

## **Contesting Gendered Borders and Boundaries in Western North America Mining Unions**

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In the past decade scholarship about women in mining has reoriented our thinking about how this most “masculine” of industries was socially, culturally and historically constructed as the occupational domain of men. Yet despite recent government, corporate, and union efforts to increase the number of female miners, women remain a small percentage of the mining workforce across the world. In North America, almost forty years since anti-discrimination legislation sought to increase female blue-collar industrial workers, deindustrialization also diminished women’s opportunities as they continued to encounter fierce resistance to their employment. This paper examines how women in western Canada and the U.S. Pacific Northwest in the last sixty years contested gender segregation and the masculinist myths about the “nature” of mining, particularly through their union auxiliaries and efforts to enter mining workplaces.

This study considers boundaries between men’s and women’s spaces in home, community, union hall and industry, and how national borders also came into play to affect notions of gender and labor. Although capital freely crossed borders as industries globalized in the 20th century, scholars have seldom looked closely at the cross-border relationships between unions to compare how working-class women and men absorbed, negotiated, and contested ideologies about gender, race, capitalism, nation, and labor. For example, women struggled to physically cross international borders to build links of solidarity and support mining unions as they worked against the inequalities constructed in their separate communities. Often locked out of jobs and unions and discouraged from some public spaces, in the process they reshaped the class politics, cultures, and spatial arrangements of their communities, seeking to surmount divides both within and across communities, states and provinces, and nations. Studying how spaces and places become gendered, and how that gendering is challenged, helps us to understand how inequalities take root, persist, and change over time.