly competitive leadership and power positions (Lorber 1994). When women do achieve coveted leadership positions, they are often criticized for the ways they "do" leadership in the context of their gender; if they are "too feminine" their qualifications are undermined and it is claimed that they are not good leaders (Lorber 1994). If they are "too masculine" they are said to be abrasive, too aggressive and "bitchy" (Lorber 1994). Women's femininity is also called into question if they achieve top-level leadership positions; how much could women have *really* achieved if they rose to the top by acting exactly like a man?

In a study conducted by Schein, Mueller, Lituchy and Jiang (1996) examined the relationship between sex role stereotypes and characteristics perceived as being necessary for management in 361 male and 228 female management students in Japan and China. The results showed that men and women in both countries believe successful middle managers possess characteristics, attitudes and temperaments more commonly attributed to men than to women in general (Schein et. al. 1996). When these results were compared with studies done in the United States, Great Britain and Germany, "think manager-think male" was found to be a global phenomenon, with this attitude being especially prevalent among males (Schein et. al. 1996). Despite the many political, cultural and historical differences among these five countries, the belief that women are less likely than men to possess managerial qualities is held by male

managerial students worldwide (Schein et. al. 1996). However, females' degree of managerial sex-typing varied from country to country, perhaps being indicative of the opportunities presented to women to achieve these positions in each country (Schein et. al. 1996).

A study conducted by Haveman and Beresford (2012) shows that these gender stereotypes still exist. Widely held cultural expectations about what men and women can or should be doing, for example, who can do math, who should be taking care of the household, and who should work, are the basic cause of gender differences in job preferences, educational attainment and work experience (Haveman and Beresford 2012). They assert that choices, including what field to study, how much education to get, whether to work outside of the home and what kind of job to get are constrained by cultural gender roles and norms (Haveman and Beresford 2012). An example of gender norms as being beneficial to men and as a hindrance to women is shown in Harris' and Guiffre's book, (2015) "Taking the Heat." Getting promotions is often tough on women who work as professional chefs, as they are expected to conform to the gender roles imposed on them and are often subject to harassment, hazing and intimidation in the workplace (Harris and Guiffre 2015). One chef recalls that she was passed up for a promotion because she had a family and was not seen as being committed to her career, while a male chef was given that promotion because he had a family to provide for and needed money (Harris and Guiffre 2015).

Not only are women left out of important networking groups in the workplace on the basis of gender alone, women are excluded and held back in their careers based on marital and parental status as well. Lorber explains, because discriminating against women based on marital or parental status in the hiring process is now illegal in the United States, these tactics have been informally replaced with "The Mommy Track" (Lorber 1994). The "mommy track" was

intended to make is easier for married women with children to continue professional careers with flexible working hours and generous maternity leave, but when women do take advantage of these benefits offered, their professionalism and commitment to their career is called into question (Lorber 1994). The latent function of the "mommy track" is the de-railing of women who were on tracks to top-level positions (Lorber 1994). The "mommy track" keeps well-qualified women in lower-paid, lower-prestige ranks and assumes that because they are mothers, they could not possibly handle the leadership and responsibilities of the workplace and the home at the same time (Lorber 1994). Mens' efforts to advance in their careers is rewarded, while women are punished under the guise of assumed familial responsibility (Lorber 1994).

Cunningham and Macan (2007) also found that in addition to women who are already mothers being penalized, pregnant women are also penalized during the interview process. The study showed that despite being rated as equally qualified, committed, dependable, and as a good fit for the position, pregnant applicants were given significantly lower hiring recommendations than non-pregnant applicants (Cunningham and Macan 2007). The pregnant applicants were also given significantly higher "likely to be absent often" ratings as compared to non-pregnant applicants (Cunningham and Macan 2007). Non-pregnant applicants were also rated significantly higher on the "masculine" variable than were pregnant applicants; non-pregnant applicants also had higher ratings on the recommendation for hire scale, indicating not only that non-pregnant people have a better chance of finding a job, but that people who are perceived as masculine have better chances of gaining employment (Cunningham and Macan 2007).

Women do not only experience judgment and stereotyping during pregnancy by employers, but after they have children they appear to be stereotyped as well. Cuddy, Fisk and Glick (2004) also found that working mothers are often reduced to stereotypes in their careers:

viewed as warm but incompetent, or competent, but cold. Participants in the study rated working mothers as significantly more warm than competent, and childless working women as significantly more competent (Cuddy et. al. 2004). Working dads, however, were rated as equally warm and competent (Cuddy et. al. 2004). Employers also expressed less interest in hiring, promoting and educating working mothers than they did childless working women (Cuddy et. al. 2004). Working mothers were stereotyped as being more warm, but significantly less competent and therefore less likely to be requested, hired or trained than a childless working woman (Cuddy et. al. 2004). Simply adding a child caused people to view women as being less competent, less capable, and less skillful (Cuddy et. al. 2004).

Flexible work arrangements and career interruptions caused by family and medical leave represent a deviance from the time norms and career responsibilities and devotion of a typical manager or upper level professional (Stone and Hernandez 2013). Deviation from full-time, standard employment becomes a stigmatized attribute and workers that display such behavior are labeled and treated as deviants and outsiders (Stone and Hernandez 2013). Among mothers, college-educated women have the highest labor force participation rate (Boushey 2008). However, research on the causes of taking a career break has shown one of the major causes to be workplace inflexibility, specifically in time and scheduling matters, as well as the marginalized status that comes with part-time positions for those who do choose to take them (Stone 2007; Williams and Boushey 2010). Stone and Hernandez (2013) found that 76% of interviewees made statements linking work status (part time/full time) and motherhood status to stigma. The frequency of this stigma tends to be higher among women who work in male dominated professions, but it is also apparent in gender-integrated fields (Stone and Hernandez 2013). For most of the female professionals in the study, working in a male dominated

environment made them a highly visible minority, and they reported learning early in their careers that motherhood would make them unable to fill the time demands of their careers (Stone and Hernandez 2013). Women did not have to actually be pregnant to experience stigma; it is simply their ability to become pregnant that marked them as deviant and unable to demonstrate sustained commitment to their career, leading them to be stigmatized and treated as deviant or inferior in the workplace (Stone and Hernandez 2013).

Feagin (1986) describes some other ways men subtly undercut mothers in the workplace: considerate domination and collegial exclusion. Considerate domination occurs when someone else decides what responsibilities a woman can and cannot handle, instead of letting her take responsibility for her own time. Collegial exclusion may not be readily recognized, as it is the act of thoughtlessly planning meetings and networking events at times that women will likely have family responsibilities (Feagin 1986).

In a lab study and audit study of actual employers, Correll, Benard and Paik (2007) find that mothers are penalized on a number of measures including recommended starting salary and perceived competence. Fathers were not penalized, but sometimes benefitted from being parents, while mothers, as shown in the audit study, are discriminated against by actual employers (Correll et. al. 2007). In the lab study component, mothers were judged as significantly less competent and committed to their jobs than women without children were, with competency ratings 10% lower for mothers and commitment ratings 15% lower than for non-mothers (Correll et. al. 2007). The recommended starting salary was 7.4% less for mothers than was offered to non-mothers, a difference that was statistically significant (Correll et. al. 2007). In contrast, fathers were rated as significantly more committed to their jobs than non-fathers, and were offered significantly higher starting salaries than non-fathers (Correll et. al. 2007). The audit

study shows that with real employers, non-mothers received 2.1 times as many callbacks as equally qualified mothers (Correll et. al. 2007). The results of the lab study corresponded closely to the audit study, in both of which women experienced the "motherhood penalty" where fathers did not (Correll et. al. 2007).

Not only do gender stereotypes and gender roles play into how women are treated in the workplace, it may have an effect on how they advance in their careers. The glass ceiling phenomena and motherhood penalties have already been discussed, but sometimes women also prioritize their domestic lives and do not advance in their careers because of gender role socialization. Though dual-earner families are becoming increasingly common, dual earner couples are also working more hours than they did 20 years ago (Jacobs and Gerson 2001, 2004). On top of working more hours, wives continue to do more household work and contribute to domestic care more than husbands (Bianchi et. al. 2000). Because women are offered maternity leave by companies when they give birth, and fathers are not usually given paternity leave, this reinforces the traditional gender role stereotypes that women are the ones who are supposed to be at home taking care of the children, while men are supposed to be at work, being the breadwinners. It would be irrational to expect a woman to give birth, get up, and go into work the next day. However, extended paternity leave for fathers could normalize the male role in domesticity, taking away the stigma that domestic life is "a woman's thing." Furthermore, when women do use their maternity leave to care for their children, they may be penalized in the form of having their professionalism and commitment to the job questioned (Lorber 1994; Stone and Hernandez 2013). Women are given flexible hours and maternity leave, yet penalized when they use those allowances to care for their families, and this creates a roadblock for them when they try to advance in their careers (Lorber 1994; Stone and Hernandez 2013).

Stigmatization of women in the workplace occurs not only when women become mothers, but often before they do, simply constructed on the basis of their ability to become a mother (Stone and Hernandez 2013). This stigmatizing treatment can take two forms; overt or covert (Boyce et. al. 2007). Overt being the outward statements about inferiority of part time workers or mothers who take leave, or other biased behaviors, and covert being behaviors such as avoidance or exclusion in the workplace (Boyce et. al. 2007). The experience of stigmatization also requires a "stigma consciousness" in which the victim is aware of the stigmatizing treatment and believes it is directed at them personally as a form of prejudice (Boyce et. al. 2007). Stigmatization is associated with lower levels of job satisfaction and commitment, as well as withdrawal and absenteeism, one reason why women who become mothers "opt out" of their careers and choose to focus on their familial responsibilities instead (Stone and Hernandez 2013).

The interviews of female chefs in "Taking the Heat" revealed that the number one reason respondents gave for leaving the workforce was that it was incompatible with family needs (Harris and Guiffre 2015). Being the boss, or head chef, does not excuse someone from the long hours and extreme physical demands of being a chef, either (Harris and Guiffre 2015). They are also penalized when it comes to promotions and moving up, being seen as less committed to their careers because they have families (Harris and Guiffre 2015).

Not only are women with families stereotyped and excluded, women without families are stereotypes and excluded simply by virtue of being women. In "Taking the Heat" professional women chefs detail their on the job experiences, and many respondents report that they are stereotypes and not given any chance to move up or do any "real" work, because as a minority in a male-dominated workplace, they are already considered deviant, based on their gender alone (Harris and Guiffre 2015). Women are not considered to be "strong" enough, physically or

emotionally, and are often discriminated against, harassed, hazed, and placed in pantries and on "salad bar duty," because the men assume they do not belong in the kitchen (Harris and Guiffre 2015).

In addition to subtle gender segregation and discrimination techniques in the workplace, women are also subject to sexual harassment. Gutek (1985) found that women who work in male dominated workplaces more often experience sexual harassment compared to women who work in more integrated or women dominated fields. For example, women who work in trades have higher rates of harassment and sex discrimination, at 60 and 56 percent respectively, than women who work in secretarial fields, at only 5-6 percent (Mansfield, Koch, Henderson, Vicary, Cohn, and Young 1991). A study by Konrad and Gutek (1986) found that women treat sexual harassment differently depending on their work environments. They found that women who work in female-dominated jobs with other males were less likely than other women to label sexual behaviors at work as sexual harassment (Konrad and Gutek 1986). This is perhaps because of the non-male dominated workplace, in which the women do not feel excluded from the group and, therefore, are more likely to believe that these behaviors are normal, or are not serious, such as a joke among workplace friends. The study found that men in female dominated jobs might stress their own masculinity and find that sexually aggressive behavior in the workplace is not sexual harassment (Konrad and Gutek 1986). Women in male-dominated jobs or gender-integrated jobs, however, are more likely to find sexually aggressive behaviors in the workplace to be unpleasant, and they are the most likely group to report these behaviors as sexual harassment (Konrad and Gutek 1986). It is not only gender and the integration of males and females in the workplace that can spark problems such as sexual harassment, but the

situation of the workplace itself causes men and women to define and report sexual harassment differently.

A plethora of research has been conducted on women in the workforce and the subtle and overt ways in which they are discriminated against (Stone 2007; Gutek 1985; Feagin 1986; Lorber 1994). Many articles and books have been written about what it means to be a woman in the workforce, how and why discrimination happens, and the gender definitions and standards set by society. It has been shown that discrimination happens, and prevention methods have been implemented at many workplaces. However, is how women react to discrimination when they experience it, and how they come to define these experiences as discrimination or harassment, rather than just a simple joke between coworkers. This thesis is a mixed methods project. The first part is an ethnographical look into what it is like to be a woman in a male dominated workplace from a firsthand prospective. The second part is a series of interviews comprised of other women and their experiences in a variety of male dominated workplaces. Together, these methods not only provide an insight from an ethnography perspective, but from the perspective of other women in a variety of fields, allowing for more possible generalization of results and greater validity of themes.

Methods

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects and responses of being a woman in a predominantly male working environment. Inside and outside of the workplace, men have varying responses to a woman doing something that has long been considered to be a “man’s job” by society. The first methodological approach of this study is participant-observation. I worked as a heavy equipment operator at a small construction company, and went about doing

my job and living my daily life as normal. I simply took note of the way I was treated as a woman compared to the men in the workplace, and any comments/actions made toward me because of my gender, whether they were positive or negative. I recorded all of these interactions on small sticky notes throughout the day that I expanded into a full narrative when I arrived home.

Outside of the workplace, I simply noted people's reactions to me in my work clothing (jeans, a work shirt, steel toed boots, often covered from head to toe in dirt and grease) and their comments and reactions about my occupation. As I was often asked about what I did, because it is unusual to see a woman in public dressed the way that I was and covered in dirt and grease. I acted as a participant-observer in all settings, going about my days as I would normally, noting the reactions and comments of people inside and outside of my workplace, as well as taking note of my own reactions and feelings in these situations. My normal day as a heavy equipment operator consisted of getting to work, and going straight from my car to either a front-end loader or excavator depending on the day's tasks. Usually, I was in a loader. I would first check the oil, hydraulic fluid and antifreeze in the loader before climbing inside to start it and let it warm up for a few minutes. Then I would head down to the quarry and begin loading trucks or mixing/screening topsoil. Sometimes I would be doing both, going back and forth from the screening plant to load trucks and mixing more topsoil to be screened in between.

At the end of the day, I would go to the greasing and fueling station and put fuel in my loader then shovel out the bucket and grease it. I explain the process of greasing in more detail below. I spent, on average 50-60 hours per workweek on site, though as a heavy equipment operator many of those hours were spent inside the cab of a machine working alone, so the interactions that did take place throughout the workday on site were especially important. I was the only

female operator on site throughout the duration of my study. The site where I was working and gathering data for this study consisted of an office building, a truck scale (as dirt is sold by the ton), and scale house where someone would be sitting inside printing weight tickets for trucks, a workshop where the mechanic fixed and maintained trucks and machinery, and the main office building (See appendix B below). Inside the main office, there were one or two other females at any given time, for a total of three on site. I was the only female operator on site. The other two functioned as the head of accounting and a secretary/scale master, wherever she was needed most. When I was very young, too young to reach the pedals in the machines, I worked in the scale house during the summers, where I became familiar with many of the truck drivers and companies that we did business with.

In addition to the participant-observation style research described above, I also conducted open-ended, semi-structured style interviews with women who have had these experiences. I collected a snowball style sample of women who work or have worked in a male dominated field and interviewed them about their experiences; usually via the telephone as these women are busy, working professionals. I began by interviewing a woman who worked in the geology field that a professor had recommended to me. I interviewed 10 women, 9 via telephone as they work and live out of state, and one in person during lunch in her office. My thesis advisor assisted me in this method, as he knew some women who were happy to participate, and they knew other women as well. Interviews were conducted in person or via the phone, depending on the participant's preference and what was most convenient for them. I also searched online for women's organizations such as the National Association of Women in Construction and found some participants that way. Interviews, whether in person or on the phone, took about an hour each. I was able to interview ten women working in various fields such as construction,

telephone company line work, engineering, mathematics, technology systems, finance, fire prevention architecture, and geology. The pool of respondents was relatively small, as recruiting was difficult and organizations that employ women in male dominated fields did not want researchers working with them without lengthy application processes. Because the interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview style, the length of each varies. I have included the interview guide in appendix a.

Hypothesis

Many articles and journal publications point out the different types of roadblocks and harassment women face in the workplace (Stone 2007; Lorber 1994; Gutek 1985). Some propose theories about why this happens, and many mention marriage and childbirth as common roadblocks for women in any career (Stone and Hernandez 2013; Stone 2007). There is a qualitative gap in research on womens' reactions and reflections upon the challenges they face in the workforce and how their identities and workplace environments shape those reactions. I hypothesize that women in male dominated workforces will stand up or speak out against harassment or discriminatory practices in the workplace. The articles expressed at great length about different sociological phenomena that affect women at work, possible explanations for why these phenomena occur. However, another gap in existing research materials occurs concerns the societal acceptance or rejection of women's careers in male dominated fields outside of the workplace itself. I hypothesize that, though people may not outwardly say so, there is still a lack of acceptance in general society for a woman working in a male dominated workforce. Much of the previous research on the subject suggests that women feel powerless in a male dominated workforce, but little research shows how this may have changed in recent years

(Gutek 1985; Lorber 1994; Mansfield 1991). I predict that women who work in male dominated workforces will have assimilated to the workplace enough so that they are not powerless, and are in a position to speak up should they feel the need. In the following sections, I detail my participant observations and findings while relating the parallel experiences of the women I interviewed. Each section represents a different theme that I found during the course of this study including reactions of women to workplace events, probationary treatment of women in the workplace, advancement of women in their careers, the effect of family on womens' careers, how women fit into their workplaces, the overcoming of gender roles and boundaries, surprising experiences in the workplace, and societal reactions to women's careers.

Stick To The Status Quo?

Although I hypothesize that women in male dominated workforces will have assimilated to the workforce enough to be comfortable speaking up when needed, it is important that I include instances of "sticking to the status quo," or, simply "letting it go" in the case of instances that could have been problematic. I use the term "sticking to the status quo" to refer to the times when women did not report or speak out against incidents that occurred for fear of being considered deviant in the workplace. "Letting it go" refers to the times when women did not report or speak out when incidents occurred in the workplace because they did not think it would be worth it, or for other reasons that they explain below. The women I interviewed were very reflective and in telling me about their experiences, often explained why they did not speak up. Many said that after experiencing these events and reflecting upon them, that they would be prepared to speak up in the future if the need arose.

Because I had worked at the company where I operated heavy equipment for a few years, many of the truck drivers from the various trucking companies that we worked with knew me or at least knew of me from having seen me around the site. Because much of the truck driving and heavy equipment operating occupations take place alone in the cab of a truck or machine all day, the CB radio is frequently used as a necessary, and sometimes entertaining, mode of communication between operators and truck drivers. Every morning, the rounds of trucks would drive in, waiting to be loaded or to dump their loads of material, depending on what jobs we were running that day. A loader operator would have to either load the truck or show them where to dump material. There were two operators: myself, and a male who was two years older than me. Every morning when the trucks would come in, I was usually in charge of loading them, and the drivers would say "good morning," or "how are you?" over the radio. One truck driver, who was a bit younger than the usual bunch, always smiled at me and said "good morning!" enthusiastically when he came in to get loaded in the mornings. He would often ask questions and make small talk as he was waiting to get loaded, with questions such as, "How old are you?" "Are you in school?" "Where do you go to school?" and "What do you want to do with that degree?" Many of the drivers made small talk like this, but this driver was persistent and eventually started calling me "pretty lady" and "sweetheart" or other pet names. This was a bit embarrassing, as CB radio conversations can be heard by anyone in the vicinity on the same channel, but I brushed it off and let it go, because in my experience truck drivers behaved this way. This behavior deviated from the standard truck driver banter, however, when it crossed the lie from playful names to somewhat forceful flirting.

Over time this truck driver's actions became bolder. He drove in one morning and asked me for my phone number. I declined, but then he said he was only "30 years old baby!" and he did

not want to accept my “no” for an answer. I was very uncomfortable, as I was only 20 years old at the time and did not want to date anyone, much less anyone 10 years older than myself. He insisted that we could “just go out and have a good time,” but I was only 20 years old and was uncomfortable dating this older man, who was essentially a stranger, save for the few times we had chatted over the CB radio at work. I declined repeatedly, and when he finally left, I brushed it off as just another embarrassing incident.

When the same driver came back for the next round he asked me, “What’s 1 + 1?” and I answered, “two…?” and I was very confused as to why he was asking me this, only to hear his response of “Nah, baby, its me and you!” and the subsequent laughter of all the other truck drivers in the quarry, who could hear all of our conversations over the radio. The other truck drivers encouraged him, laughing at his jokes and egging him on by saying things like, “come on honey just give him your number!” and “ohhh, homeboy ain’t getting lucky tonight!” I was very embarrassed and didn’t respond. I just brushed off the incident and let it go again. Looking back I remember how uncomfortable I really was; I was cringing in my loader seat. Reflecting upon my experience, I realize I did not stand up for myself despite being so uncomfortable because I had worked at that company for years. I had heard stories of truck drivers behaving in lewd ways and using bad language and had become socialized into the culture of that workplace or the mindset of, “that’s just how truck drivers are.” I was also very shy, and cannot discount that in my reflection on these events; I did not want to make a big deal of nothing if that is “just how truck drivers are,” and despite being embarrassed, I let the incident go and did not say anything about it. Reflecting upon this incident, I feel as though I could have spoken up, and it would have been more effective than staying silent, and I can see myself speaking up in the future. However, at the time, I was afraid it would create hostility in the workplace, and so I let the issue go.

Women I interviewed mentioned the "that's just how guys are mentality" in some of their responses, and many cited company policies against harassment as being helpful when one is in a problematic situation. "That is just how some guys are," said one woman, who works as an engineer, "it helps to be in a company with strong policies and procedures that are actually enforced."

Some women reflected upon their experiences as I did and wished they had done things differently, instead of just letting incidents that bothered them go. One respondent, who reported being harassed by another woman in the workplace said that she had reported the incident, but the offender was only suspended for a short period of time and then was allowed to return. In reflection she says, "I think I would have done things differently. I should have objected when they brought back the offending woman; she wasn't questioned as thoroughly as I was. But by that point I was just ready to move on." This female power plant manager, instead of not responding initially, let the issue go after seeing that it was not going to be handled the way she would have preferred, and the lenience of management toward the offender suggests the normalization of harassment.

Another woman, who works as a fire prevention architect, reflected upon the ways her past attitude toward incidents of harassment have changed, as awareness of the issue have grown and policies have become stricter:

> *A few years ago I probably would not have said anything about inappropriate comments or incidents, I would have just brushed it off or changed the subject. People don't like change. Or, if they are used to issues being brushed off or ignored, they may not want to make a big deal over nothing and deal with all the work that goes into reporting. But after someone at work made numerous inappropriate comments to me and others, I promised myself I*

> *would not tolerate those actions and would address the situation immediately.*

Another woman, a mathematician, who experienced gender discriminating comments and behaviors in her workplace suggested she would speak up the next time,

> *When the guy outwardly said to me, "I don't believe in gender equality," I really didn't know what to do with it at the time; I just stood up and walked away. When they wanted to put me on a seat in a committee just because I was female, I said no, but I really didn't explain why or my reasons behind it. I feel like refusing the position would have been more effective if I had spoken up and said why. I can definitely see myself speaking up more readily in the future.*

The women I spoke to during interviews that did not speak up when incidents of inappropriate behavior or harassment occurred expressed their desire and intent to do so in the future, either using their own voices or by relying on company policies to assist them in handling matters. The women did not cite fear or powerlessness as their reason for not speaking up, but rather in reflecting upon their experiences, expressed a desire to be able to speak up in the future or, if given the chance, to change the ways they had acted in the past.

The majority of women I interviewed did speak up or report incidents that were inappropriate or considered harassment, and they were confident in drawing the line between harassment and simple joking.

The following responses indicate that the women are confident in knowing what constitutes harassment, but if they are individually confident, their definitions still vary across individuals. Some women describe their own boundaries and generalize when it comes to where others "draw the line."

A geologist stated confidently:

> *It's like pornography; you know it when you see it. When incidents or jokes make me feel uncomfortable, it is no longer harmless joking. I have not struggled with determining what constitutes harassment at all." She continued, "I reported harassment once and harassment coupled with gross negligence on a job that I was responsible for. In both cases the men were temporary contract help and both were let go. The first man was found to have been bothering several women, and I am not sure of the official reason the second was let go. Given that he was trying to purposely mess up some work that was being done that could have caused very bad engineering problems, I was more concerned with the negligence in the second case, but did not ignore either incident.*

An engineer stated:

> *I don't have trouble differentiating between the two at all. My company makes it easy to handle. If I feel that I cannot approach my boss, there is a concerns program that I can call and they will address any issues. I don't personally engage in joking or talking about sexual topics. I spoke with a boss once about comments that he had made to one of my coworkers; he stopped talking to her short term but her complaints grew. She used the concerns program and he was transferred to another group until her co-op term ended. I think that it is good to communicate calmly and clearly to any coworker about comments or issues that make us uncomfortable; they may have no idea.*

Another geologist addressed the matter with a similar perspective:

> *It is one of those you know it when you see it things, and depends on your relationship with the person, if you have a relationship that allows some joking, if you give and receive jokes back and forth…harassment involves intentional insults meant to intimidate and cause harm. In my career, personally, I have never been harassed and would know if I had.*

An engineer who works in the energy field explains:

> *We have strict harassment policies at work but unless they are enforced there may be folks who try to find where your line of tolerance ends. Personally, I am not easily offended and don't mind a simple joke. A few years ago the company fired two male*

> *supervisors for sexual harassment and that sent a strong message to everyone that it would not be tolerated. We have a 1-800 hotline for workplace ethics that handles concerns of those who call.*

A fire prevention architect also added:

> *If I can tell the person doesn't mean anything by it then I let it go, but if comments are directed at me specifically, I might feel uncomfortable. When a male made numerous inappropriate comments to me and other coworkers, I reported him and he was fired.*

Another participant defined the issue confidently within the context of her own boundaries:

> *It crosses the line for me when it is an unwanted and unwelcome comment. Like anyone else there are a few people with whom I am close and we may joke about things that are "inappropriate" from time to time, but the jokes never threaten my self-worth or sense of belonging in the workplace.*

Some women define "the line" differently, as this architect does:

> *It is a thin line, and I make it very clear from the beginning that I will not tolerate anyone crossing that line, even when it is meant in a playful or joking manner. I know when I am being treated differently, but I only bring it up to my boss if it relates to work; if it is personal, I address the specific person. If it happens in a meeting or gathering, I call the person out on it, and if I miss my chance I make sure to follow up on it with that specific person. I talk about it and it dies there,*

The majority of women interviewed in the study very confidently defined what does and does not constitute harassment, and many referred to company policies in their answers and solutions to harassment if they had experienced it. Many even confidently took the situation into their own hands and said that they have or would approach the offender and speak with them directly about the problem. They do not brush off the issues or have the "boys will be boys" mentality. They are effectively reflexive and are able to confidently draw their own lines and personal boundaries when it comes to harassment in the workplace, as well as handle problems

effectively with methods of confrontation; either by confronting the offender themselves or relying on company policies to address the issues. Many women were individually confident in defining “the line” and what they would do if or when it were to be crossed. Though their definitions vary across individuals, it is important to note their confidence in asserting where they stand and defining their limits, whether it is on a personal or general level.

‘Mansplaining’ and Probation Periods

My own experiences were both similar and different to those of the women whom I interviewed. I found some of the contrasts to our experiences in different male dominated workforces interesting, as well as the implications and causes, which will be discussed below.

Many people seem to have a misconception that operating equipment is an “easy” job where you sit in a cab and play with a machine all day. While the majority of the day is spent inside the cab, operating is anything but easy. I came home from work every day covered from head to toe in dirt, grease, oil, hydraulic fluid and who knows what else. At the end of every day, the hard work was only beginning. Maintenance of the machines is partly the responsibility of operators. At the end of every day I was responsible for fueling my loader and greasing it. I was also responsible for shoveling out my loader bucket, which would accumulate dirt and debris all day especially when it rained and the dirt was especially sticky. This is essential to keeping a loader in good condition; if dirt isn’t shoveled out of the bucket daily it can become impossible to remove. Some materials, such as black clay, have an acidic pH and can erode the metals in the bucket. The weight of all that accumulated material can also throw off the balance of the machine and reduce the weight of the loads going into the dump trucks. The loader I operated had a 15-ton bucket. For comparison, this machine could easily scoop up a medium sized car in

the bucket. Shoveling out the bucket at the end of the day is one of the most laborious tasks of operating. There were days when I would shovel until my hands were bleeding, and the blisters on the palms and between my fingers were torn open and oozing. I never asked for help when doing this. When the other operators would come over and shovel out my bucket for me, which they did almost daily, I would often tell them that I could do it myself. They usually insisted on doing it for me, because they assumed I lacked the skills or muscle to do it myself because of my gender. On the job site, I never witnessed two men helping each other shovel out loader buckets; they did this themselves, because each one knew the others did not need help. Upon reflection, I realized that accepting or asking for help would have marked me as "inferior" or "helpless", so my insistence on doing everything myself evidenced my own feelings of being on a "probationary status." None of the men ever jumped in to do tasks for each other, because they knew and expected each other to do everything by themselves. The gendered expectations placed on me, however, were that I was not good enough or strong enough to complete some tasks. Therefore, I was constantly "checked up on" to make sure I could do it, or "helped" when someone would jump in and start doing the work for me.

Many of my days were spent in a loader dumping topsoil blend into a hopper to be screened. The dirt would go through a number of screens and then onto belts and a stacker, which then piled it up, ready to be loaded onto trucks. Occasionally, usually when it was rainy and the dirt was heavy, the stacker or one of the belts would get stuck, and I would have to shut everything down, get out of the loader, and shovel off the belt until it was unstuck and could move again. Once, when the screener got stuck, the other operators noticed and came over to help me get it unclogged. I didn't ask for help, as I was out of my loader shoveling away. One of the operators, as we were shoveling, decided to explain to me why the screen got stuck, even though I already

clearly knew why, and he knew that I knew. He explained, “The screener got stuck because of the big chunk of dirt. When the dirt is wet it sticks together more and it gets heavier, so you have to be careful and go slow.” I simply nodded, not wanting to be rude or start an argument because I was already slightly annoyed at having to stop working to clean off the clogged belt. I already knew why it was stuck, that was clear. Nevertheless, my male coworkers felt it necessary to give me a little extra guidance and explain it to me anyway, every time it happened. While this may have been presented as helpful advice, it implied a superior authority or expertise over my own and a parallel skepticism about my status as a talented operator. It became clear that this skepticism was gender-based, as even new male operators were never treated this way.

We started another contracted job in mid-July where trucks were bringing loads of recyclable material in from a paper processing plant, and I had to mix that with fill dirt and run it through a screener. The screener that I was using was very old, and the hopper was very slow. The belt often came loose and got clogged and stopped. Sometimes huge chunks of clay from the fill mix or the paper material would be stuck together and cause the hopper and stacker to clog. I would have to get out of the loader, shut the machine down, and shovel the belt off and shovel the hopper out to unclog it. I would never ask for help doing this, as I feared the other operators would make fun of me for clogging the machine, but also because I wanted to prove that I could work just as hard as they did, and I could. Whenever someone did clog a stacker, which was not uncommon, they were teased or ridiculed for the rest of the day. I never requested help because it was not necessary. I shoveled until my hands were torn open and bleeding, but every time the other operators noticed I was shoveling they would come over to help or to push me out of the way and do the job for me, because they assumed I could not do it myself, as I am a rather small girl and they assumed that I would not have the strength to do this kind of work.

Climbing the Ladder

In opposition to previous research cited in the literature review women I interviewed for this study said that they had the opportunity to advance in their careers and were given guidance or were able to advance when they wanted to, even in male dominated fields. Some women felt that they were given more guidance, and it may be inappropriate to assume that the "extra guidance" was due to a gender bias. The women interviewed said that they did not feel as if they were "on probation" or being watched or coddled in their careers or paths of advancement. My own experiences, however, were more consistent with those described in the literature. I felt as if I received more guidance. However, I did not feel as though it was helpful guidance. It was more condescending and made me feel as if my coworkers did not take me seriously, even though some of them had been working there for a shorter period than I had. I did not feel as if I had been out on probation, however, I did feel the need to work hard and prove to myself more than anyone that I was just as much of an operator as any of the males that worked with me. This internal sense of probation or measuring up may have stemmed from the "extra guidance" or as I liked to call it, "mansplaining," a condescending type of help given without request, because the males in the workplace assumed my gender deprived me of the skills I needed to succeed.

When women advance to a position of leadership in a male dominated career field, it is often said that they feel as if they are on "probation" (Lorber 1994). They feel they are being watched to make sure they are really good enough to be a leader, and that their selection was justified. My female respondents, contrary to studies published, often found this was not the case; as one of the engineers put it, "I felt that I was somewhat monitored when I first moved up to a supervisory position, but that seemed to be true for everyone. I don't think my leadership was questioned because I was female."

Another woman commented, “I think the team that I was supervising watched me carefully, as they were not familiar with me, however, I did not feel scrutiny from above. My boss was comfortable with my position and trusted me.”

A mathematics professor reflected, “I haven’t felt like I was “on probation” in my position yet, as I am relatively new to this field, but I feel like I want to prove to myself more than anyone that I am a mathematician.”

The majority of women interviewed said that they never felt as if they were “on probation” or that their leadership was called into question because of their gender. Many stated they were happily in leadership positions, but also enjoyed the technical/field work side of their careers as that is what had gotten them interested in the fields in the first place. Contrary to a number of research articles stating that women receive less guidance and mentoring in the workplace, (Lorber 1994; Gutek 1985; Konrad and Gutek 1986; Hultin 2003) a majority of the women I interviewed stated they had received more guidance and were able to advance in their careers if they “put the work in.”

A geologist explained,

> *It is not difficult to advance in my career, even as a woman, if you have a passion for it, treat people well, and don’t take yourself too seriously, I believe anyone can advance if they are lucky enough to get a job in the field. I was never held back or discouraged, in fact, I was one of the first employees to be chosen to be included in a program that would set you up on a path to a supervisory role. I did not personally like it because it involved a lot of paperwork, office work, and meetings, and took away from the fieldwork experience that I fell in love with in the first place.*

“I have been promoted every six years, but as I continue to get promoted I find myself working more in an office setting and doing less of the technical and field work, which I do not

like because I did not enter this field with the goal of working in an office all day," says another engineer.

Another engineer explained,

> *I have advanced at a relatively fast pace; there are times when I felt like male counterparts with stay at home wives overlooked me, but I have also turned down advancements because it was not the right time for my family. However, I am happy in my career and have no regrets. There are those who still think women should be at home raising children, but I feel like that generation is retiring.*

"I have had plenty of opportunity to advance in my career; it is not hard if I put the work in. I haven't ever felt left out of guidance or mentoring, I actually feel like I've received more guidance through the years," the fire prevention architect explained.

An engineer adds,

> *I do not feel like my gender has held me back in my career, I really think it is up to the individual. Many folks are complacent or happy to just stay in the position they are in; you can go as far as you want, just believe in yourself and put in the work. I have never felt discouraged from entering positions of authority in the workplace.*

It is important to note that many women, while asserting that their positions of leadership did not feel "probationary," also deferred leadership in their careers, for various reasons. In future research, it would be interesting to make note of how this phenomena differs with men.

Family Matters

At twenty-two, I do not have, nor am I planning on having children anytime soon. However, the women with whom I spoke had families and lives of their own outside of work, and family is an important factor to consider in a woman's career, especially in a male dominated workforce. While it is illegal to discriminate against married women or women planning on having children during hiring processes in the United States, studies show that women with families face barriers

in their workplaces because of their family life and children (Gutek 1985; Lorber 1994; Stone and Hernandez 2013). The women in my study discuss these challenges openly and how they overcame them.

In terms of advancement, a woman with degrees in both engineering and geology asserted that she was not denied the opportunity to advance because of her gender, but she asserts:

> *I did not want to go into management, which is the only place I could have moved up to. I was given plenty of opportunities to advance but I was happy where I was, and I had two young children to think about as well. I was not held back by my gender or the company so much as I held myself back because I cared about my children more than upward career mobility.*
>
> *If someone is willing to relocate and change jobs regularly, it would be very easy for anyone, regardless of their gender, to advance at my company. I do not wish to jump through any hoops that would disrupt my family and my life outside work; I have been promoted every six years and have been able to support my family in a comfortable but not extravagant way, and I am happy where I am.*

One construction worker describes it as a balancing act:

> *My work schedule requires over 60 hours per week, so I don't have much of a social life. I am not very connected with a group of friends outside work, but my husband is wonderful and understanding and does not question the crazy hours or the fact that my coworkers are almost all men. He works in the power industry; he is much more connected with the kids' teachers and school and sometimes I do feel a bit out of the loop and I would like to be able to be a wife and mother more, but I am not a workaholic and am not trying to get promoted. The job interests me and I am happy where I am in my career, but with good things there will always be challenges, and I challenge myself to find ways to spend more time with family and friends, but I do not beat myself up over it. I try to be feminine when I am at home, though it is hard to wear a hard hat and steel toe boots all day and come home looking and smelling good. It is a balancing act.*

A geologist describes the situation in similar terms:

> *I am juggling the everyday life of being a wife, mother, friend and family member just like everyone else. I realize it takes a village to raise a child in today's world and I am not afraid to ask for help. There was occasional conflict with work schedules when the kids were growing up, but what marriage doesn't have conflict from time to time? I did not feel judged by my coworkers or bosses, but instead by other stay-at-home moms, but I was never cut-out to be that person. My kids are now in college and I'd say they turned out just fine despite not having a stay-at-home parent. I was not willing to move around or work extensive hours and travel frequently as someone who did not have a family might have. I have children and a husband who also has a career. I have a life outside of my company and career.*

An engineer explains:

> *Having children is the best thing I have ever done and has made me a much better person and manager. The cost is high but it is worth it, I have a terrific husband and if it were not for him I would not be able to maintain the hours and pace that I do. As a manager, when anyone has to leave work to handle a family matter I am the first to work with them to find a schedule that helps their family.*

Another geologist explains:

> *When my son was a baby my job caused some strain at home, as it required me to travel and meant my husband would have to care for the baby by himself for days or up to a week at a time, but he was understanding, and fortunately this became less of an issue as our son got older. I may have made some changes in my career if my job had asked me to be away for extensive periods of time on a regular basis.*

"My daughter had the opposite of an adverse effect on my career. She helped me to grow, learn, and appreciate women like myself who are able to balance work and family," explains a woman in the construction industry.

Women in various industries discuss the challenges of balancing both work and family, and some cite their husbands as being big contributors in the domestic setting, a factor to which they contribute some of their career success. Contrary to articles and studies published showing that

having children has an adverse effect on women's careers, these women do not cite their families as ever having an adverse affect on their work life (Lorber 1994; Gutek 1985; Stone and Hernandez 2013). In reflecting upon their experiences, they do not cite "mommy tracks" or company barriers as holding them back, but rather cast the blame unto themselves, but not in a negative light. The women with whom I spoke often put their families before their careers, but they do not feel as if they have been "held back" or forcibly constrained from attaining any higher-level positions; they simply did not desire moving up as they were happy where they were and had achieved a manageable equilibrium between work and family life.

The prioritization of domestic life may or may not be due to experiences within the workplace; however, it is almost certainly due to gender socialization (Jacobs and Gerson 2001, 2004; Bianchi et. al. 2000). On top of working more hours, wives continue to do more household work and contribute to domestic care more than husbands (Bianchi et. al. 2000). Women are offered maternity leave by companies when they have children, and fathers are not usually given paternity leave, thus reinforcing the traditional gender role stereotypes that women are the ones who are supposed to be at home taking care of the children, while men are supposed to be at work, being the primary money-earners. It would be unreasonable to expect a woman to give birth, get up, and go into work the next day. Extended paternity leave for fathers could normalize the male role in domesticity, taking away the stigma that domestic life is "a woman's thing." Furthermore, when women do use their maternity leave to care for their children, they may be penalized in the form of having their professionalism and commitment to the job questioned (Lorber 1994; Stone and Hernandez 2013).

The women in my study did not mention being openly penalized in any way, but instead mentioned deferring leadership in order to prioritize their duties to their families, a result of

socialization of gender roles as mentioned earlier. Extended time off for family care given to women and not to men normalizes the phenomena of women putting off work and career advancement in order to care for their children. Many of the women I interviewed were in the middle or advanced stages in their careers, suggesting they were middle aged, and thus grew up in a time period when having stay at home mothers was a norm, the primary breadwinner of the family being the father. Therefore, these women were socialized into a gender role value system that places women in the domestic sphere prioritizing family and men in the workforce prioritizing professionalism and career advancement.

Big Shoes to Fill: Fitting Into The Workplace

In the book, "Taking The Heat," Harris and Giuffre offer a look into a professional kitchen, a career that has been traditionally gender-segregated since its establishment (Harris and Giuffre 2015). Because of the military roots of the culinary arts, men have traditionally dominated this role, in the context of creating restaurants with their personal rules, visions for their food, and styles of cooking (Harris and Giuffre 2015). Though cooking for the household has been a task historically delegated to women, professional cooking takes on a different, more dominating role. As Harris and Giuffre (2015) explain, cooking in the home is a task meant to please others; to make food taste good and to care for and nourish others: the family (Harris and Guiffre 2015). However, being a professional chef, one is expected to dominate the kitchen, to be in charge of every single detail from the way the food is prepared to the way that it is served, to have a personal vision and style, and not to cater to customers, but to guide them (Harris and Guiffre 2015). Female chefs often face hazing, harassment and discrimination in the kitchen (Harris and Guiffre 2015). This traditional male-domination of culinary occupations has created a workplace

culture that manager assume is hard for females to fit into. The “rules” of this traditionally male-dominated domain have extended past just gender, but into gender stereotypes. Being a chef sometimes requires carrying or lifting heavy things; and it is often assumed that women will not be able to do so (Harris and Guiffre 2015). Being a chef also takes an emotional toll, as it is a high-pressure, intense job and many doubt that women have the emotional strength required to handle it (Harris and Guiffre 2015). As one “kitchen rule” given to women states: “There is no crying in the kitchen” (Harris and Guiffre 95). Some managers do not hire women because they assume women will not be able to fit into the workplace (Bobbitt Zeher 2011). Research on women chefs indicated that women were judged as unable to fit into all-men teams specifically because of their gender (Fine 1987).

Every workplace has a different atmosphere and culture that workers adapt to and fit into; the way a worker fits in may even be a part of the hiring process at some companies. At my workplace, the truck drivers and loader operators often engaged in casual conversation and joking to ease the stress of the workday and make the job a bit more fun. The men often used vulgar language and sometimes joked about women and made sexual jokes or comments; I had become a bit desensitized to it because I had worked there for over four years and I had come to accept it as just a part of the workplace culture. Their jokes did not offend me, as they were not directed at me or made to single me out. I just happened to be a woman in this male dominated workforce, and the culture of that workplace had been established long before I arrived. Much like the women chefs in “Taking the Heat,” I did not want to interrupt a previously established workplace culture, which happened to include these kinds of jokes and banter. In “Taking the Heat” professional female chefs rarely attribute mistreatment to sexism or misogyny on part of the male chefs; they accepted it as a part of a long-since established male-dominated kitchen

culture (Harris and Guiffre 2015). I did not want to speak out against the jokes because it would not only have violated a cultural norm of the workplace, but would have made the setting tense for the drivers and operators, myself included, if they felt they could no longer make jokes or that they had to walk on eggshells around me. Occasionally the jokes and teasing would target me as the drivers and operators teased each other playfully quite often. There was a noticeable difference in the ways I was teased as compared to the other males on the site. The jokes always had to do with my gender, and no one else was ever teased about their gender or about being a male.

On a day in July, as we were working with multiple trucking companies hauling in and shipping out various material, the truck drivers from the company that was hauling material in were talkative and friendly and they would joke around with the male loader operator whenever they came in on a round. I had the task of pushing the material they were bringing in into a pile and keeping it out of the road, as well as adding some to the topsoil mix that I was working on. When the truck drivers were coming in for their next round, one decided to bring me into the teasing: “Look at little Miss Barbie up here in her loader with her skinny jeans and flip flops! Man, she don’t belong up in that loader, she’s goin’ to the beach!” I didn’t respond right away, as the joke did not make much sense to me- I was very clearly wearing steel-toe boots and work jeans. The other male operator joined in, “Yeah, girls don’t belong in no loader, she’s a loader driver!” The term “loader driver” as opposed to loader operator is used in the operator’s world, as a joking/derogatory term for someone who is really bad at operating a loader/other piece of equipment. The correct term for someone who works with heavy equipment is “equipment operator,” not “driver.” I jumped in with a remark of my own: “It looks like I’m the only one doing any operating around here, since you two care more about my shoes than about your jobs!”

And I was quickly shot down with, “Ohhh, no don’t mess with her, must be that time of the month!” Another truck driver jumped in, “Man you don’t want to mess with that, my wife jumped on her menstrual cycle this morning and ran my ass over!” I rolled my eyes and continued back to work, which was my general reaction when it seemed that I could not “win” in the banter battle.

Often my daily tasks would include running a front-end loader to load topsoil or other material mixtures into a screening plant, which would then screen the material and deposit it onto a stacker belt, creating a pile (See photos in appendix B). Sometimes the stacker belt would get stuck because too much dirt would pile up at the front and make it too heavy, especially on rainy days. This required me to get out of the loader, shut everything down, and shovel off the belt until it would move again which could take hours depending on my ability to shut down the plant in time. One rainy day I was loading recycled paper material into a screener, and the stacker belt got stuck because there was too much material and it was too heavy. I stopped the plant and started shoveling. One of the other operators found out and came over to me, got out of his loader, and started to help me shovel, joking, “You’ll still be here digging tomorrow with those little girly arms!”

Occasionally, one of the male operators would clog the old screening plant and have to shut it down to dig it out. The other operators would tease him as they rode by, and sometimes the boss would even jump in on the fun banter, calling him a “plant clogger” or “stacker stopper” and everyone would laugh and joke about it for a few days. If I had to shut down the screener to shovel, I would also be at the brunt of the jokes, but I’d get called a “loader driver” and told that “she can’t drive a loader, she’s a girl!” or, “look what that girl did, clogging that screener!.” The jokes were usually directed at my gender, not just the fact that the screener had gotten clogged.

“I don’t know about these girl loader drivers, she’s holding up the work!” another operator joked. “Yeah see look what she did, these girls can’t operate no loaders!” The teasing directed at male operators was always related to the thing they had done, the action they performed to warrant the teasing, while teasing directed at me was aimed not at the action, but at my gender.

At the end of every day, loader maintenance, including fueling and greasing the machine, were mandatory, and were also the dirtiest parts of the job, especially if it had been raining. Between scraping all of the dirt and mud out of the loader bucket, climbing all over the machine and in between tires and between the loader bucket and body of the machine to reach all of the grease points, I would end up covered in mud, dirt, and grease, especially since the grease gun sometimes got stuck and exploded all over. The males found this hilarious and would tease me and point out how dirty I was every day when I was done greasing and cleaning up my machine:

“Jesus, look at you, you’re covered in dirt!”

“Are you sure you greased the loader and not just yourself?”

“You should’ve told me to come help you clean out your bucket, you wouldn’t have gotten so dirty!”

“Sure you don’t mind getting all that dirt in your fingernails?”

They all thought it was hilarious that I did not mind getting dirty, even as it was part of the job, because I am a woman, and they associate femininity with being clean, neat and pretty, not covered in grease and mud. They associated me with feminine stereotypes, which say that women do not like to get dirty or have dirt in their hair and fingernails, and so they would tease me about getting so messy every day, though they did the same thing themselves when it was their turn to grease and fuel their loaders.

Though teasing in the workplace was aimed at my gender, I still was a part of the banter that took place as a normal part of the workday. Had I spoken out against it or demanded that it stop,

I would not only be violating a workplace norm, I would also be excluding myself from the "fun" of the workplace environment that included the teasing and banter. I let the teasing and jokes go as they did not really offend me and I understood they were only meant as jokes, though I did notice the difference between the way the operators joked with each other and the ways they joked with me in the context of gender. But for me, there was a choice and, either way, it had consequences for my gender role or my job. I could either assimilate and fit into the workplace by perpetuating the norm of joking and fun banter, even if my gender was poked fun at, or I could be excluded from this area of the workplace entirely based on my gender if I spoke up.

The women I interviewed all had different experiences with fitting in at work in their male dominated fields. Some describe being left out of the "men's club" in their workplace, similar to the one to which I assimilated.

The president of an accounting firm explains:

> *I do not golf…golf is the new strip club…way back when man used to go to strip clubs to deter women from hanging out with them, but more progressive women started going to and decided it was not a big deal, and now many men network and socialize over games of golf, as many women do not play. As for fitting in at work in general, I am emotional by nature and always have been. I have had to learn to control that aspect of my personality because I do not want to be a boss that flies off the handle or is perceived as being bitchy.*

An engineer had a similar experience to mine, as she told me, "I have transitioned into many new roles and you always feel like an outsider at first. Finding people to help you assimilate and making an effort to humble yourself and learn about the culture of the workplace along with the people and business helps to break down barriers whether they are gender based or otherwise."

An engineer explains a situation similar to that of the accounting firm president:

> *There is an underlying sentiment that if you do not like golf or professional sports, so as to do or talk about these things with clients or the work team, you will be unsuccessful. I do not enjoy these things, and being an engineer in the environmental field I think golf courses are highly unethical from that standpoint, not to mention that it is an activity that has been dominated for years by wealthy old white men.*

She continues:

"I quite often find that I feel left out in the workplace. Not in terms of opportunity or career advancement, but I feel like I definitely do not belong to the "guys" buddy-buddy, beer drinking hangout group."

One engineer mentions company policy as a way of forcing inclusion in the workplace: "We have had a huge diversity push at my company in the last 15 years so everyone is super sensitive to appearing to be inclusive. Sometimes you wonder if it is a show or if it's real, which can breed anxiety, but you either confront it, stress about it, or move on and get over it."

A woman who works in construction and engineering answered:

> *My first assignment was difficult. I believe many people did not know they were not being inclusive and were excluding others, and there was no way to say something or fix it without hurting someone. I maintained a positive attitude, did my best and expressed interest in everything. When I could, I got out of that group and started a new career with ample opportunity, and found that people in construction and manufacturing/power plant settings seemed to be able to create a much more inclusive work environment.*

Another construction worker adds:

> *In my career I have worked around drillers and construction workers in some pretty adverse conditions, and if I was ever treated differently it was more of a protective way, like a sister. I didn't feel excluded because of it, but I was appreciative and tried to look out for everyone else in the same way.*

Both my experience and the experiences of my respondents illustrate the exclusivity that often accompanies working in a male-dominated working environment. It is one of the many challenges women in male-dominated occupations often face, and both my respondents and I adapted and dealt with it in our own ways, as illustrated above.

Rising Above

Some women mentioned the challenge of overcoming the gender boundaries in the workplace. One woman stated, “I am not manly at all, and cannot “act like a man.” I am confident and upbeat, gracious and professional, and express those qualities in my leadership.”

An engineer mentions:

> *I have been told that I need to be more assertive, which I think is BS. I am not assertive, and not aggressive, but I manage to do a good job, not piss people off, and stay true to my nature. I do not let people walk all over me but I believe anyone who is overly aggressive, whether it be a woman or a man, is not going to get any better treatment or more respect. The opposite usually happens, in my experience. Of course, I have heard the saying that an aggressive woman is a bitch but an aggressive man is successful. I think I have grown from the experience; I have learned that sometimes restraint is better than confrontation and that not everyone is always going to agree but we can still work together and get a job done. I hope that the people I worked with have accepted women in the workplace a little more because of having worked with me.*

Another woman had a similar experience and tells me:

> *The expectations for women to act and be certain ways are more annoying than anything else. In the workplace I am apparently supposed to play with the big boys, but not act like one, so they can be aggressive or use foul language, but I have a different set of rules to abide by because of my gender. However, every workplace has a culture, and it is impossible for a company to adapt to every employee’s personality, so for one to be successful, you have to adjust a bit and fit in somehow.*

"I have been told that I shouldn't be "too girly," like I shouldn't act girly and wear girly things because then I may receive unwanted comments from men," replied a geologist.

A woman in the construction industry explains;

> *I've been told to be friendlier and smile more. I think I am perceived as overly ambitious and by association, overly aggressive. But the men at work are ambitious and aggressive as well. I am a naturally very determined person, and my industry requires that if you want to do well and be successful, so I have not had to change myself to fit in.*

The women I interviewed experienced some similar situations as I did, but the workplace culture varies depending on the company. The women I spoke with described instances where, like me, they had tried to fit in, but did not quite fit into the "man's club," as many of the men they worked with were into golf and sports, and they were not. They also described trying to assimilate into their workplace as I did, but they were met with opposition, not in the form of teasing like I was, but in the form of being told they should be more/less aggressive. If they were "too feminine," they were not aggressive enough, but if they "acted like a man" in an attempt to assimilate, they were told they were being too aggressive or were perceived as "bitchy." Studies published show that women often face this dilemma at work (Lorber 1994; Sandler 1999). Women who act as "conceptual men" may pay a price in the form of criticism from colleagues and others because of their perceived lack of femininity (Pierce 1995; Roth 2004). It has been said that women often "act like men" when in an environment dominated by males in order to be perceived as good workers (Bell 1990). Ely (1995) also found that it was problematic for women in male dominated law firms to act too much like men, as it hinders their ability to view those women as sexual creatures.

In "Taking the Heat" the frustration of women trying to find an effective leadership style in the midst of this double standard is evident. Respondents explain that men can "do what they

want" but when women are "too aggressive" to "too bossy" they are often disregarded and brushed off as being "bitchy" (Harris and Guiffre 2015). However, if women are not aggressive enough or do not have an assertive enough leadership style, they are wrote off as being "too nice," or as "not having what it takes" to do the job of a chef (Harris and Guiffre 2015). Women who try to adopt a masculine leadership style are wrote off as bitches who are "trying to act like a man," yet if women adhere too strictly to traditional gender roles, they are seen as unfit to work in a professional environment, much less lead one (Harris and Guiffre 131).

Many of the women I spoke to seemed confident in their ability to adapt and in their natural personality traits that made them fit into their workplaces, and for many, the contradiction between feminine and masculine did not seem to be so much an internal debate and struggle in the workplace as it was a casual annoyance. My assimilation dilemma was a bit different as it was not "too feminine" vs. "too manly," but rather a toss-up between being left out of the workplace banter because I am a woman, or being included in it, but being included in a separate way based on my gender.

Release The Floodgates

Throughout my interviews, many women I interviewed told me some surprising things that they had experienced. These occurrences were not only surprising because of what had taken place, but I was surprised that the women, whom I had never met or spoken to before, had so readily told me about these personal experiences, enthusiastically answering my questions. This theme in responses prompted me to create a category for these types of answers; perhaps these women want to talk about these experiences and issues, but no one has ever asked.

The president of the accounting firm readily answered my questions about experiences with sexual harassment in the workplace. “This does not happen to me in my office so much as it does at conferences and networking events. I had one guy take his wedding ring off as I was talking to him!” she said. “People in my industry can be really sexist because it is a male dominated industry,” she continued, “I had a man grab my leg under the table at a dinner recently. That made me really angry,” she said.

“That’s unbelievable,” I responded. “Did you react when he grabbed your leg?”

“I just scooted out of range, and I was shocked, so I didn’t say anything. He was much older than I and was also a fellow firm owner. I lost all respect for him after that.”

A construction worker told me, “I have been in the industry for 25 years and have heard many sexist comments and sexual innuendos. Many people thought my advancement was due to my gender, that some corporate board member was just trying to fill a diversity requirement by promoting me just because I am a woman.”

A fire protection architect answered, “Very few women do what I do. I have had many men whom I have never met try to call me “sweetie” or pet names like that. They tend to ask if they can help me, because they don’t think I can do tasks by myself. Others express disbelief when they learn what field I am in.”

An engineer told me, “I have not personally experienced sexual harassment, but I have been very surprised to see men gawking at ladies who have anatomy that cannot be hidden under baggy clothes or workplace uniforms.”

When I asked the questions about workplace harassment and discrimination as I was sitting in the office of the mathematician, she stood from her chair and quietly closed the door before answering. “I have had someone outright say, “I do not believe in women’s rights,” she told me.

She continued,

> *I was also in a meeting where they were putting together a faculty committee, and needed another member. One of the men said, "You're younger and you're a woman, you should do it!" I said no. I don't think women should take on more work or be put into positions simply because they are women; they should have it because they want to or because they choose to.*

I was impressed by and appreciative of the willingness of these women to talk about issues that have affected them in the workplace and also found it intriguing that they so readily came forward with this information to someone who is essentially a stranger. This pattern suggests to me a readiness and willingness to speak about these experiences and issues, but a void of a space or time available for these women to do so. Perhaps it is assumed that these issues have died out, and therefore no one ever asks about them. It is also possible that as a way to combat these issues, women take ownership of them, and openly discuss and share them when asked, instead of being bashful or hiding them.

I have had similar experiences that have been detailed in this paper; I share my own experiences with the readers of this paper, like the women who I interviewed shared with me, and consequently, with the readers as well.

Surprise! This Construction Man is a *She*!

None of the women I interviewed said that they took any steps to hide or disguise their careers from the view of general society, and many of them expressed their satisfaction with reactions they had received from people outside of their place of work. Friends, family and casual acquaintances all appear to be very accepting of these women's careers in male dominated fields. An engineer, who holds degrees in both engineering and geology, explained:

> *I have worked using both my degrees, and generally people are more interested in geology, but in a positive way, I think because that is not as common as engineering. People show their interest by asking questions, such as how I got into the field, or expressing their support and encouragement.*

"People are generally not terribly interested in my career. They know I work at a power company in the construction industry, but they generally do not have much to say about it. I usually get comments such as, "Wow! You don't look like you work somewhere that requires a hard hat and safety vest!" said the construction worker.

A geologist explained,

> *When people ask what I do I tell them and they always say "wow," and tell me how cool of a job I have. My family is proud that I have a degree in science, and my niece pursued a geology degree after she interviewed me for a high school project that required her to interview different people. Most people ask lots of questions and say their friend/loved one took a geology course in college and loved it, or they tell me they have some special rock. I have never had negative comments about my career choice. One difficult person asked me if my job was to "rape the planet" to which I responded that it was my job to protect it.*

An engineer responded:

> *People outside of work are generally impressed with my career and my ability to compete with men. The fact that I'm an engineer automatically associates me with intelligence, and then when they realize that I manage and direct a staff made up mostly of men they realize that I am not intimidated by much.*

These responses contradict the misconception that many people have that women who work in male dominated careers face backlash from society or are subject to negative comments when they reveal what it is that they do as a career. This also shows an opportunity for women; they are breaking a social norm, and being met with positive social sanctions instead of negative ones. Perhaps these responses indicate a changing generation, where it is more socially acceptable not

only for a woman to be working, but for a woman to be working in a typically male dominated career, stereotypically associated with masculinity.

Pretty, Pretty Princess: Dress Up Loader Operator!

One of the recurring themes I noticed while working as a heavy equipment operator took place not on my job site, but outside of the workplace, while I was still in my work clothing, or while talking about what my job was and what I did. It was not uncommon for me to be stopped as I was getting my breakfast from a convenience store in the morning: "Headed to work? What do you do?" as it was quite unusual for a woman my age to be dressed in steel toe boots, a greasy, torn pair of jeans and an equally grease stained t-shirt, a 5:00 a.m. on a summer morning.

I would usually stop at Wawa for breakfast in the mornings; my days started as early at four or five a.m. I would go to get a muffin, doughnut, or something to snack on throughout the morning. On several occasions I would run into other men, usually in the same industry, as construction workers, truck drivers and equipment operators all start their days fairly early in the morning. On one occasion, I was getting a muffin and this man, wearing a neon yellow sweatshirt stained with dirt and grease, torn up jeans and boots looked at me and asked me, "Where are you headed this time of morning?" I told him that I was going to work and he asked where I worked. I responded that I worked at the dirt quarry down the road as a heavy equipment operator. "Wow. I wouldn't expect someone so small to be able to do all that," he said. "Do you like doing that?" he asked, never acknowledging that I was an operator. "I really like it," I told him. He responded with surprise, "Wow, well I'd think someone like you would be happier in an office or a kitchen or, whatever, don't have to mess up your pretty little hands." I remember the comments made me angry. He didn't even know my name and had only just met me, but

automatically assumed that I would be happier in a kitchen or office, based solely on my gender and the way I look.

On an overnight camp stay with my Boy Scout troop for which I was the Scoutmaster, I was talking with the man who was running the archery range. He was a middle-aged white man, and when the topic of work came up I told him that I had operated heavy equipment. He was quick to reply with surprise, “With those dainty little hands!?” The comment made me laugh, as you do not need large hands to operate heavy equipment; in fact, they might be a hindrance. But his calling my hands “dainty” meaning “small and pretty” implied that someone who has small and pretty features or who embodies the “small and pretty” appearance, would not be able to operate heavy equipment, or should not be operating heavy equipment. As operators are dominantly male and men are not defined as being small or pretty in their traditional gender role definitions, a small and pretty female, or someone with small delicate hands, is someone who is seen as perhaps unfit to be performing such a “manly” task.

On another occasion, in the same store where I usually stopped for breakfast, I was in line waiting to pay for my items and the man in line behind me asked, “so, where are you headed this early in the morning?” and I told him that I was going to work, and he asked me where I worked. I told him that I worked as a heavy equipment operator down the road and he replied with surprise, “Wait, you’re too pretty to know how to do all that.” First, he disregarded my job title, and refused to acknowledge that I, a woman, could be an operator. Second, he gave me a compliment, but it was a thinly veiled disguise of his disregard for my position. This was confusing and backhanded, because it was a sentiment of disapproval for the job I held and a total disregard of my position as an operator, but also carefully costumed as a compliment because he slipped the word “pretty” into it to describe my looks. I really wasn’t sure how to

respond to him, so I laughed it off and silently thanked the other cashier for coming up to the counter and opening another register so I could get away from this man and get to work.

While out on a date with a male in his 20s, we discussed work and I described my summer job to him. I told him that I operate equipment and he responded with surprise. He stammered for a minutes and could not really seem to come up with anything to say. Eventually he said, “So they let women do that now?” I told him that yes, they do. There is no requirement to have a penis to operate a loader. I ended the date rather quickly after he also made racist and homophobic remarks.

I was also casually talking to another man, in his 20s through the social media app, Tinder. He asked what I did for work one day while we were chatting and I told him that I operate equipment. He did not respond for some time, but when he did he responded with sexist remarks. “No way! I think you’d be happier in the kitchen making me a sandwich, babe!” he said. I got angry and blocked him without responding. This response demonstrates a disapproval of my active breaching of gender lines and defying gender role stereotypes. He responded by telling me where “I should be” as a woman and assigning me a stereotypical place that conforms to traditional gender roles: a kitchen.

I had a variety of interactions with different men on this dating app, and many of them did not disapprove of my job, but rather sexualized it. I chatted with one who, when I told him what I did, said, “Wow, a woman like you doing that stuff, that’s so hot!”

I was chatting with yet another young man and when I told him I was at work, he asked what I did. I replied, ‘I operate heavy equipment.” And he responded, “I love a girl who isn’t afraid to get a little dirty.”

On my way into work another morning, I was in Wawa getting breakfast and a man wearing jeans and work boots and a greasy sweatshirt approached me. He asked the typical questions, "Where are you headed this early in the morning?" and "where do you work?" and when I told him that I operate heavy equipment at the site down the road he responded, "Oh wow, well you don't see too many females doing that sort of thing." I laughed it off and just said, "Yeah, I like it, it's a good set of skills to have." As we waited in line to pay he asked, "so you from around here?" I replied, "I am, but I'm just home from college for the summer so I won't be here for long." After we paid and as we made our way to the parking lot, he stopped. "Wait a sec," he said. He pulled a business card out of his wallet and handed it to me. "That's my number on there. Take that and call me anytime you wanna hang out. You know me and the boys do bonfires and stuff, no stupid shit, don't get too crazy but we like to have a good time." I took the card, silently never intending to use it, thanked him ad went to work. He was in his late 30s or 40s and the idea of "hanging out" with someone that much older than I was made me uncomfortable. These responses demonstrate thinly veiled disapproval for my status as an operator, but instead of outward disapproval, it is disguised in the form of compliments. These men did not outwardly tell me they disapproved or that I should be doing something else, instead they undermined my position and status as an equipment operator by equating my position to something sexual. They then could still see me as a sexual being, and I was therefore still conforming to traditional gender roles because I was seen as a "sexy operator" and not a real operator.

On another morning, in the same Wawa, I was by the bakery case trying to decide what I wanted to eat. Another man came up and opened the door to the case. He was wearing jeans, greasy boots and a black sweatshirt and was balding with a black goatee. He stood slightly

shorter than I did and he was in his late 30s. He turned to me and said, “I’m sorry, excuse me” I replied, “it’s okay, I was deciding what I want.” He replied with a laugh, “I don’t know what I want, that’s my problem!” his joke had a sexual undertone to it that I might not have noticed if it weren’t for the wink he threw me. I laughed, but I was slightly uncomfortable and I let him pick out his breakfast and move on before opening the door to the case and getting a muffin. He asked what I did, and I answered him, “I operate heavy equipment.”

When I got in line to pay, they only had one checkout lane open, and the man as right in front of me. When it came his turn to pay, he turned to me and said to the cashier, “I’m getting her stuff too.” And I politely refused, “Thank you, but you really don’t have to do that, I don’t even know your name.” I said. “Come on hun, it’s a gesture!” he insisted. I politely refused again, “Thank you, I appreciate it, but I really don’t even know you, you don’t have to pay for me.” I felt my cheeks burning red and I was becoming very uncomfortable as the cashier, an older woman with grey hair pulled back and glasses, just watched and said nothing. The man paid for his food and left, shoving open the doors with much more force than necessary. The woman at the counter said, “It was a nice gesture, but you know you can never be too careful and I understand that.” I simply nodded, paid for my breakfast and left, only to find that the man was parked right next to my car in the parking lot. He slammed his car door shut as I opened mine and climbed into my car fast, wanting nothing more than to get out of there as soon as possible. It may have been that because I was dressed for work and because I worked in the construction industry he saw me as “sexy,” as many other men did when they saw the way I was dressed and learned what my job was. When I did not accept his acknowledgement of my “sexiness” he became angry and stormed out of the store, because I had just invalidated his status as a man in that situation by refusing to accept his “gesture,” or nod to my desirability.

As I was transitioning from this summer job into college, and getting to know people on campus, I felt myself faced with more disapproval from my peers. I was talking to a few of the women who would be starting college with me, and one, who was raised in an upper-class neighborhood in New York and who worked at a retail store, could not understand why I worked where I did. “So where did you work this summer?” she asked. “I operated heavy equipment.” “What’s that?” she responded. “It’s mainly a custom soil blending company that ships and receives material product for large commercial business and government projects, and I run some of the equipment on site such as a loader and excavator.” I replied.

“Ew! Why can’t you work at a normal job, like, in a store or something?” she responded.

“There aren’t many stores near me, this job is close and pays a lot more than I would make just working at a store.” I replied.

“Still,” she said, “Like, nobody does that.”

I let the conversation end and chalked up her rude responses to her lack of understanding. Not everyone grows up in areas where jobs like “heavy equipment operator” and “truck driver” are common.

Another woman in the construction industry explained, “I have gotten comments such as, “Wow, that is so amazing!” and asked questions like, ’How do you manage to do that?’ which bothers me because I know that they would not be asking those things if I were a man.”

Some women I interviewed also mentioned receiving comments such as these. An engineer told me, “I am often met with a general sense of shock because I am an engineer, and that is not something that people often expect a woman to be doing. It is irksome because that is a sexist assumption that “men do these jobs and women do not.”

“I have had dates accuse me of “acting like a man” because I am confident and not easily led on. My family, however, is proud of what I do,” explained a woman in the construction industry.

When I was not met with outright surprise or disapproval of my job, I was met with what became a recurring theme of coded sexism. The invitations to “hang out,” the compliments, kind gestures, and pet names all followed my revealing what I did for a living. Because I am a woman, and have qualities associated with femininity, men could not understand how I could be working in such a masculine job. They disguised their disapproval as compliments and sexualization of my position, but still stripped the title of my career from me, never referring to what I did as “operating” but rather as “that” or “that stuff.” They separated my job from me, and effectively refused to believe that someone who had feminine qualities could perform such tasks. It’s a subtle way of undermining my position and refusing to acknowledge that a woman is working in a field like equipment operation, and holds the title of “equipment operator,” a title a man would typically hold. Instead of outright displaying dismay or disapproval, or suggesting a career associated with femininity as some men did, when they suggested I would be happier in a kitchen or office, many men made my job into a game of dress up. They sexualized my role, and constructed it so that I was not really a heavy equipment operator, but rather a separate feminine entity, dressing up like an operator and playing a sexy little game, because they could not accept that someone who appeared to be so traditionally feminine could also perform duties that have long been associated with masculinity.

The women I interviewed experienced similar comments, questions and a sense of surprise from people outside their workplaces. These instances help to illustrate the theme that men do not expect women to be partaking in masculine roles, and when they do they cannot take it

seriously, even when their disapproval is disguised as a compliment such as, “wow, that is so amazing, you’re a woman doing all of that!”

Results and Discussion

Contrary to previous research suggesting that women feel powerless in male dominated workforces, women I interviewed confidently asserted themselves, or said that they would if faced with a harassment or discrimination situation in the workplace. The women who I spoke to confidently defined their “lines in the sand” of where the jokes end and harassment begins. Some even took matters into their own hands and spoke directly to the offender if a problematic action occurred at work. They are effectively reflexive, and are able to confidently draw their own lines and personal boundaries when it comes to harassment in the workplace. They are also able to handle problems effectively with various methods of confrontation: either by confronting the offender themselves or relying on company policies to address the issues. The women I spoke to that did not speak up when incidents of inappropriate behavior or harassment occurred expressed their desire and intent to do so in the future, either using their own voices or by relying on company policies to assist them in handling matters. The women did not cite fear or powerlessness as their reason for not speaking up, but rather in reflecting upon their experiences, expressed a desire to be able to speak up in the future. This pattern suggests women are not simply sticking to the status quo of male dominance and power in the workplace, but are willing to speak up to change it or defend themselves when questionable incidents occur. These results are not flawless, and social desirability bias, the tendency of interview respondents to give answers that they think the interviewer wants to hear, cannot be ignored as a possibility for generating such an overwhelmingly positive response. It is a possibility that these women

thought I would have wanted them to be assertive and stand up for themselves as a fellow woman in a male dominated industry, and thus responded in such ways to make themselves seem more likable, as humans have a tendency to do when we are being interviewed.

In opposition to previous research, women I interviewed for this study said that they had the opportunity to advance in their careers and were given guidance or were able to advance when they wanted to, even in male dominated fields. Some women felt that they were given more guidance and as a researcher I cannot make the assumption that the "extra guidance" was not due to a gender bias. However, the women interviewed said that they did not feel as if they were "on probation" or being watched or coddled in their careers or paths of advancement.

Experiences in my own field, however, were different. Like the women I interviewed, I did feel as if I received more guidance. However, I did not feel as though it was helpful guidance; it was condescending and made me feel as if my coworkers did not take me seriously, even though some of them had been working there for a shorter period than I had. Similar to the women whom I interviewed, I did not feel as if I had been on probation, yet, I did feel the need to work hard and prove to myself more than anyone that I was just as much of an operator as any of the males that worked with me. This internal sense of probation or measuring up may have stemmed from the "extra guidance" or as I liked to call it, "mansplaining," a condescending type of help given without request, because the males in the workplace assumed my gender deprived me of the skills I needed to succeed. It is entirely possible that the opportunities for advancement were available to the women in my study because of the more recent encouragement for women to be involved in the STEM fields, and because of diversity policies being implemented by companies who recognize gender discrimination or bias. I cannot surely say that the glass ceiling is

disappearing anytime soon, but the responses of women in my study who cite hard work and dedication as leading them to careers they have always wanted could be promising.

Women in various industries discuss the challenges of balancing both work and family, and some cite their husbands as being big contributors in the domestic setting, a factor to which they contribute some of their career success. Contrary to articles and studies published showing that having children has an adverse effect on women's careers, these women do not cite their families as ever having an adverse effect on their work life. In reflecting upon their experiences, they do not cite "mommy tracks" or company barriers as holding them back, but rather cast the blame unto themselves, but not in a negative light. The women with whom I spoke often put their families before their careers, but they do not feel as if they have been "held back" or forcibly constrained from attaining any higher-level positions; they simply did not desire moving up as they were happy where they were and had achieved a manageable equilibrium between work and family life.

The majority of women whom I interviewed said that they had plenty of opportunities to advance in their careers, but chose not to for their own reasons, one of them being their family and personal lives. It is possible that without husbands and children, these women could have advanced to the tops of their fields, and the families could be cited as a roadblock to their careers in that aspect. However, I cannot assume that the women would have taken that path, as many cited other reasons for not advancing, such as lack of fieldwork; they did not want to sit in an office and do paperwork all day, which is why they entered their field in the first place. While it is possible that their families were detrimental to their careers in some ways, those effects seemed more individually than systematically imposed in this study.

Though teasing in the workplace was aimed at my gender, I still was a part of the banter that took place as a normal part of the workday. Had I spoken out against it or demanded that it stop, I would not only be violating a workplace norm, I would also be excluding myself from the "fun" of the workplace environment that included the teasing and banter. I let the teasing and jokes go, as they did not really offend me, though I did notice the difference between the way the operators joked with each other and the ways they joked with me in the context of gender. But for me, there was a choice and either way it had to do with gender. I could either assimilate and fit into the workplace by perpetuating the norm of joking and fun banter, even if my gender was the butt of every joke aimed at me. Or, I could be excluded from this area of the workplace entirely, based only my gender, if I spoke up; no one would want to joke with me anymore because of my gender, and I would thus be left out and excluded in the workplace because I am a woman. The women I interviewed experienced some similar situations as I did, but the workplace culture varies depending on the company. The women I spoke with described instances where, like me, they had tried to fit in, but did not quite fit into the "man's club," as many of the men they worked with were into golf and sports, and they were not. They also described trying to assimilate into their workplace as I did, but they were met with opposition, not in the form of teasing like I was, but in the form of being told they should be more/less aggressive. If they were "too feminine," they were not aggressive enough, but if they "acted like a man" in an attempt to assimilate, they were told they were being too aggressive or were perceived as "bitchy." Many of the women described being perceived as "bitchy" or "being a bitch." In literal terms, "bitch" refers to a female dog in heat, but when used in this context, refers to a woman who has overstepped gender boundaries. When men overstep gender boundaries, they are not referred to by a derogatory name, but instead, their sexuality is often

called into question. Many of the women I spoke to seemed confident in their workplace identities, and for many, the contradiction between feminine and masculine did not seem to be so much an internal debate and struggle in the workplace as it was a casual annoyance. My assimilation dilemma was a bit different as it was not “too feminine” vs. “too manly,” but rather a toss-up between being left out of the workplace banter because I am a woman, or being included in it, but being included in a separate way based on my gender.

I was impressed by and appreciative of the willingness of these women to talk about issues that have affected them in the workplace and also found it intriguing that they so readily came forward with this information to someone who is essentially a stranger. This pattern suggests to me a readiness and willingness to speak about these experiences and issues, but a void of a space or time available for these women to do so. Perhaps it is assumed that these issues have died out, and therefore no one ever asks about them. It is also possible that as a way to combat these issues, women take ownership of them, and openly discuss and share them when asked, instead of being bashful or hiding them. I was surprised, but also grateful, that women were so willing to talk about issues that had affected them at work with someone who was virtually a stranger. This pattern suggests a want or even a need for women to speak about these issues, but a lack of anyone having ever asked. I also cannot rule out the possibility of social desirability bias again; it is possible that women opened up to me readily because they wanted to develop a rapport and feel well liked and respected.

Many women who I spoke to revealed that they receive not negative, but positive comments when they reveal that they work in male dominated workplaces. At one time, it was unheard of for a woman to be working in a “mans’ job.” This also shows an opportunity for women; they are breaking what has become a social norm and being met with positive social sanctions instead

of negative ones. Perhaps these responses indicate a changing generation, where it is more socially acceptable not only for a woman to be working, but for a woman to be working in a typically male dominated career, stereotypically associated with masculinity. While bias and gender discrimination has not disappeared in the workplace and these factors are still important to take into account, this area could benefit from further research and a larger more generalizable sample to ascertain the social sanctions women face for working in male dominated fields.

When I was not met with outright surprise or disapproval of my job, I was met with what became a recurring theme of covert sexism. The invitations to "hang out," the compliments, kind gestures, and pet names all followed my revealing what I did for a living. Because I am a woman and have physical qualities associated with traditional femininity, men could not understand how I could be working in such a masculine job. They disguised their disapproval as compliments and sexualized my position and stripped the title of my career from me, never referring to what I did as "operating" but rather as "that" or "that stuff." They separated my job from me, and effectively refused to believe that someone who had feminine qualities could perform such tasks. This is a subtle way of undermining my position and refusing to acknowledge that a woman is working in a field such as equipment operation, and holds the title of "equipment operator," a title a man would typically hold. Instead of outright displaying dismay or disapproval, or suggesting a career associated with femininity, when some men suggested I would be happier in a kitchen or office, many men made my job into a game of "dress up." They sexualized my role, and constructed it so that I was not really a heavy equipment operator, but rather a separate feminine entity, dressing up like an operator and playing a sexy little game because they could not accept that someone who appeared to be so traditionally feminine could also perform duties that have long been associated with masculinity. Like a dominatrix, I was seen as sporting the

symbols of physical power, but ultimately interested in the gratification of a man. The women I interviewed experienced similar comments, questions and a sense of surprise from people outside their workplaces. These instances help to illustrate the theme that men do not expect women to be partaking in masculine roles, and when they do they cannot take it seriously, even when their disapproval is disguised as a compliment such as, "Wow, that is so amazing, you're a woman doing all of that!" These results are not without limitations and must be investigated from an objective standpoint, and it is possible that the compliments from men were genuine and did not have anything do with my career as a heavy equipment operator. However, it would be oddly coincidental for the comments and gestures to all have happened *after* I revealed the field in which I worked.

Conclusion

During the course of this study, I found many themes that provided valuable insight into the challenges women face in male dominated workforces. The evidence in articles that suggested marriage and childbirth created systematic roadblocks for women's careers was not supported by interview responses (Lorber 1994; Stone and Hernandez 2013). Participants cited personal desires to deny advancement in their careers, or said that they did not want to advance because they would be taken out of the fieldwork, which was why they went into their respective fields in the first place. My hypothesis that women in male dominated workforces will stand up or speak out against harassment or discriminatory practices in the workplace was supported. Many women in my study confidently stated that they had or would stand up or speak out against harassment, some even said they have or would speak to an offender directly about the problem. My hypothesis that there is still a lack of acceptance in general society for a woman working in a

male dominated workforce was not supported by interview responses. Many of the women whom I interviewed cited positive responses and positive social sanctions when they revealed they work in a male dominated workforce. However, my own experiences showed a different type of disapproval: disapproval masked by compliments as a way of separating a masculine career from someone who embodies femininity, and thus still not accepting that someone who has feminine attributes could perform a masculine role or success in a career traditionally associated with masculinity. My hypothesis that women who work in male dominated workforces will have assimilated to the workplace enough so that they are not powerless and are in a position to speak up should they feel the need was supported. Many women described themselves as being confident, determined and assertive, and were confident in knowing their limitations on how far jokes could go before they crossed those lines. This study could be made more generalizable by expanding the sample size and region; both for a bigger sample size leading to greater generalizability, but also for a more varied population of women who work at different levels in different male dominated fields. This study could be improved by being expanded to better explore the themes suggested here, which may suggest some sociological changes concerning gender and the workforce.

The current study adds to the pre-existing literature by exploring themes of societal response to women who work in male-dominated fields, the effect of family on women who work in male-dominated fields, and womens' confidence in standing up for themselves in male-dominated workplaces. In general, the hypotheses were supported as demonstrated by ethnographic data and interview responses.

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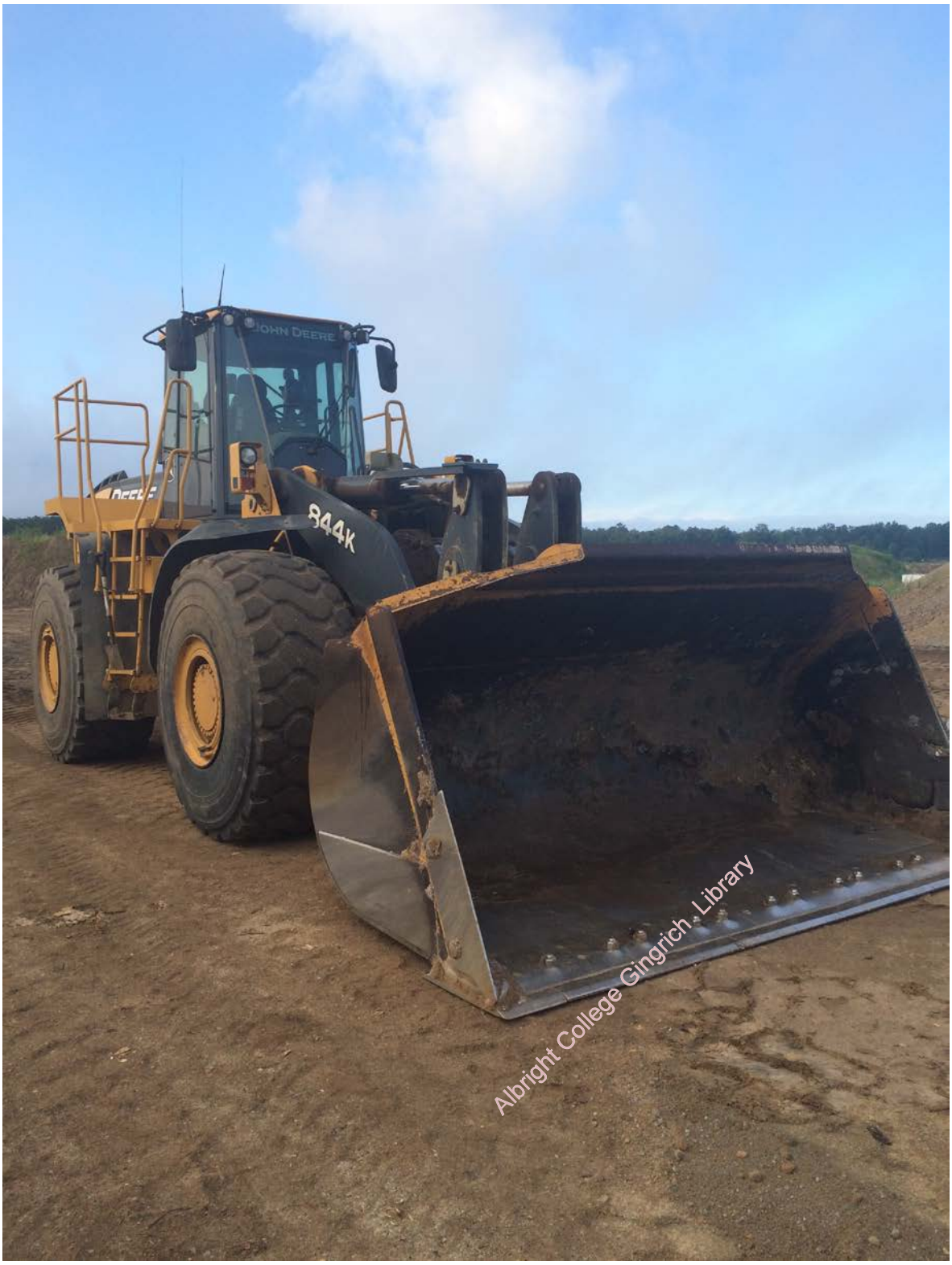
Appendix A: Interview Guide

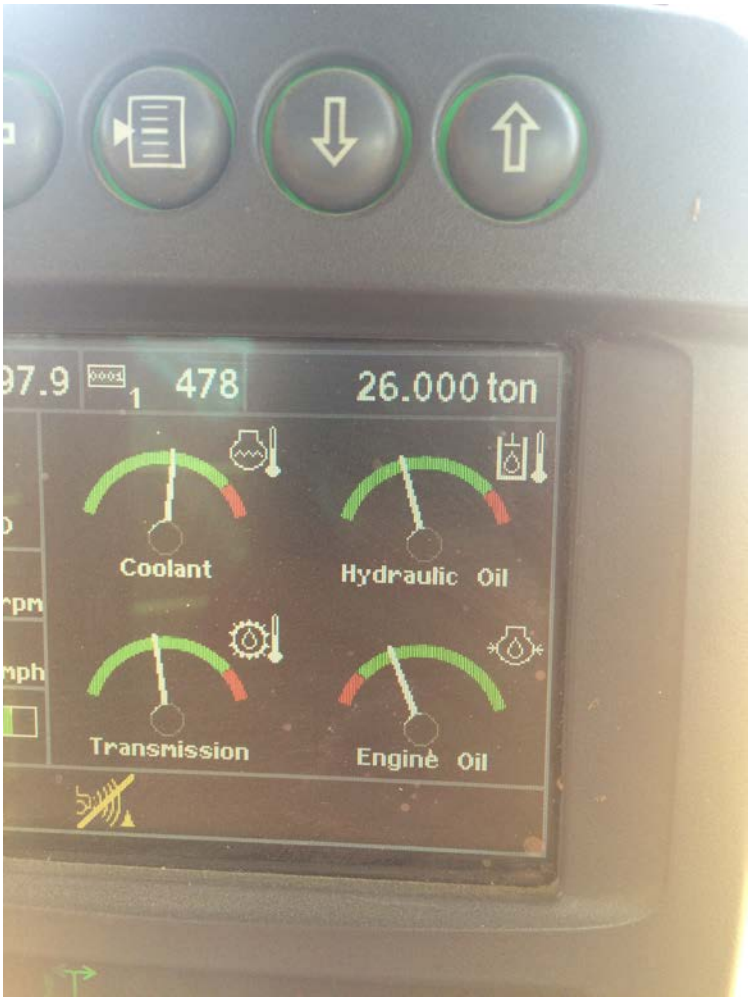
1. What comments have you received from men or women on the job? Were they good or bad?
2. What comments have you received from men/women outside of the workplace? (On a date, within your family, friends, casual encounters, etc.) Were they good or bad?
3. How do you feel about your career?
4. How do you think people see you because of your career? Does it ever cause you any trouble in your personal life?
5. Do you ever take any steps to hide what you do?
6. How do you draw the line between actual harassment and simple comments or jokes? Is this something that you have struggled with/found it difficult to determine?
7. How did you get into your field? Was it something you had always wanted to do?
8. Have you ever left a job or deferred an opportunity because of harassment/jokes/comments?
9. Have you ever felt excluded/left out in the workplace? If so, how did this occur and what were the consequences?
10. Have you ever felt like you were getting advantages based on you being a woman?
11. Are there times that you were not sure if you were being treated differently or not? If so, how did you make a determination of how to respond? What did it feel like not to know for sure? What did you ultimately do?
12. Is it or was it difficult to advance in your career? Do you feel this is because of the nature of the job, or because of gender discrimination?
13. Have you ever attempted to report or talk to someone about harassment or jokes/comments being made? What happened?
14. What did you do or say in response to any of these incidents? How effective do you think your responses were? Why or why not? Would you do something different if you could do it over again? If so, what and why?
15. Have you ever felt like these issues were simply brushed off or ignored? (Or that they should not be talked about? I was often told "that's just how the guys are")
16. Have you ever been put in a position of leadership at your job and found that you were "on probation"? (Being monitored to see if you could handle the job/if your position as a leader was valid)
17. Have you found yourself being discouraged from moving into a position of authority? Have you ever felt as though male co-workers receive more guidance and you feel left on your own?
18. Do you have a child/children?
19. Do you feel as though having a child would have/has had an adverse affect on your career? How?
20. Have you ever felt or been told that you should act a certain way in the workplace? (ex; being told that "you're being too manly" "you're too aggressive" "you should smile more")
22. Have you ever felt the need to "fit in" at work or to change your attitude or actions to better fit into the workplace?
23. Do you feel that you have had to change some aspects of who you are in order to better succeed in your workplace?
24. Have you ever felt or been told that your position has been sexualized because of your gender (For example, when I was operating equipment, I would go to get breakfast before work every morning, and men in line at the store would try to pay for my food or get my number because "a girl operator, that's hot")

Appendix B: Photos for Reference

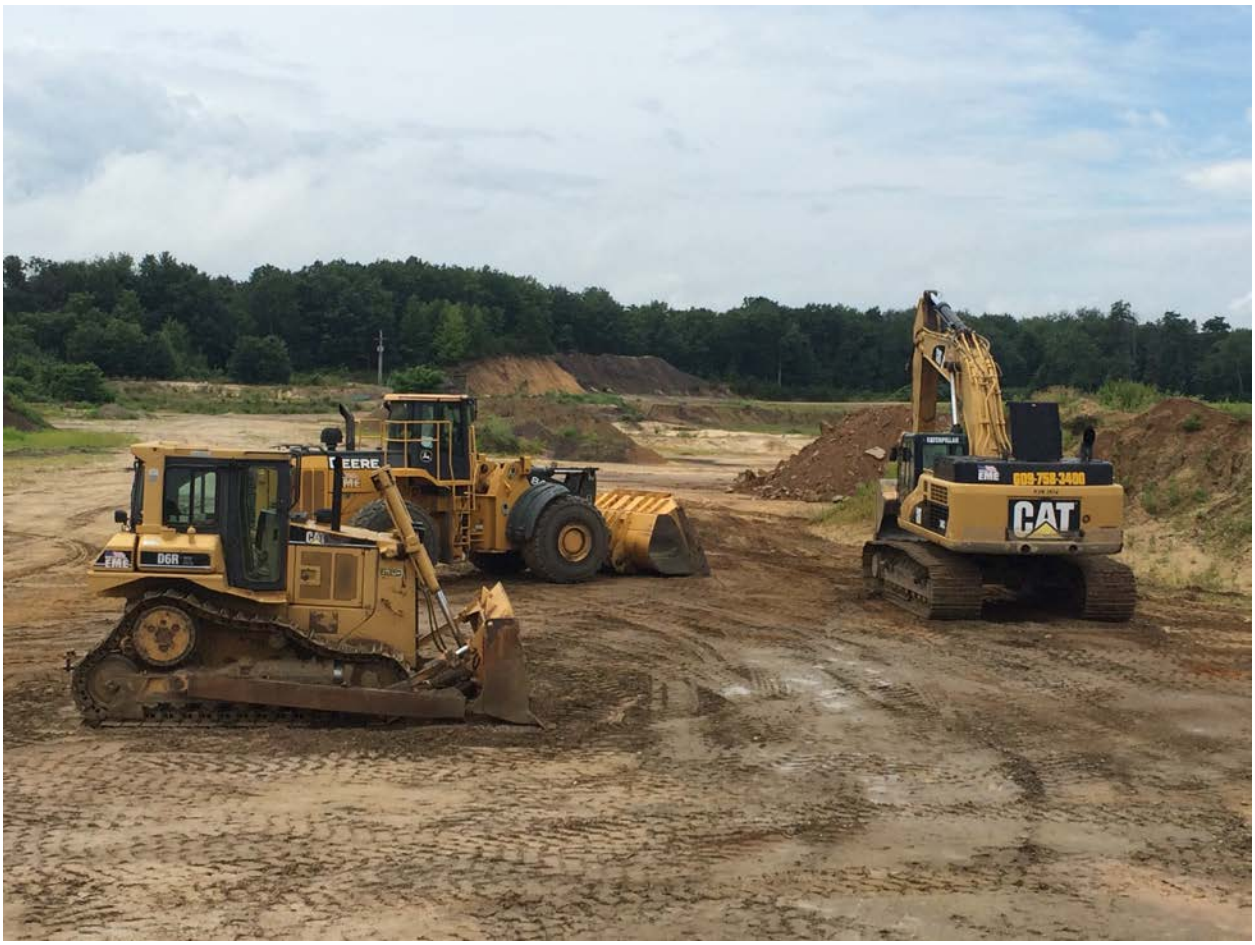
An overview of the site where I worked. The lake and entire surrounding area are the quarry. The white tent in the bottom right of the photo is used to store topsoil so that it does not get wet or snowed on and can be used all year round (customers get angry when the dirt is wet, even when it is raining). In the right side towards the middle one can see the driveway entrance, and in the parking lot the largest building is the mechanics shop, and attached to that the building with the slightly darker roof is the main office. Across (above) from that is the scale house and truck scale. To the right of the mechanics shop is where the greasing/fueling station is located.



My front-end loader, where I spent most of my time.



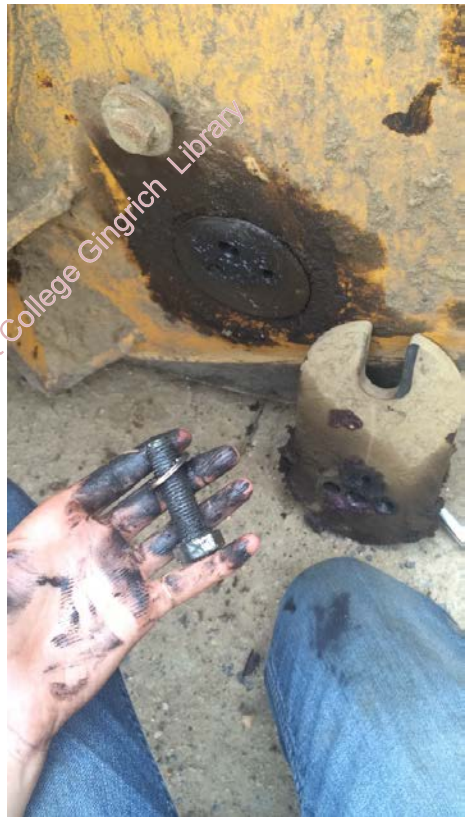
The gauges inside of the loader. On the top right is the bucket scale, so that operators can load trucks accurately when they ask for a certain tonnage. This was a rare, perfect 26 ton load.



Pictured are a bulldozer, excavator, and front end loader on site.

The excavator that I occasionally operated (top)

To the right is a demonstration of why operating and maintaining equipment is a dirty job.
I am fixing a snapped bolt on a loader bucket here.



This is one of the topsoil screening plants on site. The conveyor belts are old and would often get stuck if too much dirt accumulated on them, or if it was raining and the dirt was wet and too heavy. The entire plant would have to be shut down and shoveled off.

This is the topsoil screening method that was more often used. The super stacker (largest conveyor) was rotated to create new piles when needed. We would load trucks from the pile farthest to the right, and when that pile was gone, move the stacker to create a new pile there, and start loading from the one next to it, so that when that one was gone and the new pile complete, the stacker could be moved again to start another pile and the next pile could be loaded into trucks. This way piles were constantly being created, and making topsoil (a product constantly in demand) is a continuous, constant process.

The mixture is loaded into one of the three "hoppers" which shake and screen off large chunks of hardened dirt, rocks, sticks and other debris. The dirt then falls onto a conveyor below the hopper, where it is taken to another hopper with a smaller screen, to screen out rocks and other smaller debris. After that it is taken by the super stacker and dumped into a growing pile, ready to be loaded into a truck.