



## **Discourses as Control Devices in the Mining Culture: Tensions in the Integration of Women in Chilean Mining**

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### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

This article addresses the discourses that the mining culture sustains and the tensions associated with the integration of women into the sites of large Chilean copper mines. It discusses the discourses, understanding that they are central cultural systems in understanding speech, behavior, and control mechanisms that are reproduced through language.

Several works in different contexts (Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009; Lerner, Brush, & Hisrich, 1997; Thompson, Jones-Evans, & Kwong, 2009) corroborate the difficulties experienced by women in integrating into the labor market. In Latin America, Chile has the lowest rate of female participation—close to 40%, compared to 61% in Brazil, 59% in Peru, and 56% in Colombia (ENCLA, 2009).

Mining in Chile is a strategic industry for the country, where copper-producing companies today produce 34% of the world's supply of this mineral. Since 2003 copper mines have produced 7.4% of Chile's gross domestic product and 58% of the country's total exports (ENCLA, 2009). This activity is concentrated in the northern macro zone, representing between 30% and 60% of regional gross domestic product. In the region of Antofagasta, 14 mines are currently in operation, which is the largest proportion in the nation (Aroca & Rivera, 2009).

Since 2006, the proportion of women who participate in this sector has increased by 41%, which equates to 7.4% participation of women in this labor force compared to the 92.6% participation of men. However, this gap increases in the operating areas, where only 2.3% of the laborers are women (Mining Council, 2009; National Socioeconomic Survey, 2009), which is well below the figures that this industry shows in countries such as Australia or Canada, where the participation of women reaches between 20% and 30% (International Labour Organization, 2011; Mihychuck, 2010).

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Nevertheless, the principal challenges facing large-scale mining in Chile for the 2010s is to offset the projected deficits of a qualified workforce. The workforce demand is projected mainly for mobile equipment operators, maintainers, and equipment operators. Moreover, growth among both employees and contractors for the sector as a whole faces two critical periods: 2013–2015 and 2018–2019 (Fundación Chile, 2011). In these two periods, several large-scale mining projects (AngloAmerican Chile, Antofagasta Minerals, BHP Billiton, Codelco y Collahuasi) will be in the operation phase consuming most of the available qualified workforce.

This scenario presents opportunities for reducing the gender gap in the industry by more quickly integrating women into the sector. According to figures from the National Women's Service (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer, 2011), women's participation in large-scale mining should increase by at least 10%, from 11,760 to 25,000, by 2015. To achieve this, companies must immediately train women, especially in the areas of risk prevention, driving trucks and heavy machinery, working inside the mine, and logistics (National Geology and Mining Service, 2011). In addition, companies must address the transformation of the mining organizational culture to make it more prone to integrating women.

This article discusses the discourses that the mining culture sustains and the difficulties associated with the integration of women into operating sites, the perceptions of male and female mine workers regarding the integration of women into the sector, what the process of adapting to this labor market has been like, and what obstacles and contradictions female workers must face.

### **Mining Culture, Gender, and the Latin American Labor Market**

Since the mid-1990s, studies of the labor culture in Latin America have moved from structuralist traditions of labor culture toward subjectivist trends in which there is a more in-depth characterization of the subjects based on gender and theoretical-methodological proposals for comprehending social and labor identities (Guadarrama & Torres, 2007).

Different works have explained the reasons for the lower presence of women in the labor market and the influence of variables such as age, schooling, activity sectors, monthly income, gender gaps, and distribution of the employed by sex (International Labour Organization, 2011). Other studies have gone into depth regarding the psychosocial and cultural dimensions that influence female workers' attitudes regarding employment in the region. Heller (2004), in research performed in Argentina, mentions that both sexes start from different experiences in initiating a working career; they have different socialization guidelines, cultural values, and behavior models.

In Chile, Palacios (2006), in research performed in the Metropolitan region, examined the weak equilibrium that exists between men and women in the roles they perform and the lingering tension between women and employment. Contreras and Plaza (2004), Godoy (2008), and Uribe-Echevarría (2008) affirm that those aspects called "not observable" (cultural) are central in understanding the sexual division of work and the difficulties in balancing work and the family (Avendaño, 2008). This expands on the questions regarding the role of discourses and speech as cultural artifacts that transmit value systems

and meanings on what is expected of men and women in certain labor markets, generating real occupational segregation systems by sex.

In the case of Spain, Ibañez (2010) affirms that occupational segregation by sex constitutes a structuring aspect since it is not due to the inefficient assignment of labor resources to certain sectors but rather that a large part of the differences in salaries is because the female sector is concentrated in occupations with lower wages, a reality that also exists in the United States and in Scandinavian countries.

In Chile, Palacios (2006) addresses the high segmentation of employment of women in the country, with a greater proportion of them in service jobs. The strength of the family as the main symbolic reference and generator of prejudices regarding female employment is a central factor in this process. Labor segregation as well as occupational stereotypes characterize this region (Araujo & Martuccelli, 2012).

In the 1990s, qualitative studies were initiated in Latin America that sought to understand the symbolic aspects associated with female employment (Guadarrama & Torres, 2007). Lamas (2002) and Burin and Meler (2009) address how gender relations mold the production process in society. Other works associate the labor market and gender (Godoy, 2008; Kirkwood & Tootell, 2008), the impact of adjustment processes, and the transformations in production organizations in the sexual division of work and the system of economic and social relationships. An analysis of female employment, compensation, fringe benefits, consistency, and status concludes that, even though women contribute the main income, their workforce is socially stereotyped as "secondary" (Avendaño, 2008).

### **The Mining Market and Gender Gaps**

Specifically in the mining market, both Australia and Canada show the highest percentages of participation of women, as mentioned above (International Labour Organization, 2011), compared to 13.6% participation of women in Mexico, 2% in Peru, and nearly 6% in Chile (Mihychuck 2010).

At the international level, the industry is characterized by a lower participation of women in the sector, which translates into lower wages, scarce positions of high responsibility, and a higher average turnover (International Labour Organization, 2002), despite the fact that in Chile the high technological levels used in the production processes of the large copper mines would make greater inclusion of women possible. However, this is a labor activity that not only takes place in a space occupied by men but where the norms, practices, and discourses that circulate in the industry are hegemonic.

Mayes and Pini (2010), in research on media reports of women in mining management in Australia, refer to a female "revolution," with more and better gender negotiation by women in positions of power in the industry. It is therefore postulated that discourses are fundamental in understanding gender inequality at work, since they are what define the spaces and the possibilities for men and women.

Tallichet (1995), referring to the experience in the mining industry in the United States, points out that there is a strongly genderized practice where the social hierarchy between men and women is

legitimized in the organizational culture. Privileges, practices, and discourses are manifested through a functional differentiation of the work by gender.

Sexualization represents the power of men to stigmatize women and maintain the stereotypes of women's inferiority. However, results obtained by Lozeva and Marinova (2010) in mining in Western Australia reflect that the discussion of gender associated with the relations of the patriarchy and mining exploitation demonstrate the need for a transformation that contributes to the sustainability of settlements in the desert. More research is required to integrate the negotiation models based on gender and on the normative frameworks that work. Consequently, the international experience in mining shows two dimensions: a sustained effort to maintain the proportion of women in the sector and the persistence of gender factors as determinants of the position of women in the industry.

In Latin America, studies on masculinity are relatively new, and there is scarce documentation, with dissimilar development. Specifically regarding mining, the first records are of a historical nature and narrate the strength of masculine identity in mining, the shift systems, and the labor structure (Carmagnani, 2006; Vergara, 2004; Zapata, 2002). Then there is the more psychosocial research that through the workers' discourses starts to reveal the status of men, women, family conditions, the effects of the shift system, and the roles that the subjects play in public and private spaces (Barrientos, Salinas, Rojas, & Meza, 2009; Vergara, 2007).

Valdés and Olavarria (1997), referring to the identity process of Latin American men, affirm that there is no single masculinity but rather a multifaceted process in transition, questioning gender stereotypes (Carabi & Armengol, 2008). Despite the fact that these transformations are not generalized, there is evidence of changes in the collective stereotypes and in the guidelines for social interaction.

Klubock (1995), in a study of El Teniente mine in Chile, highlights the importance of gender ideology in the molding of the female working class and how identities were structured in this context. Ayala (2012), in a quantitative study, explores the obstacles for women in mining, including the mining culture, the organizational aspects, and the leadership. Salinas, Barrientos, and Rojas (2012) concur with Ayala on the centrality of the mining culture, specifically addressing discourse as a communicational device, and describe how, through the use of indirect language, workers hide discrimination and a dominant masculine identity.

Language is not a static and closed system, because the strength and orientation of a statement are not determined exclusively by contexts or previous positions. On the contrary, a statement can obtain its strength based on the rupture it produces in its context, and in these circumstances it is important to refute what has been settled (Butler, 1997). The critical analysis of discourse is a way of addressing social problems that have been linked to it (discrimination, exclusion, inequality, among others).

The critical analysis of discourse is a generic term that applies to an approach dedicated to studying speech, discourse, and communication (Meyer, 2003; Van Dijk, 2012). It enables visualizing the social and political relevance of the text and shows a dimension of meaning that exceeds the typecasting involved in a concrete situational framework (Hennecke, 2004). In other words, the use of language is

performative and therefore is a privileged way of accessing the way the subjects construct reality in interactions in different contexts.

In Latin America, various studies have used the critical analysis of discourse as a theoretical-methodological approach that has made it possible to address problems of discrimination due to race, nationality, or gender, focusing on discursive discrimination toward foreigners and illegal immigrants, especially toward non-Whites in Western Europe and the United States. Also, the mistreatment or discrimination of minorities and sexist statements and attitudes have been analyzed (Raiter, 2008).

In Brazil, the Constitution of the Republic has been the subject of analysis of discourse (Magalhaes, 2005). Research in Argentina has examined the neoliberal discourse (Pardo, 2005) and the representation works in the communications media (Zullo, 2008). In Chile, research has focused on indigenous, Mapuche discrimination (Merino, Quilaqueo, & Saiz, 2008) and intercultural communication in the press (Browne & Yañez, 2012).

### **Methodology**

This study of women in the mining industry in Chile is descriptive and interpretive. The unit of analysis was made up of 110 workers—70 men and 40 women—from mining sites in the region of Antofagasta (Esperanza, Gaby, and Chuquicamata, among others). The interviewees have different socioeconomic and educational levels, with technical and/or university education; include workers who are married, single, and with and without children; and perform various work functions, including heavy machinery drivers, risk prevention specialists, equipment operators, surveyors, mine operators, engineers, and geologists. They work various shifts, such as 4x3, 4x4, 5x2, 7x7, or 9x5.<sup>2</sup> And they include female workers with at least two years of experience and male workers with at least five years of experience.

### **Analysis of the Data**

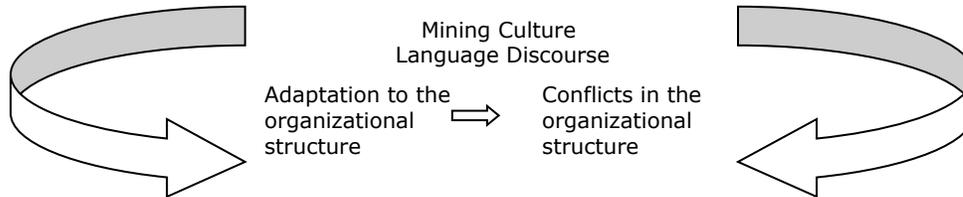
In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants. To analyze the discourses, each of the interviews was read in detail, and a simplified version of the codification proposal of grounded theory (Trinidad, Carrero, & Soriano, 2006) was used. Open categories were identified, which implied an analytical procedure to identify the, subcategories.

### **Results**

In keeping with the study's objectives, the findings were grouped into two main categories: one referring to the female workers' process of adapting to the mine site and the other related to the conflicts they experience in the sector, both based on language and discourse as foundations of the mining culture. See Figure 1.

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<sup>2</sup> The 4x3, 4x4, 5x2, and 7x7 shifts indicate the number of days a worker is on site and the number of days the worker has off. For example, a 4x3 shift means that the worker is on site for 4 days and then has 3 days off in the city.



**Figure 1. Mining culture language discourse.**

The process of adapting to the mining site involves adjusting to a broad organizational system that includes structure, organization-environment, communicational and authority systems, labor climate, conflict, and organizational culture. The organizational culture—defined as the set of ways of conceptualizing the work, myths, beliefs, and values—extracts a significant part of its premise from the society in which the organization is inserted, producing a basic coherence between the organization and its surroundings (Rodríguez, 2012).

In the mining industry, the strength of the culture has led to identifying the “mining culture” as a unique trait of this productive sector, in which a series of characteristics, manners, beliefs, and functions are typical of this sector. The shift system; the long distances between the sites and urban centers; the hostile desert environment; the significant weather fluctuations; the work at high altitude; the risk of accidents on the site; and the regulatory, communicational, cultural, and social systems of the workers and their families form a complex system of relationships, where the man, as the subject of production, occupies a central place. Since the origins of this industry, the physical characteristics of the worker as a productive subject have consolidated the traits of the mining culture.

Various studies on miners in Chile affirm the trend in the sector to define manliness as a normative and articulating focus of this organizational culture, thereby naturalizing the distinctive formulation of manliness, even on the part of the workers themselves (Klubock, 1995; Vergara, 2004, 2007). Therefore, the integration of women into the mine site in large-scale mining in recent years<sup>3</sup> has set off certain transformations in the different levels of the organizational structure. Conflicts within the labor organization have had effects at both inter- and intrapersonal levels, including roles, tension due to status derived from the rights and limitations of the positions that the workers occupy, problems derived from the job and its associated tasks, and stress<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> In 1987, a law was passed in the labor code that established that women could not be occupied in underground mining works or in sites qualified as requiring efforts in excess of their abilities or hazardous to the physical or moral conditions of their sex (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 1987). This law was repealed in 1996 (see <http://www.portalminero.com/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=27525149>).

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In their discourses, the female workers report two dimensions. On the one hand, they recognize a series of tensions such as prejudices, hostility, and resistance to their integration into the sector; on the other hand, they are motivated to be integrated into the industry due to the economic benefits they receive, with which they satisfy their individual and family needs. They also consolidate their personal independence and achieve greater social integration. The compensation and benefits that these companies offer offset the difficulties. Furthermore, the opportunity to carry out a position for which they were educated is another relevant factor. With regard to the aspects of their work in mining that they like, both the female and male workers agree on the contradictions that being a mining worker generates.

When I came to the mine it was horrible for me . . . There were times when I wanted to leave, it made me sad, I cried, but I never said "I can't take anymore." It was harder for us because we were the first ones. They didn't want to raise us up to the great ones because we were women. (Female worker, 40 years old)

The thing is that work in mining is very demanding because you have to spend a lot of time up there and in the end you spend more time with your workmates than with your family, but the benefit is that you're paid well; there are benefits for the children's schooling, for the wives; so actually it makes up for it. (Male worker, 32 years old)

The discourses of the interviewees reflect the duality that working in mining implies; there is a clear awareness of the cost-benefit trade-off that the industry involves. There is also a dual dimension regarding the transformations that the integration of women into the sector has produced, given that the female workers do not see a real change on the company's part, above all in the cultural and discursive aspects by which the organization abides. Rather, the emphasis is on complying with the regulations driven by the state in terms of equal opportunities, the participation of women, and the industry's corporate image.<sup>5</sup> Regarding the latter, there are clear differences in the discourses between female and male workers, male sector have a more superficial view of the problems faced by the female sector. On the contrary, the women are more critical and self-aware of the limits that women face on the worksites. That is, the transformations have occurred in the framework of a founding semipatriarchal logic where the man is the main provider and the woman is a secondary provider (Ibañez, 2010). The Table 1 described the perception of female and male workers on the adaption of women in the mining.

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<sup>5</sup> The Good Labour Practices Program works with large companies, both public and private, to create reference models of gender equality practices in employment through the voluntary implementation of actions, plans, or programs

**Table 1. Substantive Codes and Associated Families.**

Open category: Perception of female and male workers on women's process of adapting to the mining site	
<p>Female workers: subcategory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mining culture conditions the mining company's organizational structure.</li> <li>• Manliness is the focus of masculinity in mining.</li> <li>• Female workers face prejudices, hostility, and resistance from men.</li> <li>• Economic benefits are the main incentive for staying in mining.</li> <li>• Women seek to meet the needs of the family and children.</li> <li>• Personal realization at work is an important factor.</li> <li>• Changes in companies are of a regulatory nature (integration of women); there is not a cultural change.</li> </ul>	<p>Male workers: subcategory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits that mining companies provide are central for fulfilling the role of provider.</li> <li>• The mining provides protection to the family including social benefits (schooling, health care); however, the lack of a father figure in the family is evident due to the shift system.</li> <li>• The mining sector implies high risks in the work place; health is passed over for money.</li> <li>• Family life is limited by the shift system.</li> <li>• It is a closed circle; there are values such as safety at work and respect in mining that are priority.</li> </ul>

Masculinity as a cultural modeler in the mining industry favors discriminatory practices and discourses. Women are undervalued compared to men, which justifies a social order that functions as an immense symbolic machine that ratifies and supports masculine domination based on sexual distribution of the work (Bourdieu, 2007).

Women are perceived by the male workers as weaker; they are excluded from performing heavy work and are limited in ability to ascend to higher positions. In the cases where a woman is a leader and performs as a boss, is in a position of authority, and distances herself from the female stereotype that men expect, hostile reactions are added to discrimination.

Men resist female authority in interactions on the worksites. Women offset men's rebelliousness with an "exacerbation of manliness"; that is, to be "recognized," women bosses carry out their gender identity assuming the masculinity model by "speaking loudly," "pounding the table," and "having a lot of character." Masculinity is reinforced as the organizing focus of the work/mining structure. Below there is two oral extracts, which described these tensions at the workplace.

Develop aptitudes of strength, be a winner, form an attitude of here I come, act determinedly, pound the table. (Female worker, 48 years old)

When women are learning, there is envy; the chauvinism that we men have; even when you are learning and you see that someone else is learning more, there is envy, but the truth is that it's because you're getting lazy; you have to find the right way to get to be the instructor. (Male worker, 58 years old)

Masculine practices in the workplace show distrust and undervaluation of women's capacities, where simultaneously gallantry is seen as covering up for masculine hegemony. Regarding the question about the most difficult aspects women must deal with on the sites, the interviewees point out:

Sometimes men say you women should be knitting, preparing the meals, watching soap operas. (Female worker, 37 years old)

Since nobody likes the topic, they haven't been able to get used to it, like when you have a women you try to be nice, that you want to come in, and all that. In the end that must bother the women. I think it's good [the integration of women], because it gives you a second point of view, different from what is common in the men. (Male worker, 44 years old)

Female workers perceive the pressure of the social mandate to be the same as their coworkers in capacities and functions.

Due to the height of the trucks, they have three ladders. Sometimes you have to lift your foot and hang on to the handrail in order to get into the truck. For us it's complicated. (Female worker, 34 years old)

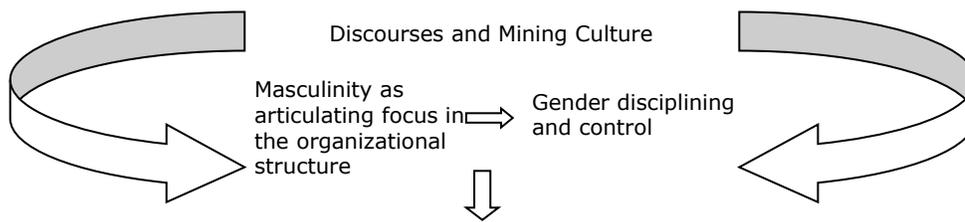
Culturally yes, the Chilean male chauvinist is stupidly chauvinist. They brag, they go out with ten different girls, they talk about it. I'm more macho than the others, I don't wash at home, and I don't cook at home. They don't tell me what to do, I give the orders. If they try to impose themselves, ah no; I'm a miner and that is not women's work. (Male worker, 45 years old)

These discourses are central due to their symbolizing strength and the impact they have on women's identity, since language is a fundamental medium for psychological and cultural structuring, to make us subjects and social beings. These discourses constitute founding elements of the cultural matrix, of the structure of meanings. Table 2 includes a list of the main obstacles and contradictions detected in the interviews.

**Table 2 Substantive Codes and Associated Families.**

Open category: Perception of female and male workers on the obstacles and contradictions that female workers face	
<p>Female workers: subcategories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Masculinity is as an articulating focus of the mining labor structure</li> <li>• There are discriminatory practices.</li> <li>• The gender differences of women are undervalued in the mining.</li> <li>• The male workers perceived the female as weak.</li> <li>• In comparison to the men the women are limited in accessing higher positions.</li> <li>• There is masculine rebelliousness against the female leadership</li> <li>• The women have to acquire female manliness to offset men’s resistance.</li> <li>• The status of the position is put first in the organizational structure relative to gender difference.</li> </ul>	<p>Men: subcategories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is distrust of women’s capacities</li> <li>• Masculine hegemony is expressed in conducts of subordination versus gallantry.</li> <li>• Women receive less pay for the same jobs.</li> <li>• Women are competition in the industry.</li> <li>• Unlike men, women continue carrying out their role as mother and homemaker in their free time.</li> <li>• Women are strong, hard-working, and adapt easily to the job.</li> <li>• Women are valued according to the position; female engineers are respected more.</li> <li>• The integration of women improves the working environment.</li> </ul>

**Conclusions**



**Figure 2. Protagonism of language.**

Extensive research exists on the technical aspects associated with extraction, production, and mining management, but there is less background on culture, discourse, and gender in the mining industry, and on how these components contribute to the power relations in this sector.

Worldwide, mining has been an eminently masculine productive activity. This continues to be the case despite the growing integration of women into the mining industry both internationally and in Latin America. It is a constant that has not had significant modifications.

Therefore, it is important to address the problem based on inductive logic that seeks to analyze discourses at a micro level, highlighting particularities over generalizations. The findings enable inferring that we are faced with an organizational structure that uses discipline and control as well as regulations to neutralize the particularities of women, reinforcing a masculine cultural and discursive system. The last is more inclusive for the incorporation of the women in the mining industry but at the same time it is still highly contradictory in the labor practice.

The labor law in Chile that prohibited women from taking part in the mining sector was repealed in 1996. Female workers have a growing interest in changing this situation and increasing their participation in the area, motivated by the economic, work-related, and personal expectations that the mining industry offers.

It is sought that this sector makes family demands of the women compatible with work, but in the practice it does not occur. Based on the obstacles, tensions, and contradictions documented in this study, these transformations also point toward improving the balance of work with family responsibilities between men and women, minimizing the traditional excess burden that falls on women, which limits their integration and career projection.

The major problem that stands out in the study, and the one most difficult to address, is the strength of the mining culture and the central role of masculine identity as a modeler of this context. This culture orders the mining social/work structure and conditions gender relations, the sexual distribution of the work, stereotypes, activities, and communicational systems.

Contrary to expectations, the intensity of the culture is transversal and conditions the productive structure of the industry. Moreover, the difficulties reported by the interviewees are common, regardless of their socioeconomic status, educational level, or age.

Associated with the second objective regarding the obstacles, tensions, and contradictions experienced by women workers, the workplace in mining is identified with a highly regulated masculine system that conditions symbolic aspects such as language; representations of the worker, the company, and the family; as well as physical aspects associated with clothing, regulations, transportation, schedules, meals, and shifts.

These conditions push female workers into an intense process of adaptation and discipline to meet the demands of this productive environment. They are subjected to an intensive socialization process. At the same time, in the male workers' masculine stereotype, the women are pressured to perform the traditional roles of mothers, wives, and women, resulting in emotional and psychological wear and tear on the women.

Finally, it is suggested that the advances proposed by the International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank group, be considered by e this topic through a manual that has been developed based on the experience in South Africa, called "Women in Mining."<sup>6</sup> It is recommended that the tasks of preparation, recruitment, and retention are the result of a company's overall strategy and are not relegated to the human resources department.

More research is needed to integrate the cultural and discursive aspects of the mining industry, generating more inclusive gender negotiating models that permit addressing the sustainability of the industry with a strategic vision that includes dimensions such as engineering (infrastructure), human resources (recruitment and training policies), communications (internal and external with a gender perspective), and cultural change (work on modifying values and principal beliefs regarding gender identities).

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<sup>6</sup> The manual can be downloaded at  
[http://www1.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/region\\_\\_ext\\_content/regions/sub-saharan+africa/publications/Ionmin\\_womeninmining.pdf](http://www1.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/region__ext_content/regions/sub-saharan+africa/publications/Ionmin_womeninmining.pdf)

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