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WOMEN IN NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS:
A CASE STUDY OF WORKER MOTIVATION

By

Katherine L. Wesley

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies

Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Under the Supervision of Professor Marilyn L. Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

October, 2012

WOMEN IN NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS:
A CASE STUDY OF WORKER MOTIVATION

Katherine L. Wesley, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2012

Advisor: Marilyn Grady

The Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupation Act (WANTO Act) of 1992 highlighted an urgent matter facing the American workforce that persists today. The urgent matter in 2012 involves the precarious effect of demographics on the American labor market, placing women at the crux of engaging opportunity or maintaining status quo.

Women must be empowered and encouraged to seek employment opportunities they have never considered, e.g. male-dominated, nontraditional occupations, for the U.S. to keep pace with labor market needs. The need amplifies the myriad of issues for women in male-dominated, nontraditional occupations.

Among the barriers confronting women is the persistence of substantial wage differences when women and men do exactly the same jobs (Crawford, 2012) as well as the continued clustering of women at the bottom of the hierarchy in nontraditional occupations.

The purpose of this study was to understand how mentorship contributed to long-term success in nontraditional career paths of women at Lincoln Industries in Lincoln, Nebraska. The site was chosen for its national recognition and five-time honor as “one of the best places to work in America” (Lincoln Journal Star, 2011, para. 4).

A qualitative case study was designed to examine the meaning of long-term employment for women in a nontraditional occupation and how they interpreted their experiences. Data was collected through interviews and a focus group.

The findings augment existing knowledge concerning best practices for industries that seek to maintain the employment of women in nontraditional occupations and address significant issues facing the U.S. labor market. The findings will inform educators of salient factors helpful in the advancement of women, personally and professionally, in the pursuit of nontraditional occupations. Finally, the findings of the study will assist women as they navigate the issues that intersect gender and achievement.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the special people in my life who have supported, motivated, mentored, and tolerated me, through this process. I am grateful for each and every one.

To my advisor, mentor and dear friend, Professor Marilyn Grady, who has consistently guided, challenged and insisted that I embrace my past, let go of my doubts and reach for all that I long to be. I am thankful to know her, to have grown from her experience and knowledge, and with her support, to have ventured onto a path I never would have imagined.

To my daughters, Sara and Kaitlin, who have waited patiently for me to complete my degree. They are a continual source of inspiration. It is for my daughters that I am most proud of this accomplishment. I would also like to thank my mother, Sarah Grace. My mother is an amazing and resilient woman who has believed in me, always and forever.

To my husband, Kevin, who has encouraged me, and supported me, to be whatever I wanted to be, since the day we met. To my special research partner, this could not have been possible without you.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Congress stated, as part of their findings in support of the WANTO Act (1992) that:

American businesses will face a dramatically different labor market than the one to which they have become accustomed. . . . [T]wo in every three new entrants to the work force will be women, and to meet the labor needs such women must work in all occupational areas including apprenticeable occupations and nontraditional occupations. However, women face significant barriers to their full and effective participation in apprenticeable occupations and nontraditional occupations. (United States Congress, 1992, Section 2501)

The literature presents evidence suggesting that women are not only capable of performing the work of nontraditional occupations but are interested in nontraditional occupations as careers (O'Farrell, 1999). In order to discuss these issues, it is first necessary to provide brief, but concise, definitions of nontraditional occupation, the WANTO Act (United States Congress, 1992), role model, mentor, and longevity:

- Nontraditional occupation means jobs in which women make up 25% or less of the total number of workers in that occupation. (United States Congress, 1992, Sec. 2508)
- The WANTO Act (United States Congress, 1992) is the abbreviated term for Congressional Act 29 USC Chapter 27, Sections 2501 – 2509, Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO). The purpose of this chapter is to provide technical assistance to employers and labor unions to

encourage employment of women in apprenticeable occupations and nontraditional occupations. Such assistance is provided to enable businesses to meet the challenge of Workforce 2000 by preparing employers to successfully recruit, train, and retain women in apprenticeable and nontraditional occupations (United States Congress, 1992).

- Role model refers to a trusted counselor or guide (Role Models, n.d., para.1), or an experienced, productive superior who relates well to a less-experienced employee and facilitates her personal development for the benefit of the individual as well as the organization (Noe, 1988).
- A mentor is someone who gets involved with the details of one's socialization and development in a profession (Young, MacKenzie, & Sherif, 1980); a person at work who takes a personal interest in your career and who guides you or sponsors you (Roche, 1979).
- Longevity, for the purpose of this paper, refers to women employed on the production line of a manufacturing company for five or more years.

Background

A brief historical overview of this topic indicates women were first introduced to nontraditional occupations during World Wars I and II when the United States government needed women to work in the relatively high-paying blue collar jobs usually held by men. When the wars concluded and men returned, government support was withdrawn and women were left without options to remain in these nontraditional occupations and they returned to their traditionally female employment or full-time homemaking.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited employers and unions from employment discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion and sex. Thereafter, in 1965, President Johnson's Executive Order 11246 (United States Department of Labor (USDOL), n.d.) required companies conducting business with the federal government to expand job opportunities for minorities. Executive Order 11246 (USDOL, n.d.) was amended in 1967 to include affirmative action for women. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1972 mandated federal agencies to prohibit discrimination. The EEOA prompted many city, county, and state agencies to develop procedures prohibiting discrimination and requiring affirmative action policies in employment and education.

Thirty years later in 1992, Congress passed the Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupation Act (WANTO Act) to assist employers and unions in recruiting, training and retaining women in apprenticeable and other nontraditional occupations (Congress, 1992). The WANTO Act provides numerous levels of aid designed to assist women in gaining skills required to find and keep good jobs in fields most women have not previously considered. The WANTO Act provides an outreach program to employers and labor unions, technical assistance to employers and unions meeting certain criteria, and competitive grants. The WANTO Act also finances a study of barriers to participation of women in apprenticeable and nontraditional occupations.

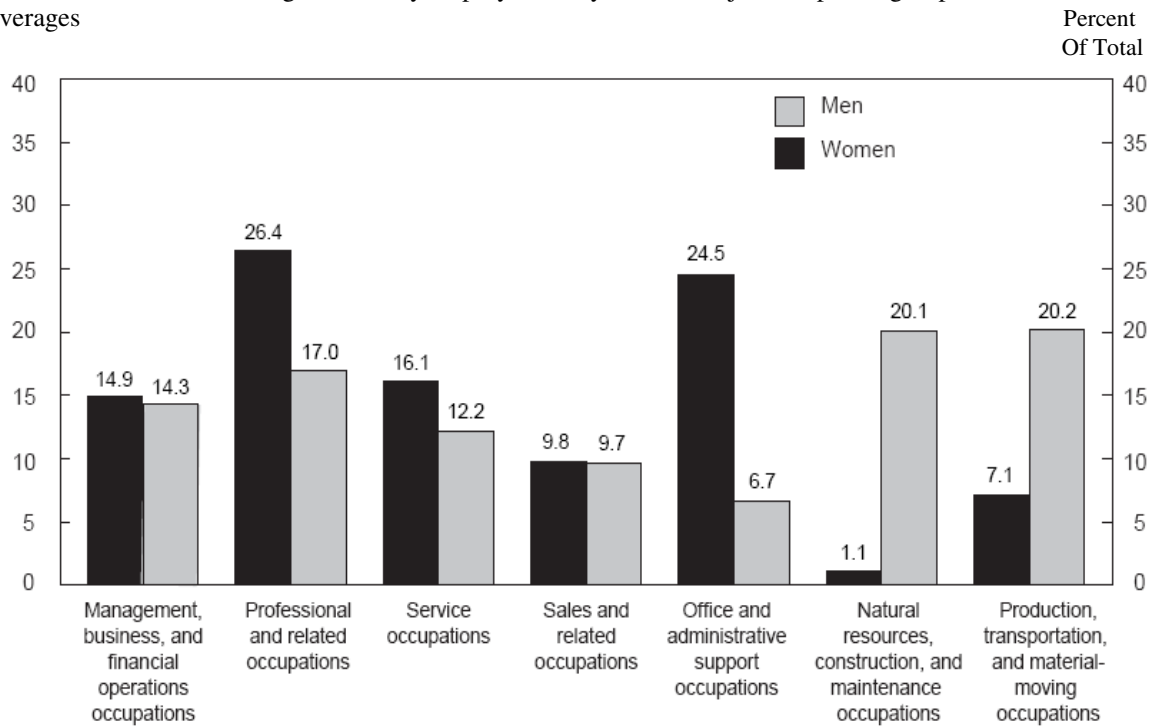
Title 29 USC Section 2503 (United States Congress, 1992) appropriated \$1,000,000 in assistance, in the form of competitive grants distributed by the Secretary of Labor to community-based organizations. The grants have been distributed each year

since 1992 and are divided among 50 employers or labor unions to provide the technical assistance required to meet the goals of the WANTO Act (United States Congress, 1992).

Federal appropriations together with other forms of assistance are vital to the continued proliferation of women in nontraditional occupations not only to promote a reasonable pay wage for women and their families, but also to address the needs associated with America's changing workforce. Unfortunately, a mere six years after passage of the WANTO Act, the findings of Carrington and Troske's (1998) study of 4,000 manufacturing establishments revealed that women blue-collar workers tended to be concentrated within industries that paid less than those where men were found (O'Farrell, 1999). Examples of blue-collar occupations where women were heavily represented were largely comprised of piecework wherein women were paid according to how quickly and accurately they worked. This style of remuneration added considerable stress and pressure upon females employed in this type of industry (Mulcahy & Faulkner, 1997).

Women are now well-entrenched in the workforce including those women with children. However, recent statistics show that women continue to be underrepresented at the top of their work organizations (Elacqua, Beehr, Hansen, & Webster, 2009) as well as in nontraditional occupations as illustrated in Figure 1. Research suggests that having similar role models is one of the most important criteria for retaining women in nontraditional occupations (Yates, 2001) and that mentoring strongly indicates that individuals of all identity groups (racial, ethnic, and gender groups) benefit from multiple developmental relationships as each offers unique developmental opportunities (Thomas, 1989; Kram & Bragar, 1992; Parker & Kram, 1993).

Figure 1.
Distribution of full-time wage and salary employment, by sex and major occupation group, 2010 annual averages



Note. Adapted from United States Department of Labor. (2012). *Highlights of women's earnings in 2011* (Report 1030). Retrieved from www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2011.pdf

There are difficulties, however, associated with role models and mentors for women in nontraditional occupations. Relationship issues abound, highlighting the fact that “. . . cross-gender mentor relationships have several complexities that often limit their usefulness” (Parker & Kram, 1993, p. 42).

. . . [M]en and women prefer to form mentorships with members of the same sex, but women have difficulty establishing mentoring with other women because there are not as many women at higher ranks, and they especially have trouble forming mentoring relationships with men in male-dominated careers. Women often exclude themselves from mentoring relationships or are excluded from powerful male networks. (Elacqua et al., 2009, p. 286)

This reality partially explains the shortage of female mentors in male-dominated occupations (Noe, 1988). Tokenism is also a plausible explanation for the lack of mentors for women in nontraditional occupations. “According to Kanter (1977), individuals are considered tokens when they enter a job environment in which their social category (e.g., sex or race) historically has been disproportionately represented” (Noe, 1988, p. 67). Issues arise for both sexes, relating to tokenism, which creates distance, resentment, and dissatisfaction in the workplace. Noe (1988) hypothesized that as the percentage of women in nontraditional occupations increases, men may be more willing to serve as mentors because of the diminishing perceptions that women hold these jobs as tokens. The percentage of women working in nontraditional occupations has not yet reached a level sufficient to counteract the effect of tokenism in the workplace.

The implications of gender are significant with regard to the diminished status attributed to being female in the American culture. Yoder (2002) stated, “[T]he negative outcomes associated with token numbers do not result from proportional scarcity alone but rather from underrepresentation combined with lower status” (p. 10).

The issues revealed within the literature concerning attracting, training, and retaining women in apprenticeable and nontraditional occupations are considerable and continue to negatively impact women and the American workforce. A significant source of support, beyond the appropriation and other forms of assistance provided by the WANTO Act of 1992, is the positive effect a role model or mentor may have upon women in nontraditional occupations, notwithstanding the issues mentioned above. Research concerning the positive effect of role models and/or mentors upon white collar women in nontraditional occupations is abundant (Crawford, 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

However, what motivates women in blue collar nontraditional occupations requires further research.

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to understand what role mentorship played in the long-term success of women working in blue-collar nontraditional occupation. A case study was utilized, comprised of women employed on a production line for five years or longer who agreed to be interviewed. Rather than focus on the pathology of this issue, which has been covered extensively, I sought to identify the best practices of a manufacturing plant with a proven history of worker satisfaction and long-term employment of women working on their production line. The research questions were:

1. What role does mentorship play in the level of success, measured by longevity, in the nontraditional employment of women at a successful manufacturing plant?
2. What motivates women to work in this setting?

Epistemology

It is important for consumers of research to understand the philosophical positioning of the researcher because this positioning reveals personal beliefs concerning the nature of reality (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology), as they intertwine in the research process (Merriam, 2009). The views that scholars bring to qualitative research are many. Given my understanding thus far, my epistemology, or way of knowing, is Constructivist. Those adopting this epistemology support the notion that reality is socially constructed and when participants discuss their understandings, their meanings are “shaped by social interaction with others and from their own personal histories” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 40). The Constructivist supports multiple

realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Things are defined and find meaning within one's consciousness yet are indelibly affected by culture, race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The Constructivist approach is comfortable with what is. Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) assert the Constructivist works from the bottom up, using the participants' views to build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes. I looked at the motivation of women employed in a blue-collar nontraditional occupation and sought to discover what sustained them. This study fits the Constructivist approach: using participants' views to build broader themes and generate theory. This worldview also fits nicely within my discipline which most often utilizes the qualitative research method.

Aside from classifying my worldview from within the information relayed in the literature and complementing my research question and discipline, a constructivist perspective fits my personal philosophy. The meanings I embrace have developed through social interaction and have evolved through levels of maturity and experience. I understand now, better than before, what shapes my perspective and I acknowledge and understand that like elements are at play in everyone's perception of their reality. I approach life and research from a stance of understanding.

Valuable information could be acquired by approaching this research study quantitatively, from a canonical perspective. For example, simply knowing how many women are employed on the production line at this manufacturing plant and for how long is relevant data easily measured and attained through survey research. However, this method does not provide the comprehensive and exhaustive data required to adequately address my research question. There was much more to learn by approaching this

question qualitatively than from the ostensibly linear relationship gleaned from survey results.

A qualitative approach was better suited to reach a deeper meaning. Merriam (2009) stated, “[Q]ualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). The goal for this research was to better understand the deeper meaning long-term employment in the nontraditional occupation of a production line has for these women, how the participants interpret their experiences, as well as what role, if any, mentors played in their experiences. Getting at this deeper meaning was best discerned through continuous attention to the particular perceptions of the actors (Stake, 1995). The goal was most reachable and more thoroughly understood by utilizing a qualitative research method, specifically a case study. Further guiding the decision to conduct a case study for this research question was Creswell’s (2007) definition of case study as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case *description* and case-based themes.

Here the “case” is the group of women employed for five years or more on the production line at a manufacturing company in the Midwestern United States. The case is bound by its physical environment, the manufacturing company, in which the women are employed.

Data Collection

Patton asserted that interviewing participants is an ideal data collection procedure for this type of research question as it allows a better understanding of unobservable feelings and thoughts (Merriam, 2009). The interview questions were structured with an aim toward better understanding participant perceptions of self in their work setting and the presence or lack of positive relationships with mentors. The interviews were audio taped and I transcribed them.

Qualitative study is *emergent* and *flexible* (Merriam, 2009). I remained responsive and open to any changes needed as research progressed. However, as mentioned previously, I utilized interviewing as the primary form of data collection. The study began with 18 face-to-face interviews and one focus group with five participants. The questions were structured to ascertain a better understanding of participant perceptions of self in their work setting and the presence or lack of positive relationships with mentors. The semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C) included the following questions:

1. How did you learn about your position here?
2. What is it about your employment here that is most satisfying?
3. What is your most positive work-related memory here?
4. How have you been encouraged in your work place?

If interview participants did not mention mentorship or role models, the following “probes” were utilized:

5. Is there a person here that you look to as a mentor or role model?
- 5a. If yes, how has this person affected your experiences here?

The questions were designed to invite a dialogue wherein the participants engaged in story-telling of their experiences within the company. Low inference paraphrasing and non-leading probes helped direct the responses to the area of interest.

The focus group interview was an additional form of data collection. Focus group discussions are effective when we seek to gain information about *why* people think or feel the way they do. This type of data collection “allows for group interaction and greater insight into why certain opinions are held” (Krueger, 1994, p. 3). Facilitating a focus group positions the interviewer within the group as a permissive and nonjudgmental observer juxtaposed to an authority figure striving to lead the group. This positioning is helpful when attempting to illicit information because opinions often change or become reinforced through listening to others’ opinions, hence, may yield undiscovered or incomplete perceptions from those disclosed during individual interviewing.

The focus group interviews were audio taped and conformed to Krueger’s (1994) questioning route model. This model included an opening question to allow participants to become familiar with one another followed by introductory, transition, key, ending, and summary questions. The information gleaned from individual interviews informed the substance and direction for key questioning during the focus group.

Research Site and Participants

The manufacturing company chosen as the research site is situated within Lincoln, Nebraska, a city whose population is approximately 262,340 (U.S. Census Bureau, July 2012). Lincoln Industries was an ideal site for this research because of its proven track record of nationally-recognized performance and success in employing

women in nontraditional occupations for a period of five or more years. Lincoln Industries authorized full access to their company and employees.

The company agreed to provide the names of women working on the production line for a period of five or more years. A letter (Appendix A) was distributed to the eighteen female employees identified by the company explaining the scope of the research and requesting their voluntary participation in the study. Each female participant received an Informed Consent (Appendix B) notification for their review and signature prior to the start of their interview.

Lincoln Industries provided complete access to their facilities and employees for observation purposes and interviewing. The management team at Lincoln Industries facilitated the face-to-face interviews with all of the participants by telephoning their department five minutes prior to their scheduled interview, to remind the participant to report to the conference room.

Data Management and Analysis

Separate files were created for each participant, utilizing participants' last name for identification purposes. Each named file was further divided into sub-files: Interview and Focus Group Discussion. This information served as the case study database (Yin, 2008) and was saved at multiple locations to ensure its safety as well as to provide multiple access points.

As suggested by Merriam (2009), I conducted ongoing analysis beginning with the first interview because, "Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed" (p. 171). Ongoing analysis allowed the opportunity to identify emerging

themes (Table 1) or patterns and then incorporate questions concerning the themes and/or patterns into further interviews and focus group discussion. Analysis was supported by vigorous observer note taking during interviews and focus group discussion and required a constant moving back and forth between the descriptions of what occurred and my interpretations of those descriptions.

Table 1.
Coding theme development

Culture	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment at Lincoln Industries • Mindset/Work Ethic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication
Gender	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Characteristics • Working With Men • Judgment and Stereotype 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Girl Card • Differences Between Men and Women
Leadership	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Leadership • If Issues, I Go To 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative Leadership
Blue Collar Work	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior Work History 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of Blue Collar Work
Motivation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay • Work Culture • Benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People • Job is Rewarding • Kids
Mentor and Role Model	
Family	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something Different for My Kids • Upbringing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and Kids

In vivo coding, a word-based analysis which analyzes the verbatim words used by the participants, aided in this back and forth interplay and was performed on each interview and focus group discussion. A brief description of this coding process follows. Each transcript was read entirely then re-read a paragraph at a time. After reading the paragraph, a two or three word phrase of code was assigned to the paragraph. The in vivo codes were then compiled into categories and the categories were compiled into themes.

Thereafter, each interview was given an identifying notation to aid in accessing the data according to relevant themes for the research project.

Validation

It is especially important to qualitative research professionals that their findings are valid and trustworthy. For the qualitative researcher this is particularly significant because of their often intimate involvement in people's lives and the possible repercussions from that involvement. For the informants, participating is not without risk. Validity, therefore, involves a careful design of the study that applies standards well developed and accepted within the scientific community (Merriam, 2009); it is also relative and must be "assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions" (p. 214).

Triangulation across the multiple methods of data collection was utilized to confirm internal validity. The information relayed in the interviews and focus group discussions was cross-checked and compared with my observations of the participants.

The research design for this project permitted five days in the field. This time commitment provided adequate engagement in data collection and ultimately saturation. Saturation was an additional form of validation utilized. The goal was to engage long enough to see and hear the same information and patterns over and over again (Merriam, 2009). Five days was sufficient to reach saturation.

I engaged professional colleagues in on-going discussions regarding the process of my research and as a means to confirm that data and findings were congruent. This peer review was used to validate the research and provide a detailed account of the methods and procedures decided upon and followed throughout the study, also referred to as an audit trail (Merriam, 2009).

Ethical Issues

Various ethical issues may arise within qualitative research due to the close relationship between the researcher and participants. The researcher's role may be associated with perceived power imbalances. Remaining sensitive to the potential for the research to be disruptive to the site as well as the possible exploitation of the participants, given their status as an underrepresented group, was of primary importance (Creswell, 2007).

I received approval from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Institutional Review Board. This required review procedure addressed the ethical issues surrounding the study and included safeguards to protect participant anonymity and data collection. An Informed Consent (Appendix B) was signed by each participant prior to beginning the interview process and detailed the purpose of the study, the benefits associated with participation, the time involved, and reiterated that participation was voluntary and could

be rescinded at any time without damaging their relationship with the researcher, the university, or their employer. There were no known risks associated with this study.

In summary, eighteen women voluntarily agreed to take part in this study via face-to-face interviews, a focus group, and to be observed while working on their production line. The interviews and focus group were audio taped and transcribed by me. Through the process of in-vivo coding, seven themes emerged that spoke to the motivation of the women. These themes, sub-themes, and their significance, will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

FINDINGS

THEME: CULTURE

Themes that emerged from the data were Culture, Gender, Leadership, Blue Collar Work, Motivation, Mentor/Role Model, and Family. The sub-themes related to the following: employment at Lincoln Industries, mindset/work ethic, communication, personal characteristics, working with men, judgment and stereotype, the girl card, differences between men and women, positive and negative leadership, if issues I go to, prior work history, knowledge of blue collar work, pay, work culture, benefits, people, job is rewarding, kids, something different for my kids, upbringing, and family and kids.

I have included statements from participants that illustrate the emergence of themes and subthemes within the data, arranged in order of most dominant to less dominant.

Sub-Theme: Employed at Lincoln Industries

The theme of culture was dominant in the interviews with eight individuals. Following are comments made by these individuals that illustrate the significance of culture in the employment experiences of these women.

One individual spoke extensively about culture, "That's one of our beliefs and drivers, honesty in everything you do." This individual described two examples of honesty. The first was in connection with random drug testing; she stated that if a person were to fail a random drug test, if that person were honest about it when confronted, the person would keep his or her job. The person who failed the drug test would be "put through rehab, but you'll keep your job." The importance of honesty in employees was

also mentioned in an instance of sexual harassment. While employed as a team lead, this individual was told by a member of their line that he was being harassed. She reported the harassment to her supervisor and upon confirmation of the harassment, the offending individual was immediately “let go.” The interviewee stated that the harassing employee was honest about the behavior when confronted, which led to her being let go from the company. When I expressed surprise at that level of honesty, the interviewee acted as though this type of honesty was a natural occurrence; as though it was nothing special to tout in their workplace. She also spoke about the company’s “no tolerance” level for harassment and violence, “You don’t even get warned for it (violence), if you do it, you just know you’re gone.”

The interviewee also shared an instance of work culture with regard to team harmony, “Lincoln Industries is very big with fitting the right people with the right people” and often move employees around to reach harmony on lines, “We had an individual that used to work with us that was not where we were at all, I mean she did not mesh with our group at all.” The person was moved to a different line and their line ran smoothly once again.

Another example of culture was relayed through the training that all employees go through:

Before they come to the floor they go through training so they learn a lot of stuff and one of the things in the training is just basically how our atmosphere is.

We’re very open. No question is a stupid question. It could actually be the stupidest question you’ve ever heard but no one would ever make fun of you for asking it because that’s just how we are. The culture here is so open to pretty

much anything and everybody. They don't care if you're blue, purple, doesn't matter. If you can do your job and you are a good person. That's another thing, they don't call you employees here. You can get in a lot of trouble for calling someone an employee. We are people.

The notion of being people rather than employees was also described in the following statement, "everybody's replaceable . . . But they [Lincoln Industries] try to make it where you can't be replaced because they've invested so much time and training into you, they like to keep their people around."

Honesty was mentioned by another interviewee as we discussed the process she went through to become employed by Lincoln Industries. This woman was telephoned by the company's "person resources" department after she submitted her application to Lincoln Industries. As a side note, I learned through other conversations that Lincoln Industries does not refer to their human resources department as human resources, but rather "person resources." She was informed by the person resources representative that this telephone call was referred to as a, "Talent Plus interview just to see what type of person you are and what your beliefs are. If you have the same beliefs and drivers as the company then you were a good fit and then you actually got your interview, and if they liked what you said from the interview then you were hired." As part of the "Talent Plus" interview she was asked how important honesty was to her. She stated, "I've never had anybody in a job before ask me how important honesty is, and is it ok to lie."

This person also mentioned that her experience at Lincoln Industries felt like family, "Everybody was pretty much equal; they don't treat anybody any better or beneath anybody else. . . . They treat you like more of a family here." This sentiment

was repeated in other words; another woman stated, “We’re all valued, no matter what. I mean everybody is somebody.”

The feeling of family that the women received from the company was not an empty promise. The women relayed multiple instances of the company standing behind the trust and support of their people. Lincoln Industries shares a portion of their plant with co-contractors. At times, co-contractors and Lincoln Industries’ people work side-by-side. During one occasion, a co-contractor’s employee had become mentally unstable to the point of verbally threatening others. The Lincoln Industries employee became aware of the unstable individual through her friend who had been threatened. The Lincoln Industries participant shared:

Well, one of the gals had let me know because I was her friend and I kept telling her, I said, go to your boss. If you don’t go to your boss, I’m going to my boss. She wouldn’t go to her boss. She didn’t think that her company would back her up. I knew without a doubt mine would. So I went to my boss and immediately he was spoken to and he’s gone – kind of scary.

This same Lincoln Industries interviewee recounted another incident wherein she contrasted the support she received from a prior employer to the support she receives from Lincoln Industries, with regard to being touched inappropriately by a male co-worker. She shared that inappropriate touching does occur and that when this type of incident occurred at her previous employer, the management simply moved her to another location. She explained, “He’d been there longer and they just moved me but when it happened out here (Lincoln Industries), work took care of it right away and the guy was gone.”

Another woman spoke about the company's support of her during a difficult time in her life:

I was separating from my husband and changing my entire way of life after 27 years. Most people who go through and do that have trouble with jobs during their transition time. I knew though I wouldn't have to go through that because this company would work with me.

When asking her further about this time she stated:

I have a strong belief in their [Lincoln Industries] beliefs and drivers. I would be the poster child for it. I would seriously be the poster child for it. To put it as bluntly as possible, it's the Bible. That is probably a rude way to put it but it's their commandments.

The work atmosphere was referred to repeatedly throughout my conversations with female employees. One woman stated, "It's professional here but it's not like if you work in an office or something." Five women referred to their fellow co-workers at Lincoln Industries as a kind of work family, "There are only nine people out there so it is like everybody knows everybody really well and we're kind of a close . . . it's just like a little family." Another woman shared:

Everybody over there kind of feeds off each other, so it's kind of a close dysfunctional family . . . it is like a big family – and every family is dysfunctional but it is a family none-the-less. So it is kind of nice. Some people look at it is kind of cheesy that we are people and not employees but it is kind of nice.

One participant referred to her supervisor as her best friend, "here it is very family oriented." The fifth woman likened the work family to little groups:

It's kind of like little groups. When I started here I was on line 31 and 34 and it was like our own little group and even now they moved me to 36 and 37 and it is kind of like our own little group.

Another dominant element of work culture was flexibility. Many of the women mentioned flexibility when discussing their work. Three women expressed flexibility in three very different ways: work schedule, family, and personal talent. One of the women talked about the multiple jobs she performs at work which leads to variation in her schedule, "I have worked all kinds of different schedules." With regard to family, this woman shared that she has school-aged children and is permitted to flex her work schedule to allow time to take the children to school before arriving at work, "It's really flexible." The third woman who mentioned flexibility spoke about each of their personal talents:

We all use our talents no matter what they are or where they are at. If you have an ability to do something . . . we have a gentleman that can polish. It is an awesome, beautiful job. So, if we have some little something that needs polishing, that is who we go to.

Flexibility was also discussed in terms of being transferred to different lines. Two women shared the many instances they changed jobs:

. . . I got put over in that area and then when I transferred out, because the chemicals bother me. The chrome bothers me. It gave me sinus infections all the time. So then I transferred over to line 36 where they plugged and unplugged mufflers and I liked that a lot better. It is an automated line. I worked over there

but it is really hard on your body so, I mean your arms, your wrists, and it is fast and I did that for four years and then I transferred out here.

The second woman shared her experience at being promoted from a line worker to a team lead:

So as soon as a spot opened there, I put in for it and got it; I have been there since. And then a little over a year ago, the team lead that was over there, she applied for a different position and got it. So she is over at the main plant now and I just put in for that and was chosen. I don't know if I was the only one, but it doesn't matter because I got it!

As we continued to talk about what it was these women liked about working at Lincoln Industries, others simply stated, "I liked it as soon as I came here. It was exactly what I wanted to do" and "I do like it here. I like the people here."

Sub-Theme: Length of Employment at Lincoln Industries

Of the 18 women I interviewed, 16 shared their length of employment. To be included in the study, an individual had to have been employed at Lincoln Industries for a minimum of five years. The average length of employment at Lincoln Industries for the interviewed group was 8.125 years; the shortest length of employment was five years, the longest at Lincoln Industries was 15 years. Ten of the 16 women had been employed at Lincoln Industries on their production line for five years or longer. The average age of the participants was 37.

Of this group, three of the women learned of employment opportunities at Lincoln Industries through their boyfriends. Four women became aware through their friends or family, two women applied through a temp agency, and one woman could literally see

the plant from her back porch. This woman came to the United States from a different country, but her husband resided in Lincoln, Nebraska. She was unable to drive when she first came to the U.S., so she would often walk. During these walks, she saw Lincoln Industries and decided to apply. She stated she was hired temporarily for a period of approximately five months until paperwork was confirmed; thereafter she was hired full time with benefits. Her employment with Lincoln Industries is her first and only job since arriving in Lincoln. She has worked at the company for eight years.

Sub-Theme: Mindset/Work Ethic

The women I encountered at Lincoln Industries shared a strong will, determination, and an exceptional work ethic. A strong work ethic was modeled by five of the women. One woman shared a part of her background that portrayed her strong work ethic and determination. This woman came to the blue collar manufacturing industry from the nursing field. She was a certified nurse's assistant working in nursing homes at the time her sister was injured in an automobile accident. The injured sister convinced the woman to work her hours for her at Big Apple Bagel so she would not lose her job while recuperating. The sisters had known the manager at the bagel shop for some time and he agreed to the arrangement. Shortly thereafter, a position became available at a different manufacturing company in Lincoln. The woman took her nephew there to fill out an application and while they were in the office, the secretary asked the woman to fill out an application as well. She did and one week later she was hired and scheduled to work weekends, as well as work her sister's weekly hours at the bagel shop, and her CNA position at a nursing home. She stated, "I was working 95 hours about every other week."

Another individual represented her dedication to work, “I was jumping in everywhere they needed me on the line, all the different job duties, inspecting, racking, trash dumping, I’d jump right in and when people came in new, I would help them too.” One woman spoke about work ethic in this manner, “I want to learn more computer stuff so I can do all my own reports and charts, but as far as the company, every time something new opens and the company is offering training, I am doing it or I am signing up for it.” Two of the women spoke about volunteering on other lines to learn procedures:

I volunteered to go over in polishing too, so I work a couple of days over there. I wanted the training to see what they have to do. I heard it was hard work; of course, I’m up for the challenge! I wanted to do that and also learn the process of the parts we do. Even though I’m not working on a plating line I wanted to know about it.

One woman who spoke about work ethic displayed her commitment to learning a new job on a different line that she wanted to be transferred to, on her days off. She said, “I would work on the weekends and ask the supervisor if I could come and do some work for him. That’s how I proved myself down there to where he would want to hire me.”

Five of the women discussed work ethic specifically; however, almost all of the women talked more about their determination as a mindset:

- I was determined I was going to be working here [Lincoln Industries].
- I don’t really see a lot of negative.
- I’ve been at Lincoln Industries ever since I decided I was going to be here.
- I’m not going to shoot it in the foot before it gets going. I want to try it.

- You only get stressed about things that you let stress you and there is not a lot that causes me stress.
- You have to get along with everybody.
- It all has to be done for us to be successful.
- Be yourself, be the best you can be.
- Be strong, you can do it, you're just the same as everybody else.
- Treat everybody with respect, but you also demand that respect.
- I expect respect.
- I deserve a right to be standing next to you, even though you're a man and I'm a woman, I will be there right beside you.
- I never quit, I don't like to quit on anything.
- I proved them wrong.
- I can take care of myself.
- I'm not some wuss that can't lift, I came prepared.
- Whatever a man can do a woman can do.
- I can pull my own weight around here and prove that I can do this job.
- If I'm going to quit this job I am going to quit because I want to.
- I am going to do this because I want to do it.
- I let the men know that I can do it – don't worry about me, I can do it, if I want your help I'll ask for it. . . . I pretty much just have to say that one time.
- I always volunteer to do something new.

One of the women talked about mindset in terms of a certain attitude, “I think if women come in with a certain attitude, that’s all you have to have, is a certain attitude.”

When I asked her to explain what she meant, she stated:

Ok, it’s the type of attitude you have that you are sure of yourself and if you come in with that type of attitude that you are sure of yourself, men will say, “Oh well, she’s not one of them.” There are certain women that come in and think they have to be mean. You don’t have to be mean. You can be nice but stern.

Another woman shared that a positive mindset helped her turn things around when things were not going very well for her at Lincoln Industries:

The way I look at it is that we spend the majority of our lives here (Lincoln Industries). I mean, I spend more time here than I do at home with my children. So, you are going to have to make the best of it. And, with me having two children at home to take care of, I cannot make my work life miserable. I have to admit, mine was pretty miserable for a while; but, I have just kind of turned it around and made the best of it. You actually just start enjoying it. So if you have a good day, you end up enjoying your job

Sub-Theme: Communication

Three women commented on the value of effective communication to build a sense of unity on their line. One individual shared the following,

In my area, we even have little sessions where we talk about what issues came up for that day, what we’re doing about it, how we’re going to achieve it, and have a good rapport with everyone. You can open up and talk and it will constantly keep you engaged; but also, the team itself will constantly flow together and interact.

One woman shared how “just working with people every day you learn how to communicate with them.” The final interviewee who talked about communication stated that even though the attempt to communicate effectively begins with the members of the line, ultimately there is recourse available to everyone:

If you have an issue with somebody you can pretty much say, “I have an issue with this and I have an issue with that and maybe we should try to do this.” If it doesn’t get better you go talk to your team leader.

THEME: Culture

Sub-Themes:

- Employment at Lincoln Industries
- Mindset/Work Ethic
- Communication

Chapter 4

THEME: GENDER

Gender was discussed by all of the participants; surprisingly, gender did not emerge as the most dominant theme. The possible implications of gender for women in nontraditional occupations in the literature can be visualized as a rogue wave in the otherwise calm current of relationships in the workplace. The sub-themes dominant in the participants' narratives offer a perspective that helps explain why gender was not of primary relevance.

Sub-Theme: Personal Characteristics

All of the women spoke about what aided them in their employment in a male-dominated field. Many talked about personal characteristics. Those who discussed personal characteristics considered themselves "tomboys." They said being a tomboy aided them in their interactions with men at work. One woman stated, "I've always been a tomboy . . . and I hung around with all my brother's friends. I have always been one of the guys. Maybe that's why I am more comfortable, I am in a man's world here and I have always hung out with guys. Even outside of work most of my friends are guys."

Three interviewees used the same wording to express their thoughts: "I have always been kind of a tomboy," "I have always been a tomboy," and "I am one of the guys." Another woman said she was a tomboy and that she was involved in a two-year program in electronics at a community college, "I was going for electronics . . . I was the only female in my class, which I am fine with. In high school I had more guy friends than girlfriends."

Other women spoke about their job “on a production line” as something they enjoyed:

- I like labor; I like the lifting and the moving. I don't like to sit still.
- I like challenges, I enjoy working.
- I like to use my hands; I am pretty good, very quick.
- It is not really hard for me; it is just what I do. I like to do it and I think I fit very good in it.

One participant described herself, “I'm a hands-on person. I like to physically work.”

This participant was the only woman who had prior work experience in a white collar profession. She was unhappy in that line of work and explained, “I just wanted to work with my hands. . . . I just think I fit in here better than I did in the office. I felt like I was playing a role there - playing dress up maybe. It just wasn't my thing. . . . It has to do with me. I don't think it has to do with the job.” This woman has been with Lincoln Industries for just under ten years and is not interested in moving vertically in the company. She stated, “I don't want to go to that next level. I guess maybe because it is more politics and I don't want to deal with that. And, it involves getting behind that desk again and I don't want to do that. I want to be hands-on.”

Another interviewee explained her thoughts on promotions within the company:

I do not want to take that path; I am looking for something else. Not sure what it is yet but team leads have different responsibilities; they are not always on the line or they are not always working with the people on the floor and I enjoy that more.

This woman expressed the same opinion concerning a vertical move, “I get out there and I build parts every day with them and I like that. I don't want to sit at my desk and look at reports every day.”

The following excerpt comes from a woman who was actually promoted to team lead and then returned to the production line in conjunction with a downsizing of the company:

I was just a regular worker and then I was moved to team lead. They (Lincoln Industries) had some reconstruction, so I went back down to regular worker. I think I had the opportunity to go back to team lead again but, I kind of enjoy just working with the guys on the floor. So I did not want to go back to team lead.

One woman believed a part of her personal character has changed, “Now that I have been here so long and am comfortable, I have a different attitude. I am blunt and confrontive.” This woman also shared, in connection with a family member who works in a traditional female profession, “I would rather do a physically challenging job rather than bust my butt for 23 years to make what I have made here in five.”

Six women mentioned personality traits they viewed favorably for work on a production line with men: patience, a positive attitude, personal inner strength, sense of humor, the ability to just let things go and self-confidence. One person described how her self-determination and proactive forethought served her during the time she was applying for her position at Lincoln Industries. She was aware that the plant she was working at was going to be closing down; she had been granted an interview at Lincoln Industries:

After the first interview I thought, “Well I think I really have a chance at this job.” I was kind of scared because I knew my other job was on the line and I had given my notice two days before they called everybody into a group and said this is our shut down date. The other people there were crying, wondering what they were going to do and I knew that I had a job to go to.

Two of the participants' perceptions of their personal characteristics were critical, “I think my expectations of people are too high and I kind of need to lower it. . . . I get frustrated if I cannot teach somebody something or they cannot get it” and “I hate laziness.” Other comments concerned the participants' physical size: “my biggest challenge here is not that I am a woman, it is my size,” “I am a little person, and a woman,” and “I am small, I'm tiny, I'm short, and my appearance made them skeptical because there is a lot of heavy, hard work out there to do.”

Sub-Theme: Working With Men

Fourteen of the women who participated in the interviews shared positive examples of their experiences working with men. Three of the women described instances when the men on their lines helped them, “They do some of the heavier stuff that requires a little more strength than what we have. We just ask one of them to do it and they are happy to do it. Especially if it involves power tools” and “They help out a lot. I noticed that and that is helpful too. Seeing me and then going over to lift a rack that is three times the size I am. They help, which is awesome.” One woman stated she “never had any issues” and another said, “I actually get along easier with men than I do with women a lot of the time.”

This participant became pregnant while working on the production line. She had the following experience working with men during this time:

It was nice; they were looking out for me. I wouldn't say they were more lenient or expected less because I was a girl but if I needed help they were there and when I got physically tired they were always right there to help, especially when I got pregnant. We would rotate machines and when I was pregnant, pushing a tube onto a bender isn't really something you want to be doing, especially when you are four or five months pregnant. So when it was my day to do that, almost every guy that I worked with at the time would say, "Hey, you wanna do this, I'll switch with you." It was really nice.

A few negative examples were offered. One woman shared her experience working with men after she became the first female operator of a line:

When I went over there I was the first female operator and the guys didn't like it. So that took a little bit. I have trained several people here; I have had guys that I have trained that have been really excellent and listened to me and I have had other guys that will not listen to me at all. They were mean to me. I had one temporary guy reply when I asked him what his name was, "don't worry about my name we won't be meeting up anytime soon." So, you have to get used to the comments. You have to earn your respect. You can tell the ones that like you and the ones that don't. Every once in a while you run across somebody out here like that, but most of them are pretty decent.

Other women were indifferent, "I don't know, you just do what you have to do," and ". . . over there in the area I was working was entirely guys and they were just busy

doing their own thing - - they show you what you needed to do and they went off and did their thing.”

One woman stated, in regard to working with men, “I don't think it pertains to male/female at all, sometimes people don't like change or they think the way they are doing it is the best way.” One person shared an issue she had while working with a man at a previous plant:

I had an issue with a guy and I don't really know for sure what it was but we talked about it. I don't know if we necessarily got anything out of our talk though. There were three other guys in the department, so if I needed help on anything I would just go to them.

The final comment on this topic was a mixture of positive and negative:

If you enjoy your job then somehow you find a way to deal with it or you brush it off. But if you look back on it and think about it, if it is not a typical situation and you get defensive about it then you are the one being a bitch and then they'd say, “What's your problem, just joking?” Well, just joking gets old.

Sub-Theme: Judgment and Stereotype

When the women discussed concerns related to their employment in a blue-collar nontraditional occupation, three spoke specifically of being judged based on their gender. One interviewee talked about her perception of being judged by male production line workers within the manufacturing plant when she was transferred to different lines, “They are going to compare you and rate you; they do not know how you work or what you can handle.” One woman justified being judged, “A lot of the females that come in,

most of them have never had manufacturing experience before. They have never worked in a factory.”

Another participant stated, “I think when I walked in here the first day to work in the pipe fab, everybody looked at me like ‘why is there a girl here.’ I don’t know if they ever did, but it kind of felt like maybe they took side bets to see how long I would last.” A different woman showed concern, “I didn’t want people to think I couldn’t do.”

The topic of judgment on various levels was present during the interviews. One woman spoke about the importance of having correct information to support discrepancies or issues of behavior, “If there is no proof of anything, then you become known as a complainer.”

The concern of being viewed stereotypically was an issue for the women and at times, played a role in how they treated each other. One woman stated, “People think that men are able to deal with the dirtiness, the extra labor, and they don’t think that women can handle that extent of it.” She went on:

I am harder on the girls because you are not here to look pretty; you are here to work. I think just because you are a girl, they shouldn’t be lenient on you. You should be able to do just as much as the guys do. You are in the same position, same job, same pay; you should work exactly the same. Some of them can’t handle it, they do not lift racks and that is ok, it is the dirtiness. You are going to get dirty, just get used to it!

Sub-Theme: The Girl Card

This “reverse” judgment can also be seen in three of the participants’ comments concerning the “girl card:”

I don't like girls playing the girl card. So, when we are all loading up a line and everybody is grabbing racks and putting them on the bars so we can put parts on the racks and there's one woman standing aside I get irritated with it. They don't see guys and girls as equals.

Another woman talked about her experience just beginning work on a new line:

They (the men on the line) thought I was going to be like the other woman over there and they treated me accordingly. When I began to do the work myself, the woman who was on the line before me said, "Oh don't do that, I pretend like I can't do it and let the guys do it."

One woman discussed judgment and stereotyping received from her team leads:

I did have three or four bosses who were the team leads and they had the same attitude about women. (This attitude was that the work done on a production line at Lincoln Industries was not for women.) I had to argue with them about it and that is when I asked to be moved somewhere else. Later they realized what I was trying to tell them, as their daughters became older, and a couple of them came back and said, "You were right."

Sub-Theme: Differences Between Men and Women

Eight participants spoke about their perceptions of differences between men and women in this type of workplace, "Guys don't like to be trained by anybody," "Girls will complain ahead of time, or right at the beginning, and guys will just do it and complain while they're doing it," and "Guys will just do whatever you tell them. Girls want to know why they have to do that."

One of the women shared: “Being close to people (working on the production line) adds an emotional part to the line that you have to deal with; the guys are easier to deal with than the girls. Girls just say nothing, nothing, nothing, and guys will usually talk,” “I think the women are faster building the little things where the guys are better at the bigger stuff,” “The women tend to talk more than what the men do,” and “They (men) have more of a dry humor which is what I enjoy. They joke a lot more.”

Gender was not a dominant theme in this study. The participants’ perceptions of self-overall exhibited more masculine than feminine characteristics. The narratives revealed instances where new female hires on a production line, that exhibited stereotypical feminine tendencies, were treated more harshly by their female peers than their male counterparts.

THEME: Gender

Sub-Themes:

- Personal Characteristics
- Working with Men
- Judgment and Stereotypes
- The Girl Card
- Differences Between Men and Women

Chapter 5

THEME: LEADERSHIP

Leadership emerged as an important element of job satisfaction for the participants. The women relayed that all employees are required to take orientation courses in which effective leadership skills are repeatedly discussed. Through the conversations, three sub-themes emerged in connection with leadership: positive examples, negative examples, and who participants' felt most comfortable approaching if they had issues in their employment.

Sub-Theme: Positive Leadership

Leadership was discussed by nine of the participants. Six women spoke emphatically about the importance of leadership on morale and motivation they received from management, "I think it has to do with who your supervisor is, absolutely has to do with it" and "I think it has a lot to do with the boss."

A second instance of Lincoln Industries' management promoting positive leadership for their workforce was the training required of team leads. One individual spoke at length concerning leadership development:

They put you through development leadership classes if they feel you need to take that next level class, they put you through that or one-on-one training with you and walk you through everything. One of the classes is how to deal with people: how to deal with someone who is angry, someone who is happy, someone who is always crying, because we have all of that here. We have 17 different nationalities here; you have people that cannot speak English and you wonder how to talk to that person. They teach you all of that here.

The leadership training was evident in the following quotes, the first of which addressed work schedules: “I talked to everybody and asked what works for everybody” and “Our team I think does a pretty good job, if one of us gets done early we go help the other person. We just float around to even everything out.”

One woman spoke about the training she received and how it helped to ease her concern and build confidence when working with chemicals:

They have an electro-plating class so you learn about some of the chemical make-ups, different things about chemicals and what they do, and what causes what.

Then they have a higher, Level A, electro-plating class. You can take classes and learn about it. I think it was more intimidating before you think, “Oh gosh, acid.”

But, now that I know about it, it isn’t what I thought it was.

Four women spoke about their leadership qualities in terms of “knowing their place:” “I didn’t fire anybody or write-up anybody for anything, that wasn’t in my job description, but I knew where to take it if I needed to take it somewhere,” “I was the supervisor and that was my responsibility, so I took care of it and my supervisor took it from there,” and “I am a lead but I do not see myself above anybody. I am friends with my workers.” When being promoted to team lead one interviewee stated, “I don’t change; I didn’t change what I was doing. I still worked as much as they did. Just because I have a title doesn’t make me any less of a worker.”

Sub-Theme: If issues, I go to . . .

Two women spoke about their leadership qualities in terms of building relationships. One woman shared an experience she had as a team lead:

She (a woman who worked on my line) told me that when the past lead was here she felt like she could never talk to her and she can talk to me. She said I'm more supportive than any of the other bosses she's ever had. Everybody is more open. I have made it clear that if they have an idea or a suggestion to share it. I have proven that I am going to stand behind my word.

One woman spoke about the relationships in her area, "My area is a close knit area and we all interact with each other really nicely. I'm really lucky." Two other interviewees spoke about their experiences with their team leads, "She just listened and tried to help you figure out the solutions" and "I would turn to my team lead if I was having issues. I feel comfortable talking to her."

Sub-Theme: Negative Leadership

Only two of the women interviewed spoke about leadership in a negative way. The first of these quotes concerns the impact a superior had on motivation. The individual this participant refers to was a team lead who did not exhibit the beliefs and drivers associated with employment at Lincoln Industries, "I used to dread coming to work here . . . [i]t made me not want to do anything extra." The second quote speaks directly to the ability of management at Lincoln Industries to intervene in instances of poor leadership on the part of team leads, "It's changed a lot, I think I am on my ninth supervisor."

The participants spoke about different elements of leadership that may have affected their job performance and satisfaction at Lincoln Industries. The women were able to speak from a reference of personal knowledge and experience regarding leadership at Lincoln Industries because of the new hire orientation required that

permeates the culture of this organization. The two instances of negative leadership affecting the participants were easily relatable to ineffective leadership style by the interviewees.

THEME: Leadership

Sub-Themes:

- Positive Leadership
- If Issues, I go to . . .
- Negative Leadership

Chapter 6

THEME: BLUE COLLAR WORK

Seventeen of the participants had worked other jobs prior to being hired at Lincoln Industries. One of the women stated her employment with Lincoln Industries was the first and only job she has had in the U.S. The discussions surrounding prior work history were revealing and positive in an explanatory sense, with regard to the level of satisfaction the participants describe in their positions at Lincoln Industries. The participants had a frame of reference of previous employment with which to juxtapose their current experience.

Sub-Theme: Prior Work History

The theme of prior work history within the manufacturing industry was dominant in ten interviews. Five of the women worked in traditional female occupations prior to their employment at Lincoln Industries. Two of the women worked in the medical field: one as a CNA and medical aid, another in housekeeping at a local hospital, and the other woman worked in a bank. A fifth woman arrived in Lincoln from another country and her position at Lincoln Industries on a production line was her first work experience in the United States.

Five of the participants had prior experience in blue-collar work. One individual had been employed for 27 years in manufacturing assembly. Prior to being hired at Lincoln Industries, she worked in a packaging department for a manufacturing plant and prior to that she was employed, "At another assembly place and made micro chips." One individual stated:

I really don't know what a traditional female route is because right straight out of high school I went to Novartis and worked there for a couple of years. I have always worked in manufacturing, every job that I have had is basically inspection.

One participant, interested in electrical engineering in high school, began her employment at a Nebraska power plant:

There were no girls anywhere beginning in my math classes at a community college. I worked at a Nebraska power plant and wore a hard hat every day. It was dirty and hot. Then I went to Lester Electrical as an electronic tech. I sat at a bench doing circuit boards for five years and thought, "Ok, this is boring." Then I worked for a friend's accounting firm. I wasn't sitting at a desk all day long; I did payroll, ran some stuff around and did data entry, which I wasn't real thrilled about.

Prior to another participant's employment at Lincoln Industries, she:

Worked at a motorcycle shop for five years selling parts, accessories, and retail stuff. Before that I worked at a plant, for just a few months that printed and put together magazines. They decided to close their plant there. I have had other production jobs, but my work at Lincoln Industries is my first experience bending metal.

One of the participants worked at Burger King for five or six six years and then went to Best Buy. She decided while she was working at Best Buy that she was not earning enough money so she began working at a factory in Falls City, "[T]hey made tools and sledge hammers; it was pretty interesting." Another woman had brief experience at a factory that assembled electrical cords and batteries.

The final interviewee who discussed prior work history stated she applied through Work Force, a temporary agency, for a job at Kawasaki. She worked at Kawasaki for five years but was never offered a full time position at Kawasaki, “You make good money out there but you have to get hired on and that’s the kicker. When you are temporary they can do whatever they want to with you.”

Sub-Theme: Knowledge of Blue-Collar Work

Three of the participants discussed their prior knowledge of blue collar work. One participant explained how she knew about nontraditional employment:

I grew up in a small town of about 16,000; there wasn’t a whole lot for jobs there. You either had fast food or grocery stores and then there were three manufacturing places there, two of them were almost all women. The only real men that worked there were supervisors and the maintenance guys. That is where I started because my mom worked there and it was a higher paying job than working at the grocery stores because some of those places you couldn’t get 40 hours in and you did not have health insurance benefits. When you go to a manufacturing place that is where you can get your 40 hours and you can get all the benefits. I got the 401K and all that stuff. Back then, McDonald’s didn’t have that.

One of the women stated she “learned about this place through my brother. He worked there for almost eight years.” However, she also stated she did not realize Lincoln Industries existed until her brother became employed there. Another woman shared, “They (Lincoln Industries) were advertising it on line and I had another friend

that actually still works here and he said, “You should come out here.” I did and have been here ever since.”

All of the participants, except one, had been employed before being hired at Lincoln Industries. Three participants were aware of women working in blue-collar nontraditional occupations from a family member or friend.

THEME: Blue Collar Work

Sub-Themes:

- Prior Work History
- Knowledge of Blue Collar Work

Chapter 7

THEME: MOTIVATION

The essence of this study was to understand what motivated women to maintain their employment in a non-traditional occupation. The data did not support the literature with regard to the motivation of women in non-traditional occupations. Instead, the following sub-themes emerged as significant.

Sub-Theme: Pay

Each of the participants discussed what motivated them to remain employed in their blue-collar occupation. Their answers varied, however, seven women spoke about the pay; one shared, “It was funny because the first day I started it was \$7 an hour and by the end of the week I was up to \$8 and then by the end of the year I was at like \$12!” Another stated, “I started out here at \$8 an hour and now I get over \$16.”

The wage possible at a manufacturing facility was greater than what was normally paid to CNAs in a nursing facility, “The money I make for a week at a manufacturing plant was 15 days at the nursing facility.” However, this worked against one of the participants who had built up 17 years working in a different manufacturing plant, “I was there at that place 17 years so I built up to \$15 an hour; when I came here it was \$10 an hour to start.”

Two women felt as though they would not receive comparable pay in a different kind of job, “I don’t think I could go anywhere and make the same amount of money” and “I want to receive a certificate, but, I have worked here for so long, I make good money now, so I don’t want to leave this place.” One woman discussed the benefit of working overtime:

I try to get a really decent check, anywhere between 90 and 100 hours. All the over time is really a bonus. There are not a lot of places in Lincoln, if you think about it, as far as factories or plants; when you take the pay and the job, it is just really good.

Sub-Theme: Work Culture

Six of the participants discussed the atmosphere at Lincoln Industries as their motivation for remaining employed:

Every six months we have a state of the business meeting so they let us know where we are going, what is happening, what accounts we have received, and what is on the horizon. This is really good. It makes you feel like you are a part of it, you are a stakeholder. That's what I always tell myself, I am a stakeholder. It gives everybody a sense of pride and purpose and makes it so much easier to keep going on that path.

One of the participants spoke about a monthly luncheon sponsored by Lincoln Industries called "Champions:"

[T]he company buys everybody lunch; they have it catered in. [T]hey tell us how the company is doing as a business and what specific lines are doing good; at the end of the program there is recognition. Anybody can get up there and say something.

Recognizing each other's accomplishments was also mentioned as motivational:

We all recognize each other's accomplishments. [A]s a new person, I picked those that were best to show me how to do something. And, maybe their way didn't work so someone else would show me. We are all permitted leeway to do it our

way. The beginning of the part and the end of the part needs to be correct, but how you wire up the harness, as long as those wires are in the correct places, is not an issue.

Other comments concerning motivation included flexible work schedules to allow the pick up or drop off of children from school and the comfort of knowing that issues will be addressed immediately through the company's human resources department.

Sub-Theme: Benefits

For five participants, the benefits provided by Lincoln Industries were their primary motivation. One woman, in particular, stated that very thing, "I wanted to be hired because I wanted the benefits." She also stated that, "After five years (of employment) I got three weeks of vacation and that is very nice. I'm thinking of going to college in the future. I don't know yet, but my supervisor already told me whenever I am ready there are people here that know how to introduce me to what I want to do next." Another participant said, "They want you to get your degree and they encourage it. It's a great program, and they pay for it." Yet another stated:

They're pretty good at stuff like that too. You know they pay for your college and once you graduate, even if they don't have a place for you they will find you a place so you can practice what you went to school for. They are very much people oriented and they do a lot for us.

One participant expanded on how Lincoln Industries' educational opportunities were linked to increased income:

You can advance if you want to, and they do tuition reimbursement as long as you keep up a certain grade point average. You can go into the office or you can

become an engineer, or anything you want. They call it the Vision College and they have on-the-job training also. You can take classes like electro-plating. You can learn about chemistry and take a test and you can get a dollar an hour more if you pass the test. You can advance up and use that knowledge of electro-plating and get a different job. And, if I wanted to, I could go back to school, like for accounting and work in the accounting department. If you wanted to, it is available.

Other comments were: “They have good benefits and actually they are better than what I had before,” “I have been here 11 years, I make pretty decent money and the benefits are good,” “I have flexible hours now so I can take my daughter to school when my husband is working,” “Their Wellness Program is awesome,” and “They pay for my Weight Watchers and pay for my gym membership, if I want to go.”

One woman spoke at length about her experience climbing a mountain as part of Lincoln Industries Wellness program:

I have been really impressed with the fact that if you become platinum the work pays for you to go climb a mountain in Colorado! They give you a Friday off, give you spending money for the weekend, pay for the hotel and the bus ride to Colorado, and get to climb a mountain! I climbed up to 14,000 feet and there were 55 mile an hour winds and it was 30 degrees up there in the middle of July! I didn't wear warm enough clothes, but, you know, it was a huge accomplishment! It was the hardest thing I have ever done. To me, climbing that mountain is one of my greatest memories. How many companies do you know that motivate fitness? They were even on CNN.

This same participant also reported being motivated by the respect she received from her supervisors:

I am treated very well for what I do and I make good money doing it. But, also, you are not just a number. I can walk by the President of the company or the Vice President and they know my name without looking at my shirt.

She also mentioned being motivated by the benefits her longevity with the company provided:

If you've been here ten years, Mark LeBaron (the president of Lincoln Industries) has a condominium at Breckenridge, Colorado, about nine miles away from Frisco, Colorado. I get to go to the condo in August and stay for a week. This will be the first year I've gone out of all the years I've qualified to go.

Sub-Theme: People

The people they worked with at Lincoln Industries motivated three of the women: "It is the people that keep everybody around here; if you have a good atmosphere and good people to work with, you don't really care," "I like the people and the company; the way they do things," and:

It is absolutely the people, probably the friends I have made here; they keep you sane. You know, on the weeks or the days when I am just tired of it and ready to leave I have people out there that just kind of calm me down and keep me sane. You really don't want to leave because you don't know if you are going to find people to work with like that again.

Sub-Theme: Job is Rewarding

Three of the interviewees spoke about the feeling of satisfaction and pride they received from seeing the end product:

I like what I do because you take all of these parts and you have a finished product. You can look at any Harley Davidson on the road and say, “Hey, I think I built that headlight!” So it is kind of rewarding in that sense and I feel very proud of what I have accomplished.

One woman simply stated, “I am a lifer, unless I win the lottery!”

Sub-Theme: Kids

Two participants were clearly motivated to remain employed at a blue-collar nontraditional occupation for their children, “My whole goal is for my kids. I just need to keep pushing on for my kids” and “You look at your kids and that is the reason.”

Motivation is a factor affecting any employment situation. However, motivation becomes very important for women to remain employed in blue-collar nontraditional occupations. The participants spoke about various motivators; the ability to earn an increased wage was most dominant. The work culture at Lincoln Industries and benefits the company provides were next in dominance, respectively.

THEME: Motivation

Sub-Themes:

- Pay
- Benefits
- Work Culture
- People
- Job is Rewarding
- Kids

Chapter 8

THEME: MENTOR / ROLE MODEL

Research on women in nontraditional occupations points to the importance of a mentor or role model in the work place as someone who facilitates the acceptance and development of new people within a department. The literature supports a significant increase in the level of satisfaction, promotion, and longevity in the workplace for women who have successfully engaged in mentoring relationships with key individuals in their establishments. The data here does not support the role of mentors and/or role models in the satisfaction level or motivation of women employed at Lincoln Industries.

The interview question related to mentors and role models did not elicit clear responses from the participants. All of the women struggled with this line of questioning. After failing at prompting or hinting about the role of mentors or role models in their work, I simply asked the question: Is there a person you consider a mentor or role model in your job? One interviewee responded simply, “No.” Three of the participants mentioned their supervisors; however, those supervisors have since moved to different areas within the company, or retired, and are no longer considered their role models or mentors. The women discussed mentors and/or role models as follows, “My supervisor that hired me, he’s retired now, he kind of pushed me along, “This is what you need to do and this is what you need to do.” It’s helpful to have somebody like that.” Prior to this person retiring, he supervised this participant for nine years. Another participant responded with, “I had one but he retired.” A third participant who was mentored at Lincoln Industries stated, “[H]e would explain symbols to me when there were things I

wasn't quite sure of. When he was my supervisor I thought he was a pretty good mentor."

One participant stated:

There was a girl that I used to work with; she was someone I used to strive to be like and then I quit because I wasn't sure exactly why she no longer worked here. I thought, "Maybe I shouldn't be like her."

Three women discussed the role of mentors and/or role models in terms of themselves: "I like the way that when new people get hired they depend on me to show them the correct way to do things. I like that most of all," "I just want to learn everything I can to be like the lead that they want to say, 'Hey, I want you to be like this.' When they hire new people, this (meaning me) is our standard and this is what we want you to get to." However, this person stated immediately thereafter, "I don't know if I can consider myself a mentor."

Another woman said:

[I]f you don't hear people talk about mentors or role models, I think it is because we have natural role models, like our area lead now, George, he is easy going. You tell him we need this, he'll get this. He comes over and asks me how are things going, do you need anything, are we having problems? If we are having problems he wants to know why and what we are going to do to fix it; then he trusts me to get it taken care of.

This participant also mentioned that new hires were placed with "training buddies." A training buddy is typically someone who has worked on the line for a

number of years, has knowledge of each of the positions on the line, and works with new hires to show them how the job is done.

The confusion experienced by the participants when asked specifically about mentorship and role models illustrates the presence of this relationship is relatively insignificant for this sample. The data, rather, supports a level of self-efficacy and a determined mind set together with equity in the work environment as key factors to longevity. Self-efficacy in young girls may be supported or delayed by family dynamics. The following chapter will discuss the role of family in the lives of the participants.

Chapter 9

THEME: FAMILY

Family histories and relationships emerged as a theme in this study. Family dynamics played an integral role in the upbringing of these women and their development of a positive sense of self-efficacy. The effect of family dynamics is dominant in the lives of the participants as they pursue employment, marriage, the making of their own families and what they want for their children.

Sub-Theme: Something Different For My Kids

Two participants shared the sentiment of wanting something different for their children. Both women reflected positively on their experiences working on a production line in terms of friendship, benefit and remuneration; yet both hoped their children would choose a different path. One woman stated:

Oh yeah, it's weird; I brought my oldest through here on a tour and, I love my job so much, I really do for me; but, I tried to get her to want to do the office job or executive or customer resources, whatever, just not to work on the line.

The second participant stated, “. . . and now he is going to college so he won't have to be just here. Even though here is paying the way.”

Sub-theme: Upbringing

The participants came from varied backgrounds. Five of the participants were born and raised in Nebraska, two were born outside of the United States, eight were born in the Midwest, and one was born in the Southwest.

Seventeen participants had siblings; one was an only child. Twelve of the women shared information about their families. Eleven of the participants' mothers, (step-

mothers, biological or foster mothers) worked outside of the home, four of these women worked in blue-collar occupations. Two of the participants either did not know their father or were not raised with a father figure, three of the fathers were in the military, and the remaining fathers were employed in traditional blue-collar occupations.

Following are statements made by some of the participants concerning their nuclear families:

- She was a stay-at-home mom for a long time, until I was about 6th or 7th grade; she was security in the fitting rooms at Mervyns. That was where they put their security people, in the fitting rooms. My mom finally got a sense of style. This was my foster mom. I had two foster sisters and two foster brothers.
- I have a younger sister. My parents were married for 22 years and then were divorced when I turned 18. My dad worked at Goodyear. I am not close to my dad at all.
- I grew up with my stepmom and her kids; she had three boys and three girls. I have two older brothers, a younger sister and a younger brother. She did foster care, day care, and at the end she worked at a factory. My dad was a jack-of-all-trades. He was a mechanic; he was good with his hands and could build things.
- I grew up in Lincoln. My mom was a substitute teacher; my dad was a chemical specialist in the Army.
- I grew up in Nebraska. My parents divorced and my mom moved us to a different state, but we all came back here when we were old enough to be with my dad.

One participant said that she and her parents work, or worked, in nontraditional occupations:

I was born and raised here and went to high school here. My mom works at Lincoln General in de-containment, so it is kind of a laborer job and my dad is retired now but he worked at Farmland. They were both blue collar. My sisters are the white collars in the family. They went to college and did all that. They were both finance managers for ConAgra foods.

Sub-Theme: Family and Kids

Commentaries by the participants touched on their upbringing and extended families. They provided a brief illustration that furthers our understanding of the participants' perceptions of their lives. The participants have varied backgrounds and experiences; yet have achieved success at long-term employment in a male-dominated, blue collar, nontraditional occupation:

- I grew up here in Lincoln, I got married and started a family early and I pretty much waited for my girls to start school before I looked for a job. So, this is kind of the first job I've ever had really. In school I took a test on what I would be good at and I am very quick with my hands and multi-tasking - - it has benefitted me here quite a lot. My mom worked at a hospital for 20 years; I make \$2 less an hour than she did when she retired. I have four girls.
- I came to the U.S. 13 years ago. I never knew my father. My mother had five children, I used to live with my sister and her husband because my mom had to go to work; she was a housekeeper. My husband works for the post office, part time, and he's going to college. He wants to be an accountant. We have no children but we want them.

- I came here when I was 13 (from Vietnam). I grew up with my dad here and two of my sisters. I grew up in a family that was poor yet hard working. I dropped out of school when I was 11 but I got a GED after I had a baby when I was 18 – he is already 11 and I have a four year old too. My friends are different than me. I'm a hard worker.
- I grew up in a family that was poor and had to do a lot of hard work. My family used to be a farmer and my parents had me taking care of cows since I was ten and walk a really long way to school, so this kind of work here is nothing. It doesn't bother me. Same with my sisters, they work at Farmland in Crete. Really cold, really hard work. My husband works at Lester but he also goes to school to be a cop. He is half way there.
- I was the 9th kid in my family, my mom had 14 pregnancies and only ten of us survived. I was a military brat so I am used to being around a lot of guys and I have five brothers. And in school I was track team manager for women and men for school.
- I have an 11 year old daughter, two dogs and a partner. My mom, she's 4'7", I think, 65 pounds and she's got the worst attitude you will ever meet. She is like a drunken sailor, she is horrible. She is an RN and still works in a health care facility. If someone tells me I can't do it, I'm gonna do it - - I don't care if I hurt myself doing it – I'm gonna do it. I learned that from my mom. My dad was six feet and dismissive, he was like just go with the flow.

The theme of family is depicted differently in each of the women's stories.

However, the common denominator in each story is an inner strength and determination

that continues to empower, and perhaps sustain, these women in their work in a male-dominated industry.

THEME: Family

Sub-Themes:

- Something Different for My Kids
- Upbringing
- Family and Kids

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to better understand what role mentorship played in the long-term success of women working in blue-collar nontraditional occupations. The first research question was:

What role does mentorship play in the level of success, measured by longevity, in the nontraditional employment of women at a successful manufacturing plant?

Mentors take an active role in the socialization and development of employees new to their work area. Generally, mentors take a personal interest in a new employee's experience and often facilitate, or sponsor, the new employee's transition into a department or on a production line. Role models play a more professional role and are usually an experienced, productive superior who relates well to a less-experienced employee and facilitates her personal development for the benefit of the individual and the organization (Noe, 1988). Mentors engage new employees on a personal level, whereas role models engage new employees on a professional level, for the ultimate benefit of the organization. The literature is replete with examples of the gains women in white collar nontraditional occupations experience when they are successfully engaged with a mentor or role model; however, the findings of this study do not align with the literature on women in white collar nontraditional occupations.

Based on the interviews of 18 participants, only one participant spoke directly about mentorship and this conversation was in response to a specific question posed during the interview. The remaining 17 participants did not mention mentoring relationships or people they respected at Lincoln Industries as mentors. Instead, the three

participants who did respond with examples of their perception of “mentors,” were describing the definition of a “role model.” The three individuals who spoke about a person at Lincoln Industries who offered them advice, explained electrical symbols, or pushed them to excel on the lines, were all referring to their direct supervisors.

Supervisors may be mentors as well as role models, however, the descriptions from these participants of their helpful relationships was more akin to a supervisor; a subordinate relationship, rather than an equal friendship.

A “training buddy” was mentioned by one of the participants. She described a training buddy as someone who was proficient in the work of the line and able to guide the new employee to learn correctly. The use of training buddies is to support new employees in the assembly process and does not purposefully involve or require support in any other regard at work.

The second research question was:

What motivates women to work in this setting?

The data supported a clear consensus of work culture. The responses varied with regard to motivation; however, what was most distinct in their responses was, whether the participants discussed their pay, benefits, or the people they worked with, as motivators—all of the participants linked their initial response to the work atmosphere, or culture, fostered by Lincoln Industries. The culture at Lincoln Industries was conveyed to prospective employees beginning with their first interview; a telephone call referred to as the “Talent Plus” interview.

Talent Plus, formed in 1989 by Dr. William E. Hall and his former graduate student Doug Rath, has offices in Lincoln, Nebraska; Singapore; and Colombia. Dr. Hall began studying human potentiality during his doctoral work at The Ohio State University. He accepted a faculty position and eventually became the head of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he established the Nebraska Human Resources Institute with his then graduate student, Dr. Donald Clifton. Dr. Clifton received the Presidential Commendation as the Father of Strengths-Based Psychology, by the American Psychological Association, in 2002. Doug Rath studied under Dr. Hall at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, earning a Master of Arts degree in Educational Psychology in 1972.

Hall and Rath worked to:

. . . develop and implement one of the most advanced selection, recruitment and coaching systems available today. This system is based on years of study and analysis of various psychological “life themes” that determine the success an individual is likely to have in specific endeavors. Talent Plus uses this scientific approach today for all clients - identifying a company's best employees and creating a benchmark that allows companies to select candidates with the potential to be among their best performers (Heritage and Leadership, 2012, Doug Rath, Chair page, para. 2)

An understanding of Talent Plus is relevant here because Lincoln Industries’ partnership with Talent Plus and the use of their scientific assessments is foundational to developing a culture that promotes women in nontraditional occupations.

Lincoln Industries utilizes the Talent Plus research and assessments related to the ideal production line worker. The specificity in which Talent Plus has honed their research is directed toward proficiency in a job category, rather than individual characteristics. Lincoln Industries partners with Talent Plus, to administer their Talent Plus phone interview to prospective employees in order to identify and measure potentiality. The assessment embeds benchmarks that not only discern whether or not a prospective employee has a talent, but also measures the intensity of talent.

The Talent Plus interview also aids Lincoln Industries in building diversity into their workforce. There are no questions in the interview that might discriminate against race, gender, age, or any other personal characteristic. No personal information is relayed to Talent Plus by Lincoln Industries concerning prospective applicants. The interview is designed only to measure the potentiality of an individual.

Through Talent Plus interviewing, Lincoln Industries is able to introduce an understanding of their work culture immediately. The actual interview questions are the private property of Talent Plus, however, the interview data strongly suggests there are questions related to honesty, dependability, and work ethic. The Production Worker Interview Interpretive Analysis of Talent Plus is located in Appendix D.

Limitations of Research

This study utilized purposeful sampling to reach the goal of understanding a phenomenon occurring with a group of women employed on a production line at a manufacturing plant. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). This design and

sample was driven by the desire to learn about a group of competent and experienced female production line workers, not average opinions.

The research sample consisted of 18 women and one focus group, consisting of five members of the research sample. Meeting the research criteria of employment for five years or more on a production line limited the sample size. Further limiting the sample size was the volunteer aspect of the study. Each of the 18 participants volunteered to be interviewed face-to-face and five of the 18 individuals volunteered to participate in a focus group discussion, hence, self-selected. The size of the sample was determined by the research criteria and as a consequence, was small.

A further limitation to the study was the possible effect on the responses given by the participants, due to fact that none of the participants had been interviewed previously for research purposes. The participants' newness to the interview process and the possible effect on their responses may have been further impacted by the location. All of the face-to-face interviews and the focus group were conducted within private conference rooms at Lincoln Industries. Both conference rooms utilized at Lincoln Industries were sound proof, however, the rooms had windows positioned so that other employees and management passing by could see the participants and me. This "visibility factor" may have had an effect on the participants' responses.

The research site may have been a limitation. Lincoln Industries is a stellar example of a manufacturing plant; the company has received multiple awards and national recognition for their flawless products and excellent work culture. The distinguished reputation of this facility as "one of the best companies to work for in America," (Lincoln Journal Star, 2011, para. 4) when combined with the all-volunteer-

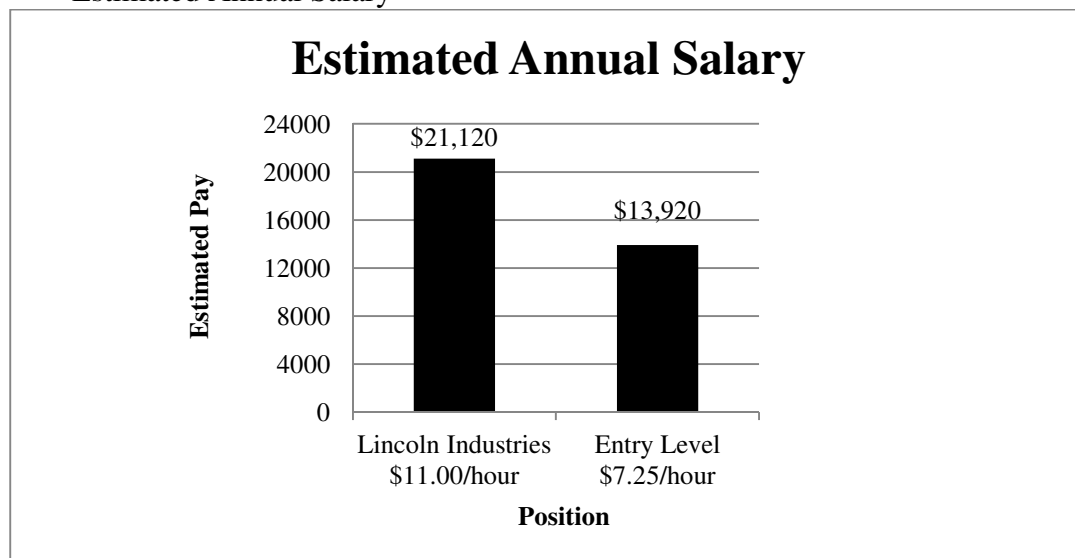
based sample may contribute to false positive findings. False positive findings may be associated with research samples comprised of volunteers, due to the engagement and enthusiasm the volunteer participants have with and for their workplace.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The results of the study conducted at Lincoln Industries have broadened the understanding of what motivates women to remain employed in nontraditional occupations. Blue collar, nontraditional occupations provide a pathway for women who do not pursue higher education to earn a wage comparable to men that would enable women to support their families. The state of economic affairs in the U.S. has propelled the importance of remuneration and health insurance benefits to a fever pitch. The continuing decline of the economy, coupled with the decline in the number of two-income households in the U.S. renders many women subject to harsh realities. The divorce rate in “America for first marriage is 41% to 50%; the rate after second marriage is from 60% to 67% and the rate in America for 3rd marriage is from 73% to 74%,” in addition, “children of divorced parents are prone to divorcing 4 times more than the children of couples who are not divorced” (Divorce Statistics, n.d., para. 3). Hence, earning a wage sufficient to support a family is a literal lifeline for women who are without other means of support or revenue streams.

The federal minimum wage and the minimum wage in the state of Nebraska is \$7.25 per hour (Department of Labor, 2012). Lincoln Industries begins new production line employees, male and female, at \$11.00 per hour (personal communication with Steve Bauer, September 10, 2012). Figure 2 depicts the estimated difference in annual salary for both types of positions.

Figure 2
Estimated Annual Salary



Note: This graph depicts the average pay for women at Lincoln Industries starting at \$11.00 per hour versus an entry level position with no experience or higher education required starting at minimum wage, \$7.25. A year is defined, for this purpose, as 40 hours per week for 52 weeks.

This wage is not dependent upon past experience or education; rather it is based on the potential talent of an individual. An entry level position at Lincoln Industries versus an entry level position in a traditional blue collar female occupation that does not require past experience or the attainment of higher education equates to a difference of roughly \$600 per month, or \$7,200 per year; yet only 34% of Lincoln Industries' workforce is women.

Beyond the obvious benefits derived from the increased pay capacity possible through nontraditional occupations, the implications of this study reflect the success attainable to an organization and its employees by providing a gender-equitable work environment. Research indicates the intersection of gender and power has a significantly negative effect upon women employed in male-dominated nontraditional occupations (Crawford, 2012).

The findings of this research reflect that the gender-neutral work culture created by Lincoln Industries validates the importance of each person in their employ such that women were able to grow personally and professionally, if they desired, in the culture. Employees were not viewed as men or women, but rather as people. What is typically referred to within organizations as human resources was referred to as “people resources” at Lincoln Industries. The participants’ length of employment was indicative of the positive effects of a gender-neutral work culture.

Lincoln Industries was able to create and sustain an atmosphere of “family” within their organization. Many of the participants’ narratives confirmed this sense of family when referring to the people employed on their production lines and those they have worked with on other lines during their years of employment at Lincoln Industries. The culture at Lincoln Industries provides an example of success for other organizations to emulate with regard to the job satisfaction of women working in male-dominated nontraditional occupations. The culture at Lincoln Industries regards all of their people as stakeholders in the organization. Eagly and Carli (2007) stated, “[S]tereotypes and beliefs held by individuals within organizations give rise to organizational norms that take on a life of their own and can be difficult to change” (p. 187). Lincoln Industries has been successful in creating an organizational norm that, as the data suggests, enables a level of buy-in from the participants (stakeholders) that contributes to their longevity and job satisfaction.

The participants’ length of employment suggested a positive sense of self-efficacy, or self-authorship: an ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences and to engage in relationships without losing one’s identity (Baxter

Magolda, 1999). The development of self-efficacy for women in white-collar nontraditional occupations, as stated in the literature, is significantly furthered through relationships with a mentor or role model in the workplace. The findings of this study do not support the development of self-efficacy through relationships with mentors, but through positive experiences and relationships with significant males such as fathers, brothers, husbands, and friends. These relationships, as revealed within the participants' narratives, provided the support and catalyst to reject stereotypical notions of women's work and adapt a self-identity that was positive and confident.

This improved sense of self-efficacy, is the dependent variable revealed in the case study of what motivates women to work in blue-collar, nontraditional occupations and what contributes to their success. The participants' backgrounds suggest a level of self-efficacy promoted and nurtured by the significant male relationships in their lives.

The findings imply an importance in the role significant male relationships play in the development of self-efficacy for women who feel comfortable working in male-dominated, blue-collar, nontraditional occupations. This finding is significant because it contradicts the significance of mentors in furthering or augmenting the success of women employed in male-dominated, white-collar, nontraditional occupations. The positive and active interaction of fathers and brothers in the lives of their daughters and sisters, while always deemed important, may also be said to assist girls and women to develop confident notions of self, sufficient to support long-term employment in male-dominated fields.

These findings have implications for parenting, for teachers in the K-12 setting, and for vocational training taking place at community colleges. In 2010, approximately

12% of women, age 16-years and older, were employed in the blue-collar industry (Department of Labor, 2012), as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2
Employed Women, 2009 and 2010 annual averages (Numbers in thousands)

Women	Year			
	2009		2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total, 16 years and over	67,876	100	66,208	100
Management, professional, and related occupations	26,813	39.5	26,833	40.5
Management, business, and financial operations occupations	9,412	13.9	9,199	13.9
Professional and related occupations	17,401	25.6	17,634	26.6
Service occupations	13,980	20.6	14,077	21.3
Sales and office occupations	22,477	33.1	21,289	32.2
Sales and related occupations	8,073	11.9	7,761	11.7
Office and administrative support occupations	14,404	21.2	13,527	20.4
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	626	0.9	587	0.9
Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations	208	0.3	190	0.3
Construction and extraction occupations	219	0.3	191	0.3
Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations	199	0.3	206	0.3
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	3,980	5.9	3,421	5.2
Production occupations	2,661	3.9	2,152	3.3
Transportation and material moving occupations	1,319	1.9	1,269	1.9

Note: Employed Women, 2009 and 2010 annual averages (Department of Labor, 2012, Labor Statistics from the Current Population Study page)

To capitalize on the changing demographics of the U.S. workforce, and provide a viable pathway toward economic stability for women who do not pursue higher education, women must be encouraged and supported to pursue nontraditional and apprenticeable occupations they have never considered.

Following are recommendations supported by the findings of this research.

The presence of a positive male figure in the lives of girls cannot be over-emphasized. Male teachers should take an active role in fostering the positive self-efficacy of female students. It may be argued it is the role of school counselors, not male

teachers, to aid in the positive self-efficacy of female students. A 2002 study on the underrepresentation of women in the Informational Technology field stated that:

None of the participants identified a counselor or academic advisor as being influential in their career choice. ... They found that most counselors had the same gender stereotypes of occupations – girls are nurses, boys are doctors – and of girls' math and science abilities (Meszaros, Burger, & Creamer, 2005).

The Meszaros et al. (2005) study utilized a sample of six women who held senior level technology and science positions in government, business, and education at the time of the study. The findings suggest school counselors did not aid in promoting the positive self-efficacy of these women, during their school-aged years. This study concerned support mechanisms for girls while in school; the findings may be important to all school-aged girls.

The positive example and support men were able to provide women in male-dominated careers was reflected in a study of 3,000 U.S. college graduates who assessed their career status 15 years after graduation (Cramer, 2012):

In industries where there were few women—and an aggressive, engineering-intensive, competitive culture—women who had male mentors were earning more money and were happier with their career progress than women with female mentors or no mentors at all. (p. 315)

The findings of my research suggest the same effect applies to women engaged in a male-dominated, blue-collar, nontraditional occupation.

Vocational training programs should utilize the power of a positive male relationship in promoting self-efficacy in young women. It is plausible the vocational

training component of community colleges may have the greatest impact on promoting women in nontraditional occupations merely by the mass of matriculates these institutions engage with. Currently, 57% of the 13 million-plus students enrolled at community colleges within the United States are women (AACCC, 2012).

Vocational education is supported by the U.S. administration in 2012 as part of President Obama's American Graduation Initiative, a focused effort to enhance the workforce development function of community colleges in service of national and global economic competitiveness (Pusser & Levin, 2009). During a 2009 speech at a Macomb County Community College in Michigan, President Obama stressed the importance of job training and introduced a woman named Kellie who left a job as a forklift operator, returned to school, and emerged as an apprentice pipe fitter (Pusser & Levin, 2009).

The example of Kelli, the apprentice pipe fitter, illustrated an opportunity for women to receive training or certification in a nontraditional occupation, and the opportunity for vocational training programs to make a positive difference in the self-efficacy of women.

Women have made substantial gains toward equity in the workforce. When reflecting on the time when women were first welcomed into the work of nontraditional occupations, 2012 seems like an entirely different America. However, there remain challenges for women, especially in relation to their acceptance in male-dominated nontraditional occupations. The women highlighted in this study were all talented, strong, resourceful, and confident women who have succeeded, by virtue of their length of employment, in a man's occupation. Their example provides a glimpse, supported by

social learning theory, of the challenges women are apt to overcome, aided by a strong sense of self-efficacy, and a gender-neutral workplace.

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APPENDIX A

Letter to Prospective Participants

Dear _____,

Hello. My name is Kathy Wesley; I am a student in the Educational Administration Department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Lincoln Industries has agreed to assist me in a research project and provided your address so that I can explain my study to you. A portion of my research involves gaining an understanding of the factors affecting women employed in a nontraditional occupation. Your employment on the production line at Lincoln Industries makes you an ideal candidate to participate in this study.

I am writing to ask you to participate in the study. You have unique and valuable information on this topic, and your participation will contribute to new and additional knowledge about women navigating careers in nontraditional occupations.

I would like to interview you at a time that is convenient to you during your work day. The interview will take no longer than forty-five minutes and will be audio taped. You will be given a copy of the transcript of your interview for your review, and you will have an opportunity to make changes in the transcript. I am also enclosing a copy of the Informed Consent form for your information. This form contains additional information about participating in the study and will require your signature before being interviewed.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study and you will be able to stop at any time without jeopardizing your relationship with Lincoln Industries, me or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I can make myself available to speak with you personally, if you wish. I can be reached at 360-320-2060.

I will be happy to share the findings with you after the research is completed. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will be known only to me. Please consider participating in this research project. I believe it will be a positive experience and add to existing knowledge about women, like you, employed in nontraditional occupations.

Thank you.

Kathy Wesley
Doctoral Student
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Identification of Project:

A Study of Motivation related to Women in Nontraditional Occupations

Purpose of the Research:

We invite you to participate in this study because you have unique and valuable information to share regarding the topic of this exploratory study. The information you share will allow us to publish findings of this study in scholarly journals and to present them at scholarly meetings and conferences. Thus, your participation contributes new and additional knowledge about worker motivation and leadership development.

The purpose of this research project is to understand what motivates women to remain employed in nontraditional occupations.

Procedures:

We request your participation in one 45 minute audio taped interview.

We will schedule the interview at a convenient time for you, held in a mutually-agreed upon convenient location, and allow for privacy and minimal distractions during the interview. Before the interview begins, you will be asked to sign this informed consent form.

You will be given a copy of your transcript for your review, verification, comment, and request for any changes.

Risk and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks with this study.

Right to Ask Questions and Answers:

Your rights as a research participant have been explained to you. If you have any additional questions about the study, please contact me, Katherine Wesley, at (360) 320-2060 or Marilyn Grady, at (402) 472-0974. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigators or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Institutional Review Board (UNL IRB), telephone (402) 472-6965.

Benefits:

You have unique and valuable information to share regarding the topic of this exploratory study. The information you share will allow us to publish the findings of this study in scholarly journals and to present them at scholarly meetings and conferences. Thus, your participation contributes new and additional knowledge about worker motivation for women in nontraditional occupations.

Assurance of Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during the study that could identify you or any related party that we discuss (e.g., your employers or co-workers) will be kept confidential. To that end, we ask you to not mention any employer or co-worker's name. When we quote any of your

comments or summarize your comments in any written document or presentation, we will do so in a manner that does not identify you or any related party we discuss. We will use pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

The researcher will convert the tape into a printed transcript. The study's investigators will be the only ones who will listen to the audiotape and read the transcript. The audiotape and transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet in Katherine Wesley's office at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Department of Educational Administration, for one year after the study is completed. The information obtained in this study may be published in refereed journals or presented at professional meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

Voluntary Participation and Opportunity to Withdraw:

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to decide to not participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adverse effects. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can withdraw from the study at any time without harming your relationship with the investigators, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision to participate in this study with your signature confirming that you have read and understood the information presented to you in this consent form. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Initial if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Investigator)

(Date)

INVESTIGATORS

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APPENDIX C

Purpose Statement and Questions

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to better understand how mentorship contributes to long-term success in nontraditional career paths of women at a successful manufacturing plant in a mid-sized Midwestern city.

Research Questions

1. What role does mentorship play in the level of success, measured by longevity in the nontraditional employment of women at Lincoln Industries?
2. What motivates women to work in this setting?

Interview Questions

- 1.1 How did you learn about Lincoln Industries and your position here?
- 1.2 How long have you been employed at Lincoln Industries?
- 2.1 What is it about your employment here that is most satisfying?
- 2.2 What is your most positive work-related memory at Lincoln Industries?
- 2.3 How have you been encouraged in the work place?

Appendix D

Production Worker Interview Interpretive AnalysisSM Theme Pages

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DRIVES AND VALUES describe a person's motivation to develop their potential and to set high expectations for themselves. This group also reflects the personal principles by which they live and work.

+ **VALUES** represents the degree of dependability and responsibility an individual brings to the job. This theme also indicates an individual's commitment to consistently doing the right things right.

+ **ACHIEVER** indicates a person's drive to accomplish something every day and need to continuously improve their work.

WORK STYLE addresses how a person carries out their job responsibilities. Factors considered include their energy level, their ability to set priorities and their capacity to plan what needs to be achieved in order to meet expectations.

+ **LEARNER** assesses an individual's capacity to learn from past experiences and apply the knowledge gained to ensure successful outcomes in the future.

+ **WORK ETHIC** identifies the level of honesty and loyalty that a person brings to their role and the high standards of excellence they expect from themselves and their team members.

PEOPLE ACUMEN explains how a person builds relationships with others and how others feel about their relationships with that person.

+ **POSITIVITY** represents an individual's ongoing focus on the positive aspects of situations and people.

+ **RELATIONSHIP** reveals a person's ability to develop relationships in order to work effectively with others as a part of a team.