

Article

Experiences of being a Couple and Working by Shifts in the Mining Industry: Continuities

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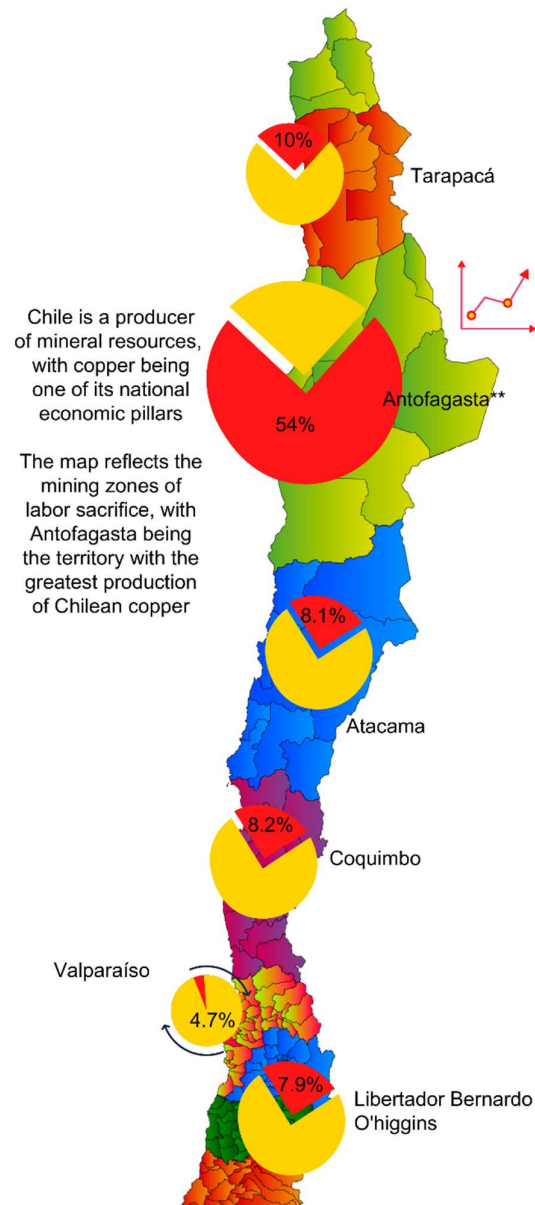
Abstract: This study seeks to understand, from a gender perspective, the experiences of mining couples in Antofagasta, Chile, especially the negotiation between their intimate lives and the absences of their partners due to the shift work modality. We analyzed testimonies from men and women living in Antofagasta, considered one of the three largest mining regions in the world. Among the main findings, power relations based on the hegemonic gender model supported by the sexual division of labor are identified, which persist in this mining area, despite progress in equity issues in Chile. We propose that, although there are differences between the discourses of men and women and their subjective positioning, both actively collaborate with the reproduction of social gender relations marked by male domination. We observe that this way of living as a couple is associated with the organization of mining work, which is central to the reproduction of the gender order with a hetero-patriarchal tone.

Keywords: couple; shift work; gender; Chile

1. Introduction

The Chilean copper mining industry is deeply linked to the socioeconomic and cultural structures of territories where large scale mineral extraction processes occur. The Antofagasta Region is located in the north of Chile and is one of the main copper mining areas in the country [1] illustrated in map 1 that represents copper production in Chile. A significant number of families living there base their economic livelihood on various sectors associated with mining, which ranks first in the generation of employment in the region with 31%, contributing, in addition, with 57.9% to the regional GDP [1,2]. The cities

of Antofagasta and Calama have stood out worldwide for their levels of copper production, ranking third among 68 ore producing countries [3,4].



Map 1. Represents copper production in Chile.

Source. Cochilco Ministry of Mining. Estrategic Investments 2020-2028.

In the last ten years, the region has become the second most important in Chile, with an economic growth rate of 13.1% [2]. However, these data come into tension with the valuation that the inhabitants make, for example, of their security and human development. Regarding this, the Regional Observatory for Human Development points out the presence of a general atmosphere of insecurity and the persistence of different social and economic gaps in education, access to work, housing and health among the inhabitants of the region. Likewise, in the study on social perceptions, a lack of interest is observed in the desire of the inhabitants to take root in the locality. This process is associated with a high rate of floating population, who work in Antofagasta, but their families live in other regions. These groups are attracted by the mining work, which they relate to the region as optimal for work and not suitable for developing a family life. The floating population corresponds to 40% of the inhabitants [1,5].

When reviewing other research carried out in Chile on relational processes, we discovered that their findings reveal, on the one hand, a social network crossed by typical elements of the contemporary neoliberal model, where the value of money and consumption is placed above relational quality. On the other hand, gender relations are strongly marked by a historical androcentrism. These cultural marks are expressed in the structure of the northern culture, which helps to reproduce gender and class hierarchies articulated with conservative values, thus stressing the emotional relationships between couples in the area. In the same context, progress can be observed in these restrictions towards equity in the youth population, which are framed by various expressions of violence [6–8]. This resistance to recognizing the capacities and rights of women is exemplified by the persistence of social representations generated in the mining environment, such as rejection, contempt, and an exclusionary perspective to their presence in these labor territories, with emphasis on operational areas or maintenance, considering that they are not "places for women". In the past, their participation was limited to domestic functions, such as cleaning, food preparation, administrative or secretarial work [9–10–11]. Although they have now entered into professional jobs, due to the pressure of changes in Chilean labor policies, their presence and the valuation of the female subject continues to be slow and conflictive, as will be seen in the experiences outlined in the study.

Similar to what occurs in other countries, affective-sexual relations are organized around the possibilities and limitations inherent to the organization of mining work. Therefore, for purposes of this study we use the notion of "mining couples or families" [7,12–14]. Part of the slowness in the transformation toward equity in the couple is related to economic-emotional dependencies linked to important social and wage benefits offered by mining companies. We will also say that mining jobs involve labor relations that along with demanding high levels of productivity from the workers, imply periods of exclusive dedication to the worksite when working on shifts¹ far away from the cities where their families live [6,7,15].

We will also confirm that in local social discourse, "mining couples" are signified as holders of high levels of economic resources, which associates mining workers with the role of providers and many times, the sacrifice of family and couple experiences. This way, the gain in terms of economic resources would be paid for in affective costs for the miner, his partner, and a high cost in terms of the absence/presence of the man at home, producing a type of contradiction: *working for the families at the cost of the families*. The research shows that this type of relationship can be associated with the libidinalization of money within couples and families, converting money into an important means of communication among men, women and children, and many times in the ultimate basis for conserving the bond [16].

In traditional mining couples, it is principally the men who are absent from family life due to shift work, during periods that range from four days on the worksite and three days off, to work shifts of two uninterrupted weeks (biweekly period) (Labor Code, article No. 153, 2005). In this dynamic, in the absence of their partners, women concentrate power in the private sphere, related to decision-making in day-to-day relations with the children, as well as in the administration of the economic resources that come from the mining work. However, when the partner returns from his shift, this meagre quota of power for the women is retracted, re-establishing the hierarchical gender positions – a system that has been called the "accordion family" [14,17]. This denomination refers to the discontinuity between work and rest (life in a couple and with children) and causes people to experience emotional distancing from the family [12]. The excessive physical demands that the activity has historically involved, accompanied by health risks and extreme environmental conditions (thermal oscillation, snow, and geographic altitude, among others)

¹Shifts are organized in periods of days exclusively for work and the same number of days of rest, that vary according to the activities that the worker performs and the type and size of the mining company. They can also be 12 x 12, 7 x 7 or 4 x 4.

were thought of as constrictions that women could not endure. It is undeniable to point out that shift work impacts the subjectivities of men and women, and certainly social/family and gender relations. In this dynamic, the work shifts filter into the affective bonds, leaving marks that lead to the emergence of power conflicts in the couple's relations [6,18–23].

Such conflicts take on even greater relevance when we consider that in Chile and the world, but very specifically in Chile, May 2018 was the scenario that marked the start of what has been called *the rebellion against patriarchy* [24], consisting precisely in radically making an issue of the structure of patriarchal domination and its symbolic violence [25]. Undoubtedly, these social transformations also impact the androcentric conservatism of the “mining family”, especially in younger families who are starting to seek new accommodations and life arrangements as a couple and family. That gives rise to our research question with which we seek to contribute to the analysis of questions of the traditional gender order in mining areas: Which cultural impositions are reproduced, and which are transformed and/or subverted in the discourse of *mining couples in the process* of reconciling the demands of the companies and the affective requirements of life as a couple and the children?

2. Materials and Methods

Considering the research question, we will point out two important options of a methodological nature. The first: make the discourse on mining work, its social and technical organization, and its implications for life as a couple the object of our study; and second, survey a critical analysis of the discourse from a gender perspective as an analytical tool [26–28].

2.1. Regarding the Information Production Strategy: The Open Interview

We employed a biographic strategy [29,30] using an investigative type account, emphasizing life as a couple and work. Each session lasted for 120 minutes, in three encounters with each participant, regarding dimensions such as: the demands of mining work; tensions between intimate life and work; affective relations and resolution of conflicts, among others. Each person signed an informed consent that protects their anonymity and authorizes the use of the information for research purposes. Each interview recorded was transcribed and constituted analysis material for the preparation of the next session.

2.2. Regarding the Analysis Strategy: The Option for Critical Analysis of the Discourse

In virtue that the research question refers us to the intimate life and sexuality of the couple, we analyzed what the discourse reproduces and/or transforms regarding gender order in the arrangements of life as a couple. The focus of study is on the capacity that the discourse has to produce or reproduce gender relations [31]. In this sense, when we situate the discursive operations through which a traditional gender order is reproduced and/or transformed at the center of our research question, we would somehow be understanding it (gender) as *interdiscursive*, spoken and being spoken through and by the discourse of the subjects who are expressing it. From this perspective, the speaker is conceived as a “subject inserted in a social topography that defines places of expression that are fundamentally positions of subjectivity” [32].

Consequently, what we are seeking is to understand such subjective positionings, which Davies & Harré [33] define as conversational phenomena, as a social interaction capable of generating social results. Standing out among these results are interpersonal relations since the subjective positioning implies at the same time the positioning of other subjects and social objects. Consequently, through positioning, social orders are generated or regenerated. From this perspective, conversation is understood as a set of *acts of speaking*; that is, it involves expressions with illocutive strength; capable of producing social effects [34]. The social effects that interest us here are those that reproduce the patriarchal

domination inscribed in social gender relations and those that collaborate in their transformation.

2.3. Participants

10 people participated -as seen in Table 1-, including mining workers and women affectively linked to them. The age distribution was from 21 to 65 years old, including persons in mid-management positions from the mining sector and in the lower middle socioeconomic sector who agreed to be interviewed, given that they are the population with the biggest emotional, family and couple voids, as opposed to persons at management or higher levels, who have access to greater cultural and symbolic capital [35], with more opportunities and flexibility in the labor sphere. The criteria for inclusion included being a mining worker or the worker's partner, being subject to a shift system, being in an emotional relationship for more than one year and having their own children or the partner's children.

Table 1. Participants in the study.

	Code	Age	Occupation	Shift system	Socioeconomic level	No. of children
1	José	61	Operator-Union	4x3	Medium – Low	3
2	Pedro	36	Mining worker	7x7	Medium – Low	2
3	Claudio	38	Mining worker	7x7	Medium – Low	3
4	Patricio	42	Mining worker	4x3	Medium – Low	2
5	Manuel	40	Operator-Union	4x3	Medium – Low	3
6	Mario	32	Mining worker	4x3	Medium – Low	1
7	Mónica	43	Homemaker	-	Medium – Low	2
8	Silvia	35	Small business owner	-	Medium – Low	3
9	Estela	50	Homemaker	-	Medium – Low	3
10	María	45	Homemaker	-	Medium – Low	1

Self-prepared

To access the persons interviewed, we recurred to institutional networks with mining companies and their unions. We used the snowball method among the participants. It is important to point out that this population is difficult to access, both for the restrictions that the companies impose on their workers and the resistance on the part of the subjects themselves to openly address topics that are evidently sensitive, such as intimate life, love and sexuality, which were actually being dealt with in each of the interviews, favoring the display of discourse based, fundamentally on listening, which opens the possibility for joint reflection with the interviewees from a feminist perspective, being understood as a recognition and initial validation of the possibility of contradiction, capable of questioning positions and of inviting the other to construct and join rational conversations as well as to imagine fantastic transformations of history [36,37].

3. Discussion of Results

We organized the results based on a survey of a broad discursive focus that we denominate *arrangements of mining family life: centrality of the organization of the work in the (re)production of subjectivities and socio-affective relations*. With the analysis we seek to interpret how, through the discourse on work and its organization by shifts, subjective positionings and socio-affective relations are being constructed. Based on this central focus, we identified two associated focuses. The first, sustained entirely by male mining workers interviewed, strictly reproduces a traditional sexual division of the work, distributing practically without a doubt the production tasks to men and the reproduction tasks to women. The second, conformed by statements made by women, gives account of some

tensions, the farther you are from subverting or transforming the gender order that the organization of mining work seems to reproduce with particular strength.

We developed a section in which, as we present fragments of the interviewees' discourse, we seek to explicitly state the theoretical and epistemological frameworks based on which we make our interpretation proposals, in order to make it clear from where we are looking. This is a way of being as safe as possible from the temptation of the divine eye, which as suggested by Haraway[36], looks from everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

3.1. Arrangements of Mining Family Life in the Voice of the Men: A Strictly Sexual Division of the Work

In this first section, as we proposed above, we analyze fragments of the discourse expressed by the male miners.

We understand the organization of the work as well as gender as sources of demand based on the production of subjectivities and social relations. In this sense, we start from the premise that mining work and its social and technical organization require workers to raise defensive strategies of the trade that are reconfiguring their bodies and subjectivities [38]. We also say that this subjective configuration often implies an effort of virilization in which the value of productivity holds a central place [39]. In that regard, we look at the following fragment of an interview:

"You endure it. It's impossible for a man to solve family matters, but on the job a mining worker is highly productive! That is, the productivity of a mining worker is very high. We know that data. The men solve problems quickly; it's technical, you look for ideas, you resolve, investigate. But they are not able to implement those abilities at home" (José, 61 years old, 3 children).

Productivity and endurance emerge as important signifiers in support of the subjectivity of the male mining workers; they constitute a value. Nevertheless, they seem to have as a consequence the discursive construction of the worksite as a space exclusively for deploying their creativity in searching for solutions. The work demands, the worker responds, and as manifested in the quote, *a mining worker is highly productive*; something that, on the other hand, in the family scenario, is constructed as being impossible. We propose that in this interview extract, the gender discourse, speaking through the interviewee, reproduces the classical sexual division of the work and that in the name of labor productivity, excludes the male worker from the demands of resolving conflicts in family life.

That reproduction of the sexual division of the work reappears strongly in the discursive constructions regarding what the men need from their partners:

"The women in our case, have to take care of everything when we leave. You can't be going down all the time, asking your boss for permission. You can't go down, because if you are going to be going down, there are, I don't know, fifteen of us up there and the boss is counting on the fifteen of us, so if you leave, the other fourteen feel it and have to take on the work of the one who left. So, the idea is to try not to go down, so you don't look bad with the boss and also to take care of your job. For that reason, our women are important because they have to take care of everything" (Mario, 32 years old, 1 child).

This interview extract seems to reinforce the discursive construction that situates the male worker as an indispensable subject on the worksite: "you leave and they feel it", while at the same time he is absolutely replaceable in tasks at home, where "she has to take care of everything". The construction is polar, practically dichotomic, and reproduces the classical notion of the sexual division of the work: the productive dimension of work is the men's responsibility, while the reproductive dimension of life is the women's responsibility. This arrangement allows the worker to be completely available for work while on shift, which seems to be fundamental to *take care of your job*; that is, to sustain employment, and to *not look bad with the boss*. What management requires is construed as

a form of total availability and that is a standard that a worker obtains to the extent that he has a partner who *takes care of everything* at home. The strict sexual division of work is discursively construed as a type of key requirement for conserving employment (and a counterpart not stated here: family life, of which she is in charge).

We look at the following interview extracts to go into some specifications regarding this “everything” referred to in the discourse, especially concerning the reproductive tasks associated with caring for and raising the children:

“The old lady has to know how to substitute at all times (accidents, birthdays, parties, others), when the children are sad the old lady has to deal with the little kids, so they don’t miss us, so while we are on the job they don’t need anything from us” (Pedro, 36 years old, 2 children).

Caretaking tasks in general, and in this specific case those that have to do with the affective support of the children are construed as the woman’s duty, since *the old lady has to*, where *has to* expresses an imperative. The imperative is manifested as *deal with the little kids*, which we understand as a requirement to take care of the children’s emotional stability and to fill, on the affective plane, the role of father and mother, since the expected effect of the task assigned to the mother is so the father *is not missed* while he is on the worksite. We could say that the assignment that the interviewee makes here is that his absence is not felt, which constitutes an illusion, or a type of negation of reality.

The requirement to fulfill tasks of an affective order also overlaps with those functions that have historically been associated with the paternal role, such as the establishment of rules and respecting them at home:

“The other thing that happens to me is the matter of the kids. When I come home and they do something bad, I don’t scold them. I don’t feel I have the right to scold them because I am up on the site for seven days. If you come home and scold them, you end up being a bad father figure. So, I leave all that to my wife. My wife does their homework, teaches the children. Everything that has to do with the kids at home, I completely exempt myself (...) They end up being the witches, ha ha ha” (Manuel, 40 years old, 3 children).

Covered and justified by the shift system, the male interviewee allows himself to renounce the tasks of a normative order at home regarding his children, explicitly avoiding them and placing that duty on his partner. In the words of Lagarde [40], they seem to require a mother-spouse who doubles as a *witch*, in charge of rules and limits. However, the reverse of this discursive trick that presents a type of renouncement of the right to exercise the paternal role is that the male mining worker seems to be losing his place at home.

Another important matter to clarify is that this arrangement is constructed by the man in solitude, or at least constitutes an agreement not necessarily spoken. He doesn’t tell her: you be the witch; he does it, up to a certain point behind her back, and that seems to be expressed by the laugh: *they end up being the witches, ha ha ha*, a *they* that is also pronounced in an impersonal manner, since it does not involve an agreement made with the other. It is a tacit agreement and maybe taken as obvious, as a requirement and obvious consequence of the man’s work system.

We propose that the discourse is configuring the following image: we need a woman-mother-spouse who does not need us, and with that, the man is constructing himself as a subject absolutely dispensable at home, and even undesired:

“after the shift you come home to a house that your wife dominates. Your children don’t pay much attention to you. If it is you that tries to impose something, in the end the only thing they want is for you to go back up to the mine. You become a provider, a provider and nothing, nothing else.” (Claudio, 38 years old, 3 children).

“I come back and the youngest pretends she doesn’t know me” (Patricio, 42 years old, 2 children).

A circle seems to be closing in which the discourse reproduced by the interviewees is the strictest sexual division of work. However, a very important detail is that this exercise does not allow them to be positioned at home as a figure of power. On the contrary,

the subjective sensation grates on contempt and rejection, on not wanting him to be there, for him to go back to the worksite, to the place where he is truly needed and important, and where his subjectivity makes sense and can be sustained. At home, the *wife dominates*, and the children do not recognize the father's authority. Constructed that way, the negotiation between the members of the couple ends up excluding the male worker from the intimacy of family life, constructs him as provider and a type of stranger. Money and his contributions as a provider are being constituted as the measure of the bond between the male worker and his home and family.

3.2. Arrangements of Mining Family Life in the Voice of the Women: Tensions between Accommodation and Resistance

This focus principally surveys the discourse of the women mining worker partners and is also centered on the discursive construction of the sexual division of work and the issues relative to economic and affective dependence (or not) regarding the father-provider figure.

Just as in other Latin American cultures [40] this hierarchical and gendered order within the couple is naturalized in the mining culture, granting and reinforcing the sense of the forms of heteropatriarchal nuclear family construction in the zone. Also, the subjective positionings constructed for women in the private sphere of the home and at a considerable distance from the places of decision-making and productive work are actualized [41–44].

We look at this first fragment, in which it appears that the strategy constructed to carry on life as a couple seems to be that of more or less passive accommodation to the sexual division of work proposed (or imposed) by the shift system:

"When he is at home we don't get bored because we say, "what are we going to do today?", "let's go for a walk ", we have to buy something. I don't like to go downtown by myself unless I have to do an errand, and I don't like to be in a line but I have to, and I do it with my head down. I don't like to go window shopping either or have a coffee. If I have to visit my sister, my friend or sister-in-law I dare to go. He takes me everywhere. If I say, "I don't want to cook" he tells me, "let's eat out". (Mónica, 43 years old, 2 children).

The participant presents a couple relationship in which she remains in a place of waiting and passivity and he, in a position of action and even diversion. The text is explicit: going alone to a public space (doing errands, window shopping, having a coffee) seem to be a prohibited act, one that you have to do *with your head down*, so as not to be seen. For reasons deeply rooted in gender order and masculine domination [35], a woman only goes out alone if she is getting together with other women in private and family spaces (with a sister, sister-in-law, or at most, with a friend). The discourse reproduces subjective positionings for women that are based on relations of emotional and economic dependence toward the male provider figure, actualizing feelings of insecurity and fear when faced with occupying a public space. The man is construed as a protector and dispenser of monetary resources for consumption that provide satisfaction [45]. This discourse supports the restriction of women's possibilities for developing life plans independent of the couple [41]. It discursively reproduces a model of a couple sustained by the image of romantic love through which an ideal of completeness is promoted and normalized based on a hierarchized and stereotyped dichotomy of (supposedly) male and female roles [44,46,47]. A type of distribution of spaces that reproduces restricted modes of subjectivation in the symbolic-material space of the couple: dependence, fear; insecurity and infantilization of the woman, and in the man, control and management of the couple's life.

The discourse analyzed is not necessarily monolithic. In that regard, we review the following extract, which seems to focus on the women's possibilities of performing productive tasks as a focus of transformation and gain in gender equity:

“Since last year, I own a SME (small-to-medium enterprise) related to pastry. At the beginning it was difficult because I was taking his time (from him when he was at home). I noticed, along with a group of girls, that when they come down from the mine you have to be completely available for them because they have been confined. That’s what they think. When they come down they like to go out. My husband likes spending time with his family. Last Friday I had to deliver 400 sweets. I had told him that I wanted be at home early to start preparing my sweets in peace. He made us go out early, but I got back at 8 PM. I felt cheated because we did what he wanted to do anyway. So, it’s here where you have to give in a lot, so you don’t quarrel.” (Silvia, 35 years old, 3 children).

In this case, difficulties are observed in establishing negotiations with the partner that enable delimiting individual and work development spaces in favor of the woman. The fragment chosen presents a power relationship in which she has to make significant efforts to accommodate, constructing the image of their couple in the mode that they (the group of mining couples, *with a group of girls*) seem to understand it - as men who demand the availability of (their) women when they are at home. The foregoing seems to assume a willingness to suspend any other interest or task, which places them in a position of subordination with respect to the needs of the male worker at home. The woman is placed in a position where she has to give in to the demands for time and attention required by her partner and the manifest objective for that is to avoid conflict. For the participant, assenting to her partner’s requirements implies postponing both her personal interests and her search for economic and affective independence [40,42,48]. This way, a subordination is reproduced toward the symbolic and economic control exercised by the provider figure. The quote is explicit: despite her request to consider her needs too (return early), she is not heard. The way the phrases are constructed is also eloquent: *He made us go out early, we did what he wanted to do anyway*. The action and the decision-making capacity continue being the man’s, and the woman, at least in this interview fragment, accommodates those requirements in order to avoid a fight. In this case, the woman’s economic entrepreneurship is possible, but provided it is subordinated to the role of mother-spouse and is clearly hindered when the man is at home.

It is important to state that while a tension is manifested, the possibility of making an issue of it, or fighting to transform the situation is not discerned in the discourse. The manifest imperative; that is, what she *has* to do is *to give in so you don’t quarrel*, and not manifest dislike, very probably to safeguard the worker’s physical and psychological rest, since he will soon return to the worksite.

Finally, another nuance of the discourse is what we find in the following fragment, in which we can appreciate a type of acceptance of different rules, one with the husband and father at home and another without him:

“When he (husband) is at home everything changes. For instance [...] he doesn’t eat vegetables so I have to cook pasta. When my son and I are alone, I cook other types of meals.. [...] I don’t make plans when he’s at home. A woman comes to the house to iron when he is not at home because he doesn’t like strangers at home. When he is not at home, I make the rules but when he arrives home everything changes. For instance, I don’t leave things on the dinner table, but he leaves his shoes anyplace, his bag at the door until he is leaving, and he just unpacks it that day. I used to unpack it for him and put the things away, but not anymore. It’s another rhythm when he’s here, it’s something different at home.” (Estela, 50 years old, 3 children).

Just as in the previous case, we can propose that this involves tacit agreements, that the woman accepts in silence, as a type of passive resistance rather than the mode of an exercise of adaptation; she doesn’t dispute it for its form, she exercises it when the man is not there. The discourse speaks of two different ways of living at home that are marked by the absence/presence of the man-father-worker at home. We could say two different cultures, two different standards, that the interviewee refers to, from orderliness to what they eat. We propose that the discourse speaks of the subjective positioning of the woman in the *family culture*, stressed between obedience to the demands and requirements

of the partner and the search for autonomy in the relationship and in her home. The absence of the male figure is construed as an opportunity to organize the family space according to her priorities, while his presence is practically a time to endure because she knows how and when it will end: *he leaves his shoes anyplace, his bag at the door until he is leaving.*

What we previously denominated “mining family normativity” constitutes a social ordering through which gender order is reproduced. We propose that this normativity forms part of what Meler [49] calls the “mining family culture”, according to which the constant adjustments experienced in the intimate life of the couple and in the relationship with the children derived from the shift work and the organization of mining work in general, are being subjectivized; that is, incorporated into the psyches and bodies of the family members, thereby defining their ways of being and relating in the world [50]. As a corollary, we would say that the social and technical organization of mining work reproduces the heteropatriarchal gender order, or rather, that the traditional gender order is reproduced by the mining organization of work.

To close, as suggested by Dejours and Gernett [50] and also Meler [49], the organization of work also reaches the processes of subjectivation of the children, since it traverses the patterns of child-raising and defines styles of bonds that impact the production of the children’s subjectivity. For that, we consider the following interview fragment:

I am the witch, and he (the husband) is the boy that plays with him (the son) all day. Even last year, Vicente (son) was called on (at school) to recognize the family: I am the mother, and he is the father and the brother. The other day I answered him (her partner) and told him, “thanks to me he loves you because since he was a baby he didn’t catch you [didn’t take him into account]”. The child must have felt that he rejected him, since he wasn’t affectionate. They weren’t like they are now, that they are more like partners, more united. If one doesn’t feel the love from the other person, he is indifferent. That’s the feeling in their relationship. Over time, I insisted so much with him on Vicente that now they get along better. Now Vicente is bigger; I taught him to play ball, with cars – it wasn’t him (María, 45 years old, 1 child).

The signifier *the witch* (re)appears, this time in the voice of a woman interviewee. Here the witch represents the person who has to take charge of everything except playing with the child, which as a counterpart emerges here as the exclusive task of the father. The discourse emphasizes that by bringing an image that speaks of an exercise that the child does at school, in which he recognizes his father also as his brother, alluding to the place of parity in which the male worker is positioned with respect to his son. In this way, the discourse situates the woman in a position of authority, more a sort of uncomfortable authority that is signified with the word *witch*.

Also, the narrator positions herself as guarantor of the love between father and son. It is she who articulates it, who promotes it, and what’s more, thanks to her the child loves the father. The man is signified as somehow incapable of generating love or attachment with the child, like he is unable, even though now fathers are not like they were before: *they are more like partners, more united*. Despite these changes that the interviewee recognizes in the world, they are changes that her husband male mining worker has not been able to develop in himself. If there are advances in this transformation, they are the result of her effort.

4. Conclusions

Seeking to answer the question, which cultural impositions are reproduced, and which are transformed and/or subverted in the discourse of *mining couples in the process of reconciling the demands of the companies and the affective requirements of life as a couple and the children?*

In this sense, we would say that what we are understanding as a *mining family culture*, that is, the ways of intimate life, of organizing family relations and even the possibilities of experiencing oneself, of feeling one’s own subjectivity, in the frameworks proposed or

imposed by the organization of mining work and especially the shift system, favor the reproduction of a gender order strongly marked by male domination based on a strict sexual division of the work that assigns production tasks to the men and reproduction tasks to the women, placing the former in a position of greater value.

We also discovered that the majority of the *arrangements* expressed in the discourse do not, strictly speaking, constitute agreements, since most of the time they are tacit, not negotiated, perhaps taken to be obvious or natural. The possibility for agreement is related to a fear of conflict, especially in women, who seem to exert themselves to maintain an emotional climate free from tension at home in order to guarantee optimal rest for the male worker.

For the male workers, the effort to endure this work organization seems to involve a significant risk, which is the sense, often explicit in their work, that the quality of life of their family ends up being the cost of their work. They work for the family at the cost of family life. The interviewees reiterate and reproduce a type of paradox: needing a family that doesn't need them, which ends up positioning the men in the only place possible – the worksite. It is there where they feel they are contributing, capable of offering solutions, of mobilizing their intelligence and their senses in the interest of resolving the problems that the daily work presents, which is often not the case at home and in issues of a domestic nature, since there it is she *who must deal with it*.

Finally, we started this research with the idea of finding tensions and escape points, cracks or fissures in the standard gender order in the contemporary, post-feminist revolution mining family. However, in the demands of the organization of mining work in Antofagasta we found that there is still a type of quarry, reproducing male domination – a matter that in symbolic terms constitutes a significant challenge for the country, considering that mining is the principal local economic activity.

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