

FAMILIES
MOBILITY
AND
WORK

edited by

Barbara Neis, Christina Murray, and Nora Spinks

Families, Mobility, and Work

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Families, Mobility, and Work: An Introduction

Barbara Neis, Christina Murray, and Nora Spinks

Families are diverse and dynamic. Family lives intersect with and are mediated by changes in the world of work, including sectoral, spatial, and temporal shifts in employment and technological and social organizational changes such as globalization and the growth in precarious employment. Substantial bodies of research have explored work–family intersections, but this research often overlooks a third and increasingly important realm of activity that mediates life at home and at work: the sphere of extended/complex employment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM) (Hughes and Silver 2020). Where intersections of families, mobility, and work are addressed, this is often done in a piecemeal fashion with a focus on a particular type of family, type of work-related mobility, and employment sector. This edited collection, *Families, Mobility, and Work*, is the product of a series of research programs seeking to address this gap.

The collection follows the Vanier Institute in defining families as:

[A]ny combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following: physical maintenance and care of group members; addition of new members through procreation, adoption or placement;

socialization of children; social control of members; production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services; and affective nurturance (i.e., love). (Mirabelli 2018, 3)

This definition, appropriately for this collection, does not assume family members live together or spend most of their time in close proximity to each other.

Contributions to the collection encompass employment in multiple sectors and diverse types of E-RGM across the spectrum from daily extended (in terms of time/distance) work-related mobility through weekly or seasonal longer-distance rotational mobility to regions and jurisdictions separate from places of residence. This spectrum also includes mobility that entails prolonged (up to a year or longer) absences from home in other countries, as is commonly associated with the lives of international labour migrants (Cresswell, Dorow, and Roseman 2016; Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015). E-RGM can entail complex/extended commuting to a single, fixed workplace (as with commuting office workers) as well as mobility within work, as between multiple workplaces (home care, cleaning); to transient (construction, temp agency employment) places of work; and, as in the transportation sector, employment in mobile workplaces.

The *Families, Mobility, and Work* collection mobilizes findings from substantial research and outreach programs rooted primarily in the Canadian context. Its objectives are to extend and deepen dialogue among researchers, communities, practitioners, the private sector, and government bodies about the distribution, prevalence, and dynamics of extended/complex E-RGM, its intersections with the work and family lives of Canadians, why this is important, and what needs to be done in light of what we are learning. Specific objectives of the edited collection include:

1. To raise awareness and increase understanding regarding varied forms of labour mobility, their intersections with family and working lives, and their impacts on families, including extended/intergenerational families;

2. To explore what is known (and/or not known) about the needs of these workers, families, the practitioners who support them, and the communities where they live;
3. To gain a deeper understanding of the unique needs of these workers and their families and how these can be addressed through future research, practice, and policy development.

The collection draws on work carried out through four initiatives involving one or more of the editors and contributors. These initiatives include the On the Move Partnership,¹ a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded, pan-Canadian research program focused on diverse forms of employment-related mobility in multiple sectors, rural and urban contexts, and across seven provinces. They also include the Tale of Two Islands project based at the University of Prince Edward Island, also funded by SSHRC, which focused on rotational workers who live in Prince Edward Island (PEI) and Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, and work in western Canada, as well as work supported by the Vanier Institute of the Family² on military families and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on family life in Canada. Some stories from migrant workers, their family members, and those who serve and support them, which originally were presented to the Families, Work and Mobility Symposium co-organized by the editors, supported by SSHRC and the Vanier Institute, and held in 2018 in PEI,³ have also been adapted for the collection. We also draw on a brief synthesis of some findings that can be found in a research note published elsewhere (Neil and Neis 2020b).

Placing the Collection in Context

With some exceptions, research on the intersections among family lives, extended/complex mobility, and work tends to focus on particular types of mobility (international migration versus rotational work versus commuting) and categories of mobile workers (caregivers, agricultural workers, transportation workers, daily commuters, rotational workers). Many of the contributions to this collection provide reviews of the literature relevant to these particular areas. Here we will introduce just a few illustrative examples from recent inter-

national literature with themes relevant to this collection and then provide an overview of key, Canadian studies.

Kilkey and Palenga-Möllenbeck's (2016) *Family Life in an Age of Migration* is an international edited collection that uses a migration and mobility lens, as well as a family life-course perspective, to explore ways different types of migration and mobility intersect with family lives across the life course. They focus on groups from countries of the Global North and Global South other than the 1 per cent of wealthy business travellers who have the resources to buy the family-related services they need to support their mobility. Their cases include both those related to migration/mobility for work and for other reasons such as marriage and reproduction. Baldassar and Merla's (2015) *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care* builds on the global care chains literature with its focus on international women labour migrants from countries of the South who provide care in countries of the North in exchange for wages used to support their children and families in their home country. The authors do this by using the concept "circulation of care" to encompass the diverse types of care relationships, activities, and often multi-generational actors (grandparents, children) involved in sustaining different kinds of transnational families. The collection focuses on the agency of transnational families, questioning the often-negative conceptualizations of these families while still attending to often-asymmetrical responsibilities for care and ways caring is shaped by national and institutional policies.

Aybek, Huinink, and Muttarak's (2015) *Spatial Mobility, Migration, and Living Arrangements* has a Western European focus and also seeks to bridge the literatures on international migration and mobility, arguing that both can "be treated as life course events that are consequential to couple and family dynamics" (4). They start from the premise that mobility of all kinds entails costs, as well as opportunities — including for families — but these vary, as does who pays and who benefits. The case studies include both circular (commuting) and non-circular mobility (residential relocation), including three that focus on work-related mobility and family. The findings highlight the gender and class dimensions of extended/complex mobility for work with negative effects for families more likely to be associated with women's mobility and with mobility

reliant on poor transportation infrastructure and to lower-status jobs. Ralph (2015) examines the motivations of growing numbers of Euro-commuters who live in one country in Europe and work in another, as well as the ways this type of commuting or circular mobility influences their personal, family, and social lives. In an overview of the literature on internal migration, Anne Green (2018) distinguishes between internal short- and long-distance migration and “circulation” or commuting. She notes that: (a) dual-earner households are less likely to migrate and more likely to commute than single-earner households; (b) changes in the social organization of work have somewhat decoupled spatial from social (i.e., upward) mobility; and (c) social networks and social support exchanges can be affected by mobility. She also notes that “fractured” families with custody shared across households can work against migration and to some degree in support of extended/complex commuting for work.

de Guzman, Brown, and Edwards’ (2018) international collection, *Parenting from Afar and the Reconfiguration of Family across Distance*, considers the dynamics, processes, and impacts of physical separation of parents from children through migration for work, being orphaned in the context of crisis, incarceration, or military deployment, and loss of custody. Contributions explore the extended family experiences of stayers and leavers in a community in Ecuador; the ambivalence of Thai grandparents in “skipped generation” households (what we call in this collection “grand-families”) who take responsibility for caring for and sometimes supporting their grandchildren in the absence of their parents; and the family-related effects of military deployment, including for children. These contributions explore similar themes to those discussed in this collection. Lindemann (2019) examines how commuter spouses who live apart embody and disrupt gendered constructions of marriage in the United States. Laura Tejada’s contribution to this volume (also based on research in the US) provides a bridge between the present collection and that body of research on long-distance relationships.

Extended/Complex E-RGM and Families in the Canadian Context

Within Canada, an estimated 16 per cent of the labour force engaged in complex/extended mobility for work in 2016 (Neis and Lippel 2019). In some

situations, one or more family members engage in prolonged daily commutes within cities and regions. In other situations, family members may work away for days, weeks, months, and even — as in the case of some temporary foreign workers (TFWs) coming into Canada — for years at a time while their family members live, work, and travel more locally. A third group involves those employed in mobile workplaces such as transportation, shipping, ambulance drivers and other health-care paraprofessionals, and others. Some of this third group also engage in extended commutes to work, as is the case for seafarers from Newfoundland employed on ships operating along the St. Lawrence Seaway (Shan and Lippel 2019). Extended/complex mobility for work is particularly common in some sectors such as construction, mining, transportation and shipping, health care (particularly home care), agriculture, forestry and fisheries, some parts of the tourism sector, and among some other service sector workers such as those employed in hospitality and food services (e.g., cooks and cleaners in fast food restaurants or hotels). Extended absences for work in other provinces are particularly common in some labour-exporting regions like Atlantic Canada (Neil and Neis 2020a), whereas prolonged daily commutes are more common in large cities.

It is reasonable to ask why workers engage in complex/extended mobility for work. Mobility is an inherent part of certain types of work, including employment in mobile workplaces, as in the transportation sector, employment at remote industrial worksites including mines and oil and gas extraction sites supported by work camps, and the military. Certain kinds of mobile work can provide opportunities for education, training, upward mobility, travel, and access to pensions for those with limited options, as with the military, the construction trades, and seafaring. International and internal labour migration from labour-exporting countries and regions is a product of both global and national-level differences in employment opportunities and wages. It is shaped by “mobility regimes” encompassing clusters of immigration and corporate and other policies that constrain opportunities for many groups to migrate permanently to live close to employment, including immigration, housing, and other policies (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018). International E-RGM can be associated with a search for opportunities to immigrate and to achieve

eventual family reunification and upward mobility for subsequent generations (Bryan, Chapter 22; Perry 2020b).

From the point of view of families, physical proximity can play a key role in building trust and strengthening ties, but these can be undermined by poverty, debt, and unemployment (Hughes and Silver 2020). Longer commutes to better-paying jobs can bring money into households and regions (Ferguson 2011; Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015) and provide opportunities for training and advancement. Certain kinds of rotations or work schedules such as two-weeks-on/two-weeks-off can help compensate for time away in terms of building trust and strengthening ties. There are, however, economic and social costs to extended/complex mobility, and even when workers are eligible for economic compensation to cover direct costs such as for travel, it is not always easy to access (Ryser, Halseth, and Markey 2020). Furthermore, whether dealing with extended daily commutes, mobile work such as long-haul trucking, or long-distance labour commuting or rotational work, work and travel schedules are frequently less balanced with more time away from family than at home. Being away from family and friends can weaken connections and erode familial relationships (Perry 2020b). In communities with large numbers of commuting or rotational workers, it can also undermine the participant base for volunteer services in source communities (Donatelli et al. 2017; Murray-Arsenault 2014; Newhook et al. 2011). Working away can also change financial needs and spending patterns, including where and on what employment income is spent, which can have implications for family and community dynamics (Butters, Hall, and Vodden, forthcoming; Murray-Arsenault 2014). Maintaining family and community connections and relationships requires effort and effective communication and can be hard to sustain over time. Furthermore, marital breakup and other challenges can quickly change anticipated shorter-term mobility commitments into longer-term engagement by contributing to new financial and other issues and problems.

On the Move and Tale of Two Islands researchers and others have documented the mobility patterns, experiences, and policy drivers and implications for mobility among Alberta oil sands workers (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Ferguson 2011; Neil and Neis 2020b; Wray 2012); international live-in care-

givers and nurses on temporary work permits (Banerjee et al. 2018; Dorow, Cassiano, and Doerksen 2015; Hill et al. 2019; Nourpanah 2020); internally mobile homecare and professional and paraprofessional health-care workers (Fitzpatrick 2020; Fitzpatrick and Neis 2015; Jackson et al. 2019; Leiter et al. 2018; Nourpanah 2019a, 2019b; Nourpanah et al. 2018); truck drivers (CBC Ideas 2014; Hanson 2014a, 2014b, 2020); Black train porters in Montreal (CBC Ideas 2018; High 2017; High, this collection); industrial construction workers (Barber 2016, 2018; Barber and Breslin 2020; Haan et al. 2020; Martin 2021; Ryser, Halseth, and Markey 2020; Neis and Neil 2020); seafarers (Shan and Neis 2020); international labour migrants in the tourism and other low-wage sectors (Bryan 2017; Bryan, Chapter 22; Perry 2020a, 2020b; Smith and Staveley 2014); and precariously employed immigrant workers (Premji 2018; Thorburn 2018). Kelly, Mosquera Garcia, and Dorow (Chapter 5) interviewed migrant tradeswomen doing fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) in Alberta. Murray-Arsenault (2014) talked to mothers who participated in FIFO employment while grandparents cared for children (see also Murray, Lionais, and Gallant, Chapter 12). On the Move researchers have considered not only those who are mobile for work, but also those who are mobile within their work. This is the experience of seafarers (Shan and Neis 2020), truckers (Hanson 2014b; Neis et al. 2018), airline personnel, train workers (High 2017; see also High, Chapter 2), police officers in rural areas (Neil 2019), and others.

In Atlantic Canada, in some regions like Cape Breton, the Burin and Northern Peninsulas in Newfoundland, northern New Brunswick, and the western region of Prince Edward Island, there are high rates of interprovincial mobility for construction, fishing, tourism, oil and gas, trucking, logging, home care, and hospitality. There is also mobility offshore (in shipping, fishing, and offshore work) for work on a daily, rotational, or seasonal basis and, given relatively high rates of military engagement, deployment-related mobility. Prolonged daily commutes within the provinces such as from St. John's to the Bull Arm and Long Harbour industrial sites are also common (Barrett 2017). In smaller, peripheral, and more economically depressed regions, such as Cape Breton, PEI, and parts of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), earnings from mobile work have contributed a meaningful injection of income into local

economies (Lionais, Murray, and Donatelli 2020; Lionais, Murray, and Wilcox 2016). In Cape Breton, for instance, mobile work to Alberta recently stood at levels of employment and income equivalent to the role that coalmining and steelmaking played in the mid- to late 1980s when the regional economy was dominated by these industries. In NL, the interjurisdictional labour force, at its peak in 2008 (14,462), employed the equivalent workforce of half the cod fishery prior to the cod moratorium of 1992 (approximately 30,000). If one includes the intra-provincial mobile work within NL, the oil and gas industry likely temporarily replaced most of the lost cod fishery jobs, at least for men (Lionais, Murray, and Wilcox 2016).

On the Move and Tale of Two Islands research on interjurisdictional mobility from Atlantic Canada to other regions has found that young men in NL are the most likely to engage in mobility for work, while their female partners provide family support, especially if they have young children (Haan, Walsh, and Neis 2014; Hughes and Silver 2020). However, at some points and in some contexts, the proportion of older workers migrating temporarily for work is higher (Hewitt, Haan, and Neis 2018; Neis and Neil 2020). Some older couples migrate together to other provinces for work (Gmelch and Royal 2017; Lincoln and Gmelch, Chapter 19), and some migrate temporarily with their families, as with seafood processing workers from NL who travelled to the Maritime provinces and elsewhere for work (Grzetic, Chapter 3; Knott and Neis 2017).

Overall, this research and that of others has shown how stretching family relations across time and space, while linked to opportunities for work — and in some cases, more stable, predictable, higher incomes — can create challenges for workers and for their families (CBC Ideas 2019; Cresswell, Dorow, and Roseman 2016; Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015). Thus, while clear economic benefits sometimes are connected to E-RGM (Aroca and Atienza 2011; Lionais, Murray, and Wilcox 2016), there are also social, emotional, and potentially physical challenges for mobile workers, their families, and their communities (Kaczmarek and Sibbel 2008; Kelly 2009; Taylor and Simmonds 2009; Torkington, Larkin, and Gupta 2011; Vincent and Neis 2011), with increasing cautions emerging about the social costs associated with particular forms, including rotational work away (Ferguson 2011; Mazer

2013; Wray 2012). These challenges arise partly from the effort and financial, emotional, and other costs associated with synchronizing the complex and often shifting rhythms of family lives, mobility, and work schedules and rotations (Neis et al. 2018). Situations of mobility share “potentially burdensome travel costs, time pressures, tradeoffs around health and quality of life, and other challenges” (Cresswell, Dorow, and Roseman 2016, 1788). Being separated from a partner and other family members can cause tension in relationships and create challenges around child, elder, and other forms of care (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Ferguson 2011; Murray, Skelding, and Barton, Chapter 7; Vincent and Neis 2011). The absence of one partner or siblings can enhance the family responsibilities of those left behind, constraining their employment options (Rye 2018; Taylor and Simmonds 2009). In some cases, jealousy and marital tensions can contribute to social isolation for the spouse at home (Murray-Arsenault 2014; see also Murray, Skelding, and Barton, Chapter 7), while work and travel schedules and pressure to make as much income as possible while away can contribute to the social isolation of the mobile worker(s) (Donatelli et al. 2017). Social supports at work can be strengthened by working in crews and with family and friends; they can be constrained by labour turnover linked to subcontracting and precarious employment, and by employment in transient locations and living in temporary housing, such as in work camps and hotels (Hughes and Silver 2020; Newhook et al. 2011; Wray 2012).

Extended commutes, long rotations working away with limited time at home, and work in mobile worksites can leave workers tired and stressed (Dorow et al. 2021), sometimes creating unsafe travel and work conditions (Lippel and Walters 2019). Where common, as in some rural areas of Atlantic Canada, working away can affect local employment and create tensions within communities by changing spending patterns and creating visible differences in housing and other forms of consumption. Occupations in trades and transport and equipment operators have the highest rate of occupational injury in Canada (Nowrouzi-Kia et al. 2019) and many of these are mobile workers (Neis and Lippel 2019). When mobile workers are injured, they often rely heavily on family members to care for them and help them get from home to the various appointments required for rehabilitation (Howse et al. 2018).

In the case of international E-RGM, challenges can also entail dealing with different cultures, with finding affordable and safe housing, and with policy and other contexts such as rules around immigration that can constrain options and limit voice and opportunities for family reunification (Cedillo, Lippel, and Nakache 2019; Nakache 2018). Complex/extended E-RGM can enhance or diminish individual, familial, and community well-being; it can exacerbate or improve work–life balance; it can ease or make more difficult accessing affordable, quality child-, elder-, or disabled-dependant care. In sum, E-RGM has the potential to “positively or negatively affect the physical, mental, emotional, and social health of workers and their family members” (Newhook et al. 2011, 123).

Tale of Two Islands researchers have conducted interviews with intergenerational family members and key informant interviews with professionals who provide care to these families in Cape Breton and PEI (Murray, Lionais, and Farrell 2013) to identify the challenges FIFO creates for professionals trying to work with family members. Diverse professionals including teachers, family therapists, addictions workers, teachers, spiritual leaders, and physiotherapists working in communities where mobile workers and their families reside have discussed challenges identifying and providing appropriate care to best meet the needs of these families (Donatelli et al. 2017). Families and practitioners have expressed feelings of isolation and a perceived lack of support from policy-makers and professional associations regarding the needs of mobile workers and their families.

The Collection

Families, Mobility, and Work will be of interest to researchers, practitioners, and community organizations responsible for providing support to mobile workers and their families, including: educators, health-care professionals, religious leaders, sector associations (employers and unions), community organizations, family resource centres, municipal and provincial government representatives and policy-makers, mobile workers and their families, and the general public. The collection consists of research-based contributions, often using a storytelling approach, as well as individual stories, songs, poetry, and a photographic essay. It is written for a broad audience and is highly visual,

incorporating a variety of images and photos. Contributors include researchers, mobile workers and their families, and those who serve and support these workers and their families.⁴

The collection has national and international relevance in addition to particular relevance for Atlantic Canada. Focused at points of intersection between mobility, work, and family studies across diverse groups, sectors, and types of mobility, this book offers unique perspectives on an emerging topic. It considers a wider range of work-related geographical mobility patterns and their implications for families than is often considered elsewhere in books on mobility and the family life course (Assmuth et al. 2018; Aybek, Huinink, and Muttarak 2015; DeParle 2019; Kilkey and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2016), intimate adult relationships (Hannaford 2017; Holmes 2014; Lindemann 2019), parenting and kin care (Baldassar and Merla 2015; de Guzman, Brown, and Edwards 2018), gender roles (Brettell 1987; Yuk-Ping Choi and Peng 2016), commuting (Lindemann 2019; Ralph 2015), and specific mobile occupations (Doherty, Patton, and Shield 2015) and places (Meil and Schneider 2008; Viry and Kaufmann 2015). The collection incorporates as well perspectives on disability, work, and mobility (Howse and Penny, Chapter 4), youth as sources of support in families and communities with migrant worker labour forces (Power, Chapter 15), the power of digital storytelling (Gmelch and Royal, Chapter 20), the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canada's mobile labour force (Neis et al., Chapter 27), and reflections on international labour migration and families research and its intersections with the work-related mobilities of the reporting researcher and her family (Bryan, Chapter 22). There is a similar reflexivity in Grzetic's exploration (Chapter 3) of what she learned about the lives of migrant Newfoundlanders by visiting their home communities and spending time with them in their destination communities.

The collection has seven parts. Part I, "Diversity, Mobility, Work, and Families," brings together four pieces that explore the experiences of diverse types of workers engaged in a range of different types of mobility. Because extended/complex mobility for work is not new and because work, and thus mobility, is influenced by social and institutional processes, this first part opens with Stephen High in Chapter 2 providing a historical account of the work

mobility and family lives of Black railway porters. Because of anti-Black racism, work as train porters travelling across Canada was one of the few employment options open to Black men living in Montreal during the period between World War II and the 1960s. High argues their stories are a reminder of the need to locate our understanding of employment, mobility, and family resilience within a wider history of racial capitalism.

In Chapter 3 Brenda Grzetic explores ephemerality in the lives of Newfoundlanders migrating for work. She uses findings from ethnographic field research, photographs, and collage to help us access the experiences of those who move seasonally for work in other provinces in seafood processing, agriculture, and forestry. These workers often migrate as couples, and sometimes as families with young children, and frequently travel and live/work together while away. Grzetic examines the annual struggle to get to places with work opportunities, find and pay for a place to live, and, if necessary, place children in school in another province, while also getting enough hours of work to cover their costs and qualify for Employment Insurance when they return home for the off-season. She describes the feeling of emptiness in the communities they leave behind; the criticisms of women who migrate for work leaving their children behind; the antagonism and other challenges they have to confront in their destination workplaces and communities; the ephemerality that is part of living in two places; and the sense of relief and need for healing they experience on their return home.

Dana Howse, in Chapter 4, presents an interview with Mandy Penney in which Mandy explores her experiences with often short (in terms of distance) but complex daily mobility to school and work as a person with a physical disability living in St. John's. The interview highlights the important role family and family-like friendships play in Mandy's ability to overcome the challenges associated with employment expectations in the context of limited work, transportation, and housing options. All of these create additional challenges for persons with physical disabilities.

Part I ends with a contribution by Griffin Kelly, Maria Fernanda Mosquera Garcia, and Sara Dorow on women rotational tradesworkers' "juggling act" as they struggle to manage the challenges and exclusions experienced while

employed in FIFO jobs in the resource extraction sector in western Canada. It asks the question, “What happens when women working in already heavily masculinized workplaces are also regularly far from the people and places where they mother (or strive to become one)?”

Part II, “Rotational Work and Evolving Families,” explores diverse experiences and perspectives associated with rotational FIFO and drive-in/drive-out (DIDO) long-distance mobility, much of it based on the experiences of workers and families living with the opportunities and challenges associated with travelling from Atlantic Canada to work in the oil and gas sector in Alberta. Thousands of primarily male workers engage in this kind of rotational work (Neil and Neis 2020a). Kevin Ryan, in Chapter 6, reflects on the history of his entry into and eventual successful exit from rotational work as he retrained as a registered nurse and found local employment in order to live and work at home with his family in PEI. Kevin’s vivid descriptions of his evolving life as a rotational worker and its intersections with his changing family are captured in his personal story and in the lyrics of songs he has written and performed about that life.

Christina Murray, Hannah Skelding, and Sylvia Barton’s contribution, in Chapter 7, “Amber’s Story,” is based on a narrative distilled from multiple conversational interviews with a woman living in rural PEI. Amber’s story describes the evolution of her personal and family lives during 12 years of rotational work and as her children grew from “tots to teens.” The chapter talks about entry into rotational work, its prolongation and challenges, and the strategies the family developed to overcome those challenges. Murray shared this story and others from her doctoral research with family resource centres in PEI and, as a result, some centres developed programming targeted to families dealing with the effects of rotational work.

Sara Dorow and Sandrine Jean’s contribution in Chapter 8 consists of two fictional “letters from camp” from rotational workers to their families based on insights from extensive qualitative research with workers living in the camp environment. The first letter is from an older woman who works as a camp housekeeper to her daughter in Nova Scotia and the second is from a 44-year-old oil worker to his wife. Themes in these letters about the importance of

other workers and family-making away from home for reducing the loneliness and challenges of rotational work, and of blocking out the world at home as a strategy to survive the time away, appear in other contributions as well. Nicole Snow and Ian Fong, in Chapter 9, explore their experience with Ian's transition to a self-employed, mobile worker travelling regularly for work while Nicole works as a nursing professor in NL. It describes the progression in their relationship from tension and resistance to finding ways to "make it work" for them as a couple and in their relationships with family and friends for the foreseeable future. Chapter 10, the final contribution to Part II by Kara A. Arnold and Nora Spinks, reports on findings from research done with employers and human resource personnel in companies that employ rotational workers. It describes the current resources and supports provided by employers to their mobile labour force and families and the types of supports that would potentially provide more appropriate and effective support for mobility-related challenges.

The chapters in Part III, "Mobility and Multi-Generational Family and Community Relationships," offer a firm reminder of ways unpaid, poorly paid, and in some cases financially and emotionally costly intergenerational supports for family members and communities are a key part of accessing the opportunities and weathering the challenges and hazards to family and community lives associated with extended/complex mobility for work. In Chapter 11 Diane Royal explores the extensive unpaid work and essential services commuters from Bell Island, NL, perform both for members of their extended families and often for the wider community.

The next three contributions focus on the active engagement of grandparents in PEI and Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, with their children and grandchildren affected by mobility. These contributions are based on research and public engagement work done through the Tale of Two Islands project. Christina Murray, Doug Lionais, and Maddie Gallant, in Chapter 12, present findings from intergenerational interviews and focus groups involving grandparents who provide support to families dealing with extended mobility and the related absence of male partners. Don Avery and Gaby Novoa's Chapter 13 focuses on Avery's personal experiences that led him and his wife to take responsibility for caring for their grandchildren and on his journey in becoming involved

with organizations to support grandparents caring for grandchildren. It also highlights Avery's role as a leading advocate, along with Christina Murray, for policy change. The third grandparent-related contribution is a poem by Rolanda Pyle, "Grandparents Are Special — A Tribute to Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren." Themes around the rewards and challenges associated with differing types of engagement with their children and grandchildren are explored in some depth and are reflected to some degree in references to grandparent involvement in contributions by Kelly, Mosquera Garcia, and Dorow (Chapter 5) and Grzetic (Chapter 3) in Part I. In Chapter 15 Nicole Gerarda Power draws on her *On the Move* research with young people in NL where she tells the "untold story" of the contributions made by children to family and community-building in the context of migrant work. Part III concludes with the only international contribution to the collection: Laura Tejada's Chapter 16 presents findings from her research on intergenerational dynamics in long-distance relationships where couples live apart for extended periods of time on a regular basis.

Part IV, "Marine and Coastal Work, Mobility, and Family-Making," brings together a series of contributions rooted in Atlantic Canada's coastal communities based on stories and research with a focus on families, mobility, and marine and coastal work. It opens with Alexia Stasha Newson's story of her life as a woman working onboard a Coast Guard vessel in Atlantic Canada (Chapter 17). This is followed by Sharon R. Roseman's contribution in Chapter 18 on lightkeeping and family-making based on the life history of a former fish harvester turned lightkeeper she interviewed as part of her larger study of work-related mobility to and from Bell Island, NL. This chapter emphasizes the family-making activities engaged in by these lightkeepers and other rotational workers as they plan and make meals and care for each other in their remote worksite.

The other two contributions in Part IV are linked in that they derive from George Gmelch and Diane Royal's ethnographic research and experience making digital stories with mobile worker families in the rural Newfoundland community of Bay de Verde and surrounding areas. Bay de Verde was a vibrant inshore fishing community that, like so many others, was devastated by the

cod collapse. The community has survived and to some degree thrived due to the shift of primarily male workers to mobile rotational work in seafaring, offshore fishing, and offshore and onshore oil and gas and remote mega construction projects. The construction of a new, large seafood processing facility that employs not only locals but temporary foreign workers from Thailand and the development of tourism businesses have also contributed to community resilience. Andrew Lincoln and George Gmelch's photo essay of Bay de Verde in Chapter 19 tells the story of this recent history, thereby giving a face to rotational workers, their families, and to others who live and work in the community. Gmelch and Royal, in Chapter 20, provide a point of entry into a series of digital stories they helped produce based on the lives of some of these rotational workers. This chapter also reflects on digital stories as a research/outreach tool that are posted on the On the Move website (www.onthemovepartnership.ca) and on how the digital stories affected these families in Bay de Verde.

Part V, "International Migration, Work, and Families," shifts our focus to the experiences and family lives of international labour migrants in Canada — in the past and present. It opens with Marie Antoinette G. Pangan's story (Chapter 21) of her journey from being a temporary foreign worker employed in seafood processing in PEI to gaining permanent residency and being able to bring her son to Canada to live with her. She eventually went to university, graduated as valedictorian, and is now working as a registered nurse. Catherine Bryan, in Chapter 22, juxtaposes the gendered history of the experiences and factors that drove migration in her family since the 1920s with findings from her ethnographic research on Philippine workers brought to western Canada in recent years to work in a hotel and convention centre. Both "stories" explore ongoing gendered relationships, including the navigation of familial roles and responsibilities. Bryan uses her piece to highlight the need for reflexivity among researchers studying labour migration as they combine mobility for their research with studying the lives of others. Part V concludes with Shiva Nourpanah and Pauline Gardiner Barber's contribution on recent refugee movements in eastern Canada after their entry into the country. Chapter 23 asks why refugee claimants and often their families move from central Canada to Nova Scotia, given the

strict conditionalities associated with work permits and intense labour and resources they require to keep them valid. A key part of the answer is refugees' commitments to family, which drive not only their initial entry into migration but also secondary migrations within their destination country.

Part VI focuses on mobility, work, and military families. Members of the military are highly mobile both for and within their work, with families often having to move to new bases, and deployment internally within Canada and internationally being a core aspect of military life. The latter is well illustrated by the deployment of military personnel into long-term care homes and remote First Nations communities dealing with outbreaks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 24, by retired Colonel Russell Mann, tells of a tool military families and resource centres have devised to help children and parents manage the sense of loss associated with deployments. Families create flat dads and flat mums (images of the departing parent mounted on poster board) for children to carry about with them during the deployment. More recently, children have started making similar "flat me" images their parents can take with them on their travels. This is a resource that might be adapted for other families with children that have to grapple with the effects of repeated separations.

Chapter 25, by Ashley Williams, Garth Smith, Dawa Samdup, and Heidi Cramm, looks at the challenges military families with children with autism spectrum disorder encounter accessing supports and services as a consequence of repeated mandatory relocation. Findings from interviews with parents highlight the disruptions and delays in accessing critical services with negative consequences for children's well-being, as well as parents' strategies for addressing these issues. The section concludes with a contribution by anthropologist Karen Samuels (Chapter 26) on veterans who join motorcycle clubs after retirement from the military. She notes that military personnel move frequently and that they develop close, family-like ties to each other as they live, eat, and work together. Motorcycling together can help create a community of support for these retirees and offers some degree of continuity with the requirements for hyper-alertness and hyper-vigilance required of them in the military.

Finally, Part VII focuses on mobility, work, and families in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that is ongoing as we write in September 2021. In

Chapter 27 Barbara Neis, Kerri Neil, Katherine Lippel, and Lesley Butler examine issues related to the mobile labour force and COVID-19 with a focus on family-related concerns. Their contribution notes that many of the workers designated as “essential” during the pandemic in Canada and elsewhere are part of Canada’s mobile labour force, and argues that their willingness to continue to go to work in the context of the ongoing pandemic has played a crucial role in the ability of others to stay at home, thereby reducing the risk of infection and death. The conditions under which many have had to work, travel, and live, however, have often unnecessarily exposed them and their families to the risk of infection and to pandemic-related mental health issues. Chapter 28 is by Deatra Walsh, an On the Move researcher and member of a rotational worker family. During a morning walk around St. John’s, NL, Deatra reflects on COVID-19 and its consequences for their lives. Closing out Part VII, Melissa Ralph in Chapter 29, explores her life as the wife of a NL mobile offshore oil and gas worker, including the social isolation, worries, and challenges that come with juggling her own employment, intermittent single-parenting, and maintaining a positive relationship with her husband. She opted to deal with her own challenges and those of others by creating a Facebook page to generate a support network for herself and others. “Newfoundland and Labrador Workers Separated by Work” is intended to be a positive space where others in similar situations can meet virtually, share experiences and information, and support each other. This and other Facebook pages for rotational workers have been particularly important for families since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated intense challenges for rotational worker families.

A brief conclusion by the editors synthesizes some of the key insights from the larger collection, outlines relevant policy issues, and identifies areas for further research. It notes that, overall, some research has documented the challenges associated with *some* types of work-related mobility (such as long-distance commuting or short, but lengthy, daily commutes) for *some* kinds of families (professionals or migrants performing jobs in unskilled positions). However, until recently, little attention has been paid to capturing and comparing the experiences of diverse families with one or more members engaged in the spectrum of mobility from extended/complex daily commutes to international

labour migrations that can take them away for years. This mobility, of course, also includes mobility within work as, for example, in seafaring and trucking. Literatures on members of the military and public safety workers tend to be separate from those on temporary foreign workers and transportation sector workers like truckers, limiting our capacity to understand, anticipate, and mitigate the effects of work-related mobility on workers and their families. This edited collection helps address these research gaps. It is designed to be accessible to academics as well as wider audiences, including policy-makers, employers and human resource managers, and those who serve and support families dealing with the effects of extended/complex mobility for work. It seeks to encourage more research on families, mobility, and work and efforts to design and implement policy changes that can help address some of the challenges this mobility brings.

A key overarching theme in the edited collection is the extremely limited support these workers and their families receive from employers and government (municipal, provincial, and federal) with the challenges extended/complex E-RGM creates for their lives at home, on the road, and at work. There are also indications that with the growth in precarious employment, supports are dwindling as challenges increase. We return to this and other overarching themes in the conclusion.

Notes

- 1 The On the Move Partnership website can be found at: www.onthemovepartnership.ca.
- 2 For more information on The Vanier Institute of the Family, see: <https://vanierinstitute.ca>.
- 3 Recordings of that Symposium can be found here: <https://familiesandmobility.upci.ca/videos/>.
- 4 Studies by authors based in universities will have gone through ethics approvals and the editors know of no conflict of interest.

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PART I

Diversity, Mobility, Work, and Families

Climbing the “Ladder of Success”: Family, Labour Mobility, and Anti-Black Racism in Twentieth-Century Montreal

Steven High

Abstract

British sociologist Satnam Virdee has encouraged us to recognize the intimate relationship between capitalism and class struggles and racial inequality. Historic anti-Black racism in Montreal ensured that few Black men found employment in the city’s many factories and shops. As a result, most found jobs working on the railway as porters, cooks, and dining car employees — job categories that were restricted to Black workers. Labour mobility was thus foundational to community and family life. Once unionized, it also provided Black families with a pathway into the blue-collar middle class. As the Montreal Women’s Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters reported in 1956, “the foundation laid by your leaders to enable you to climb the ladder of success was made by the male railroad porters and their family” (“Montreal” 1956). However, railway employment declined precipitously during the 1960s and 1970s, which proved disastrous for many families.

Introduction

Montreal’s English-speaking Black community formed in the early twentieth century due to the availability of jobs as railway porters, cooks, and dining car employees. These jobs regularly took them away from their homes for days or weeks at a time. Pervasive anti-Black racism in the city, as elsewhere in Canada,

ensured that few Black men found jobs in the city's factories or shops. Labour mobility was thus foundational to community and family life. The structuring force of racism also led Black families to settle in what is today Little Burgundy, an area once wedged between the tracks of the Canadian National (CNR) and Canadian Pacific (CPR) railways in Montreal's Southwest Borough. But this crowded inner-city area had the advantage of being near the Windsor and Bonaventure train stations where porters boarded trains that then criss-crossed the country. Quebec may not have had "white's only" signage, as in the southern United States, but it did have a history of slavery and pervasive anti-Black racism. If you were Black, you never knew if you would be served going into a bar, restaurant, cinema, or store for the first time. Proprietors had the right to serve whoever they wished, so there was always uncertainty (Walker 1997). Sometimes this racism was formalized in hiring policies and union collective agreements, as was the case on the railways, where Black workers were excluded from most occupations except those service roles reserved for them. During the 1930s and 1940s, 90 per cent of Black men in Montreal worked for the



Figure 1. Before urban renewal, Little Burgundy was located between the Lachine Canal (right) and Canadian Pacific Railway tracks (left), but divided in two by the Grand Trunk/Canadian National Railway tracks and yard leading to Bonaventure Station (aerial), May 1960. (Ingenium)

railways at one time or another. “It was the beginning of the era in Montreal when the word porter was synonymous with the Black man,” wrote historian Dorothy Williams (1997, 32). Another historian, Sarah-Jane Mathieu, in her book *North of the Color Line* (2010), argued that the racial practice of hiring only Black men as porters was exported to Canada from the United States in the 1870s (10). Montreal’s Black community grew slowly at first, with an estimated population of 2,000 in 1920, climbing to 7,000 in 1961 and doubling a decade later (Williams 1997, 109).

To understand the ways that employment-related mobility has historically affected the families of Black railway porters we therefore need to recognize that anti-Black racism was about more than a few bad apples — it was built into the very structures of the economy and the city. This is a bitter pill to swallow for Quebec’s nationalists for whom (White) francophones are the victims of history, starting with the British conquest of New France. There is little room in this historical imaginary for the victimization of others at home. British sociologist Satnam Virdee (2019, 6) has encouraged us to recognize the intimate relationship between capitalism and class struggles and racial inequality. He offers the concept of racial capitalism to make visible the extent to which racial differentiation and hierarchy are integral to class structures and as a way to understand that structural racism is, itself, a class project of imperial and settler colonial elites. He is not the first to do so. Pointing to the work of C.L.R. James and other Black intellectuals who sought to bridge the gap between race and class analysis, David Austin (2019, 66–67), a leading scholar of the Black radical tradition, has argued: “[A]nti-black racism is both a constituent part and constitutive of class and economic factors, [and] conventional conceptions of race have eclipsed the race–class character of anti-black racism.”

Oral history may be “more messy, more paradoxical, more contradiction-laden, and perhaps, because of this, more faithful to the complexity of working-class lives and working-class memory” (James 2000, 242), but what Black railway porters, their wives, and children experienced and now remember in interviews is not random but located in these social structures and racial hierarchies. Anti-Black racism is very much visible across nearly three dozen archived oral history interviews, recorded over multiple projects over the past

40 years, including *On the Move*, and archived at Concordia's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. These interviews form the heart of this chapter. Charles Burke, for example, who was born in 1933, was hired by the CNR at age 18. He had heard it was hiring so he and a friend named Earl went to the station and submitted their applications to become office boys. The next day, they were called in, with Earl (who was White) going upstairs and Charles (who was Black) downstairs. Burke thought it strange, as the offices were located upstairs, but went downstairs anyways. There, he met with a "Black gentleman," who proceeded to hire him as a railway porter:

I said "I'm here to be an office boy." He says, "you're not going to be an office boy." I says, "what do you mean?" He says, "We are going to train you to make beds and shine shoes, you are going to be a porter." I says, "No, not a porter, are you crazy?" He says, "I talked to your mother." And now my mother was like [Mike] Tyson. If you said anything wrong [there would be a beating]. . . . I says, "don't tell my mother. I'll take the job. I'll take the job." I seen Earl the next day and I says: "Earl, they made me a porter." He says, "what? I'm going to do something about that." The next day I see Earl and his face was all black and blue. I says, "what is it?" He says, "when I told my father [who worked in the company's offices], my father slapped me and laid on a beating" At that time, they were not hiring no blacks in the office. Blacks were either a porter or a redcap. Anyways, I took the job. But there was no [other] work, you couldn't get work.

Burke was not alone in learning this hard lesson. Carl Simmons (2005), a CPR sleeping car porter, recalled that: "Most families, the head of the family worked for the railway. You couldn't get another job. What other jobs could you get? There was too much racism."

Women recounted similar stories of racial exclusion. Florence Phillips, for example, grew up in Montreal's Plateau district, located some distance from

Little Burgundy, as her parents had middle-class sensibilities. She explained that her father, a proud first-class shoemaker, likely the only Black shoemaker in the city at that time, saw himself as “high society” (Phillips 2017). Continuing, she told us how “My father was with a cane and derby hat. And went to work, if you’d see him going to work, you would swear he was an accountant or something, he was going to work as a shoemaker. But he was a proud shoemaker, oh my. He walked down the street like this, he didn’t see nobody.” Her mother was also highly educated. They came to Canada from Barbados and Guyana respectively, arriving by boat in Halifax. They didn’t stay long in Nova Scotia, as there were few economic opportunities for Black people there except working in the coal mine. A steady stream of Black Nova Scotians relocated to Montreal during the 1940s and 1950s for the same reason. Once here, most worked on the trains: “[I]f they didn’t work on the train, then they worked what? Whatever they could get. It was very, very difficult to get a job here being black.” Other women said much the same thing. Before Babsey Simmons’ father came to Montreal from the Caribbean and became a porter, he was a tailor, but “in those days, there were no jobs for Colored men whatsoever, the only job for them was on the train, as a porter, which was a very demeaning job at that point in time. They were underpaid but they did their job with dignity” (B. Simmons 2005).

This chapter reminds us that employment-related geographic mobility is not a new phenomenon for many Canadians, but especially Black Montrealers, for whom it was foundational to their family and community life. We therefore need to locate our analysis of family resilience within a wider history of racial capitalism and (indeed) settler colonialism. But this is more than a story of victimization. Black Montrealers were not passive in the face of systemic racism but organized collectively to improve their situation. They were among the first Montreal workers to unionize, forming their own Order of Sleeping Car Porters in 1917 after the White railway brotherhoods initially refused to have them as members. This was briefly the first national Black union in North America, as the four Black union locals were soon incorporated into the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, making it one of Canada’s first multi-racial unions. This also happens to be my father’s union, who worked on the railway all his working life. Years of struggle followed. Hundreds of Black families, living in

protected union homes, as the Women's Auxiliary phrased it, thus benefited with other unionized workers from the rising standard of living during the post-1945 boom. Collective upward social mobility, built around labour mobility, enabled them to build strong community institutions, move to the suburbs, and send their children to university. Their story was that of many union households across Canada during this period. The decline of railway travel in the 1960s and 1970s effectively closed this collectively bargained pathway to middle-class lives much as deindustrialization did for their White working-class neighbours.

Anti-Black Racism at Work

Black Montrealers were unionized to a much larger degree and at a far earlier stage than their White neighbours. As already mentioned, Black railway porters, cooks, and dining car employees working for the CNR, one of Canada's two major railway companies, *organized themselves* in 1917. Their counterparts at the CPR did not unionize until World War II, like many industrial workers in Canada's factories, joining the US-based Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters led by future civil rights icon, A. Philip Randolph.¹



Figure 2. Montreal Mayor Camillien Houde and Lord Bessborough (flanked by two unnamed sleeping car porters), 1930. (McCord Museum)

At first, sleeping car porters worked impossibly long hours. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was no limit to their working hours as they were paid a fixed monthly salary. The number of hours they had to work each month depended on their train assignments.² There was no overtime pay. On the Montreal-to-Vancouver run, for example, porters were on duty for 311 hours and 30 minutes per month; whereas they were “only” on duty on the Montreal–Mont Jolie run for 300 hours and 50 minutes, on the Montreal–Winnipeg run for 292 hours, and on the Montreal–Chicoutimi run for 288 hours. All of these are far above the 160–184 hours that would be worked if porters had the 40-hour week. The worst run, in this regard, was from Montreal to Moncton, which required porters to be on duty for 321 hours and 50 minutes per month. Essentially, they were on duty for 42 hours of a 48-hour journey, after deducting six hours sleep from their pay — three hours sleep each night, coming and going. “No human being, under any circumstances, except to save life, should be asked to work such long hours as to seriously impair his health,” protested workers in 1927.³

Black trade unionists worked hard to improve these conditions. The hours of work became more reasonable and pay slowly increased. Porters became less dependent on tips from passengers. “They fought for more rights, and more rights,” recalled Richard Lord. According to Carl Simmons:

Guys got together, black guys, working on the railway. Those worked as porters and club cars, and they said “why is it we can’t be in dining cars, too? Why is it we can’t be waiters in the dining cars?” The guys working out of Halifax, one time, wanted to stop shining shoes because some of them had rashes on their fingers. And, so the government of Nova Scotia said: you don’t have to shine shoes no more. But you know what happened? That was only in the province of Nova Scotia. An hour and a half after you leave Halifax you’re in the province of New Brunswick and then you are in the province of Quebec. And Quebec and New Brunswick didn’t go for that. They said that it was none of our business.



Figure 3. Royal train porters on the CNR, 1951. Left to right: R. Coker, CPR; W.L. Holmes, CPR; E.D.J. Bartholemew, CNR; W.T. Fraser, CNR; C.B. States, CPR; C.D. Frazier. (Ingenium)

Gradually, working conditions improved but the job remained a difficult one. They were required to take care of a thousand different details, including making up and taking down the sleeping berths, awakening passengers and handling their luggage, cleaning the sleeping car and the washrooms, and polishing shoes (see also Foster 2019; Grizzle 1998). Given their constant interactions with passengers, porters were vulnerable to public complaints and everyday racism. In his interview, Carl Simmons told us about how his father, also a porter, explained to him at a young age how things were going to be. He had prepared him, so he wasn't scared when he started working as a porter at age 19. He saw everything during his years of service. Personally, he didn't like doing the "yes sir" and "no sir," as it ran against his nature — he wanted to smack those who treated him badly. They were trained to be courteous, even when confronted by everyday racism. The accounts of racism could be horrific. Charles Burke, a CNR porter, shared one of those stories:

When it came time for us to eat in the [railcar] diner, they put a big curtain up and we weren't allowed to eat off the menu. You weren't allowed to stay in the hotel. Because the

hotels would not have blacks in them. One time they sent me to Jasper. We stayed in the hotel, and I think the rooms were near the kitchen or something. So, I go out and I see this big pool. So, I jumped in the pool. My God they pulled me out of this pool and they drained the pool. When I got back to Montreal, they gave me 20 demerit marks because they had this system that if you had 60 demerit marks you'd get fired. They drained the pool. . . . The union said "you are lucky that you didn't get fired." (Burke 2010)

Black women also faced intense employment discrimination. Starting in 1938, the community fought for Black women to be accepted as nurses at Montreal's hospitals (Flynn 2009, 129–52; see also Este 2004, 19). The Reverend Charles Este and Stanley Clyke also met with officials at Eaton's department store in the early 1950s "and began a slow but insistent voice that negroes would be hired. The result was that each week, the employment office sent the Centre a list of vacant positions, these were posted on the bulletin board. Many applied and some were accepted."⁴ Some found employment with the city's clothing manufacturers. Several women interviewed insisted that only Jewish employers would hire them. Most, however, found employment as domestic workers in the homes of the wealthy. Indeed, Canada's "Domestic Scheme" of 1955 recruited thousands of women from the Caribbean. Several women spoke of coming to Montreal years before the rest of their families, and their children related what it was like to reunite with their mothers after years apart. Emily Amelia Robertson Heron came to Canada in 1956 as part of the domestic scheme, when she was in her early twenties. She recalls that they said that Canada had no segregation, but the reality was not what she expected: "They didn't call it segregation, but discrimination, because it was subtle business. . . . If you go to a restaurant, you were the last person they would come serve." She recounted one time walking into a liquor store and being mistaken for Indigenous — who were not allowed to buy liquor in those days. So, they gave her a "pass" to buy the liquor as "they did not know who we were or what we were. So that was another joke."

Employment Mobility and Community

Sleeping car porters may have been at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy on the railways and subject to the everyday racism of other Canadians, but they represented the labour aristocracy within the Black community. Their high status had much to do with the fact that the CPR, in particular, recruited men from the Black colleges in the US. They were often well educated, and their labour mobility made them integral to the exchange of news, ideas, and goods. Richard Lord, the son of a porter who worked as a porter during the summers to help pay for his university studies, told us this story:

My father worked at CPR as a porter, a sleeping car porter. And when my father ran, he went across the country. He used to bring in from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, eggs, and he used to bring in from British Columbia those big apples, big beautiful apples. He brought into our home but also people in the district always waited for my father to return. He would bring little surprises. The train came in at Windsor Station. So naturally we went there a lot of times. (Lord 2005)

Virtually every Black community institution built in Montreal before 1960 was founded by sleeping car porters and their wives. Porters lived the male breadwinner ideal of the time, as they were able to provide for their families (Parr 1990). But their regular absences meant that women could not work full-time, as they had to take care of their children. They therefore channelled much of their extra energy and creativity into community-building. It is no coincidence that the very first Black community institution in Montreal was the Coloured Women's Club, which was formed in 1902 by a group of porters' wives. It was an elite institution within the community, fundraising for good causes and providing a respectable (one might say middle-class) social space for community members to gather.

The Coloured Women's Club used to hold a New Year's Day *Matinée*, an afternoon dance, which Babsey Simmons described as "THE social event for the community. Everybody, for days, was talking about getting their dresses for

the *matinée*, getting your dress for the *matinée*. But unfortunately, my sisters and I were not allowed to go” as her parents did not approve of dancing on Sunday. She did manage to go one year, wearing a “Gibson Girl” with long sleeves and flared skirt and brown loafers. The memory was still very vivid, the Roseland Ballroom had a “winding staircase and that intrigued me more than dancing. Just going up and down and coming down and looking at the people downstairs, it was very, very intriguing.” After the *matinée* ended, there was “the TMTM, which meant The More The Merrier” at the Negro Community Centre (NCC), “so people left the *matinée* and went to this dance at the Center, which was packed.”

It was a treasured memory, but there were other memories. Babsey Simmons learned to play cards as a child at the NCC, but her father didn’t approve. The reason is an interesting one:

[T]hat’s where [the NCC] I first learnt to play cards, which my father didn’t approve. And when I came home all happy to play, I forget the name of the game, my father took the pack of cards and threw them in the fire. In those days you had a stove which had wood, not wood, coal, and he threw them in there because being a porter on the railroad, he’d seen too many men lose their pay check through gambling and when it came time there was no money to feed the families. So, my father was strictly opposed to cards. I never bother with cards whatsoever, it just turned me off.

The persistent influence of the Black nationalism of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) was visible in the interviews, hardly surprising given its emphasis on racial pride, respectability, and economic autonomy (see Bentley 1980; Marano 2010). Babsey Simmons’s parents used to take her to the local hall “religiously,” particularly for the Sunday afternoon forums. When she was a little girl, her father took her to see Garvey when he visited the city in 1937. The most famous member of Montreal’s UNIA chapter was Louise Langdon, the mother of Malcolm X.



Figure 4. A community event at Union United Church, Montreal, no date. (Photo courtesy of Nancy Oliver MacKenzie)

In November 1943 the wives, daughters, and sisters of Black porters working on the CPR formed the Women's Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. It was said that women needed the "Ladies Auxiliary because they need the protection of a union home," a class sensibility that was no doubt shared by White trade unionists at that time.⁵ The Women's Auxiliary flourished during the 1940s and 1950s, reporting their activities regularly in the *Black Worker*. Like their sisters from the Coloured Women's Club, they were active fundraisers. The annual Mother's Day Tea, for example, provided scholarships for area high school students. Gertrude Coward, sister of the union's secretary-treasurer, and of Velma Coward, who served as the secretary-treasurer of the Women's Auxiliary, received one such scholarship to attend the labour summer school for women trade unionists, ages 18 to 30, at Hudson Shore in the United States ("The Brotherhood Strives Upward" 1944). There she likely learned public speaking, writing composition, and economic history, as well as about the labour movement from teachers drawn from area women's colleges. In 1956, the Montreal Women's Auxiliary reminded readers of the

Black Worker that as they “climb the ladder of success” it was important to remember that it “was made by the male railroad porters in your family” (“Montreal” 1956, 8).

Evidence of this collectively achieved success was everywhere apparent in the pages of the *Black Worker*. In 1944, Beryl Dickinson Dash, a 30-year-old McGill University student and daughter of a senior trade unionist in the local union, was crowned Miss McGill University during the winter carnival “and thereby surprised millions in the Dominion of Canada and the United States” (“Daughter Honored” 1944). The carnival queen had been chosen by secret ballot by the university’s 8,000 students. According to the *Black Worker*, “she won over four other charming contestants, all white, who immediately became princesses and attendants to Miss Dash.” It ended the story with: “The Division salutes you, Queen, and your proud parents.”

As old porters came to retirement, a ritual formed in Little Burgundy where the man’s family, friends, co-workers, and supervisors would greet him at the station on the return from his last run. Retirement notices in the *Black Worker*, often nothing more than a photo caption, highlighted dozens of such cases. Albeit brief, these notices communicate some of the aspirational values and pride of unionized workers who have achieved middle-class standing. J.N. Carrington, for example, retired in February 1951 after 38 years of “efficient, loyal and exemplary service” (“Brother JN Carrington” 1951). For their part, H.A. Skerrett returned home from his last run after 37.5 years of “loyalty and service” and was met “by his beloved wife and family” (“Brother H.A. Skerrett” 1953), as did Vincent Bacchus, who retired in October 1962 after 43 years of “efficient and loyal service” (“Brother Vincent Bacchus” 1963, 7). J.A. Greene, described as a “diplomat on wheels,” returned to Montreal in 1950 after 42 years of “faithful, loyal and efficient service” (“Brother JA Greene” 1950, 5). In addition, Greene was credited with being the first porter to sign a union card at the outset of the union drive in Montreal. Occasionally, retirees chose to highlight their roles as father and husband. C.D. Bourne, for example, served 28 years on CPR trains, and had six children, all high school graduates, with a son in dentistry and a daughter who was the organist of their church.⁶ We can also see the multi-generational connection to the mobile workplace when J.L. Lord retired

in 1955 after 36 years of service and was met by a throng of friends and family, including several other family members in uniform. One of these was Richard Lord, interviewed by one of my students in 2005, who became an engineer but worked as a porter to help pay for university (*Black Worker* 1956, 5).

There is ample evidence that the relative wealth and security of railway porters and their families allowed them to move to the prosperous suburbs, a process that began during World War II and accelerated in the early post-war years. A membership list of Montreal porters working for the CPR in 1944 confirmed that only a minority, even then, still lived in Little Burgundy where much of the Black community resided in “cold flats” with no running hot water. Oral history interviews confirm this trend. Mr. Chandler, a CPR porter interviewed during the early 1980s, recalled that anyone with seniority “had their own homes elsewhere like over the river, [or] NDG [Notre-Dame-de-Grâce]. Quite a few of us lived in this area.” Likewise, Florence Phillips, who fell in love and married a porter, told us that her husband “got decent money. Yeah, they got good money. So, they started moving to the West Island [middle-class suburban area, mainly anglophone] and they all have houses in the West Island.” Middle-class flight from the inner city was thus an inter-racial phenomenon rather than primarily White flight, as was the case in Detroit and other US cities. The relative affluence of their families no doubt coloured the memories of their children.

Childhood Memories of Mobile (and Often Absent) Fathers

The nature of the job required that Black porters be away from their families for large blocks of time. “I travelled this whole country,” recalled Mr. Chandler, who worked for the CPR from 1954 until 1966. He would regularly travel from Montreal to Vancouver and back again: “Although you would be travelling overnight, leaving there at 8:30 on a Friday night and arriving in Winnipeg at 8:35 Sunday morning. Remained in Winnipeg until Monday afternoon, report at work at 5:30, leave at 7:20 and be back in Montreal on Wednesday morning” (Chandler 1982). Priscilla Gerald’s husband also travelled the country. Asked if she also had the chance to see Canada, she replied matter-of-factly: “No, I had to stay with my children” (Gerald 1982). Out of necessity, families, like

community organizations, were moulded around Black male employment on the railway, addressing some of the problems that this employment incurred.

For her part, Babsey Simmons insisted that her father's prolonged absences didn't affect her negatively. It was considered normal for the time. Besides, she added, her mother was supported by a large extended family and Black community institutions. Others found opportunity in the prolonged absence of their fathers. Born in 1933, the youngest of nine children, Charles Griffith was interviewed in 2018 in the basement of Union United Church, said to be the oldest Black congregation in Canada. His mother had died when he was young, so a "housekeeper" took care of them during his father's absence. The Vancouver run took his father away from home 16 days a month. But his father did not approve of him taking tap dance at Union United Church, in the very room he was being interviewed by two of my students so many years later. "That's when I danced," he smiled. He began to dance at age 12, but had to do so secretly. His father "hated this dancing business because he figured out of nine children, nobody graduated from high school," and Charles was his youngest and thus his last chance. But his son had other ideas: "I used to climb down from the second story on gas piping, find my tap shoes in a shed, and go dance. I had to climb back up the pipe into my bedroom window to go to sleep." He just had to dance and found an ally in the Reverend Charles Este, who looms large in the history of Black Montreal. Griffith remembers him as someone interested in helping others: "You didn't have to be a millionaire, you just had to be a person." Looking back, he recalled that "Everything started here [nodding to that very room] for me and I grew from here teaching dancing. And my career grew from here and I now teach for McGill. So, it was a step up. But the beginning was here" (Griffith 2016). Griffith also became a steamfitter at the CPR, working on the steam braking system on the trains in the local rail yard, an occupation that his father's generation was barred from. And his brother became a railway conductor, another occupation denied to Black workers until Black porters challenged it in the courts and this vestige of Jim Crow racism was dismantled in the 1960s.

By and large, children's memories of absent fathers remained positive. Very likely, they didn't want to say anything that would dishonour their parents. But

there is little doubt that the prolonged time away from home and family placed pressure on families and some marriages did not survive. This was the case with Charles Burke, a porter during the 1950s and 1960s, who regrets not spending more time with his wife and kids. He had married young, which forced him to work a job he didn't enjoy:

I got married and I got a job on the railroad. I worked as a porter. It was very discriminatory. They had Group 1 and Group 2. Group 1 was all the white employees and Group 2 was all the black employees. The only work that you could get was to become a porter. You couldn't become a waiter or conductor. I was always a rebel, I was always in trouble. I didn't want to work on the railroad but I was married.

Unhappiness with his day job eventually led him to open up the Black Bottom Café in 1963, an after-hours jazz club on Saint-Antoine Street. He was "fascinated by the nightlife" and named the café after a popular dance from the 1930s, explaining that he wanted to make a "statement" about the music and Blackness. It was open from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m. from Thursday night to Sunday morning, as the rest of the week he was out on the trains: "I was opening three days a week and working on the railroad. . . . It was open Thursday, Friday and Saturday. I had accumulated enough seniority on the railroad where I could have an organized run. I think I was running to Chicoutimi or some place. So, my railroad work always gave me three days off. I was always home to work at the club." It would get packed after two or three in the morning, and big names in the jazz world would come in after the other jazz clubs closed. Looking back, he regretted some of his choices as he was an absent father.

For the most part, however, the interviews reveal stable, blue-collar, middle-class homes. A family piano was not unusual, allowing jazz legend Oscar Peterson to learn his craft at an early age. His sister, Daisy Sweeny, became a much beloved piano teacher in the area. It is also clear from the interviews that the next generation was well placed to go to university and forge careers as lawyers, engineers, and other professionals. Juanita Westmoreland, the

daughter of one of our interviewees, Florence Phillips, wife of a porter, went to school in France at the Sorbonne to study law, and rushed back to defend the Black students arrested during the 1969 occupation of Sir George Williams (Concordia) University's computer centre in protest against anti-Black racism. It was a pivotal moment in the Black freedom struggle in Canada (Austin 2013; Mills 2010). She later became the first Black judge in Quebec.

Conclusion

The story of collective struggle and shared upward mobility, centred on labour mobility within racial capitalism, came to a close with the demise of passenger rail travel in Canada. Railway employment declined precipitously during the 1960s and 1970s, rupturing the inter-generational connection of Black Montrealers to the railways. It had a disastrous impact on many families. With their separate collective agreements and seniority lists, Black workers were effectively locked into their job categories and prevented from being promoted up or transferring out of these jobs. This lack of occupational mobility meant that many long-service employees with decades of seniority were laid off.

But Black trade unionists did not go quietly into the night. They challenged their unions to do better and, when this failed, they lodged an official complaint in 1963 under Canada's new anti-discrimination law. As one Black trade union leader explained, "the menace of unemployment and layoff intensifies the desire of members of each Group [the collective agreement divided workers into two groups by occupation and, as a result, by race] to hang on to their job and seniority rights they already have, and perhaps to try to expand their own employment opportunities."⁷ They forced the change, but it was a pyrrhic victory, as the railways no longer "had a vested interest in employing" Black workers (Calliste 1995, 311). "It's not like before," sighed Priscilla Gerald (1982). "When we came here anyway," she recalled, "there was a place for Black people, especially with the railroad." One of those laid off in 1966 was Mr. Chandler, after working for the CPR for 12 years. When he was hired, he was 222 on the union's seniority list. When he was laid off, he was number 98 on that same list. In the beginning, the only White men working as porters were students from Sir George Williams or McGill. In the end,

when the pay became “very good” and racial barriers had been torn down, “most of the porters are white.”

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Notes

- 1 For more on the working lives of Canadian Black porters, see Calliste (1987).
- 2 Proposed Revision of Rules Governing Wages and Working Conditions of Employees, The Sleeping, Dining and Parlour Car Service of the Canadian National Railways, Before Board of Conciliation and Investigation. Montreal, 30 May 1927. File: Sleeping and Parlour Car Conductors and Porters, Briefs and Correspondence, 1927, Employee Argument, Vol. 84, MG 28 I 215, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 “The Evolution of the NCC, 1927–1986,” File 13, Box F013-011.
- 5 Evelyn Braxton — history, File Montreal — Ladies Auxiliary, 1942–1952, R 12294 Box 30, Stanley Grizzle Collection, LAC.
- 6 Retirement Notice of C.D. Bourne, File: BSCP — Montreal Division-Correspondence and Clippings, 1962–66, Grizzle Collection, R 12294, LAC.
- 7 Report of Inquiry into Charges of Racial Discrimination Against the CBRT & GW by Lee William, Chairman, Local 130, File: Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE), Box 32, R 12294, Grizzle Collection, LAC.

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Ruminations on Ephemerality

Brenda Grzetic

Abstract

This chapter explores the experiences of displaced fishery workers from rural Newfoundland who take seasonal work each year in fish plants and on farms in other provinces. Through fieldwork narratives and photographs, the notion of ephemerality surfaces as a dominant structure of feeling of the overall experiences of these migrant workers, the impacts on their households and communities, and their strategies for coping with “living two lives.” A feminist political economy lens provides the general framework for analysis, allowing for interconnections between gender, class, and race structures in the context of ongoing social and economic restructuring and environmental degradation. The effects on everyday activities in the sphere of social reproduction are discussed in detail by following the dynamics of “home” and “away” — revealing the increased risks and vulnerabilities while “away” and the transformed meaning of “home” as a recuperative shoring up of protections for these workers and their communities.

Introduction

In 2006 I set out to do my PhD fieldwork on the experiences of Newfoundlanders leaving home to take seasonal work in fish/seafood plants and on farms throughout Atlantic Canada and Ontario. I was excited about the possibilities

of ethnography as a way to see up close the everyday lives of these people moving away for work. Many of the women and men I met over the following six months had spent much of their working lives in the Newfoundland fishery. Since the Atlantic groundfish moratoria in the 1990s and the end of the TAGS¹ program, many households in regions like southwest Newfoundland lost the employment options needed to maintain a decent standard of living in their rural communities (MacDonald, Neis, and Grzetic 2006).

This chapter explores their experiences of being low-wage migrant workers, the impacts on their households and communities, and their strategies for coping with “living two lives.” A feminist political economy lens helps describe the interconnections between gender, class, and race structures in the context of ongoing social and economic restructuring and the environmental degradation that has spurred on migration (MacDonald, Neis, and Grzetic 2006; Neis and Williams 1997). Feminist political economy also adds insight into issues in the sphere of social reproduction (Bavington, Grzetic, and Neis 2004) by stressing the importance of protecting the well-being of humans, communities, and environments over capitalist production practices that prioritize private profit, markets, and capital accumulation (Neis, Jones, and Ommer 2000). As Meg Luxton (2018, 37) says, if we are to survive, economies must be re-visioned to recognize the centrality of social reproduction.

By looking at ideas about the meaning of home and away, I hope to contribute to debates about gender and class in relation to production and social reproduction. Social reproduction, a highly gendered and spatialized process, encompasses all of life’s activities beyond production, including the actions, attitudes, behaviours, and emotions necessary to maintain and reproduce life daily and intergenerationally at the individual and social scale (Winders and Smith 2018, 3). Paying attention to social reproduction in labour migration and its intersections with paid work is deeply revealing of the quality and experiences of daily life at the household level. It also reveals that rural communities undertake a range of life activities, especially the reproduction of labour for the next generation, and bear the cost of capitalist development in urban areas even when the capacity to meet these costs is highly constrained. In migration contexts, where people are physically relocating for work, social reproduction

is under siege in myriad ways. These have been a focus of research in feminist political economy, especially the international movement of domestic workers (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Romero 2019). Less work has focused on intra-national labour migration, allowing for research “at home,” on the road, and in destination communities. Following these dynamics is helpful, not to contrast the locations as much as to reveal the dialectics between them, the increased risks while “away,” and the transformed meaning of “home” as a recuperative shoring up of protections for these vulnerable workers and their communities.



Figure 1. Cash Avenue. 2006. (Collage by Brenda Grzetic)

Over the course of six months of fieldwork, I interviewed people from 26 households from the southwest region of Newfoundland and Labrador and followed them to their work communities in Nova Scotia and PEI. I was able

to meet with some of them again once they returned home in the fall. I also took photographs as I travelled back and forth between these communities, in some cases with workers. Some of the Newfoundlanders also agreed to take photographs of what was important to them about their experiences of leaving for work. Along the way, I also interviewed owners of cottages, inns, and boarding houses, and representatives from town councils, schools, and community development agencies in Newfoundland and throughout Nova Scotia and PEI.

My fieldwork drew on experimental methods involving both textual and visual inquiry. I was interested in the potential of photography, not solely as representative visual evidence but as a catalyst for interruptions to dominant narratives, including the dominance of text. Grimshaw and Ravetz (2005, 6) describe photography as intervention, explaining how “using a camera positions one differently in the world. It serves to radically realign the body such that a different range of questions about experience and knowledge come into view.”

The photographs evoke the *structure of feelings* of migration. Structure of feeling is a concept developed by Raymond Williams (1977) that calls attention to what is common but often unspoken in people’s experiences. It has two basic characteristics — first, it is always a structure of actual feeling rooted in the particularity of collective experience evident in the everyday, and second, it is a common feature found in art and literature, especially of those who are made vulnerable by socio-economic conditions (Filmer 2003). In this research, “structure of feeling” acted as a bridge between the anthropological narratives grounded in feminist political economy, and the photographs, allowing for important connections between aesthetic dimensions and material things that tend to be ignored (Ware 2011). These connections were realized through my photographs of street signs from the communities I visited that not only guided my travels but also aligned with my research themes. The photographs taken by migrant workers reveal the stark differences in everyday aspects of their lives at home and away as a dominant feature. Working with these photographs and producing collage artwork from them evoke structures of feeling and dispositions among migrant workers. I refer to the most dominant disposition as *ephemerality* — a term that describes the transitory aspects of their lives and work and the tragic lightness of their movements and attitudes.

The Trouble with Normal

When I arrived on the west coast of Newfoundland in April, I had just missed some of the people I had hoped to meet before they left for work in other provinces. As I drove through the communities to my friend's house where I was staying, the place seemed deserted — one of the few people I saw was the man from the telephone company who was connecting or disconnecting cable and phone lines. It was obvious that it was big garbage week. Discarded materials from the winter's home renovation projects and spring cleanup were piled at the end of people's driveways — old bathroom fixtures, appliances, and rusty barbecues, worn-out flooring, broken toys, all waiting to be carried away to the local dump.

Once people got their call to go to work, a whirlwind of activity was set in motion and then they were gone. It all happened so fast that the school principal had to send out a reminder to parents to please inform the school when children would be leaving. Those working on town councils and in community agencies described this seasonal migration as a survival strategy that helped families maintain a standard of living and avoid income support. But they were also concerned about its negative impacts such as decreased morale, increasing loneliness, and the undermining of meaningful community cooperation for events, programs, and fire services. They also struggled to maintain garbage services: with residents away for half the year, there was resistance to paying annual garbage collection fees.



Figure 2. Signs of families gone, 2006. (Photo by Brenda Grzetic)

People in these communities said that leaving for work is normal: “[T]here’s not many people not going away around here.” However, the characteristics of migration change to varying degrees with each generation and for different classes of workers. The Newfoundlanders I followed relied on their own network of neighbours and friends. Rather than drawing on institutional supports such as those provided for “skilled” workers displaced by a recently closed local pulp and paper mill,² most of them moved without any institutional supports. They took an almost entrepreneurial approach where they negotiated within their own networks of close connections between households. This allowed them to move as a group, offsetting some of the chaos and ever-present insecurity that they experienced. It also helped reduce the cost of travel, made shared accommodations possible, and decreased the emotional and safety risks to those who would otherwise be migrating on their own.

The scope of labour migration from these small communities in 2006 was much more expansive and interconnected than one might think. The annual cycle I documented began with workers travelling by car and ferry to fish plants in Nova Scotia and PEI early in the spring, journeys that took a full day. Families who did not take their children made arrangements for them to move in with aunts and/or grandparents. Some workers returned for a week or two after the lobster processing finished in late June and then went back to process crab until the fall. In cases where a fish plant closed or was no longer able to provide the hours needed, workers sought additional hours on fruit and vegetable farms in communities near the plant. Most returned home by November but some left again for work in fish plants in Maine. They returned home by Christmas. All these workers came home knowing that there was no guarantee that there would be a job waiting for them the following year. Most were not certain they even wanted to go back to some of these workplaces.

Some migrant workers were woodsmen. They left later in the spring for logging work in Nova Scotia and were away until late summer. They stayed in rough cabin-like structures in the woods, where groups of men had bunks but no running water. In mid-summer, more people left for work on vegetable and nursery farms in Nova Scotia, PEI, and Ontario. Most returned home by October. After Christmas, others left for Alberta where they did winter work laying

seismic cables. In March and early April, the cycle started again with people seeking work with fish plants and accommodations for the coming season.

Adding to the sense of ghostliness in the Newfoundland communities was the movement of some local people into a nearby park after the school year ended, and after their spouses and friends left for work. They formed a makeshift community in the park where they had campers or RVs, giving them closer contact with other families and access to structured activities for their children. Some families on social assistance also moved to be closer to their families and friends but they did not utilize the park — instead, they camped out on the land.

In terms of depth, the main difference between these seasonal migrations and those of the past was the increasing presence of women from rural communities seeking low-waged seasonal work; many of these women moved for work without their partner. With increasing downward pressure on men's income after the moratoria and increasing living costs, households *needed* the additional income from women's work to survive and provide for their children. In some fishing households, the crisis drew women to work on fishing boats (Grzetic 2004; Neis, Gerrard, and Power 2013). Similar to other countries, women picked up “the slack” in households in the wake of crises, taking on more of the socially reproductive work in communities and stepping in where social and care services were lacking (Luxton 2018). In rural Newfoundland, it was not surprising that women also picked up the slack by coordinating their mobility needs with members of other households and those leaving for work.

Because more women moved for work, a whole range of gendered activities in the sphere of social reproduction were impacted in both households and communities. There was a withdrawal of social events and supports — most were cancelled but some were moved to the fall and winter when people were home. With mothers and sometimes both parents migrating, children were by default made mobile, either moving with their parents or moving in with an extended family member. When men left for work and women stayed behind, women had increased caring responsibilities in the home and with elders. Where women left, elder care was no longer available for some family members. Some of these impacts were stressful and the absence of women was frowned upon in the communities. A town council representative described it this way:

Historically, it was mostly men who moved for seasonal work but now that more women are going, this is seen in some negative light. People think that the mother has to be there for the kids but most of the time the kids are staying with aunts and grandparents and they're OK. It's hard on the grandparents though, taking care of teenagers. It is supports like these from aging parents that keeps people here and supports them in leaving for seasonal work. (KI³-4)

Another difference in these migration patterns from those in the past was the close affiliation of Newfoundlanders with international workers in the same



Figure 3. A shelf in the fridge, 2006. (Photo by Brenda Grzetic)

low-wage jobs in their destination communities. There were (and are) many temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in the Atlantic provinces in agriculture, seafood processing, and caregiving. At the time of this study, these TFWs were from Mexico and Russia. In PEI, Newfoundlanders (including the author) lived at an inn along with Mexicans and Russians, sharing a common kitchen and washroom facilities. In the kitchen we were each assigned a single shelf in a fridge. Likewise, on a farm in Ontario, five Newfoundlanders stayed in a bunkhouse and TFWs from Mexico shared a house on the same farm.

On Ephemerality

The Newfoundlanders said they were “living two lives” — one at home and one away. They had their friends at home who helped take care of their houses and children, and their friends away who were mostly co-workers and a few kind souls who owned cottages and inns where some of them stayed. The transition between these two lives was difficult emotionally and this was evident on the ferry crossing. There, they gloomily braced themselves for the onslaught of long hard work days in communities where they had few resources, were looked down upon as workers, targeted as Newfoundlanders for only working to get their EI,⁴ for not contributing enough to the local economy, and of course, for talking funny. They consoled each other to try and reduce the anxiety they felt by giving advice on how the time would pass: how “by the time you get settled in, a month will have passed, and then before you know it summer will be over and in September sure, you’ll begin the countdown.” Coming home was a very different story: “Getting on the ferry, well there’s no better feeling, really. My mood changes then, but it seems like it’s getting harder every year” (NL-5-4).

Ephemerality is a “structure of feeling” that helps articulate some of the feelings or dispositions of these migrant workers. It describes the fleeting and transitory nature of life and work imposed by precarity, and in turn, it is reflected in their movements, actions, and aspirations. Ephemerality captured my thoughts initially during my fieldwork because their long hours at work and constant moving about presented challenges for me in connecting with some of them. As time went on, I saw how this movement linked to their identity as Newfoundlanders and reflected the protective measures they took to minimize some of the exploitation they experienced. Even when they did not consider themselves to be migrant workers, they felt treated as such by employers who conveniently called them to work on short notice, felt little or no obligation to support their housing needs in meaningful ways, and in the fall sent them home, many sick and forgotten.

From one year to the next, the precariousness bred more ephemerality. This was seen in their ongoing searches for a decent place to live and work each year in an unending attempt to “get situated” so they could have some sense of stability: “We’re going to Alberta next year to work at a meat packing factory



Figure 4. The 1949 vote, 2006. (Photo by Brenda Grzetic)

where we have friends.” Or: “We’ll be looking at going away for the winter next year so we won’t have to pay high heat bills and I can have flowers again.” They despised precarity and were on the move emotionally and creatively with thoughts and plans for the next year, always doing the math to calculate wages and hours available for work minus their expenses at home and away. The freedom as Canadians to physically move about was their ace card and one area that distinguished the Newfoundlanders from the TFWs (Knott 2016). They often moved about due to issues with accommodations. When they were not getting enough hours at the plants, they took extra shifts at a nearby vegetable farm, options not available to TFWs. Layoffs and sudden plant closures mid-season left them scrambling within their network of Newfoundlanders to quickly find other work and another place to live.

In the midst of the chaos, a heightened sense of ethnicity emerged that manifested most obviously in conflict among groups of workers in the plants. Local people wanted a regular workday and work week. Not so for Newfoundlanders, who considered an employer who provided lots of hours of work a “good employer.” They needed all the hours they could get and this vulnerability exposed them to overwork, exploitation, and resentment. The conflict positioned one group of workers as hard-working and the other as, well, lazy:

[L]ocal workers want to go home after 5:00. We don't want days off. The local people here don't want to work. You have Newfoundlanders here living in hardtop campers or in cramped apartments and motel rooms, making less than they did in plants in Newfoundland twenty years ago. And to make matters worse, they're processing lobster and crab from Newfoundland. (NL-5)

The dynamic is intense and leaves people quietly reeling, looking for ways to move on. It also distracts perfectly from worker solidarity and reduces the likelihood of unionization or any pressure whatsoever on employers that might improve wages or health and safety within these plants.

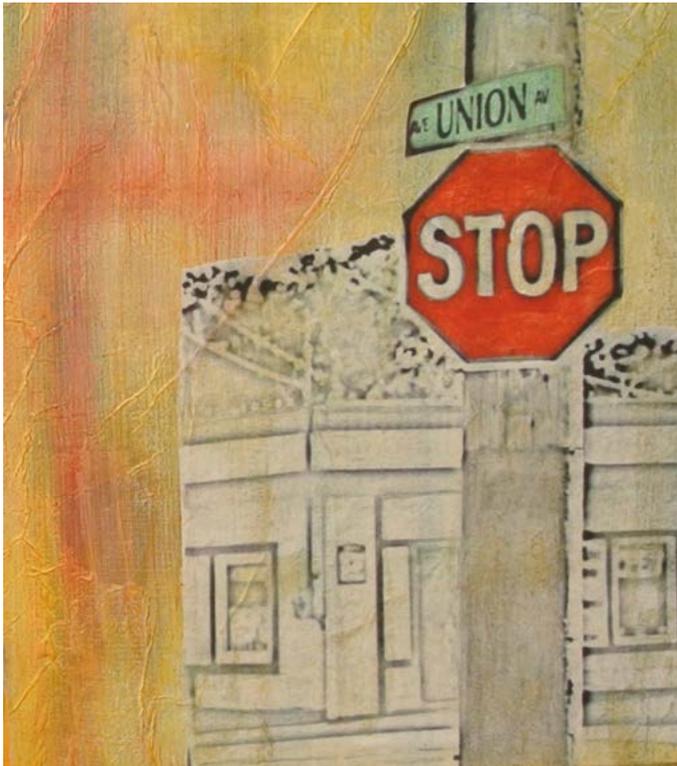


Figure 5. Union Avenue, 2019. (Photo collage by Brenda Grzetic)

Ephemerality evokes another structure of feeling — a disposition among the Newfoundlanders to keep to themselves as a group. They distanced themselves as a protective measure in order to mask the degrading surround — the way they lived while away, the stigmatized characterization of “unskilled” plant work, charges that “you’re only here to get your EI and then you’re gone,” and, ironically, an outright resentment by local people towards Newfoundlanders who moved there to do this work. At a nearby fish plant, local workers posted a sign on the parking lot at the start of the season stating: “Newfies Go Home!” (KI-21-1). Local people in community agencies described this resentment as irrational because most local people did not want those jobs. But the resentment was real and not just about these low-wage jobs that, combined with EI, barely kept them above the poverty line. It was also about the local dynamic of dispossession and the resulting heightened resistance to people from other cultures at a time when local workers were angry and struggling with real day-to-day issues themselves. This was an outcome of failed local economic development strategies in tourism and fisheries that made it all but impossible to keep their own children and family members at home and in homes. Compounding this were processes more recently referred to as “ocean grabbing”⁵ (Knott and Neis 2017), which here relates to the additional dispossession caused by wealthy Newfoundland processors who aggressively bought up fishing fleets, licences, and plants throughout the Atlantic provinces.

Local people said they have been conditioned out of wanting to work in fish plants and on farms: “[O]nly those with a lower level of intelligence went to the fish plants . . . if a man made a living at the plant, people would wonder if he couldn’t find something better. It was OK for women though” (J-97). With limited access to local workers, plant managers actively recruited Newfoundlanders, and some had an unstated hiring preference for women and married couples. Most Newfoundlanders were highly skilled, with decades of work experience in plants back home.⁶ Some completed professionalization training in seafood processing during TAGS. They worked long hours and every day if needed, even going against doctor’s orders to rest. They did the work proudly and were grateful for the work. They may not have loved working in fish plants but they did not look down on the work or those doing it.

Having lost the core economic base in their home communities, and along with it the value of their homes, the extent of their investment in communities away started and ended with the work. They minimized their visibility as migrant workers: “[T]heir focus is to get there, get the job, get enough hours for EI and get home” (KI-5-2). Their vulnerability to overwork meant they had minimal time for social reproduction activities. This was quite evident in the provision of schooling for those who brought children. From discussions with school administrators, the children were at increased risk due to the parents’ long work days and lack of supervision, children’s poor attendance, lost weeks while transferring school records, bullying experienced by the children at school, and the school’s inability to meet the student’s needs with limited resources at the end of the school year. After years of struggling to support these children and a lack of coordination between provinces, school administrators finally



Figure 6. School Road, 2006. (Photo by Brenda Grzetic)

recommended to parents that they leave the children at home in the future. Regardless, some children still arrived in April needing to attend school and the same problems persisted.

Similar challenges affected Newfoundlanders regarding access to affordable housing. These scenic coastline communities throughout Atlantic Canada have been transformed by economic development strategies centred on tourism development. The result is that many communities have an eerie ghostlike feeling because so many homes are vacant, being occupied by vacationers only for short periods each year. As a result of tourism, the cost of housing in Nova Scotia and PEI has increased dramatically and rental opportunities are limited. The available rental housing was taken by local people willing to sign long-term rental agreements, which Newfoundlanders were generally not willing to do (although a few did sign agreements and paid rent year-round). Most Newfoundlanders could not afford to pay the required first and last month plus damage deposit so they got rentals that were in such poor condition that no one else wanted them.

The lack of support for appropriate housing for Newfoundlanders made it impossible to carry out social reproduction activities in work communities and further undermined their integration into them. One of the accommodation owners I spoke with had been dealing with the lack of decent housing for workers in the community for years. She was disgusted at the state of housing offered to Newfoundlanders: “[T]hey are offering run down places in shabby conditions. One landlord has them living in ratholes.” Attempts made to resolve the issue focused on settling Newfoundlanders in permanent homes with mortgages, which was of no interest to most. In trying to access accommodations, Newfoundlanders were basically sandwiched between the needs of locals, the needs of foreign workers, and the needs of tourists, and they were essentially on their own. While employers had contractual obligations to house temporary foreign workers as a condition of their entry into Canada, I only learned of one employer who took responsibility for housing Newfoundland workers. In this case, an unused office building was converted into a bunkhouse for 10 workers, an apartment above a storage unit on the plant site housed five more, and two trailers were used to house about eight

more workers. This was at a plant where more than 60 workers, almost three-quarters of its employees, were Newfoundlanders.

Some cottage and inn owners gave Newfoundlanders good off-season rates but by the end of June, tourists were given absolute priority and rates increased. Once the cottages were booked by tourists, the Newfoundlanders had to move out for those days. Some Newfoundland women shared trailers set up in parks by their husbands before they went on to work in other provinces. Others rented small trailers in campgrounds. They lived side-by-side with tourists who had much different daily routines and often kept them awake at night. At all the plants, workers were responsible for washing their work clothes after every shift, adding yet another expense due to having to use coin-operated washers and dryers at these park and cottage sites.



Figure 7. Newfoundland family at campground, 2006. (Photo by Family NL-5)

Sharing accommodations with fellow Newfoundlanders was often the preferred approach. Some women travelled, lived, and worked together. They even shared a car and organized in advance to secure decent accommodations. Arrangements such as these worked well as long as everyone got laid off at the same time, which did not always happen. Down the road, in the bunkhouse, some women did laundry for men and on their day off cooked large meals for everyone living there. Other women would not engage in such activities and sought more egalitarian arrangements. But many Newfoundlanders shared accommodations with others from their home communities and, while difficult at times, they did so in a spirit of cooperation. This meant that men had to contribute equally to household activities such as cooking and cleaning and women added an element of certainty to these untraditional arrangements. One woman put it this way: “[W]ith four of us in the apartment, at the end of the day, two would grocery shop, one cooked and the other cleaned — you got to have a system when there’s chaos” (NL-27-3).



Figure 8. Entrance to bunkhouse, 2006. (Photo by Brenda Grzetic)

In terms of other activities, Newfoundlanders socialized very little and did very little shopping beyond groceries. A local business owner complained that “they don’t spend any money here — they don’t even go out window shopping.” Most did not spend money on unnecessary things — in reality, there was very little left after paying for accommodations, travel, and food, and sending money home each week. Some were saving for their children’s college education or a project back home. Most women said they never went for walks while away, mostly because they were concerned about their safety. This disposition among Newfoundlanders to keep to themselves did not have quite the same structure of feeling as invisibility. The local mayor knew there were a lot of Newfoundlanders in the town during Canada Day celebrations: “I can look around me here and I know everyone. I’m going to tell you I don’t see a single Newfoundlander here. It’s like they’re here but not here” (KI-16-3).

An exception to the tendency to be “here but not here” was their interactions with foreign workers, highlighting another way that class was evident in their experiences away. In fact, I think Newfoundlanders genuinely felt at times that they had more in common with the TFWs. Because they were staying at the same inn in PEI, they became friends with Russian plant workers and helped these TFWs find ways to resolve an ongoing issue with their employer concerning wage gouging. Eventually the Russian workers went on strike, refusing to work, because of the unfair deductions from their pay. Similarly, on the farms in Ontario, Newfoundlanders built allegiances with Mexican workers, partly due to work practices encouraged by employers who drew on Newfoundlanders to communicate work details to Mexican workers, relieving managers of the task. On Saturday nights, the Mexican and Newfoundland men got together to watch a hockey game on TV and play guitars. In both locations, Newfoundlanders shared a meal with the TFWs before they returned home. On the farm in Ontario, they made plans to meet again and bring their guitars the following year.

The Meaning of Home

Often on edge, it was difficult for Newfoundlanders to talk about home while they were away. They suppressed their feelings of loneliness by “keeping busy at work and blocking out thoughts of home.” A local mayor described the sit-

uation this way: “They only leave because they have to and if they had a choice they wouldn’t be packing up and going at all. It’s not a choice of their own — it’s a choice they are forced to make for their families in order to survive. They always want to come back to what we call home” (KI-17).

These feelings of loneliness made for an interesting challenge in my efforts to document what it was like to live such a fragmented livelihood. When I asked Gerald, a Newfoundlander working on the fish plant dock, to tell me what it was like to move away for work, he told me that my being there and asking these questions was just another reminder for him that Newfoundlanders are “different and degraded” and that “there’s something terribly wrong with the whole situation.” He said he considers himself a migrant worker and that he’s been insulted and degraded more often than he can count simply because he’s from Newfoundland and working here seasonally. All I could do was apologize.

Historians and sociologists remind us that Newfoundlanders from fishery-dependent communities come from a long tradition of exploitation. But amid the exploitation, there was a tremendous capacity to challenge the hegemony of merchant capital over them (Cadigan 1990). Women in fishing families were always a large and determined part of this resistance and creativity (Neis 1999). For these Newfoundlanders, such resistance takes many forms but was probably most obvious towards the end of the season when they anxiously awaited layoffs. They strategically made claims — as Newfoundlanders — to the right to first layoffs because of their need to return to Newfoundland to take care of family responsibilities. In some of the fish plants, layoffs were sporadic and this caused problems for couples and friends who lived and travelled together. Plant managers tried to accommodate them early on but in later years such requests were often declined because of surveillance and pressures from EI offices to keep them at work for as long as there was work. In one plant, Newfoundlanders quit when they were refused layoffs, causing a number of union grievances the following year when they were treated as new employees and their wages reduced. In yet another plant — a non-unionized one — management accommodated them by holding layoff lotteries for their Newfoundland workers.



Figure 9. Hope Street, 2006. (Photo by Brenda Grzetic)

The unregulated “free-for-all” environment in which these migrant workers are immersed and the dire living and working conditions while away have transformed the meaning of “home” into a place of social reproduction activities that are all but severed while away. But on their return, they must first deal with work-related emotional and physical healing and recuperation. Some of the most obvious workplace health issues included the increasing number of women who developed shellfish asthma in fish (seafood) plants. By the time they arrived home, they were so sick they had to see their doctors immediately for x-rays, medication, and therapy. Some saw doctors while away for puffers and pills but their asthma was usually much worse by the end of the season and

got progressively worse from one year to the next. Some had musculoskeletal damage from their work in the cold vegetable and seafood processing plants. Some needed hand and arm surgery when they came home, which had to be scheduled in late fall or early winter to accommodate their return to work the next spring. Most of them were coping with the effects of overwork — weight loss and exhaustion were common and it took months for them to recover. This period of recuperation was taking longer and becoming more difficult each year, partly due to age but also to the deepening vulnerabilities in their communities where health services and supports were becoming harder and harder to access.



Figure 10. Purgatory, 2020. (Collage by Brenda Grzetic)

Just like their strategy for working away, their approach to healing was also creative and cultural. They referred to away as “purgatory” but home was “heaven” — where their traditions of spending time on the land, hunting, berry picking, fishing, and in other activities have for generations supported their health and well-being. For the time they are home, they strive to rest and heal, share in cultural gatherings, and prepare for next year. It is where they feel safe to live their lives with a sense of dignity that they do not find while away. Their real emotional and financial investments are here, at home. Thoughts about next year are never far away, though, and this often means seeking advice from the community’s EI guru, who has all but replaced the local priest. One woman who spent months going back and forth to a respiratory specialist said they were looking into seismic work in Alberta the next year because she had to get away from processing crab “before it kills me.”

When I returned in the fall to meet those who had returned home, I visited Gerald, who by then had been home for almost a month. I sat at his kitchen table and wrote as he told me more about working away and his thoughts on how degrading and exhausting the whole experience was for him. He was in the middle of a renovation job replacing his kitchen flooring. There was a pile of new flooring in the kitchen and some old flooring and boxes outside by the front step, waiting for the next big garbage day. As I was leaving and he was getting back to work, it was clear that he and the others around here were finally home. They would continue leaving for work but their life was here and they would defy both the logic and the tremendous pressures on them to leave for good.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter sought to broaden understandings of the scope and depth of labour mobility in Atlantic Canada by focusing on seasonal labour migration from rural Newfoundland and Labrador to other provinces. Class and gender still struggle for consideration in most mobility research within Canada, which tends to focus on the movement of “skilled” workers to urban areas and industrial hubs. These dominant narratives unfortunately miss some of the scope and depth of neo-liberal policies, including their consequences for

social reproduction. I argue for broader notions of migrations, allowing for similarities underlying each of them to become visible and exposing them *all* as the product of neo-liberal strategies that produce and deepen inequalities and vulnerabilities along lines of gender, race, and class. Processes of local dispossession — especially the loss of fishing resources and rights and the escalating cost of housing — undermine community ownership, investment, and local employment. The resulting increase in migration creates a perceived need for temporary migrant workers.

Drawing on the narratives of migrant workers and a series of fieldwork photographs, we see how these workers survive by “living two lives,” two very different lives in fact, each with its own benefits and challenges. Despite more than a decade since my fieldwork, the photographs and narratives remain current and helpful in understanding the dynamics of migration in rural households and the increasing participation of women, including those with families. Migration is highly disruptive — not only impacting the living and material conditions of a household, it separates and alters the quality of work and life of those moving and those not moving within households and communities. It disrupts extended networks of friends, including their children and parents. Their lives at home and away show how achieving a balance between production and social reproduction is severely limited or all but impossible in both locations, albeit in different ways. “Home” is a metaphor for the security and protections they seek and deserve. It is a place of recuperation where people act to restore their health and live a decent life with enough finances to survive. “Away” they ensure their financial well-being while absorbing the impacts of other crises and the privileges of neo-liberalism, where employers and governments are free of accountability and able to dismiss any meaningful responsibility for social reproduction. The key intersections of gender, class, and ethnicity play out in their day-to-day lives at work in their struggles to find decent living accommodations and in the state’s lack of action to ensure decent working conditions and adequate education for their children. It is important to recognize how such a deep lack of institutional support for intra-provincial workers ultimately undermines unions and translates into a need for more TFWs.

Ephemerality as a dominant structure of feeling connects photographs and narratives with the jarring measures of time that constitute their lives at home and away. Within the constant migrations in and out of these rural communities, ethnography helps us stop and see how the ephemeral contains possibilities for political engagement with the past, present, and future, and with cultural attachments to “home” through memory and action. Sean Cadi-gan (2013, 188) writes that “the struggles of common experiences [among Newfoundland fishing families] constituted the motor of history as people pushed against the inequalities and concomitant injustices of their relationships.” By acting collectively — as an ethnic group of Newfoundlanders — to make their own claims while sandwiched between the needs of other competing groups, they acted to secure some level of protection from the disruptions, exploitation, and resentment by seeking rights to early layoffs, moving about to avoid hardship, working together to secure decent housing, and holding onto “home.” Not surprisingly, women took a significant role in these processes and acted as a steadying presence. They were one of the few stable sources of support these households could draw on to ensure their economic survival, but this could come at great cost to emotional and physical well-being, for themselves and their entire families.

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Notes

- 1 TAGS was the five year (1994–98) The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (followed NCARP). To qualify for TAGS early retirement: if one was a fish plant worker or a trawler person eligible for TAGS and was between 55–64 years of age or between 50–54 years of age and reached 55 while eligible under TAGS and wished to retire from the fishery, he/she could benefit from this retirement

- program. Eligible older workers could receive income supplement payments to a maximum of \$1,000/month until they reached 65 years of age.
- 2 The extent to which people were left to fend for themselves after TAGS ended was evident in the lack of knowledge in these communities about the Mobile Workforce Strategy that was put in place to support displaced “skilled” workers when a nearby pulp and paper mill shut down.
 - 3 “KI” refers to non-household interviewees in community agencies and schools, accommodation owners, etc.; “NL” refers to interviews done with members of households who moved for work; “J” refers to my fieldwork journal entries.
 - 4 Employment Insurance (Canada) provides benefits to individuals who lose their job through no fault of their own due to shortage of work or seasonal or mass layoffs.
 - 5 “Ocean grabbing” refers to dispossession or appropriation of use, control, or access to ocean space or resources from traditional resource users, rights holders, or nearby communities.
 - 6 I argue that perception of skill is often conceptualized from a class, gender, and race perspective.

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“When You Got a Disability You Get Good at Networking”: An Interview about Work Mobility with a Disability and the Evolving “Family” That Supports It

Dana House and Mandy Penney

Abstract

People with disabilities are less likely to be employed than those without disabilities. Efforts to identify aspects of work that impede the employment of people with disabilities emphasize accessibility concerns *within* workplaces such as physical barriers and rigid scheduling. Mobility issues *outside* the workplace such as transportation have received less attention despite enhanced understanding that mobility is an essential dimension of labour engagement that can have serious consequences for workers’ health and well-being. This chapter reviews relevant work disability and mobility literature and presents an edited interview with a young woman with a physical disability to highlight problematic work disability programs and the efforts of people with disabilities and their families to overcome them.

Introduction

People with disabilities are less likely to be employed and more likely to live in poverty than those without disabilities. The 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability found that the employment rate of Canadians with disabilities aged 25–64 was 59 per cent, compared with 80 per cent for those without disabilities (Morris et al. 2017). The survey also found that employed Canadians with disabilities are more likely to work part-time, and more likely to

earn significantly less than their non-disabled peers. Of the working-aged Canadians with disabilities who were unemployed, 40 per cent said they would be looking for work within the following 12 months, suggesting they were neither retired nor entirely prevented from working by their disability. This means there are almost 645,000 Canadians with disabilities who are unemployed and who have the “potential to work” with accommodations or under more inclusive conditions.

The under- and unemployment of people with disabilities or “work disability” (Loisel and Anema 2013) are associated with financial hardship, mental health concerns, and lack of support for work-disabled individuals (Crowe, Butterworth, and Leach 2016). They are also associated with substantial economic consequences for society more broadly, with the total annual income support for unemployed Canadians with disabilities estimated to exceed \$30 billion in 2008–09 (Stapleton and Procyk 2010). This amount grew 30 per cent between 2006 and 2011 (Stapleton, Tweddle, and Gibson 2013; Tompa 2013) and is expected to continue to grow, given the rise in mental illness, the increasing number of disabled youth struggling to transition from education to employment, and the growth of chronic diseases worldwide (Prins 2013).

There is a growing literature on work disability prevention and management. To date, research, policy, and programming have largely focused on aspects of work and the workplace that have implications for work-disabled persons’ labour participation (Loisel and Anema 2013; Maiwald et al. 2011; van Oostrom et al. 2009), including physical barriers at work, work flexibility and scheduling, and workplace culture and inclusion. Less attention has been given to barriers outside the workplace, such as transportation or other mobility-related obstacles that may need to be addressed to help workers get to work or to move around in the course of work (Padkapayeva et al. 2017). A growing body of literature highlights how mobility is central to our working lives and is becoming increasingly challenging and complex with the growth in precarious employment and the expansion of mobile sectors such as transportation (Haan, Walsh, and Neis 2014; Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015; Statistics Canada 2008; Turcotte 2005). This research highlights the effort and resources required to undertake travel required for work (Donatelli et al. 2017; Neis et al. 2018) and

the significant physical and mental strain on workers and their families engaged in complex/extended mobility for work (Donatelli et al. 2017; Newhook et al. 2011). These challenges may be especially problematic for work-disabled individuals who have physical disabilities. Indeed, studies examining labour participation of persons with disabilities consistently find that transportation is a major barrier to employment (Anand and Sevak 2017; Beatson et al. 2019; Jakobsen and Svendsen 2013; Lindsay et al. 2019).

The remainder of this chapter consists of an edited transcript from an interview with Mandy Penney, who has first-hand experience of under- and unemployment due to her physical disability. It sheds light on problematic work disability policies and programs that disregard, complicate, or impede work mobility and illustrates the often explicit expectation in public programming that people with disabilities will rely on family and friends to help them accomplish all forms of mobility essential to their working lives. It also highlights some of the consequences of that expectation for people with disabilities, their access to employment, and their relationships with family and friends. The interview was conducted in two parts. The first part was carried out face-to-face in St. John's in summer 2019 as part of a larger study on work mobility and work disability policy for people with disabilities. A follow-up interview was completed by phone in July 2020 to discuss in greater detail the role of family and the impacts of a subsequent snow event and COVID-19 on Mandy's work mobility. The edited interview presented here speaks to key themes in existing research indicating that work-related transportation is generally conceived as a personal responsibility falling outside the workplace realm and the employers' duty to accommodate (Befort 2015; Griffin Basas 2008). Perhaps as a consequence, while work mobility is an integral part of accessing, carrying out, and sustaining a job, the accomplishment of work mobility is largely taken for granted in work disability policy. Consequently, the programs designed to support the labour engagement of persons with disabilities tend to overlook the complex processes associated with getting to work and undertaking mobility within work that can pose unique challenges for people with disabilities and those who support them, including members of their families (Howse 2020).

Mandy Penney is a woman in her late twenties with cerebral palsy, a congenital movement disorder that affects her muscles and limits her mobility. She uses a walker and sometimes a power wheelchair to get around. In 2014, Mandy moved away from her home in Corner Brook, in western Newfoundland and Labrador, to attend university in St. John's on the island's east coast. She remains there now, 700 km from her home and immediate family. In St. John's it is easier for her to access the supports she needs, such as suitable housing, accessible transportation, and appropriate work at a barrier-free workplace.

In this interview, Mandy talks about the work she trained for but cannot do because of mobility requirements. She reflects on how she manages mobility to and within her current job and the related challenges created by the physical and social barriers she encounters daily. She shares the realities of living in an old, hilly city with few accessibility features and long, snowy winters that render previously difficult trips practically impossible for many months of the year.

Mandy recounts the numerous ways her family — and the strangers and friends who have become her family — play a critical role in her mobility and ability to work. She reflects on the often invisible nature of her own efforts to remain mobile and get around, and on the complicated and mixed feelings of gratitude, guilt, resentment, and indebtedness that can accompany such great reliance on favours provided by others. As well, Mandy notes the ways COVID-19 has amplified existing challenges and created new ones, but also the ways the pandemic has presented new ways of working and doing day-to-day things that have made her life easier. For example, she highlights how changes in the location and scheduling of work previously considered to not be feasible by employers are in fact doable and could strengthen inclusion at work.

Interview

Dana Howse: Let's talk about how you experience your disability and how it affects your general mobility. Would you say that you experience your disability constantly?

Mandy Penney: I'd say constantly. I'm not always aware of it but I always need my walker, except in my apartment. It impacts my walking and a bit of

my balance and dexterity. The last nine months I've been getting Botox in my left leg and now my right to reduce spasms and stiffness, so some days my hip hurts and I can't move my leg as much. I also have a power wheelchair that I only use when I have to. I take my walker mostly because I'm more limited in my power wheelchair.



Figure 1. Mandy travelling on a ferry for work. (Photo by Kathy Hawkins)

DH: How so?

MP: Well, you can't cancel the GoBus¹ if you're in your power wheelchair. Like, if I have my walker and my friend offers a ride, I have 45 minutes to can-

cel the bus. With my power wheelchair, the GoBus is my only option, or the Metrobus, but I don't feel comfortable on that yet.

DH: You can take a power wheelchair on the Metrobus?

MP: Yeah, but on the Metrobus, they want you to fold your walker and put it away. And if you're in your power wheelchair you have to sit in the front facing everyone. And last time I did it, I was touching knees with a stranger and I was, like, I'm not doing this again. And then you're supposed to have a friend who can strap you in but if you don't they'll do it for you. I just didn't feel very comfortable navigating it.

DH: So GoBus is your primary form of transportation then?

MP: Yeah, so I travel on either the GoBus itself or they have a contract with Newfound Cabs so they'll sometimes send you a van, accessible or not accessible, or a car. I can take rides with friends too, but when I'm getting in and out of cars, the more times I do it the more tired I get because you gotta pull all your strength up. If a car is higher, I have to bring a step stool. I prefer the bus because it has a lift, and then I don't have to tell them how to fold my walker.

DH: Right, you can just take it right up like it is.

MP: Yeah. 'Cause with the vans, if you fold up my walker or unfold it and you don't know what you're doing, you'll hurt your fingers and then I gotta show them how to do that. Whereas the GoBus drivers, you see them so often, they know you, and it's more friendly.

DH: So tell me about the GoBus. You have to book 24 hours in advance? Do they pick you up at a precise time?

MP: Well, I had a GoBus booking for 8:30 today and they didn't come till 9:00. I guess it's reliable most of the time, but sometimes they're terribly slow. Like, I had my Botox appointment at 2:30, but I didn't get in till 4:05 and I had my pick-up booked for 4:30. When the doctor finished he's like "any questions?" and I was like no, I really have to go, and I ran out. Ended up the bus was running an hour behind. I was so stressed about being no-showed.

DH: Right. So if you say "no-showed," you're not there for the pick-up that you scheduled . . . ?

MP: Yeah, they'll only wait five minutes and then you gotta pay for that ride. And if you get four no-shows in a row, I think, you're banned for a week or something, I'm not sure what the policy is, 'cause most of my no-shows are not my fault.

DH: Alright, and what's the cancellation policy? Say your plans change.

MP: It used to be 90 minutes cancellation notice, now it's 45. When I want to cancel, I do it on the online portal. Then I text them to tell them that I cancelled to make sure all my bases are covered. But, once you call to book it, I s'pose you gotta go. That's the problem with GoBus. I make the booking and then I am forced to go 'cause I don't have the energy to cancel. You always have to be planning something. Like I have to be looking into my fridge and figuring out when I am going to run out of milk.

DH: It sounds like you dedicate a lot of time and planning to get places. I imagine that's true for work too. Do you want to talk a bit about how your disability has affected your ability to get work and then get *to* work?

MP: Okay. So, I graduated my second degree in 2017, was applying for jobs then, couldn't get anything, so I moved back home to Corner Brook because I couldn't find anywhere to live that was affordable. Rent was \$1,700, \$2,200 a month for accessible units. Every day I'd find a job, do up my cover letter and resumé, send it off to a career counsellor at the government, she'd send it back, and I'd apply. That was for a whole summer. I got a few interviews, but they weren't very good. I had one with a disability organization as a fundraiser, but you needed a driver's licence and a car. The CCRW² girl said just apply anyway and see how it goes, but they weren't very impressed when they found out I didn't have a driver's licence. They were like, "You knew the job ad said you needed a driver's licence," and I was like, "Yes, but I thought you were a disability organization including people with disabilities." It was funny 'cause when I moved to Empower,³ I did fundraising for a while and I never needed a driver's licence to do that. I could have met with donors on the GoBus. A lot of disability organizations want to support people with disabilities, but they don't want to employ them. And the jobs for persons with disabilities don't match your education. I have two degrees, my friends are getting degrees and the jobs they want to

give us are like, reception. I was offered a job in CBS,⁴ but GoBus did not go out there and I could not afford a taxi to and from work.



Figure 2. Mandy at graduation. (Photo by Nathan Eddy)

DH: So, you were in reception when you started working with your current employer. What is your current job title and what do you do?

MP: I'm a training support facilitator and Inclusion Crew Coordinator. So, for training support facilitator I create all the PowerPoints for our training presentations, so right now I'm in the process of renovating all of them and we're going to do half-day training sessions, hour-long sessions, lunch-and-learns, and full day, so I'm trying to figure out what that's going to look like and, um, I go with my boss and do certain sections of the training. For Inclusion Crew, I organize all our volunteers for the festivals, so for the Regatta, Folk Festival, things like that, and I go to, like, all the events.

DH: This job gets you out and about a lot, right? You're going around with your boss to various training sessions, and you accompany her on site visits. Any other kinds of accommodations you can think of, at your current job or other ones?

MP: At an internship I had, they let me arrive a little late because of the bus schedule. Mostly working from home and GoBuses and getting taxis when necessary, because, especially when you have a disability, you have to get everything sorted out. Like your social worker has to come in and they can't do that in the evenings.

DH: Would you say your disability has affected your ability to work and the types of jobs you can do?

MP: Yeah, I have a social work degree. So I can't really do that. You need a driver's licence and a private vehicle and most people start off in job protection where you also have to visit people's houses, which would be difficult. Many social work jobs are in Labrador, which is very difficult for me to do because of the lack of accessible transportation and housing. You need a Master of Social Work to get a counselling job where you do not need to drive, but to get into a Master's program, you need work experience in social work, which is difficult to get when you cannot get an entry-level job. Even the process of applying for a job is difficult 'cause to apply to be a registered social worker you need a code of conduct, which is fine, but going to get a code of conduct is very difficult because you gotta leave, like, an hour's window to do that. I don't want to hang out at the police station for an hour.

DH: Waiting to get picked up again?

MP: Yeah. So that's stressful. And just always trying to plan your life so, like, my day is planned now till tonight. And like, if I didn't feel good this morning I'd still have to go to work because I still had to come here, but you might want to skip one thing but you can't 'cause then you have to skip another.

DH: Right, yeah. What does calling in sick look like in regards to GoBus?

MP: You gotta give 45 minutes notice. Snow days are the worst. If you get a snow day I'm texting my boss like, "Can you tell me if it's a snow day because I have 45 minutes to tell someone?" And my apartment building doesn't start shovelling till 9:00 a.m., so if there's too much snow for me to get out I have to work from home. Or when I'm at work I'm watching the clock and they'll be like, "We're closing now." I'll call GoBus and they'll say, "We'll

let the driver know,” but they never tell me if they’re coming. A few times when I got home the snow was up to my knees and I had to crawl through it. It’s difficult but I could do that with my walker. But not with my chair. I never take my power wheelchair out during winter. I’m too nervous.

DH: Do you ever travel for work?

MP: Travelling for work, or even fun, can be difficult because it takes so much work to plan when you have to find accessible hotels and accessible transit. My friends often offer to plan trips, but they don’t really know enough about my access needs. Sometimes, the hotel staff don’t even know. They believe an accessible room is a room closest to the exit. And it is very difficult to book an accessible room online through a cheap booking website. You usually have to call the hotel, which sucks. And, people often offer to help you during trips, but I like to be independent and I do not like depending on others. I find it difficult carrying my luggage and my friends offer to carry it for me, but then they make me feel bad for wanting to buy things, so I don’t like accepting help from others. People can change their minds or be in a bad mood.

DH: That’s tricky.

MP: I’ve had to travel to *get* a job too. I had a job interview in St. John’s when I was living home in Corner Brook and they were like, “Can you come in for a job interview? You can’t do it over the phone.” So, I caught the bus the next day into St. John’s, stayed with the dining hall workers and went to the job interview.

DH: The dining hall workers, they were friends of yours, you stayed in their home?

MP: Yup. ’Cause when I lived in residence, I needed help to get my lunch three times a day ’cause of heavy plates and that, so they were my best friends. I hung out with them Saturdays and they’re always . . . they’re good too because I get the GoBus to their house, but they bring me home. Or like, I got a birthday cake for my birthday and I was like, “How am I going to get that to the restaurant,” so they gave me and the cake a ride.

DH: It’s great you stayed in touch after you graduated. Um, your current job, is it indefinite?

MP: I know I can't stay there forever, but I like to enjoy it while I can. I wish people understood more that you don't need a driver's licence and a car to get a job. That's why I like MUN 'cause it's pretty accessible. You could get dropped off and walk all the way around and nobody would know how you got to and from work. 'Cause it's very stigmatizing, that GoBus. People already know you have a disability when you go for a job interview because you gotta ask them if the building is physically accessible. And I've asked and they said, "Oh yes, fully accessible" and I've gotten there, there's been lips in the door, there's been two stairs to get down to the room, there's been a stair in the bathroom. I was like, how is this physically accessible? It's nerve-wracking.

DH: Right. When you go somewhere new, do you call places ahead of time?

MP: I try to Google map the picture and look at the entrance. I ask my boss a lot. There's Access Now, that's a pretty good app. It's like, users pin a place and then mark off the accessibility things like "fully accessible," "partially accessible" . . .

DH: That must help you plan where you can go.

MP: Yeah, but I wish life was more flexible. 'Cause, like, my co-workers, they go out to lunch but, like, I can't do stuff on spontaneity. People ask me to meet over lunch and I'm like you might as well just come to my work, 'cause by the time I get there I'm gonna have to come back.

DH: Anything more you want to say about getting to work and the people who help you do that?

MP: Well, I've been thinking about how it's perceived when people help me. 'Cause it seems like sometimes when people offer me help they get put up on a pedestal, so like, my mom is considered a saint 'cause she used to drive me to university. And I used to think, she's the one who wanted me to go there.

DH: You found that frustrating?

MP: Yeah, it's a bit frustrating 'cause I appreciate what they do for me but it does make me feel bad when people say, "Oh how nice that your mom or your boss or someone drove you somewhere."

DH: You also mentioned before, the other side of that is, if you're seen as having somebody assist you, you're seen as being extremely disabled or dependent.

MP: Yeah, 'cause when I go to work with my boss, people don't know I'm working. They think she's my mom and she just brought me to work 'cause she didn't have a babysitter.

DH: Right, people make assumptions about that relationship and what you're doing there. You mentioned a number of people who help you in one way or another. When you reflect on your experience of getting to work and the role of family, what does that mean to you? Who do you consider family when we talk about this sort of thing?

MP: I think in terms of like, it goes in stages. I found that my family has changed throughout the different stages I've been in. When I lived at home and I had summer jobs and I was going to university, it was my biological family — my mom and my aunt. But then I went to residence and my family became the dining hall workers, so they used to help me get my lunch, and clean my apartment if I lost my support hours and get to job interviews instead of having to use para-transit. So, they were my family and they still are. And then when I graduated and got a job with my current supervisor, she kinda became my family. Like she'd help me out of situations if I needed a ride or I was stuck, or I had to do something for work and GoBus wasn't working out, she'd let me charge a taxi. So, I think family changes depending on what your needs are and who you connect with.

DH: It sounds like these relationships beyond your biological family evolved fairly quickly. Like, with the dining hall workers, did they help you one day and you just got to know each other better over time?

MP: When I first came to residence, I didn't know how I was going to eat because the plates are very heavy and it's buffet style, so they started helping me get my food. I'd see them at breakfast, lunch, supper. I'd see them a lot. And then I started hanging out with them, like if I came back early from Christmas I'd go to their house for supper. When I travelled to St. John's for that job interview, I stayed at their house for a week. All my friendships, when I think back, they did go pretty fast. Like, me and my current supervisor, I've known her for two years and I try to think

about the one moment when we became really close and I can't think of any, it just happened so quickly. One moment I was volunteering with her, next I was employed with her, and a moment after that we were going to the farmer's market. I guess when you got a disability you get good at networking 'cause if there's people who can help you survive . . .

DH: Sure. And how about your friend group, people you'd consider peers. Do you think of them as family in the same way?

MP: My friends, they played a bigger role when I was in residence 'cause I had more free time. If I was stuck and needed to go pick up a document, me and my friends would catch the bus. Or if I needed help sweeping my room for my inspection they would help. But when we graduated, we got our own lives, so I don't see them as much. But if I'm in a pickle I can always text them and they'll help me. And, for my biological family, I still talk to them every day and they'll help me if I'm in a pickle, but they're eight hours away so I don't do that till I'm in real trouble. I say my co-worker, who is also my friend, she's part of my family too, because we have similar needs, so if I need somewhere to stay I can stay at her house, like I did at snowmageddon.⁵

DH: Right. Tell me about what happened during snowmageddon.

MP: Well, I heard it was a snowstorm but I thought it would be like a normal snowstorm. Where I live, it's a bad place to shovel and my worker lives 20 minutes away. So my friend was like, "Do you want to come over for the snowstorm? I am worried if you fall no one will be able to get to you." And I was like, okay, I'm packing a bag. When I went over there I didn't expect to be stuck.

DH: And she has a support worker as well, right? Did they support you while you were there?

MP: Yeah, they helped me while I was there if I couldn't do something. It was pretty nice.

DH: And what about after the state of emergency was lifted and you went back to your apartment. It still wasn't easy to get around, was it?

MP: Yeah, it's funny 'cause I went back to the gym like six weeks later. My street is not very wide and there was still a lot of snow, so the buses couldn't get

down to me and I had to go in taxis, which is hard on my mobility, especially when they send taxis that are not accessible. So, I limited where I went 'cause it was so tiring.

DH: And what about during COVID-19, did you remain home, and your workers kept coming to you as essential workers?

MP: Yeah, they kept coming but it was touch and go 'cause they were all nervous. So that stressed me out. Like they got upset with me if I went out, even to the parking lot to get the grocery delivery. And before I'm through the door they'd be like "go wash your hands." I was like, "I'm 28, I know I got to wash my hands." They kinda became family 'cause you kinda got upset with them. Like, they'd go out with friends and then get mad if I went to the gym, and I was like how is that any different? I felt like my life had been out of control. My nan and mom and the dining hall workers said you can't stay in forever, you gotta do stuff, and I was like if these people get mad at what I am doing and don't want to help me anymore I'm stuck. Things are better now but for March and April I didn't leave my parking lot. And then, even with my friends — 'cause we were in a bubble — people were like, "Do you want to hang out?" and I was like, I don't know, what if my friends stop bringing my groceries 'cause they don't think I'm being safe, what am I going to do?

DH: So I guess during the height of COVID and even now, you can't call upon the wider circle of people in your life for a drive or what have you because we're still to some extent physical distancing. How's that been?

MP: Yeah, like I never went in a car for three months, which was hard 'cause everybody was like, oh I went for a drive, I did this. I was like, I've been in my house. And you can see your friends getting mad at you saying no to hanging out.

DH: I guess you were largely working from home during COVID?

MP: Yeah, I'm working from home, which is interesting. I'm trying to create space to move about my apartment 'cause I have two walkers and my power wheelchair and I'm trying to set up a desk. I'm trying to do that while my workers are around. I'm trying to schedule split shifts for my workers when I know I have meetings so I can get stuff done. It's different

'cause I don't get to see my boss as much. I used to see her a lot. We used to drive a lot and I would see her after work, whereas during COVID I'd only see her for five minutes when she dropped off my groceries.

DH: Do you have any thoughts on how COVID-19 has changed things for people with physical disabilities?

MP: Well, being told for years that you can't work from home, and now everyone is working from home. That's interesting. And flexible work — instead of working seven hours in a row, you do three and four. As long as you get your job done. People have been, "Oh, you must work all seven hours in a row." That's not true. I'm sure nobody is working seven hours sitting at their computer in their house, but they still get their work done. And telehealth and things like that, 'cause a lot of times with your disability, there's nothing wrong, you just need a form signed. And they're like, "Oh you must come in." That's not true. So COVID is hard on your health, but good if you're working. It might impact your mobility 'cause your services might not happen, but you can see your doctor through the phone instead of going there, there's curbside pick-up and delivery, and you have the ability to work from home and schedule your own work hours. 'Cause that's one of the biggest accommodations is flexibility in your work schedule.

DH: Right, so more of the world can come to you during COVID-19. We've talked a lot about the help your friends and family provide. Do they ever comment on that?

MP: I talked to the dining hall workers and I talked to my boss and they said they don't really think much of it 'cause they want to help me, 'cause they see how hard I'm working. So, like, the dining hall workers said they had fun that week I stayed with them and they'll always help me whenever I need it. I think they see it as important, but they don't put themselves up on a pedestal, 'cause they said to me the other day, "We just help you because we see how hard you're working and we're inspired by you," 'cause I talk about all the challenges I'm experiencing and they're like, "Wow, we didn't know all this stuff happens," like in terms of GoBus and waiting for this apartment and finding accessible housing and getting a job. My boss

doesn't think much of it, 'cause she works with people with disabilities. She just sees it as a way for me to be confident in my job, and get my job done.

DH: And how about your mom? She was driving you to university, or you moved home at times during periods of unemployment, has she ever talked about that sort of stuff?

MP: I'm sure she just thinks she has to do it 'cause that's what's expected of her. Like my mom didn't have her own life till I guess, this year, 'cause she was so busy taking care of, bringing me and my sister places. And I don't really have a life of my own either, like in terms of fitting into everybody's schedule, like if you need a ride you gotta go a certain time that's maybe against what you want. Or even with GoBus, if I wanted to be somewhere for seven, I'd probably have to leave at six. And I might get there by 6:10 or I might get there at 7:30. So like job interviews are stressful 'cause you don't want to be too early, but you don't want to be too late.

DH: Do you get the feeling that there is an expectation that you will rely on the people in your life to help?

MP: Yeah, even when you move out on your own, the social worker is like, "Do you have any informal supports who can help you?" They use that to reduce your home support hours. So half the time you gotta be like, "I got nobody, I know nobody at all."

DH: So when they ask if you have any informal supports, who would they expect you to call upon for help?

MP: Biological family, and then they turned to my roommate, who I just met. And then they'll turn to my co-worker and I was like, "You can't ask your boss to help you put your orthotic on!" Like, when the social worker comes you got to take down all your pictures! If you have a great aunt that you see once a year, they'll suggest her. And I was like, "My great aunt doesn't want to help me." I feel bad asking for help 'cause people are like, "Oh that's nice they helped you." I should be independent; I don't want to be a burden. Then you try to overcompensate and be like, what should I do for them? Like I feel guilty for all the times my mom helped me and sometimes I feel indebted to my friends and my boss and the dining hall workers.

DH: No matter how much people want to help and are happy to help?

MP: Yeah. And some people don't look at what you did, all they look at is what the person did like, "Oh your mom drove you to university for four years." Well, there was no accessible transportation. And it's not acknowledged that I was there from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. 'cause I didn't want her to have to come back for me.

DH: Yeah. The things you do to make it easier for others to help you aren't really seen. And if the assistance you get is framed as people doing you a favour, we lose sight of how much the system benefits from all that your friends and family do, all the money it saves by not funding that support.

MP: I agree. And I'm really thankful for my family's support. I don't know how I'd manage without it.

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Notes

- 1 GoBus Accessible Transit is the St. John's area para-transit system for persons with disabilities who are unable to use the city's conventional bus system, Metrobus.

- 2 The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW) is a national organization that supports persons with disabilities to find a job through career counselling, training, resumé support, job searching, and hosting a dedicated online job portal. CCRW also helps employers hire and support employees with disabilities. Link for more information: <https://www.ccrw.org/>.
- 3 Empower, The Disability Resource Centre, provides a variety of programs and services in an effort to promote independent living and inclusion for persons with disabilities. Website: <https://www.empowernl.ca/>.
- 4 CBS is the local shorthand for Conception Bay South, a town in eastern Newfoundland and Labrador approximately a 30-minute drive from the St. John's metro area.
- 5 Snowmageddon refers to a major snow event in St. John's in January 2020 that saw a record-breaking 90+ cm of snow in a single day and led to a state of emergency that closed roads and all businesses, essentially shutting down the metro region, from 17 to 25 January 2020. It took several more weeks for the region to clear roads and walkways.

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A Juggling Act: Mothering While FIFO

Griffin Kelly, Maria Fernanda Mosquera Garcia, and Sara Dorow

Abstract

Very little research exists on tradeswomen's experiences of mobile work, let alone on how mobile work shapes their family lives (Nagy and Teixeira 2020 is one recent exception). In the context of FIFO (fly-in fly-out) work, attention to women, family, and motherhood has focused on the spouses of FIFO workers (Kaczmarek and Sibbel 2008; Swenson and Zvonkovic 2016) and to some degree on women employed in FIFO professional or camp jobs. Our paper combines findings from two current studies of tradeswomen, predominantly in the oil sands of Alberta, to convey experiences of "mothering while FIFO." We offer four narrative vignettes that illustrate and humanize the challenges and exclusions faced by FIFO tradeswomen engaged in resource extraction work in western Canada at different stages of mothering: when pregnant on the job, while raising children, and during custody disputes. These stories demonstrate the need for examination of the policies and practices of FIFO-based employers that create barriers to work for mothers.

Introduction

Resource extraction industries around the world rely on a FIFO (fly-in, fly-out) workforce (Barber and Lem 2018; Storey 2010), and western Canada is no exception. Each year, tens of thousands of workers — the vast majority of them

men — fly, drive, or bus back and forth from far-flung home bases on rotational schedules of one week or longer to work on oil, gas, mining, and construction sites (Nichols Applied Management 2018; Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2018; Ryser, Markey, and Halseth 2016). While on rotation, they stay at camps near the projects where they work. Research to date has largely focused on the men who fly in and out and/or on the spouses and children “left behind.” Very little is known about the experiences of women who themselves participate in FIFO work, let alone women who are mothers. Our research helps to fill that gap by exploring experiences of mothering among women working under FIFO conditions in western Canada (Alberta and British Columbia). As illustrated by the four stories we share below, these conditions create a variety of challenges for *becoming* and *being* a mother across different stages of the life course.

There is increasing scholarly and public attention to the unique effects of FIFO work on the well-being and identities of workers, families, and communities, including impacts on gendered family roles and relationships (Baker and Ciuk 2015; Barnes 2019; *CBC News* 2017; Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Mayes 2020; Meredith, Rush, and Robinson 2014; Sinclair 2020; Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020; Vella 2020). Some scholars focus on the challenge of bridging the distances and “fragile synchronicities” (Neis et al. 2018) between work and home for men (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Jones and Southcott 2015; Pini and Mayes 2012; Saxinger 2016), others focus on the stress and labour of the wives and children of male mobile workers (Kaczmarek and Sibbel 2008; Swenson and Zvonkovic 2016), and a smaller group has explicitly zeroed in on the “both-and” dynamics of work and home (Mayes 2020; Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020). A few researchers have looked at the experiences of FIFO tradeswomen (Cherry 1991; Denissen 2010; Kelly 2020; Nagy and Teixeira 2019; O’Shaughnessy 2011; Pirotta 2009) but most focus on single women; mothering remains a side note.

Over 30 years ago, Acker (1990, 152) argued that work in general is hostile to “bodied processes” associated with mothering, such as breast-feeding and child care. This gendered exclusion of mothers and mothering bodies in the workplace continues today in various forms (Crofts and Coffey 2017; Huppertz,

Sang, and Napier 2019). Child-care responsibilities decrease women's actual and perceived flexibility, making them less hireable in the eyes of employers, including and especially in industries like construction and resource extraction (England et al. 2016; Enshassi, Ihsen, and Al Hallaq 2008; Pirotta 2009). Race, class, sexuality, and age compound challenges for mothers working in these industries (Parmenter 2011; Wright 2011).

What happens when women working in already heavily masculinized workplaces are also regularly far from the people and places where they mother (or strive to become mothers)? Tradeswomen who enter FIFO work in western Canadian resource extraction projects, predominantly in the oil sands of Alberta, enter a work culture marked by masculinism, gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, and health problems at work (Cherry et al. 2018; Curtis et al. 2018; Denissen 2010; Dorow et al. 2021; Goldenberg et al. 2010; Kelly 2020; Miller 2004; Moir, Thomson, and Kelleher 2011; O'Shaughnessy 2011). For women with family care responsibilities, the conditions of FIFO work bring additional stresses. Extended and distant absences from home, long commutes, and camp living, alongside the uncertain market and contractual conditions of resource industries, disrupt typical cycles of care in families (Mayes 2020; Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020) and make it difficult to manage changing family circumstances. Such absences tend to be more acceptable within the norms of fatherhood, especially for breadwinning purposes (Dorow 2015; Dorow and Mandizadza 2018). But for women, absence is a deviation from an idealized conception of motherhood; it is thought that mothers are supposed to be physically with and available to care for their children at all times, especially when children are younger (Meeussen and Van Laar 2018). Engaging in FIFO work can thus heighten scrutiny of and possible social guilt around mothering and mothering identities. The stories of women working FIFO illuminate the challenges at the juncture of employment and mothering, and show us how gendered relationships and identities are (re)organized in the process (Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015, 203).

The four vignettes below draw from two studies — conducted in 2019 and 2020 — of some 30 tradeswomen who do FIFO-based work in the resource

extraction industries of northern Alberta and British Columbia. The majority of participants in these studies were white, and all worked in the construction trades. In developing the vignettes, we focused on the experiences of mothering related to us during qualitative, open-ended interviews of one to two hours each. The details of the stories, including names and locations, have been changed to ensure anonymity of participants. Drawn from different moments across the life course, these stories provide a window into the realities and resiliencies of “mothering while FIFO.”

Women FIFO Workers and Mothering: Four Stories

Julie

Julie was working in northern Alberta as an ironworker, flying from a town in central Alberta every week. It was a job she loved and was proud to do. When she found out she was pregnant with her first child, her foreman was the second person she told, after her husband. The management of the project wanted to take Julie “off the tools” for her safety. Julie refused because she felt comfortable with the work she was doing and did not want a desk job. Months later, at the beginning of her third trimester, Julie brought in a doctor’s note with slight work modifications to safeguard the baby for the remaining work rotations of her pregnancy. However, there were no more rotations; during her next return home, Julie was given notice.

Julie felt “incomprehensibly mad” about the layoff. She thinks she got lost in the convoluted subcontractor system of the oil sands industry, making it easier for her company to lay her off. Julie tried to negotiate with her employer. They offered her a new job, but it was in another part of the province on a different rotation schedule that would have required extensive driving. She refused the new job. Julie did not think it was safe to be travelling four times as much as before, during her third trimester, on the notoriously dangerous highways of northern Alberta.

Julie and her employer considered a few more possible adaptations, but nothing offered was like her original job. She was told that the company had no policy in place, to which she replied, “How can you not have a policy? I’m pretty sure you’ve had pregnant women before working for your company. It

just . . . it flabbergasted me.” Julie remained laid off until her maternity leave started shortly thereafter.

After her daughter was born, Julie decided to take work in her hometown. She said she would consider going back to a camp-based job when her daughter is older. Frustrated with her experience, Julie said that employers need to “just accept that we’re humans” with families and caregiving responsibilities that continue while doing FIFO work and staying in camp.

Olivia

Olivia is a single mother of a 12-year-old boy, Emilio, and has been working in the oil industry for more than 20 years. She likes her job as an equipment technician, which often requires staying at camp for weeks at a time. This makes her feel somewhat detached, like she is “living a couple of different lives” at the same time — her home self, camp self, and employee self. She has gotten used to compartmentalizing these roles, living them one at a time, but occasionally she feels like a stranger “always trying to catch up once you get back to the other role,” especially when she goes back home to her son in southern Alberta. When she’s in camp “everything else falls to the wayside” as Olivia “shifts her brain” from thinking about her mothering duties and Emilio’s school assignments. Although this keeps her focused while in work mode, Olivia wonders if it appears to her family that she doesn’t care or is just distant.

For nine years, Olivia dealt with the legal process to gain custody of her son. It was “hugely complex” to manage while being a FIFO worker. The added financial pressure of legal fees made her feel worn down, but also made it all the more important to keep her relatively high-paying job in the oil sands. Olivia thinks Emilio “struggles ’cause he wants to find his place in the family unit and he hasn’t really had a ‘normal’ place because of the absence of his mom and his dad.” When Emilio was younger, Olivia wondered how to explain why she was leaving him in the care of his grandmother while away on work rotations, even though his father was not working; how could she help Emilio understand it was because of a custody battle?

Each time Olivia is off rotation, she returns to living with her mother and Emilio. And each time, she needs a few days to adjust and come back to “the land

of the living”; she needs to catch up with life at home while also recovering physically and mentally from work. Transitioning from her “camp self” to her “home self” is difficult because she has “played it alone . . . not having to stop to consider anyone else in another household.” She loves spending time with Emilio, but with other family interactions, “Sometimes it’s too stimulating, sometimes it’s too much.” Each time Olivia returns home it is also an adjustment for Emilio, who needs to adapt to how Olivia does things differently from the people who take care of him during her work rotations.

Mandy

Mandy is a proudly self-sufficient single parent of two young teenagers who has “never counted on anyone.” For over a dozen years she worked her “ass off with babies, apprenticing, working so many hours,” and bought a house. Mandy managed this by taking contracts for jobs as an electrician that paid well enough to make her time away from home worthwhile. Camp-based fly-in fly-out jobs have comprised about half of her working life, with her own mother caring for her two kids when she was away from her home in southern Alberta.

Several years back, Mandy took a job in the oil sands that turned out to be quite intense, especially with a rotation of 12 days on, two days off. With just four days off a month, and accounting for the half-day’s drive each way from the oil sands, this meant she only had one day at home every two weeks. Mandy says, “I didn’t see my kids almost for three years.”

Mandy was in constant communication with her kids when up North during those three years — playing virtual games, Facetiming, doing homework together on the phone — but with such short stints at home and the demanding culture of camp and oil sands work, it was too much. She gained weight and started drinking. One day she’d had enough and walked away. “They’d have to offer me a pretty damn good deal to ever go back there again,” says Mandy. Besides, she had promised herself that when her kids were teenagers, she would work close to home because “those are the hardest years.”

With the deepening downturn in the oil economy, Mandy has not been able to find steady work and in early 2020 she had to give up her house. She deeply feels that she has let her kids down and is sort of embarrassed that at

age 38 she and her kids are back living with her mom. At the same time, she found that the transition wasn't that hard for her children; it was already normal for them to be at their grandmother's. In the end, says Mandy, life has been financially hard, but the great trade-off is that she is home with her kids.

Working away has conditioned Mandy to spend every precious minute of her time with her kids. She wonders what life will be like as they get older, and if she'll know how to date or be with someone after so many years of "no social life to speak of."

Cheryl

Cheryl is a carpenter in her late forties with two children in high school and a long-term partner. For the majority of her career, Cheryl worked on construction sites close to her home in southern Saskatchewan. Last year, friends told her about a major project that was starting up in British Columbia. Cheryl was interested in working there now that her kids are older. It would be her first FIFO job and a new professional challenge, but she was worried about leaving her children. Cheryl's partner was supportive when she decided to go; he had worked remotely when their children were younger, and Cheryl had always been the parent to stay at home. Now the roles would be reversed, but as Cheryl pointed out, "Little does he realize that it's harder when the kids are older."

When Cheryl started the job, finding time to check in with her partner and speak to her children was difficult with a 12-hour night shift in a different time zone. Cheryl preferred the night shift because she found it to be a better work environment, with fewer instances of sexual harassment and safety violations, but the strain it placed on communication with her family was tiring.

On her rotation, Cheryl had seven days off, minus two days for travel, and another day to turn her sleep schedule around after three weeks on the night shift. Cheryl felt lucky that her children were older and were able to understand her schedule, but it was still exhausting. Reflecting on this experience, Cheryl says, "It was a juggling act, but we made it work."

An element that hung over this job for Cheryl, and all carpentry jobs, was the risk of a traumatic injury or fatal accident. This deeply worried Cheryl.

Who would take care of her children? Would her family be left in debt from funeral costs? Cheryl joined her local labour union specifically to access life insurance and other death benefits for her children if something were to happen to her at work.

Conclusion

Cheryl's reference to "juggling" is a common refrain for mothers navigating the constraints of FIFO. Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray (2020, 216) suggest that the word "juggle" implies never feeling in control of the fragmented and shifting nature of mobile work amid the differing rhythms and spatial distances between work and home — the sense that one can never quite manage to get a hold on the needs of family, finances, personal health, and career. There is always an element of precarity and, as Cheryl said, the unpredictable character of FIFO trades work forces families to make it work, at whatever cost. Research to date has shown how much of this cost, and the extra labour of making it work, is carried by "left-behind" mothers, and to some extent, FIFO fathers.

Our work shows how FIFO tradeswomen juggle the ongoing roles of mother and worker across the distant but always interrelated spaces and times of work and home, and across the changing family conditions of their life course. Entering FIFO trades work for a woman is hard enough; but pregnancy can mean facing additional impossible choices between too much travel and no work. A culture of gender harassment adds stress for women; but taking a night shift to avoid that culture creates additional communication challenges with family and deepens exhaustion for a mother taking a long journey home every week or two. Relatively high-paying work means that a single mother can provide and care for her growing children; but tough FIFO rotations and the social stigma of the "absent mother" can undermine and confound the mother-child relationship. Managing camp and home "selves" is crucial to keeping one's sanity as a FIFO worker; but the demands of motherhood bring clashes and conflicts to these selves, including trying to imagine a future self beyond "work" and "mother." And finally, these stresses and adjustments across disparate times and spaces, and across the realities of

boom-and-bust cycles, further extend gendered chains of care, quite often to FIFO mothers' own mothers.

These four stories about FIFO tradeswomen at different points in the life course only begin to suggest the complex ways that motherhood and mobile work are shaped by age, gender, family situation, type of work, and the level of support from extended family or partners. They also begin to highlight the need for more concerted scrutiny of the policies and practices of FIFO-based employers that create or exacerbate challenges for mothers, including rotation length, shift work, parental support policies, and workplace culture.

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PART II:

Rotational Work and Evolving Families

CHAPTER SIX

Coming Home

Kevin Ryan

The Forgotten Islander

(Words and music by Kevin Ryan)

Every once in a while, at the end of a working day
I drive down to Wood Islands, watch the ferry as it pulls away
And every time I see a Mustang with Island plates
I just stare at the ocean, wishing I was in their place

I'm sick and tired of being the centre of my own attention
As for ties that bind, there's none strong enough to mention
So I think I'll just head it on home and pack it all up
Looks like moving on is the only way that I'll move up

If you care you can call me the Forgotten Islander
A bunch of dreams surrounded by the sea
And while I know I'll never forget the Island
Sometimes it feels like the Island's forgotten me

Now it's easier to sing this song than it is to live it
Talk is cheap when there's only wild notions in it

And while I know it's the scariest thing that I've ever done
I'd rather be a brand new child than a forgotten son

If you care you can call me the Forgotten Islander
A bunch of dreams surrounded by the sea
And while I know I'll never forget the Island
Sometimes it feels like the Island's forgotten me

I wrote the lyrics of this song when I was 19 and in the throes of an acute and what turned out to be chronic case of wanderlust. Many years and cross-country adventures later, I found myself driving a bus of oil patch workers in Alberta and missing my son Seamus's sixth, seventh, and eighth months. My being there was no longer a wistful detour. It was a financial necessity and the product of 15 years of the harmless romantic lifestyle choices of a single man. The song above no longer represented my new reality. It was time to go home to PEI. And stay there.

It started simply, if not innocently, enough. In the fall of 1998, my buddy Steve and I went to Calgary, as so many before us, to sign up for geophysical data acquisition labour, or "seismic" work. It was meant to be a one-time adventure to get over a girlfriend, make some relatively quick, expense-free cash to pay off some minor debts, and hopefully buy a new guitar. Boy, did it come with a price. We found a job working for Norcana, a company that didn't even pay lip service to safety back when it was not a priority in the Alberta oil patch. January found us "bin riding" after dark in the unsheltered back of a work truck in minus-30 weather, travelling treacherous roads at high speeds with drivers stoned on cannabis, and who knows what else. Fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, for 84 straight days during one stretch. A touch over minimum wage, but the overtime and \$30 per day "hot shot" for expenses somehow made sense to us. Any time spent not working was spent sleeping and eating in the seismic camps and motels of northern Alberta and BC. After that much seclusion and hard work, one becomes "bushed," meaning short-tempered and mentally exhausted. We had "seismares," in which we would dream at night about doing the same monotonous work that we did all day. There was no escape! This was

the life of a “jughound,” the name given to seismic workers. (“Jugs” is jargon for geophones, the electronic sensors in metal casings we stomped into the frozen ground.) But we persevered. And with our modest financial goals accomplished and our minds and bodies relatively intact, Steve and I left Norcana when the work shut down in the spring, swearing never to return.

But return I did. A few times. Never as a Plan A, but usually as a spontaneous means to musical ends such as paying for sound systems and recordings. The short-term winter seasonal work also provided a buffer to stoke the bank account to stretch further when gigs did not make ends meet. Each time I returned to Alberta, it felt like a failure on my part — like you were going back to prison after not making it on the outside. Indeed, the prison analogy was a strong one. Weeks would pass by without the freedom of leisurely activity. Women on crews at the time were rare, and frankly — I missed them. Hard labour, walking endless lines, laying out cables and equipment in whatever type of terrain western Canada had to offer. One friend said to me as spring breakup approached, “Kev, can you believe that in three weeks, I’m only gonna have two weeks left?” somehow making his “sentence” seem shorter. Those who showed ambition to move up in the company or do summer seismic were mocked as “lifers.” It was one thing to suffer a few months to get the EI hours and have enough money to enjoy life, but to keep doing this work indefinitely? To us “winter only” hypocrites that was like losing hope. The more financially irresponsible souls would get their government-mandated three days off and spend all that they had earned in Grand Prairie, Fort McMurray, or Edmonton, returning to camp hungover and defeated. They would then repeat the cycle. Many modest fortunes were squandered in one night. Oh, the characters I met on those crews!

I eventually worked for five separate seismic companies. As I was good at describing the experience, one of the largest outfits asked me to do this at job fairs. My bleak, unvarnished portrayals of seismic life made me a “good fit,” as we would say in human resources. The crew managers wanted people who knew what they were getting into, especially if they were being flown from eastern Canada, where a majority of the workforce lived. Of course, becoming an “office guy” immediately made me a turncoat, not to be trusted by the rank-

and-file jughound. But my experience in the field gave me the authenticity necessary to launch the recruiter era of my oil patch journey. I started to look to the future in this position. Was I becoming a lifer too?



Figure 1. Wedding day. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Ryan)

The transition to human resources wasn't the only change going on at that time of my life. True love came calling, and I met and married my wife, Marcella, in the space of two years. Marriage is a wonderful thing, and my trips to job fairs and to visit crews only made our hearts grow fonder. However, the real "seismic" shift in my life came on 1 August 2009, when our son Seamus was born. This happened during the Great Recession when the global economy tanked and the price of oil and gas went with it. We had built a nice, new house in South Pinette, PEI, with a nice, new mortgage to go along with it. Less than half of the normal number of seismic crews were going to the field, so recruiting wasn't a priority, and mine was one of many positions cut. So, I went back to the field as a crew bus driver.



Figure 2. Working as a bus driver. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Ryan)

In the past, all of the times I had jumped in a car or a plane to pursue work, music, or travel for travel's sake had filled me with anticipation and excitement. Movement had been the persistent underlying theme of my twenties and early thirties. To romantically engage the unknown and leave behind the previous routines and commitments was my *raison d'être*. But this time, the thrill was most certainly gone. What I was leaving behind was a six-month-old, smiling, gurgling, handsome bundle of love — my new and improved *raison d'être* — and a wife who had to care for him all on her own. There was nothing fun or exciting about boarding that flight. I knew I was fortunate to have a job at all that winter. The driving gig was lucrative and would see us through. I resented it and felt grateful for it at the same time. Occasional Skype calls were not enough. My wife was describing herself as a single mother. While that was justified, it most definitely stung, as I was only there for family reasons. I certainly wasn't having any fun. One thing was clear — a new plan was necessary.

The next year the economy had improved enough for the return of my recruiter role. The company had gone through a merger, and I even convinced my new manager that I could work from PEI and present job fairs whenever needed. I initially hoped this would be the answer. However, even though I technically lived at home, it still involved lots of travel, as my territory expanded to cover the US in addition to Canada. The next couple of years found me in Alberta, the Northwest Territories, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming. I did plenty of work in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, but although it wasn't far from my PEI home, close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades. Meanwhile, our daughter, Emmylou, joined us on 24 April 2011. More love in the house meant it was time to change the plan again. And that required a brand-new career.



Figure 3. Home with Emmylou. (Photo by Marcella Ryan)

Most people think of what they want to be when they grow up. For me, it was the other way around. I had apparently grown up, and now I had to figure out what I was going to be.

My former enthusiasm for change served me well in this process, and it was quite a process indeed. Many options were considered. I applied for every PEI-based human resources job, but these applications did not produce a single call back. We explored many entrepreneurial schemes, including opening a flower shop, building a barn to host weddings on our property, full-time farming, starting a recording studio, operating a mobile pressure washing truck, and running a daycare. We looked into buying an existing business, such as a restaurant and a funeral home. Some things were seriously considered, while some were dismissed more quickly, but no idea was off the table for discussion.

I was also looking at further education. There were a few things that interested me. I had a degree in English literature from Acadia University from 20 years earlier, but I didn't see how that could come into play. I entertained music therapy, psychology, nursing. Essentially, I needed something that would guarantee a job on PEI and that paid the bills. Oh, and something that was rewarding and fit my personality. In my mind, I couldn't spend too much time away from the workforce for education. Ever since Seamus was born, we had been saving for whatever the transition plan was going to be and had a bit of a war chest, but it would only last so long. Meanwhile, I got a new manager in Houston, Texas, who wondered why one of his employees was living in some place called Prince Edward Island. Things were becoming increasingly worrisome.

As fate would have it, one day we were having lunch at a local restaurant when I ran into my old friend Allison. Pleasant small talk revealed that she was planning on going into nursing and had been accepted into the program. I asked her how long it would take her, and she said two years. Two years? I was sure I had friends who told me that their nursing degree was a four-year program. In any case, I forgot about it until a few weeks later when that conversation came to mind when I was in front of my computer. "Two-year nursing program," I typed. Google passively-aggressively asked me, "Did you mean two-year accelerated nursing program?" I didn't know, but I clicked on it anyway. The link for the University of Prince Edward Island Accelerated Nursing program was the result. It turned out that you could do a nursing degree in two years if you

had a previous degree. It dawned on me that I had one. But surely, an arts degree did not apply. I read on. It did! I called the Registrar's Office and spoke to the admissions advisor, who told me that if accepted, I would have to take a few high school and university prerequisites. High school? One of the courses was Grade 12 Biology. I didn't even remember if I had taken that or not. He also said that the program was very competitive, and it went by GPA. I didn't remember how well I did or didn't do, but it turned out that "A" I scored in a Shakespeare class paid off after all!

I later found out that Allison was talking about a licensed practical nursing program, which was also two years. At that time, I didn't know there were different types of nurses. Talk about being naive to health care! But once I envisioned myself as a registered nurse, there was no turning back.

Nursing! When I told my mother I'd been accepted, she said, "That's the last thing I ever thought I'd ever hear you say." But I had informally researched it by talking to the nurses I knew, and it made perfect sense. Good with people? Check. Shift work? Sure. Okay with blood and guts? Why not? The truth is, becoming a father awoke the dormant areas in my mind, my heart and my soul that allowed me to want to sacrifice every part of my being to another person. The day of my son Seamus's birth instantly divided my life into two wholly distinct and seemingly unrelated halves. All of a sudden, life had a new purpose, new meaning. I found I had so much more to give. Although I didn't know it at the time, my training to become a nurse had begun. To top it off, nursing provided so many avenues to explore, even on little old PEI. I couldn't wait to get started.

That winter found me plugging away at the prerequisites as I maintained a tenuous hold on my recruiting job. I recall writing a paper for my correspondence psychology course in Tulita, NWT. Google will tell you it is very northern. I will tell you it is very cold. The travelling, although still problematic, wasn't as depressing with an exit strategy in place. And doing schoolwork was satisfying and energizing. I systematically checked off all the prerequisites and, in the fall of 2013, I said goodbye to the seismic industry forever and began walking the UPEI campus.



Figure 4. Christmas tree hunting. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Ryan)

The Accelerated Nursing program was known for being intense, so I mostly said goodbye to playing music and any kind of social life while I studied pharmacology, nursing theory, lab values, ethics, and so on. The nursing degree has been proven to be the most time-intensive to obtain. But the program was worth every last assignment as a means to be at home and have the privilege to see the milestones of my babies growing into toddlers and preschoolers. With the war chest quickly disappearing, I remember thinking how much less sleep I was losing while working on this new dream than when I was making good money. How infinitely interesting to the soul it was to dive into something completely new in my forties. On paper, this career path looked right. But now, immersed in nursing school, it felt right.

I will never forget Friday, 21 February 2015. That was the day I received my letter in the mail with the results of the NCLEX, the licensing exam that allows you to use those coveted initials after your name — RN. I had completed all my nursing courses in early December 2015 with a 90 per cent average, but it means zilch if you don't pass the NCLEX. It's a computer-based smart test that consists of 70–250 questions, depending on how well or poorly you do. At a



Figure 5. Graduation day. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Ryan)

certain point, the screen goes black and you get a message telling you that you are finished as your heart skips a beat. That was followed by a two- to three-day period of waiting for that letter. Marcella and I had decided to take the kids to a hotel in PEI that Friday with lots of family-oriented winter activities to celebrate everyone's sacrifices during all that studying. We checked the mailbox on the way, and sure enough, there was my letter. When you read those words, "We are pleased to inform you . . ." it's like winning the Stanley Cup. "I passed" was all I could manage to say.

Seamus and Emmylou had been four and two, respectively, when I started school, and now they were six and four. They were aware that this "test" thing Dad was talking about was important, and they felt the joy as well. Every once in a while, for the rest of the weekend with a big smile on his face, Seamus would remind me, "You passed!" I did indeed. The transition was complete. Many years after I wrote "The Forgotten Islander" I wrote another song, called "Coming Home." Sometimes you need a new song. And a new plan. For Marcella, Seamus, Emmylou, and me, it was time.



Figure 6. The whole fam. (Photo by Melissa Ryan)

Coming Home

(Words and music by Kevin Ryan and Brad Davidge)

I'm burning down this road
Feeling close to burning out
But the fire in my heart is still burning
Like a secret never told
Yearning to come out
There's a lesson I'm still learning
That tells me where I really want to be
Is where I've really always been

And it's a penny for your thoughts
And a quarter for the phone
Soon my call won't be long distance
I see so clearly what I got
I wasn't meant to be alone
This road offers no resistance
From the weeks and days and hours now
The countdown is almost gone

A candle burns in my window bright
I'll sleep in a bed with you tonight
A world that I can finally call my own
Lies in front of me
I'm coming home

I don't regret the wanderlust
I've called this road a friend
And the people I've met along the way
But it's my instincts that I trust
Now that my journey's at an end
There's no question where I belong today

I'll trade the four strong winds and the seven seas
For the shelter of your arms

A candle burns in my window bright
I'll sleep in a bed with you tonight
A world that I can finally call my own
Lies in front of me
I'm coming home

There's a crossroads I have now been through
I know the place for me is my place with you
Soon we don't have to wait anymore
I've got the pedal to the floor

A candle burns in my window bright
I'll sleep in a bed with you tonight
A world that I can call my own
Lies in front of me
I'm coming home

From Toddlers to Teens — Examining Mobile Work and Its Impact on Family Evolution: Amber’s Story

Christina Murray, Hannah Skelding, and Sylvia Barton

Abstract

Central to this chapter is a narrative representation of six conversational interviews conducted over seven weeks with one individual, Amber, as part of author Christina Murray’s doctoral research in rural Prince Edward Island. That research consisted of similar interviews with four women whose husbands had been working in other provinces over a period of several years. The contribution opens with a brief description of the research objectives and methods that informed the larger research. This is followed by “Amber’s Story,” where one of the study participants reflects on the evolution of her marriage and family over the 12 years during which her husband, Eddie, had been travelling for work from rural PEI to northern Alberta. He originally left when their children were two and four and was only gone in the winter. Shortly after that, he began working away year-round. At the time of the conversations, the children were 14 and 17 and the son had just spent his first summer working in Alberta with his dad. The story provides an understanding of how labour migration came to permeate Amber’s personal and family life. It touches on pivotal research themes such as: specific roles and responsibilities, family evolution and transitions, communication and belonging, and marriage and community relations. The contribution concludes with some recommendations arising from the doctoral research for better support for women and families who have loved

ones travelling long distances for employment and information on programming implemented in direct response to these recommendations.

Introduction

The study that led to “Amber’s Story” (Amber and all of the other names in the story are pseudonyms) began with a review of existing research, policy and position statements related to economic development, and labour market trends within the Atlantic region. That review showed a lack of research and policy focus on the experiences of families dealing with widespread, largely male, temporary labour migration from the region to other Canadian provinces (Donatelli, Lionais, and Murray 2018; Lionais 2014; Lionais, Murray, and Donatelli 2020; Mazer 2013; Murray 2014; Neil and Neis 2020; Wray 2012). More specifically, there was little research on how interprovincial labour migration affected the lives and identities of those left behind, including particularly the women who remained behind and cared for children and households while their husbands engaged in employment out of province (LeDrew et al. 2018; Murray 2014; Murray 2017). Prior to entering into this narrative inquiry research, I had multiple conversations with some women who were living this life. We discussed at length the challenges women faced as they experienced the cyclical coming and going of their husbands as part of out-of-province employment. Insights from these conversations informed the design of the study.

The doctoral research sought to increase both understanding and awareness of the experiences of women who were left behind while their partners engaged in temporary labour migration in other Canadian provinces, and to identify the supports used by these women to manage their lives and the gaps in existing services available to them. The following questions framed the inquiry and were used to elicit stories reflective of women’s experiences:

1. What stories are women telling about themselves during the experience of being left behind as a partner leaves home for employment in another province?

2. What stories are women constructing in regard to who they are and who they are becoming as they experience a partner's employment out-migration? Do they include in these stories how they think this is changing other women's views of themselves?

Conversational interviewing was selected as a data collection method because it invites equality between researcher and participant. Rather than an interviewer entering into a research relationship with a predetermined and prescriptive set of questions used to gather specific information, conversational interviews allow for mutual sharing and co-construction of stories by both the participant and researcher. Conversational interviewing involves fluidity, flexibility, and openness as stories are lived, told, relived, and retold (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

The four participants had experienced the coming and going of their husbands for out-of-province employment between six and 12 years. They co-participated in five to six conversational interviews, each approximately two hours in length. Conversations incorporated personal photographs they elected to share. These photographs offered a visual representation of women's storied lives. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis of the transcript data occurred through an interpretive process of moving back and forth between field texts, interim research texts, and research texts shaped by questions of meaning and social significance.

Digitally recorded conversational interviews and photographs provided glimpses into the stories lived, told, relived, and retold by women who were left behind in rural communities and experiencing a partner's temporary inter-provincial labour migration. In shaping field texts into research texts, nine overarching narrative threads emerged and revealed women's perceptions regarding identity, including who they were, who they were becoming, and how they thought they were perceived by others. These narrative threads were organized under the following headings:

- a) Being: The Married Single Mother, Fulfilling Roles and Responsibilities, and Imagining Networks of Support;

- b) Becoming: Family Evolution, Family Transition, and Importance of Communication; and
- c) Belonging: Unsupportive Community Relations, Faithfulness and Commitment to Marriage, Self-Isolation.

We now turn to Amber's story. Through her narrative we learn how labour migration permeated her personal and family life through its influence on specific roles and responsibilities, family evolution and transitions, communication and belonging, and marriage and community relations.

Amber's Story

Amber had never considered that this would be her life, an existence ripe with change and distance: 15 years of marriage, with 12 of them spent with distance between them. She could never have predicted that Eddie would be away for this much of their marriage. But then again, Eddie could not have known either. Without Grade 12 and a high school diploma, there were not many employment options for Eddie in rural Prince Edward Island. So when he was offered a stable job working in Alberta, how could they refuse? Eddie farmed before he started working in Alberta but it's difficult to earn enough income farming on the Island when you are trying to provide for children. When one of his friends left for a year to work in Alberta and came back with money, it was hard not to consider a change. Eddie and Amber spent a full year discussing the pros and cons, but eventually they decided that Eddie would try it for a year. It was really the only option; things were not going to pick up.

The first year Eddie went away was really tough for both of them. He went out west in December and quickly came down with an illness that forced him to come home in January. That year he swore he would not go back, but sure enough the next year he left again. For the first 10 years he would come home to farm in the summers and then would spend the winters from mid-December to late April in Alberta. During the winters, he would not return to the family for visits. Having to leave home mid-December meant that Eddie missed every Christmas with his children when they were younger. He never got to witness the excitement on his children's faces on Christmas morning.



Figure 1. PEI farm landscape. (Photo by Christina Murray)

At the time of our interview, two years had passed since Eddie was offered a full-time position with an employer out of province. Together, Amber and Eddie decided that he would accept this position. This led to a new pattern of coming and going. Eddie negotiated with his employer that he would be able

to be home exclusively from the first week of December to mid-January each year. While the children were now too old for Santa visits, he never wanted to miss another Christmas with his family. The rest of the year he would come and go for work. However, in this new full-time, permanent position, the other times when Eddie could return home were unpredictable and entirely dependent on the project he was assigned to.

Amber was not angry that Eddie was away so much. She could never ask him not to do it — he loved his work out west. When he was farming in PEI, he would come home every night complaining about his work. Now he is thriving at his job; he takes pride in his work and is excellent at what he does. Eddie is valued by his employer; he is appreciated at work and they let him know that. This is something that was missing in farm work.

During his third year in Alberta, Amber went out to visit him for a couple of weeks. She was struck by the community that Eddie had in Alberta. As they walked into a restaurant they were greeted by a warm voice, “Hey Eddie, how’re you doing?” She was taken aback. Glancing around the restaurant she saw many familiar faces. It seemed as though half of the restaurant was filled with people from their community back in PEI. Honestly, this did not shock Amber. She knew of many families that were working through a situation similar to theirs. The draw of work out west is incredibly strong. Work with good pay is hard to come across on PEI during the winters. The jobs in Alberta provide a reliable source of income that is hard to ignore. Companies don’t even need to put out ads for employment, a lot of it is done by word of mouth. They had even asked Eddie to round up some of his friends to join him. So, he called some of his buddies and asked around to see if anyone was looking for work. Next thing you knew, the men were gone.

The men leave, and the women remain behind to care for their children. They take care of the house, drive the children to hockey practice, help with homework, deal with sibling fights . . . the list never ends. It doesn’t help that the nosy neighbours interject their opinions and observations any chance they get. Amber can never shake the feeling that eyes are always on her. Everybody knows everyone, and everybody is always watching. A few years back she gained some weight, and her wedding ring was too tight. When she was at

work a man came into the office and took note. “Are you and Eddie separated then?” Amber was shocked, “No, why?” “Well, you don’t have your wedding ring on.” Amber took a deep breath before explaining that she had gained weight and her rings did not fit her. Later, she relayed this conversation to her boss. Her boss was livid, “That is none of his business, why would he ask you about that?” Amber asked herself the same thing. She thought it was odd that he noticed she wasn’t wearing her rings. It made her wonder if he had already thought about the status of her relationship. Maybe there was a rumour circulating already? She found herself hoping he would tell everyone that she had gained weight.

Eddie constantly encourages Amber to get out of the house and enjoy herself. But Amber knows that if she listens to him and does enjoy herself on a night out, she might have to deal with rumours for months after the fact. Consequently, she refuses to feed the rumour mill. She doesn’t go anywhere, and she no longer puts herself in a position where she can become the subject of conversation.

Although Amber knows that she is not the only wife and mother handling the absence of her husband, she feels incredibly isolated and lonely. This past weekend was especially hard. It felt as though everyone else was out having fun; everyone else has their families around them. Here she is, alone. Eddie is away, and her children are at the age where they don’t want to spend time with her. Yes, this weekend was a particularly lonely one, but how can she complain? Other moms she knows are in the same position and have it worse than she does. On top of the stress of raising children alone, some women also have to deal with a dissolving marriage.

Balancing a relationship and distance is not an easy task. Amber has heard it all. Stories of cheating, secret families in Alberta, drug- and alcohol-fuelled disputes, you name it. She is thankful that her bond with Eddie has not faltered over the past 12 years of him working away. Of course, it is not easy, but they always seem to make it work. Something that is very important for their relationship is that they constantly text each other. Texting works for them. It is a quick way to update each other and remind one another of the love they share.

For the first couple of years, Amber and Eddie were seriously considering moving the family out west full-time. That move would have meant Eddie could be physically present in their home. The distance has caused Eddie to miss so much of their children's lives. It hurts to think about that. Even through all of the stress of parenting by herself, Amber has found joy in watching her children grow up. She has been there for all the milestones and all of the little things. Honestly, the small things are what she really cherishes, like walks on the beach with her son Evan. Amber loves walking on the beach — it reminds her of how she spent summers as a child on the Island. When she feels overwhelmed, she will go out to the beach and walk up and down the shore. There's something about the fresh air. You take a deep breath and you can just smell the salt. It's so relaxing, almost therapeutic. Sometimes Evan joins her on the beach walks. While she is walking, he will skip rocks and look at shells. When Evan was younger, maybe around nine or ten, he would hold her hand on the walks. When Amber was that age, she never would have held her mother's hand, but Evan wanted to. Such moments as that she holds close to her heart. Eddie doesn't get to experience those little moments in the same way that Amber does. Her heart aches when she thinks about it for too long.

She wanted to move the family out west, and she still does in some ways. She desperately wants Eddie to experience those moments with her. It's a big move, one that would not only impact Amber and Eddie, but also their children. And it's too big of a move. The timing just never seemed to work out. At the beginning, Amber and Eddie were not ready to make that change. Then, when Amber and Eddie were seriously considering moving to Alberta full-time, their daughter, who was in junior high, was extremely resistant to the idea. Amber understood her resistance. It is not an easy thing to leave your friends, school, grandparents, and community, especially as a teenager. Around that time Eddie was also beginning to notice patterns of drug abuse and suicide in his Alberta community. There is no way that Amber and Eddie could have uprooted their children and then placed them in an environment like that — better for them to grow up missing their dad but in a community that loves and supports them.

When Eddie first started working out west the kids were really young. In the beginning, the kids took it really hard; their daughter would cry every time

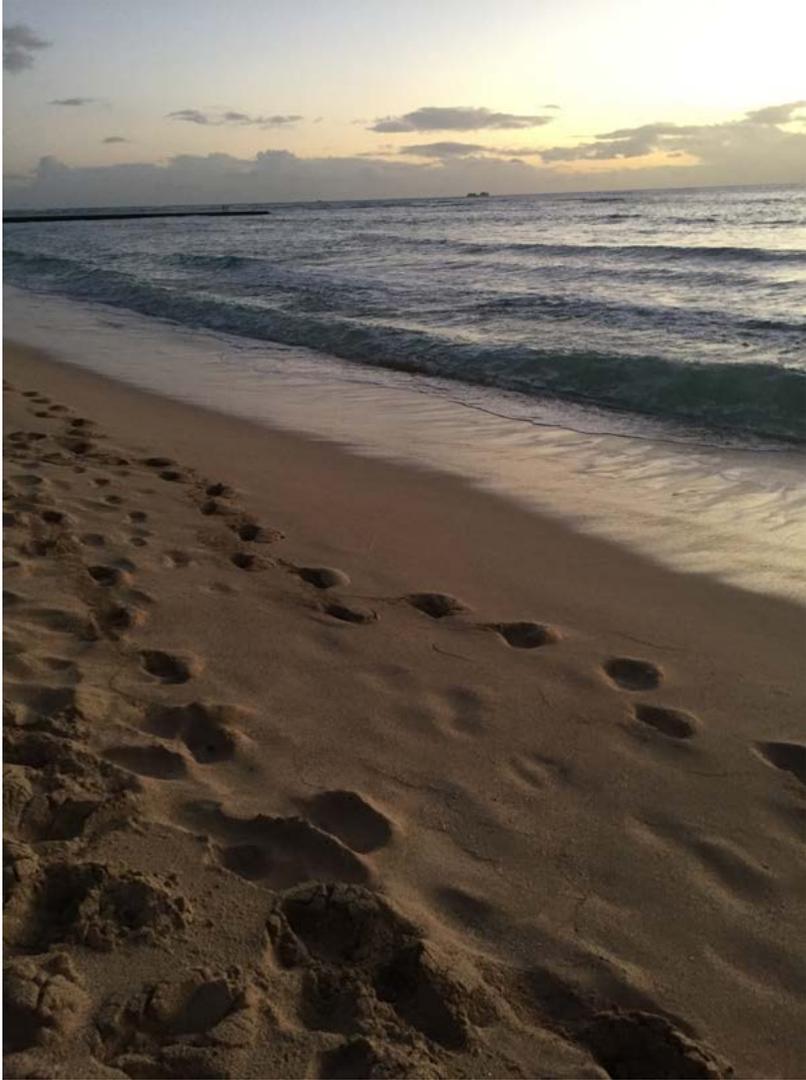


Figure 2. Walking on the beach. (Photo by Christina Murray)

she spoke with Eddie on the phone. Looking back, she now wonders if that would have been the perfect time for them to make the move. The kids would have been too young to truly understand the situation. But how could they have ever known that? That's the problem with this lifestyle, it's unpredictable.

Knowing what she knows now she would have moved out there when the kids were little. Back then she had no way of knowing that this would last so long, that Eddie would be a distant figure in their lives for 12 years.

One day Amber will move out west to be with Eddie. It's no secret that she is planning that. She has already told the kids. As soon as they both graduate high school she is leaving; she is going to live with Eddie. The kids get it. Her daughter even offers to take care of Evan so that Amber can leave a few years early. This just makes Amber smile; she is in no rush to leave her children, but she is tired of the distance. She knows that Evan also feels the draw to Alberta. She wonders if he will come with her when she heads out west. He has had a taste of what time with his dad is like in Alberta.

Amber never thought that Eddie was serious about Evan spending a summer with him in Alberta. She had laughed at the idea at Christmas, but yesterday was Evan's first day of work in Alberta. Amber knew that Eddie's absence was hard on Evan, but she did not expect that Evan would want to leave with Eddie. At Christmas, Evan mentioned to Eddie that he wanted to spend the summer in Alberta. Eddie responded, "the only way you can come and spend the summer with me is if you get a job." Amber did not think that anything would come from that conversation. Evan had never had a job before, so how would he find work in another province with no experience? But Eddie was serious and when he came home in April, he asked Amber to create a resumé for Evan. "Eddie, what would I even put on a resumé? He's a teenager and he's never had a job." "Please Amber, I need you to do this. I want to try my best to get him a job so that he can come and be with me this summer. I am serious about this." So she did it. She prepared a resumé for Evan and sure enough, Eddie found Evan a job in Alberta.

Now when she calls Eddie, she talks to Evan too. She hasn't heard Evan so happy in a long time. Since he has been out west, he always ends their phone calls with, "I love you." Amber can't remember the last time she heard her son say that to her before he left for Alberta. Although she never thought they would be in Alberta together without her, she is happy that Eddie and Evan are spending time together. Evan needed to see what life outside of PEI looked like. Amber wants him to see how Eddie is treated at work and how he treats

the people that work with him. She yearns for Evan to one day have a job like Eddie's, a job that he enjoys in a workplace that values him. The two of them are having some good male bonding time. Evan is already telling her that every summer from now on he is going wherever his dad is. This is the only way he wants to spend his summer holiday from now on — with his dad.

Discussion

While Amber's life narrative is presented here as a brief personal story, the story is distilled from an analysis of six conversational interviews and the sharing of personal photography over multiple weeks. I gained new insights in the living, telling, and retelling of this and the other three narratives in this study. Amber's narrative provides key insights into the experiences and reflections of women as they adjust and adapt to their diverse roles as parents and partners as these are repeatedly negotiated and dependent on whether a loved one is coming or going for mobile work. These insights relate to time, place, and relationship, and show that Eddie's participation in mobile work shaped all aspects of Amber's life as a parent and partner, as well as the evolution of their family lives.

Being married to Eddie for 15 years but living together year-round for only the first three, Amber's hopes and dreams for her marriage and for herself were altered by mobile labour. When Eddie first began working in Alberta the couple believed that this would be temporary, a short period of time where he would go and earn money for the family. A life of separation was not the vision she had for her marriage. Many times, during our interviews, she reflected on what her marriage might have been or could have been if Eddie had only worked in Alberta in the winters as he had during his first few years before he accepted a full-time, permanent job there. She also wondered what her life would have been like if they had made the decision to move their family to Alberta when he accepted his full-time employment.

While Amber loved her husband deeply, she felt that she had missed out on much of the day-to-day life that a wife builds with her husband when they are physically living together. She often found evenings to be long and lonely when the children were in bed or out with friends. This loneliness was worse

when social activities were happening in the community. She would have liked to go to these but purposefully chose not to for fear of being negatively talked about by others living in their community because she went alone. She had missed out on a lot of experiences this way and wished that they could have gone out together as a couple to various activities in their community.

Amber enjoyed her role as a mother and attributed the strong bond she had with her children to the fact that she was the parent who had been at home and physically with them day after day, year after year. She had the opportunity to watch their children grow and be an integral part of their lives. This is something that Eddie was robbed of because of working away. Amber was there to celebrate holidays and special events with the children. She comforted them when they were hurt, sick, or crying because they missed their father.

Because Eddie had been absent from their home so frequently and for the majority of the children's lives, Amber felt additional pressure to be an over-involved parent. She felt the need to physically be present for all of their children's activities. She realized that if Eddie was working away and she could not be there, the children would have no parents present. To make this happen, she needed to juggle her work schedule to accommodate the needs of her children. This became problematic for her when she had a job that was located outside of her community and involved a 45-minute daily commute. While she enjoyed this job and it paid well, she had to resign from the position because her employer was not supportive and would not accommodate her need to be at home in the evenings to care for her children. She was happy to eventually work in her community with an employer who knew her family and recognized the additional responsibilities she had at home while Eddie was working out of province. Amber recognized that until Eddie either stopped working in Alberta or the children were grown and no longer dependent on her for care, she would not have an opportunity to advance in her career.

Time

It was not until Amber engaged in these conversational interviews that she realized how profoundly Eddie's working away and his comings and goings had impacted her and their family. Each year their family had to adapt to periods

of separation and reunification, starting with seasonal absences in the winter that always took him away for Christmas to, more recently, having him home from December to mid-January but then coming and going on an unpredictable schedule. As she reflected on her life experiences, Amber also realized how much she and her family had changed with each passing year.

From toddlers to teens, Eddie's absence from the home had been a constant in their children's lives. In the early years, Amber recalled needing to frequently comfort them, as they could not understand why Daddy was always leaving them for work. At that time, each farewell was incredibly hard on them, but as they grew and matured they realized more clearly that his job required him to live apart from the family. Speaking about her experiences during these interviews, she realized how much her children had grown with the passage of time. There was sadness and loss in this as Amber talked about all that her husband had missed because he had worked away. Reflecting on the passage of time led Amber to question aloud things that she had not previously articulated. She wondered what it might have meant for their family if Eddie had chosen to remain at home and continue working seasonally in the farming industry.

Place

Reflecting on Amber's story, it is evident how place has played a key role in their decisions and their lives. The importance of place was evident in the beginning when Eddie and Amber made the decision that Eddie would travel back and forth to Alberta while their family remained behind in rural Prince Edward Island — the only place they had known as home.

With the passage of time, it felt like Eddie had two distinct homes: his home with his family in rural Prince Edward Island and the home that he had made in Alberta with other workers who also were from Prince Edward Island and had families living back at home on the Island. This became apparent to Amber when she went to visit Eddie in Alberta. She was struck when she recognized that when Eddie walked into a local restaurant, everyone in the restaurant knew him and spoke to him by name. This was similar to how everyone in his home community on Prince Edward Island would know him if he walked into a restaurant there. She realized that in the absence of his fam-

ily, Eddie had created a new quasi-family comprised of fellow mobile workers who knew all too well what it was like to be working in Alberta and living apart from their wives and children. Knowing that Eddie had an established social support network in Alberta was comforting to Amber; she appreciated that he had developed close relationships with other men also going through the same experience.

Eddie frequently talked about his life in Alberta, including with the children, and as their son Evan grew older, Eddie wanted him to come out to Alberta and work with him while he was on his summer holidays. The experience for Amber was fraught with differing emotions. She was happy that Eddie and Evan could be together and knew that time together as father and son was needed. She was also lonely as both her son and husband were now working in Alberta. Her daughter was busy most evenings with her boyfriend and friends and she found the time alone long. Additionally, she worried that once her son went to Alberta with his father to work, he would always want to be out there with him. She hoped that his future would not be one of leaving his family behind for work in Alberta.

For Amber, living in a rural community was both a positive and negative experience. She appreciated that her children were surrounded by extended family members who provided support, and she and the children could visit them regularly. She also appreciated the safety and security of living in a rural community. Eddie had repeatedly shared with her examples of criminal activity and excessive drug use that he had observed or heard about while working away. This was not the norm in their rural Island community and neither of them wanted their children to be raised in a place where their children could be exposed to this type of activity. Living in a small, rural community also had its challenges. Amber liked the close-knit community where they lived and how everyone seemed to know her and her children. There were times, however, when she did not like living there because of the gossip among members of the community. She worried about being the subject of gossip, including about her ability to parent their children while Eddie was working away and about her faithfulness to her marriage.

Relationship

While Amber and Eddie have experienced years of physical separation, they have remained committed to each other, to their marriage, and to the raising of their children. Both realized, early on, the importance of communication if they wanted their relationship with each other and the children to continue growing, in spite of the physical separation. Finding ways to stay connected while living apart was paramount in their family's evolution. Through the years, they actively found ways to communicate — from phone calls and letters in the early years to making and sending videos, to, in recent years, communicating multiple times a day via FaceTime, SnapChat, and text messaging, including sending personal photographs. Using technologies such as FaceTime, Eddie, Amber, and the children can physically see each other throughout the week and can be engaged with one another's lives on a regular basis. Amber feels that this enhances not only her relationship with Eddie, but their children's as well. Now that the children are older, they frequently communicate with their father on their own through text messaging and telephone calls. Eddie's regular communications have conveyed to Amber and the children his commitment to being an active co-parent regardless of whether he is at home or working away.

Amber has always felt loved and supported by Eddie. She knows that he appreciates all that she does for their children while he is working away. He is an invested parent and even though he may be working away, he wants to be involved in the day-to-day decisions regarding their children. She and Eddie realize that while the life of raising their children may have been spent apart, their futures are with each other. They have repeatedly spoken at length about how Amber will move to Alberta to be with Eddie after Evan has graduated from high school.

From toddlers to teens, Amber's commitment to her family has been unwavering. The constant that has remained is the deep love she has for her husband and children and her deep commitment to making her marriage and family work in spite of the challenges of mobile work.

Supporting Mobile Families — Community Response and Action

While Amber's story is a narrative reconstruction synthesizing key themes from multiple conversational interviews with a single participant, these overarching themes were also evident in interviews with other women participating in this study. For all of the women who participated in this study, the coming and going of their husbands year after year had shaped their role development and contributed to role confusion within their families. Women shared at length how their roles and responsibilities within their families were constantly in flux and ever changing. They identified that while it was challenging, being married to someone who worked out of province had helped them to develop inner strength and self-reliance. While their husbands worked away, the women needed to become independent in managing multiple roles, responsibilities, and adversities within their families. These experiences led to an inner confidence and strength for the women left behind and they questioned if this would have developed to the same degree had their husbands not worked away.

The women also repeatedly expressed worries about what people in their communities were saying about their marriage and the strength of their relationships with their husbands. They explicitly described how they chose to isolate themselves from others and avoided social activities as they did not want to be perceived by others as being unfaithful to their husbands while they were away. This contributed, however, to feelings of loneliness, sadness, and at times feeling overwhelmed — indicators of how having their loved one travel for work had negative impacts on their mental health.

The conversational interviews gave these women the opportunity to share their experiences with someone else in a safe, confidential, non-judgmental, and private manner. When asked to imagine interventions that would have a positive impact on women left behind, each stressed how valuable it would be to develop networks of support where women like themselves could come together, share their experiences with others, and feel less alone. These networks of support could occur through formal or informal support groups developed by women, for women. Such networks could lead to the development of new friendships and enhance their feelings of belonging within their communities.

In response to women's identified need for support, I advocated for the creation of "Families of Migrant Workers" support groups across Prince Edward Island. I met with the executive directors of each of the family resource centres across PEI to share my research and my participants' vision for these support groups. During these meetings, each director expressed their own concerns about these women and their families, including how they might support them. The discussions laid the groundwork for the establishment of these support groups, the implementation of which required buy-in from each family resource centre, funding, trained facilitators, and early childhood educators to provide child care while women participated in the support groups.

A family resource centre in the western region of Prince Edward Island implemented the first "Families of Migrant Workers" support group on the Island. This group met on a biweekly basis and free child care was provided. The support group was advertised through media releases, news stories in local papers, and through a CBC radio program episode on the experiences of women in rural PEI who are left behind and on the development of the support group. The support group was free of charge and open to any women and children who wanted to attend. After the launch of this support group, an additional support group focused on supporting fathers who migrate for work and their children was established. Known as "Who Let the Dads Out," this group brings together fathers who are travelling out of province for work and their children for an evening of fun, games, movies, pizza, and root beer.

Conclusion

Amber's story and the narratives of other women who participated in this research contributed to a deeper understanding of how families have been impacted by mobile labour. Amber's story shows how labour migration has permeated all facets of Amber's personal and family life. Particularly revealing is how relationships within her family evolved over time in light of repeated patterns of separation and reunification, commitments and ambivalences about place, and spousal and parental relationships. Key themes arising from her story and this research relate to changing roles and responsibilities, family evolution and transitions, the relationship between communication and belonging, and

marriage and community relations. These themes were also illuminated and aligned within the temporalities of time, place, and relationship.

Findings from this research highlight the strengths and challenges of the women left behind. They were also shared with family resource centres across Prince Edward Island and led to the creation of new support groups to address the specific needs of women, men, and children impacted by mobile labour. The creation of these groups met participants' identified needs for support and sharing and helped them see that, while they may have felt alone, others were having similar experiences. Such groups can help provide the changing supports these families require as their children grow from toddlers to teens.

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Letters from Camp: Work, Family, and Time in a FIFO Regime

Sara Dorow and Sandrine Jean

Abstract

Through the device of two letters written to loved ones back home — one from a camp housekeeper, and one from an oil worker — we illustrate how work, family, and time intersect in a fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) mobility regime. Drawing on dozens of interviews with both trades and camp workers in the Alberta oil sands, we have crafted these letters to illuminate the web of temporalities that characterize FIFO work and to foreground FIFO workers' struggles to navigate its rhythms and arrhythmias. Relations of work, family, and time become especially salient in camp, an “in-between” place that is not formally work but is almost never home.

Introduction

Gabriella Paolucci (1996, 147) asserted more than 20 years ago that “in the sphere of production as in other areas of social life, what counts more and more is the ability to master fluid and flexible temporal regimes and to handle their relationships with each other.” As many of us know first-hand, the multiple and often conflicting rhythms of paid work and family constitute one such key relationship. But what happens when we add to the mix long-distance commuting, or FIFO (fly-in, fly-out, which also encompasses drive-in, drive-out and bus-in, bus-out)?

When workers commute hundreds or thousands of kilometres from home for rotations of one or more weeks in remote resource-based employment, time gets complicated. Multiple FIFO-driven durations — the hours it takes to commute each way, the days or weeks in one’s rotation schedule, the days one is home in between rotations, the months or years one has been working away, the years one plans to continue working away — are crisscrossed by industry schedules and disruptions including project deadlines, seasonal work cycles, and historical booms and busts in commodity markets.

FIFO workers usually stay in a nearby work camp during their rotations, adding yet another important layer to this daunting temporal web: the “dressage rhythms” (Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020) of camp itself. The work camp is a place of routine, isolation, and enclosure that exists to propel workers back into each day of their rotation. Its denizens flow each day (or night) from work site to shuttle bus to camp entryway (also called the “boot room” or “mud room” by the workers) to dining hall to small private room, only to wake up and “eat, shit, sleep, and work” all over again (Dorow and Jean 2022).



Figure 1. Boot room. (Photo by Sara Dorow)

Meanwhile, the temporal rhythms of life back home continue apace — children or aging parents need daily care, birthdays and barbecues happen, the yard needs mowing or the driveway shovelling, and the battery on the car dies — creating temporal disjunctures and hurdles. These “fragile synchronicities” (Neis et al. 2018) between work and family are felt in the efforts to keep in touch by video chat and phone, in the frustration of missing out on family events, and in the domino effect of adjustments to family rhythms and relationships each time a worker returns home and then leaves again (Barber 2016; Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Jean 2019; Mayes 2020; Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020).

Yet we don’t know much about the view from camp: how do workers experience time in camp, especially in relation to the broader web of temporalities that characterize a FIFO work regime such as the oil sands? How do they bridge, battle, and otherwise navigate the rhythms and arrhythmias of work and home that intersect in camp?

We draw here on interviews with some 75 oil workers (trades workers, operations employees, safety officers, etc.) and camp workers (housekeepers, cooks, security, camp managers, janitors, etc.), conducted in work camps in the oil sands zone of northern Alberta, Canada, from 2014 to 2016. Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, the oil sands industry has relied on a rotational, FIFO workforce tens of thousands strong (Nichols Applied Management 2018; Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2015). Mirroring the geographical diversity of this workforce, our participants came from five different provinces; some were recent immigrants to Canada and some were part of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. All of them were rotational long-distance commuters, although camp staffers were more likely to be women, to be on longer rotations of three weeks, and to commute back and forth by bus (especially if coming from elsewhere in Alberta).

During our fieldwork we became fascinated by how workers experience and respond to the particular temporal relations of *work*, *camp*, and *home* created by the FIFO mobility regime (Barber 2018; Dorow and Jean 2022). Workers told us they felt like they had separate selves (see also Kelly et al., Chapter 5; Saxinger 2016) that sometimes coincided and sometimes clashed

as they “danced” among multiple temporal regimentations and adjustments (Stasik 2017). The view from camp provides insights into this temporal experience, especially as workers struggle to variously separate and integrate the multi-spatial and multi-temporal spheres of their lives. These struggles differ somewhat between oil workers and camp staff: while the former leave camp each day for shifts at nearby oil sites, for staffers the camp is also their worksite. Yet for all types of FIFO workers, camp is a time-space that is relatively cut off from the outside world and whose regimented routines and rhythms serve the productive requirements of oil extraction (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020). As a result, workers express the sense of time standing still, of timelessness and immobility. Workers struggle to squeeze in some “unproductive” time to negotiate their camp and family selves. And it takes real effort to do so, given the arrhythmias between work and home (Neis et al. 2018) that mark every facet of the FIFO rotation — the cycles of leaving and returning home, the commute itself, the march of time back home while in camp, and the “time of oil” (Rogers 2015) that drives so many of these other durations and schedules and rhythms. FIFO workers thus struggle to variously maintain distance and/or create connections among work, camp, and home selves, let alone explain this disjointed temporal experience to others.

To convey this experience, we have crafted “letters from camp” by two work camp dwellers — one a camp staffer, and one an oil worker. The letters are composite expressions of key thematic narratives and patterns that emerged across our research. They draw directly and specifically from interviews. Because of a concentration of workers from Atlantic Canada in our project, we have focused on the narratives of those workers, but many of their experiences echo across the FIFO workforce. And because a historic downturn in the price of oil took hold during the period of our research, the letters refer to the additional temporal “squeezes” that resulted; a few years later, COVID-19 added yet another layer of complications (see Dorow 2020). By using the format of “letters from camp,” we aim to both humanize and illuminate time as a forceful facet of work–camp–family relations in the resource-based FIFO regime (Barber 2018; Dorow and Jean 2022; Dorow and Mandizadza 2018).



Figure 2. Night shift. (Photo by Sara Dorow)

Letter One

Camp Housekeeper from Nova Scotia

(52-year-old woman writing to her daughter)

Hi Sweetheart.

I know, a rare letter from me. I woke up at 4:30 this afternoon, a bit earlier than usual for the night shift. After my shower and “breakfast” I wasn’t sure what to do with this extra half hour. So, I’m using it to write a real letter to you, not just one of those quick texts I tend to dash off during a break or after shift to ask you about the house or the grandkids.

Since I’m on Day Thirteen of my twenty-one-day stint — past “hump day,” with more workdays behind me than ahead of me — I feel like I can actually focus on home a bit. I think I’ve told you that I don’t dare start counting days until past

the halfway mark. My friend Jolene (she's on day shift this time around, so we don't see each other as much) always jokes that it's like twenty Mondays and one Friday around here! But it's not just that. We always find that as we hit our third week, we sort of begin to lose track of things. Sometimes I have to go back and forth to my room a few times after I wake up to retrieve things I've forgotten.

Yesterday was another "Freaky Friday." That's what we call those crazy afternoons when one big crew is leaving camp and another is coming in. We have to madly check people in and out and make sure enough rooms are cleaned in between in a ridiculous three-hour window. I'm on night shift this time around, so I avoided the chaos. But I still joined Jolene and Gina for a mini post-Freaky Friday party at shift change. We snuck cookies and coffee back to my room, just to step out of our "workspace" for a moment (even if our rooms are just down the hallway). Gina loved that picture of you and the kids at the park. Did I tell you I tape it to the wall by my bed every time I come back here? She's from the Philippines, so she's really far from her own grandkids.

Thank god for these gals and the rest of the crew. We keep each other sane and build in regular social time. I guess you could say we're "camp family." Kevin the cook has become one of us. He kind of looks out for everybody in camp. He knows exactly what kind of eggs some guys want when they come through the breakfast line each day, and which guys want to change it up so each day doesn't melt into the next. We were talking yesterday about a new level of crankiness among the camp guests since oil prices dropped last year. There's worry about losing jobs, about work schedules with less overtime and less time back home. Some of these guys are staying in camp even longer than us now, for months at a time. And sometimes they let out their frustrations on the staff. I think I've developed a whole new thick skin out here. (Still worth it to build that retirement nest egg! Just two years away from my goal...)

I'm so looking forward to being home again for a week. Want to hear all about the kids' latest adventures with school, soccer, and dance class. I need to spend some time with your granddad as well. I hope he's been eating right and at least vacuuming now and again. Between you and me, I sometimes feel like I just continue being a housekeeper when I get home (but the pay isn't so good).

Okay, time to get ready for shift. See you in just nine days. Well, probably ten. You know how it goes — I'll get off that plane after thirteen hours of sitting and stopovers and will have to take a day to recover. But then it's you, me, and those grandkids of mine.

Love, Mom



Figure 3. Memories of home. (Photo by Sandrine Jean)

Letter Two

Oil Worker from Newfoundland

(44 -year-old man writing to his wife)

Hi Honey.

It's Friday (I think) and I was just sitting here thinking of you and the kids. Miss you so much. I guess maybe there's one silver lining to this new soul-sucking ten

and four rotation — while I'm hanging out during those four days off I can take some time to think.

Right now, I'm sitting in the Tim Hortons in Fort McMurray. With the price of oil so low, they closed the camp coffee shop and cancelled the daily camp-to-town shuttle. So, I got a ride into town from my buddy Lee, who drives his truck from BC to save on the cost of the air ticket. (Turns out our door-to-door commutes — he in his truck and me crammed into an airplane seat — are both about fourteen hours!) I'm watching local families come in and out of Timmy's, and have such mixed feelings. I'm happy that they get to be together, but jealous and a bit depressed that we aren't.

You know how much I look forward to going home, even if it takes me a while to catch up and get out of work mode. When I get off that plane I really want to make up for the time I've been gone, but at the same time I'm so exhausted. I know it's a two-way street — that it isn't easy for you to adjust to having me around all over again each time I return. And I'm pretty sure it's even harder for you with the kids when I am away than you let on. Still, thank god our "kids" are mostly grown up. I see guys here with young children losing their minds, pulled home mentally and emotionally but badly needing the work. I don't know how we (you) did it when our kids were younger. Remember when we said, "Let's try this for two to three years, just until the house is paid off"? Ha! And look at us now. Thirteen years on and I'm still at it. Wish it felt worth it to try my luck with work back home.

I've been meaning to tell you that when I'm in camp, I sometimes struggle to bring to mind details about people and places at home. It's like the flight each way shuts off the dad and the husband that I am back home — like I go through some kind of wormhole. And then when I do start thinking about you and the kids while I'm here, it can mess up my routine and make life in camp unbearable. Sometimes I have to block out family from my mind, so I don't go crazy.

The zombie routine here — up at five, dress, line up for breakfast, pack lunch, hop on the bus out to site, work, come back at five, shower, call home, eat, unwind with TV, sleep, get up and do it all over again — can eat you up. But you also have to try to keep busy and as close to a routine as you can, so that each shift and each day goes by quickly. Little changes, like doing laundry, provide something different,

so you don't completely feel like an inmate. Doing laundry is frustrating because it messes up our evening phone date, but if I don't run straight from the bus to the laundry room on those days I won't be able to grab a washing machine in time to do a load before I hit the hay. And if there's one part of the routine I really try to hold sacred, it's sleep. Mess that up and everything else goes to hell.

If I'm being honest, our nightly calls are both a real highlight and sometimes difficult. Catching up with you and the kids reminds me that time out there in the "real world" is moving forward without me. I'm glad I'm writing this down. I realize that I rarely talk about what it's like here — I guess I do the reverse when I'm home, and block out work and camp.

Can't wait to make it home next month. I have my flight booked for the ninth.

Love you with all my heart, Rob

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Making It Work

Nicole Snow and Ian Fong

Abstract

This chapter tells the story of Nicole Snow and Ian Fong’s experience as a family that includes a long-distance labour commuter (LDLC). It opens with a brief overview of some of the existing research on family-related impacts of LDLC. The next section tells the story of how Nicole and Ian entered into long-distance labour commuting, followed by reflections on how they cope with the uncertainty associated with Ian working as an independent contractor in a volatile market that (so far) has always taken him out of province. The chapter also explores how they have dealt with the mental health challenges of LDLC and sustained their relationships with each other, and with those they love and care about. Ultimately, this is a story about what they do to “make it work.”

Introduction

Ian and Nicole have been together for over 27 years. They live in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), on Canada’s east coast. For several years now, Ian’s work has taken him thousands of kilometres to western Canada to complete inspections of pressure equipment and above-ground storage tanks in the oil and gas and other sectors. He is one of thousands of workers from NL who work in another jurisdiction as a long-distance labour commuter.

Nicole works in nursing education and research in St. John's. Together, they have had to navigate the unique challenges and tensions associated with long-distance labour commuting (LDLC) in order to nurture and cultivate their relationship across — and sometimes in spite of — time and space. LDLC is common across NL and other parts of Atlantic Canada. Overall, while the number of interjurisdictional workers residing in Atlantic Canada marginally increased from 51,710 in 2002 to 52,130 in 2016, the numbers peaked twice during this period, at 74,335 in 2008 and 76,110 in 2014. Thousands of these interjurisdictional workers were employed in Canada's western provinces and northern territories; most were male, and many worked in construction (Neil and Neis 2020). The working life of many of these “mobile workers” is characterized by four main elements:

A rotational work schedule, i.e. a specified number of days at work, followed by a specified number of days off; an extended work day, e.g. 12 h[our] shifts; accommodation of workers at or near the work site; and transportation (often paid for by the company) of workers between the work site and specific pickup points. (Storey 2016, 585)

Some might ask why workers might opt to engage in LDLC. In the first instance, there can be substantial financial incentives to working in remote areas away from one's primary residence. This is particularly the case when travel and accommodation costs are covered by the employer, and when coming from contexts like Atlantic Canada where there is often limited local employment and where wages and access to overtime tend to be less than in some other regions (Barber 2016; Considine et al. 2017; Dittman, Henriquez, and Roxburgh 2016; Mclean 2012; Whalen and Schmidt 2016; Wray 2012). Furthermore, for LDLCs employed in shifting locations without adjacent communities, employment requires mobility and time away from family, irrespective of whether the family lives in the same or a different jurisdiction. In this context, maintaining a single home base, often close to extended family and friends, is often viewed as preferential to moving elsewhere in Canada

or beyond, or to moving around on a regular basis (Whalen and Schmidt 2016). Evidence indicates that many people are willing to engage in this lucrative work, with numerous individuals reporting earnings well over six figures per annum (McClean 2012). Perhaps unfortunately, greater pay often comes with the temptation to purchase more goods, thus requiring continued access to high salaries and, potentially, continued mobility (Barber 2016). Considine et al. (2017, 11) describe workers in these circumstances as wearing “golden handcuffs,” referring to the “high remuneration packages to support recruitment and retention which may result in employees becoming dependent on the high salary provided.” The lure of these salaries and the risk of golden handcuffs can be significant.

While many stories of LDLCs involve younger individuals, many are also middle-aged and older workers for whom migrant work has become “a way of life” (Jones and Southcott 2015, 123) for them and their loved ones. Older workers may also have been pushed into migrant work by layoffs closer to home or, because their children are grown, can more easily be mobile. Migrant work then acts as a way to build up retirement funds or to achieve other objectives. Individuals can work away from home for periods of weeks (Ryser, Markey, and Halseth 2016) or months (Haslam McKenzie 2016), and their travel can span hundreds or thousands of kilometres and multiple time zones (Ryser, Markey, and Halseth 2016). These long commutes are tiring and impact time at home; long and frequent periods away and volatile rotations can create challenges for readjusting to family life (Jones and Southcott 2016). Means of communicating and connecting with families and friends on a regular basis have improved in recent decades with advances in cellular, Internet, and satellite access (Jones and Southcott 2015; McClean 2012). However, many rural and remote work locations lack good communications services and communities in which to live, creating issues for partners in terms of finding employment with their spouses if the latter choose to commute as well (SeaStone Group 2015). During the time at work, some participants form relationships with co-workers and enjoy socializing when together (Jones and Southcott 2015; Ryser, Markey, and Halseth 2016), which can ease a sense of loneliness.

Migrant work can adversely impact the mental health of individuals (Considine et al. 2017). Agyapong and Juhas (2016) observed an association between substance use and those staying in remote work site camps in northern Alberta. Many of these camps have been designated alcohol- and drug-free (Ryser, Markey, and Halseth 2016), which are colloquially known as “dry” camps. However, long hours with varying shifts can also contribute to a situation in which the worker comes to depend on medications and other substances to aid in sleeping and stimulants to stay awake, resulting in the use by some of restricted substances. Many of the hiring companies conduct pre-employment screening for substance use, such as: alcohol, cocaine, amphetamines, methamphetamine, opiates, PCP (phencyclidine), and THC (marijuana) (SureHire 2018). These tests are repeated during the employment period when, for example, a workplace incident or accident occurs, or if use is suspected. Despite these regulations, the possible loss of employment if caught, and the risk for workplace injuries and other adverse events that comes with working while impaired, some individuals continue to imbibe or use these substances.

Evidence also suggests high rates of mental health concerns for the partners of those who engage in migrant work. Dittman, Henriquez, and Roxburgh (2016, 2786) found that partners of fly-in fly-out workers reported “greater levels of depression, anxiety and stress and were more concerned than community [based] mothers about their partner’s personal adjustment.” Individuals, primarily female partners, left at home are largely responsible for running the household, providing care for children, buying groceries, paying bills, and so forth, thus putting extra pressure on them (Jones and Southcott 2015; Torkington, Larkins, and Gupta 2011; Whalen and Schmidt 2016). In response to the stress associated with these responsibilities, at-home partners are also at risk of indulging in substance use, gambling, and other potentially problematic coping behaviours that can adversely impact their well-being (Wray 2012).

While some couples acknowledge that they have to “work hard” to maintain “solid and mutually supportive” relationships (Barber 2016, 646), success can be bolstered by consistent communication with family while away through the use of phones or Internet services (Lester et al. 2015; Whalen and Schmidt 2016; Wray 2012). The quality of romantic, sexual relationships with partners

is also of concern. Viry, Widmer, and Kaufmann (2010) did not find a significant negative relationship between long-distance weekly commuting and the quality of conjugal relationships. Despite this, there was some indication that those who were involved in long-distance relationships were “somewhat less likely to be very satisfied with their partnership” (Viry et al. 2010, 3) and partnered relationships can break down as a result (Markey, Ryser, and Halseth 2015). Having time off between work rotations is welcomed but often yields condensed, pressured time to “fit in” family activities and spend time together (Torkington, Larkins, and Gupta 2011; Markey, Ryser, and Halseth 2015). Once home, thoughts of the partner leaving once again can “loom” over family activities (Whalen and Schmidt 2016, 11).

Many of the themes in existing research on LDLCs resonate with Ian and Nicole’s experiences over the past several years. The challenges and successes they face together are not new but they have experienced them in their own way. We now turn to their story.



Figure 1. Nicole and Ian. (Photo courtesy of Nicole Snow)

Making It Work

In the winter of 1992, Ian and Nicole met at Memorial University in St. John's, where they both lived and studied at the time. Ian was pursuing a science degree while Nicole was working on her nursing degree. They finished their respective programs and married in 2000.

Nicole finished her Master of Nursing degree program at Memorial in 2005. She then decided to apply to a Doctor of Philosophy (Nursing) program at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, which she started, by distance, in the fall of 2006. The program had an "in-residence" requirement that stipulated distance students must spend at least one semester on site. Nicole moved to Edmonton for the winter of 2007. At this time, Ian was enrolled in a Master of Physical Education program and was unemployed. After some discussion, Ian decided to travel with Nicole and both stayed with some of his family in Edmonton.

Ian's brother, Scott, lived in Edmonton and was working in the trades. Scott indentured Ian as a welding apprentice and guided him through the process of joining the Pipefitting Union (UA Local 488). After "pulling a slip" from the Hall (i.e., finding a position), Ian worked as an assistant to a fitter in a pipe fabrication shop. He quickly developed an interest in welding and pipefitting work and found he was making more money than he ever had before, even in positions that drew on his university education. Nicole finished the university semester, and both returned to NL. However, Ian had found his niche. He enjoyed the problem-solving aspects of pipefitting and could conceptualize complex drawings well. He had the patience for welding and began to read books on metallurgy in his spare time. Ian returned to Edmonton a number of times to complete the in-class requirements for his welding certification and to find employment. The process of finishing his welding certificate was easier to do in Alberta: fewer school hours were required to complete each level; there were more openings at the educational facilities; and welding work was easier to find. In NL, wait lists for programs slowed many individuals' plans to enrol in the trades.

By this point in time, Ian and Nicole had been together for a number of years and had developed a solid relationship, but it was challenging to maintain

their relationship “as usual” in the midst of frequent separation. Ian would be gone for weeks or months at a time. The industry, and therefore the nature and amount of work available, was unpredictable, particularly during the 2008 economic bust that happened soon after he made his new career choice. Welding positions were not as plentiful as before and, at times, Ian stayed in Edmonton looking for work and trying to manage down time in between jobs. Nicole was also working full-time teaching nursing and completing her PhD research. Thankfully, she was able to visit Edmonton when she could get occasional time away from the office. Phone calls and online texts and chats were common, but not always possible — visits could not happen when Ian worked at remote work sites and stayed in the camps. He often worked 10–12 hours or more a day and with the added time for travel to and from his place of residence to the work sites, time for conversations was at a premium, especially when factoring in time zone differences and nightshifts. Wi-fi services were sometimes temperamental. Phone calls were wonderful, but not as good as actually seeing him using video communication.

While Ian was away, Nicole focused on her PhD; while Ian was home, they focused more on each other. They struggled at times, however, to find some balance. Nicole often felt anxious leading up to Ian’s departure. This time was hectic as there were activities to fit in, people to visit, and they had to carve out time with each other in the midst of his preparations for departure and her schedule. She dreaded Ian’s absence and came to want him to leave so that she could start focusing on his return. Both had challenges adapting to Ian being away: Ian struggled to get settled in yet another place with new beds, amenities, meal choices, and so forth; Nicole attempted to adapt to an empty house and sleeping alone. Thankfully, they had cats as pets, but even pet care required adjustment. Nicole’s first independent trip to the vet with a howling cat who refused to be put in the pet carrier was interesting!

Ian’s return home was associated with a honeymoon phase where both were excited and happy to see one another, but this would quickly end. When Ian was home, she wanted him to do more work around the house — chores that Nicole thought were “his work” (Ian referred to them as the “honey-do” list). Nicole would become incredibly frustrated when Ian wanted more “down

time” that included seeing friends, relaxing, reading, and so forth. Nicole perceived herself as the one who was “holding the fort” while he was away; she organized any repairs that were needed, spent money on snow clearing as she was not able to manage it herself, and paid the bills. Even sharing a bed could be challenging as both had to get used to having the other in their space. This kind of dilemma often spilled over to shared bathroom use, picking up after each other, meal preparation, laundry: these all conflicted with their efforts to regain equilibrium and re-establish their boundaries. Nicole was concerned they were becoming less of a team and more like individual players; Ian, the more easy-going of the two, was also concerned but did not dwell on these issues as much. This lack of concern could frustrate Nicole as she perceived her concerns as being one-sided.

These challenges were compounded by deaths and illness in their families and circle of friends. Ian was saddened when he was not able to come home to attend funerals and when he could not always be there for their godson when he developed cancer. When home, Ian would spend considerable time with him attending chemo treatments together and playing video games and watching movies in the hospital. He did this not only out of a desire to “be there” to support the child and the family, but also to “make up” for time lost. When the child’s prognosis became terminal, Ian wondered, “what if something happens while I am away?” When the child (and other loved ones) died, Nicole and Ian went through parts of the grieving process separately.

“Missing out” on positive life events was also challenging. Participation in family gatherings, birthdays, opportunities to travel with Nicole on work-related trips, and other events and opportunities also happened during Ian’s absence, an experience he describes as “life passing me by.”

Nicole and Ian have been living this life for about 13 years now and while many challenges have remained constant, their ability to cope with them has improved. Ian secured his Red Seal in Welding and now holds a number of inspection certifications. He set up his own company and for several years has been travelling to various industrial work sites completing inspections of pressure equipment, storage tanks, and piping. He continues to be a long-distance commuter from NL to western Canada, where most of this inspection



Figure 2. Ian at work. (Photo by Dan MacPhee)

work is located. He is still often away for weeks and months at a time, sometimes in remote areas. Night shifts are common, and the hours are long.

Nicole and Ian believe that an important element of coping with LDLC is the acceptance of uncertainty. As a long-distance commuter, Ian has been offered contracts of one to two weeks duration that turned out to last longer. More rarely, he has been offered longer contracts that had to be shortened. Nicole has developed a greater ability to adjust to this way of life, describing herself as “rolling with the punches.” Instead of fighting against all of the

changes, seeing them as unfair, or getting upset, Nicole and Ian have gotten better at engaging in open communication, being more honest with each other and less passive, and have accepted the challenges as part of the nature of the work. They have also developed a better sense of what is crucial in their relationship and their lives and actively work to preserve that.

An important consideration in this process of acceptance and flexibility is the fact that Nicole and Ian do not have children. Early in their relationship, they took the position that if they had children, it would be wonderful; if not, then they would be good to those in their lives. Currently, they do not have to focus on the needs of any dependants; even with pets, they have worked out agreements with family and friends who will provide pet care if both are away from home. Ian and Nicole are committed to maintaining meaningful engagement with family and friends' children through multiple strategies: they welcome children to social gatherings at their home and have toys and activities available for them and they have been included in family trips with their friends with children and participate in the children's activities. Nicole and Ian's house has become a place for family and friends to come for a meal, engage in a movie night, or stay for a sleepover with their children. Sometimes these opportunities are unplanned and arise on the "spur of the moment." Nicole and Ian have learned to be open and spontaneous with their space and time, especially when work dates and schedules can be in a state of flux. Friends have also learned to adapt to Ian's challenging work-away schedule. They appreciate that Ian will be tired at times and will want to spend a night at home.

Nicole and Ian are increasingly aware of the need to shift the focus of their attention to aging parents and family members. Fortunately, their parents are skilled at using online communication platforms, making it easier to maintain contact. Coupled with calls, texts, and family visits whenever possible, Nicole and Ian have been able to maintain good family relationships, but how well their family members will age is unknown. They each come from families of four children, and having siblings can make for an easier division of responsibilities. Constraints on his ability to engage in a helping and supportive role can, however, be difficult for Ian while working away. Ian and Nicole are currently experiencing the illness of a loved elderly family member and Ian is un-

certain as to if and when he might get home if the person's health takes a turn for the worst. He manages by staying in communication with his family and expressing his concern to them. His family is understanding and accepting of the unpredictability of the situation. Their understanding and willingness to adapt are integral to Nicole and Ian's ability to cope with the challenges of living this way of life.

Their families have learned to become more flexible in planning family events, in how they communicate with Nicole and Ian, and in how they offer support. For example, Nicole's father has been known to go around the house with a screwdriver looking for things to fix or tighten when Ian is away. Nicole receives phone calls (from both sides of the family) to see how she is doing and to ensure that she is not lonely. As well, homemade meals have been cooked and delivered, as Ian is the one who is the chef in the relationship. Ian has learned to schedule his work flights so that he can spend time with family in Edmonton either before or after a contract.

In becoming an independent contractor, Ian has gained more control over his work life. He has the ability to choose whether or not his company will accept an inspection contract, although this can be a difficult choice at times given fluctuations in the amount of available work. He enjoys the project nature of the employment; he is able to go to the site, complete his work, write the needed reports, and leave. He does not become overly "bogged down" in the day-to-day operations of the workplace, and the changing nature of the projects is more appealing to him personally. Ian has worked a rotation contract in the past that spanned a number of months and he did not enjoy that as he was unable to achieve a rhythm with the coming and going between work and home. His two weeks home flew by and were not guaranteed, given the work site's need for coverage and overtime.

While he has worked in remote camps, Ian prefers to work closer to urban centres. This allows him to live in a community, have more independent housing, and cook for himself (which he thoroughly enjoys), and gives him access to various services and amenities. Nicole also prefers this as she is sometimes able to visit Ian. He is building his reputation as an inspector and has a number of repeat clients with whom he enjoys working. He has forged relationships

with other contractors and local individuals working at these sites and has many stories of the friendliness of others, the sharing of meals, the support provided, and the mentorship given and received.

Nicole and Ian have learned to understand the ebbs and flows of the away-home-away cycle. Ian appreciates that Nicole is more of a worrier than he is and anticipates that she will become anxious during the time leading up to his leaving. Nicole has also become more understanding of Ian's needs to rest and recuperate when he comes home. Despite being a nurse, Nicole sometimes overlooked the effects of continued shiftwork on her husband's body and mind. Ian is understandably physically and mentally tired when he comes home after working extended contracts with few days off and after compressing the equivalent of two weeks of work (in terms of hours) into one. Coupled with the travel and time zone changes, he has taken to using the first few days at home as "down time." In recognizing this pattern, Nicole and Ian are more prepared to cope with it. Nicole's expectations have changed from checking off the "honey-do" list to participating in Ian's down time, which provides an opportunity to watch a couple of movies, order takeout, relax, chat, quietly read together — basically to be present with one another while allowing Ian to recharge. Ian has become more engaged in doing various activities around the house. Having blocks of time off gives him more opportunity to do this instead of rushing to complete as much as he can in the span of a few days.

Ian and Nicole are very aware of the potential mental health implications of this way of life. They have sought out ways of engaging in healthy stress management, though at times it can be challenging. Ian enjoys a drink of Scotch from time to time, and this has to be mediated by camp restrictions that often prohibit the presence and use of alcohol on site. Ian adheres to these restrictions and does not engage in the use of other substances. After a minor "fender bender" on one job site some years ago, Ian was required to submit to alcohol and drug screening. He was not concerned about this as he knew he was "clean." He mentioned this in conversation with another individual, who promptly asked if Ian was willing to sell his urine. While this surprised Ian at the time, he is aware that there are numerous issues with substance use in these environments and of individuals failing substance screening and being fired from positions.

Nicole used to be worried that Ian would not find his niche in life but Ian enjoys his work. It is mentally challenging enough to hold his attention and interest and it provides him with a good income that allows Nicole and Ian many comforts. However, Ian has also taken the approach that he does not want to be working all the time. He knows of individuals he describes as “chasing the dragon.” These individuals work busy schedules, take little time off, and have acquired a set of “golden handcuffs” in the form of significant financial obligations to expensive homes, cars, and other purchases, while maintaining certain lifestyle expectations for themselves and their families. Ian seeks to avoid these handcuffs; he enjoys having extended periods of time home when he gets them.

The sudden reality of the COVID-19 pandemic for a relationship organized around one partner working away in other provinces added to the tensions experienced by both Nicole and Ian. As a nurse, Nicole appreciates the seriousness of the situation and has considerable concerns regarding travel and the health and safety standards at job sites, camps, and hotels. She wonders if others around Ian are taking the situation seriously and adhering to the public health guidelines. To cope with this, she is working on, again, “going with the flow” and trusting Ian to make his decisions and to appraise the safety of situations based on a sound knowledge of the guidelines.

Ian is also concerned. He has made himself aware of travel guidelines, public health regulations, and safe health and social practices. These can be confusing when travelling between provinces as, for example, Alberta and NL have different regulations governing behaviour. In preparation for his return, Nicole stocks the fridge, cupboards, and freezer with food so that she does not have to make many trips out for needed purchases. She set up a spare room for him for the two weeks he needed to self-isolate on his return. When quarantine is required, he uses a separate bathroom, his clothes are washed separately, they maintain physical distance, and they engage in safe handwashing and sanitizing practices. This distancing can be especially difficult when they have been separated for extended periods of time. However, they do not want to catch or spread the illness between each other or to loved ones.

Their ability to cope with Ian’s life as a long-distance worker has evolved over the years. It has required Ian and Nicole to consider who they are as

individuals and what is important to them as a couple. The road to this increased awareness and commitment to “making it work” has not been easy. There have been arguments and misunderstandings. However, there has always been a consistent, underlying respect for each other’s feelings and concerns. In becoming more understanding and patient, Nicole and Ian have strengthened their relationship further.

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Employer Policies and Practices Regarding Mobile Workers and Their Families: Reactive and Proactive Strategies

Kara A. Arnold and Nora Spinks

Abstract

Findings from a study related to the employers' perspective on leading and promising policies and practices used to manage mobile workers and balance concerns regarding employee productivity, family, and well-being are presented in this chapter. Using information gathered from online surveys and interview(s) conducted with 22 individuals responsible for managing employees who are mobile for work, across diverse organizations, we found that the majority of organizations provide reactive supports (e.g., employee assistance plans, communication tools), while fewer employers offer proactive supports (e.g., flexibility and autonomy in creating schedules on a long-term basis that work for mobile employees, given their family circumstances). While proactive supports would be most effective to allow employees to engage in mobile work and also address their family responsibilities, these types of supports are least likely to be provided according to the organizations that responded to our study. It appears that many of the concerns that employees and their families deal with when employees engage in mobile work are left to the employees alone to navigate. We discuss alternatives that would help employees and their families navigate mobility in productive and healthy ways.

Introduction

For the many employees that commute long distances for work or work for long periods in different geographic locations than where they live, life is very complicated — relationships are deeply complex and managing work–family–life logistics can be profoundly time-consuming (e.g., High et al. 2020; Hughes and Silver 2019). Organizations, leaders, and managers are increasingly called upon to manage employee mobility in ways that sustain and maximize organizational productivity, as well as employee and family well-being. Yet there is very limited research to inform how these situations could be managed for positive outcomes. In this chapter, we report on the findings of a study to understand how human resource (HR) professionals manage mobile workers and balance these interrelated concerns.

Employment-Related Geographical Mobility

Employment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM) involves extended travel, often on a routine basis, to and from work. This travel can range from extended daily commuting to overnight, weekly, seasonal, and more prolonged travel away from their usual place of residence and from one jurisdiction (municipal, provincial, national) to another (e.g., Mertins-Kirkwood 2014). It often includes, or is combined with, extensive and interjurisdictional travel as part of work, as is typical of employment in the airline, transportation, and shipping industries. It is an increasingly pervasive, diverse, but poorly understood aspect of work and social life in Canada and globally (Haan, Walsh, and Neis 2014).

Short-term daily commuting, circular migration, semi-permanent inter-provincial out- and in-migration, and temporary international migration have been studied in Canada and elsewhere. Existing research has shown that while E-RGM was historically male-dominated, it has become increasingly feminized with the expansion of service-sector employment such as home care, health care, and tourism. Research on particular industrial sectors is associated with different types of E-RGM, such as the offshore oil and gas sector and forestry, and a growing body of research exists on mobile workplaces such as those in fisheries, seafaring, trucking, and the airline industry (e.g., Hanson 2014, 2015; Knott 2016; Shan and Neis 2020).

Human Resource Practices for Mobile Workers and Their Families

Very little research has focused on how HR professionals manage E-RGM, and with few exceptions (e.g., Connell and Burgess 2014), the HR management research that has been published related to extended/complex E-RGM has focused predominantly on expatriation (e.g., Andresen, Biemann, and Pattie 2015) and the issues that multinational enterprises (MNEs) may encounter with employees and their families relocating for international assignments (e.g., Bozkurt and Mohr 2011). Very little published work investigates HR practices related to support for other forms of E-RGM, such as when the workplace itself is mobile (e.g., trucking, shipping), and no published work has focused on HR practices in the Canadian context, despite the pervasiveness of E-RGM in Canada (Haan, Walsh, and Neis 2014).

E-RGM impacts family and employee well-being (e.g., Carrington, Hogg, and McIntosh 2011; Ross 2009). It can exacerbate or improve work–life quality issues and can create new child and elder care challenges by extending caregivers’ time away from home and the distance between home and work. Moving to a rural area can provide growing families with access to more suitable lower-cost housing while they retain their urban jobs, but it may also separate them from social supports (such as grandparents) and community programs (such as home care). E-RGM can affect parent–child attachments with potential positive and negative consequences for workers, their children, and their spouses (e.g., Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee 2015; Vincent and Neis 2011).

Research focused on the employee perspective shows that for mobile workers with young children, the risk of disrupted parent–child and other attachments is particularly great when mobility entails high levels of uncertainty and ambiguity, as with dangerous jobs, and is associated with problematic drug and alcohol use, gambling, and other risk practices (e.g., Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee 2015). Prolonged periods of absence lasting several weeks, or months, are generally associated with increased pressure by employers and increased willingness of workers to work non-standard hours: night shifts, split shifts, and extended overtime. These types of schedules have been associated with many problems including stress and fatigue, which may

lead to higher occupational safety risks and delayed recovery on their return home (e.g., Education and Health Standing Committee 2015; Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee 2015).

The challenges of E-RGM can be a motivation for moving permanently to the work site (where feasible) or for giving up E-RGM by changing jobs or retiring to the home community. But not all workers can avail themselves of these options. Therefore, we were interested to understand how organizations are assisting employees and families in dealing with these challenges through HR management practice and policy.

A survey methodology was used to collect descriptive information about HR policies and practices that might help employees and families navigate E-RGM. We used the nascent literature as a basis for the types of policies and practices that were included in the survey. For example: recruitment and selection (realistic job previews and realistic living condition previews; Guo and Al Ariss 2015), training and development, workplace wellness programs (Joyce et al. 2013), and organizational support for different types of international assignments (e.g., Meyskens et al. 2009) and for employees in the form of EAPs (employee assistance plans) were all included in the survey based on previous research. The survey also included open-ended questions and followed up on other themes that have been uncovered during fieldwork in this area such as transportation issues (safety and weather-related policies) and scheduling challenges.

Methods

A cross-sectional anonymous online survey methodology was employed. The survey was housed on Qualtrics and completed electronically with the exception of one participant who completed it as a phone interview. The survey was approximately 10–15 minutes in length and included both open and closed-ended questions.

The initial survey focused on a broad definition of employee mobility and garnered responses from 15 organizations. In an attempt to boost the response rate, we then targeted recruitment to organizations with employees engaged in fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) as a challenging form of mobility for employees and families. This targeted approach garnered a further seven organizational responses.

Measures

Multiple choice and open-ended questions focused on the following areas: (1) profile of the respondent; (2) profile of the organization; (3) transportation; (4) recruitment and selection; (5) shifts and scheduling; (6) health and safety management; (7) support provided to mobile workers and families of mobile workers.

Sample

Participants were individuals with responsibility for managing mobile workers in Canadian organizations. To recruit participants, we used multiple avenues. E-mail recruitment messages were sent to:

1. Canadian HR associations;
2. sector associations (for example: Society of Petroleum Engineers, Canadian Institute for Mines and Metallurgy, etc.: 33 in total);
3. employer lists (we created a list of companies with name and contact in construction [40], trucking and shipping [91], oil and gas [101], mining [40], forestry [86], transportation [10]); and
4. contacts of researchers in the overall project.

A diverse group of organizations responded: 77 per cent were in the private sector; 36 per cent in construction; 23 per cent in oil and gas; 9 per cent in aerospace; and 1 per cent in a variety of other sectors (e.g., hospitality, power transmission, renewable energy, medical devices). In terms of size, 33 per cent had between one and 99 employees; 14 per cent between 100 and 249; 10 per cent between 250 and 499; 5 per cent between 500 and 999, and 38 per cent over 1,000. Of the 18 organizations that reported the percentage of unionized employees, on average 43 per cent of the workforce was unionized. Overall, 73 per cent reported having employees who travel from another province in Canada; 68 per cent reported their employees travel from multiple provinces within Canada; and 50 per cent have employees who travel from outside of Canada. Fifty-seven per cent reported offices in Alberta and Ontario; 43 per cent in Manitoba; 36 per cent in British Columbia and Newfoundland and

Labrador; 21 per cent in Saskatchewan and Quebec; and 7 per cent in the Northwest Territories (one organization).

Results

Challenges

A majority of organizations agreed on the types of challenges that mobile work presented for both their employees and their organizations. As Table 1 demonstrates, work-related fatigue and isolation were the most cited challenges. Loneliness was a close second. Challenges with training (62 per cent) and retention (62 per cent) were also of concern.

In the open-ended questions, transportation, road conditions, flight schedules, anonymity of the environment in work camps, and conflict between permanent residents and those who fly-in/fly-out were also noted as challenges. For example, if an employee needed to report to work on a specific date, the weather could disrupt travel to the work site. As well, flights might not line up with work schedules and this could be a challenge in terms of figuring out when and how to commute to the work site. The employee might need to leave earlier; or local workers might need to stay on.

Table 1. Challenges of Managing a Mobile Workforce

Type of Challenge	Percentage of Sample Reporting Challenge
Work-related fatigue	75%
Isolation	75%
Loneliness	63%
Challenges with training	62%
Challenges with retention	62%

Family and Employee Supports

We asked about supports (policies, programs, and/or practices) offered to mobile workers' family members. Table 2 summarizes the supports provided to families and their prevalence in our sample.

Table 2. Type and Prevalence of Family Supports

Type of Family Support	Percentage of Sample Providing This Support
Emergency family leave	100%
Opportunity to be home for special occasions	78%
Employee and family assistance plan	73%
Short-term schedule flexibility when employees have family members who are ill	67%
Communication tools and supports	57%
Accommodations for employees with family members dealing with longer-term illness	33%
Rotational shiftwork for employees with two or more family members	33%

We also asked participants to indicate what types of supports their organization provided to their employees (these were not necessarily focused on family). Table 3 summarizes these supports and their prevalence in our sample.

Table 3. Type and Prevalence of Employee Supports

Type of Employee Support	Percentage of Sample Providing This Support
Employee assistance plans	100%
Communication tools allowing mobile workers to stay connected with their families while away	86%
Workplace wellness programs	86%
Exercise facilities	71%
Healthy food choices	57%
Supports related to consideration of employees' significant responsibilities (e.g., work schedule, location, child or elder care)	43%
Autonomy to choose when to take time off	43%

In the open-ended questions on the survey, participants were able to add specific policies and practices they employed to assist mobile employees and their families. They mentioned the following additional supports: (1) create an inclusive and home-like environment for those employees engaged in FIFO; (2) guidelines in terms of things like taking off boots at the front door, wearing proper attire in the dining room; (3) creating opportunities for recreation; and (4) buses to take employees into town to interact with community members and take in activities such as golf and eating a meal at a restaurant.

Discussion and Conclusions

These survey findings provide descriptive information about some of the current HR practices that organizations have implemented to manage mobile em-

ployees of many different types. We also add to the literature by reporting on policies and practices employed to assist families of mobile workers. We found that many organizations are cognizant of the challenges of mobile work, both from an employee and organizational perspective, and there is high agreement about these challenges. Yet, few organizations appear to use a strategic, proactive approach to offering support or assistance to mobile employees and their families. Rather, most seem to respond reactively on an individual basis or assume programs not tailored to a mobile labour force will be able to respond to any need (e.g., EAP or personal leave policies).

Some types of supports are more prevalent in our sample than others. In general, more proactive supports, both for families and employees (e.g., the ability to schedule shifts that coincide with family responsibility; autonomy in work schedules; assistance with child care), were less likely to be pursued by a majority of our sample.

Providing this type of descriptive analysis is a contribution to the literature as we currently have no published research addressing how organizational HR policies and practices address mobile workers (other than international executive roles) and their family responsibilities. However, there are limitations to this study. First, we experienced participant recruitment challenges. Despite using multiple, targeted strategies, we still were only able to get a small number of participants. Whether this is a significant issue in terms of interpreting the results is difficult to know. For example, the size of the population of organizations within Canada that have mobile workers is unknown — Statistics Canada simply does not collect such data. Second, no one department or role is responsible for the concerns that arise due to employee mobility. This could be a reason why we had difficulty recruiting participants. We got very few replies through HR associations. Perhaps this is due to organizations not housing this responsibility in the HR department. Third, our study is descriptive. Given the small sample size, we were unable to perform inferential statistical analysis. Future research should investigate these issues in order to recruit a larger sample of organizations and overcome these limitations.

We found that the majority of organizations provide supports that are reactive (e.g., EAPs, communication tools) and classified as tertiary interventions

(e.g., Kelloway et al. 2017) in terms of stress management. These types of supports deal with negative outcomes that may result from the stressors that employees are experiencing, but they do not address the root problems. Many challenges are left to employees and their families to navigate alone. For example, the challenges of transportation and flight schedules are left to employees to sort out in the majority of cases. Most employers reported that they provide short-term relief for employees when they are dealing with family members who require care due to illness, but fewer employers reported providing flexibility and autonomy in creating schedules on a long-term basis that might work for mobile employees given their family circumstances. Unfortunately, it is likely that proactive approaches successfully enabling employees to engage in family responsibilities while also attending to work responsibilities are the types of accommodations more likely to assist with the challenges of balancing mobile work and family life. This may be one of the reasons why relatively few women are engaged in mobile work, as women are more likely to be responsible for family care (e.g., Ci, Walsh, and Haan 2013).

Organizations that wish to provide a progressive approach to managing workers who need to engage in complex/extended E-RGM in such a way as to encourage both employee and family health would do well to consider how they can assist employees in a proactive manner. Enacting policies and practices that would support employees to effectively manage their family and work responsibilities could assist employers to recruit mobile workers, increase job satisfaction, decrease work stress, and create a healthier workplace.

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PART III:

Mobility and Multi-Generational Family and
Community Relationships

“You Do It for Other People”: Social Reproduction Practices Outside the Home among Commuting Workers

Diane Royal

Abstract

This chapter portrays the centrality of extended family and community ties for commuting workers from Bell Island, Newfoundland and Labrador. Despite their daily commutes being lengthened and complicated by frequent ferry delays and cancellations, after they return from their paid jobs, these workers put in “second” and “third shifts” doing unpaid work. Although there is frequent attention to unpaid work in individuals’ own homes, this chapter focuses on the often equally intensive cross-household labour done for extended family and friends or as part of volunteer work for community organizations. Despite the time pressures resulting from lengthy journeys to work, Bell Island commuters’ lively and often passionate narratives prioritize their commitment to supporting others in their island community.

Introduction

Sitting at Nell’s¹ kitchen table in July 2015, I had prepared for our conversation to revolve mostly around her 20-plus years as a working commuter — travelling off of Bell Island five and sometimes six days a week and driving into St. John’s, the capital of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Having been employed in the same job for the duration of her two-decade-long commuting history, Nell was a seasoned and hearty traveller; despite being

prone to seasickness, she still caught one of the first ferries off Bell Island in the dark, early morning hours. But upon returning home on the ferry in the late afternoon much of the rest of the evening was devoted to her uncle, who had recently fallen ill. She had even requested a change in her work schedule to better accommodate caregiving. As she explained: “I get off at 3 o’clock. . . . By the time I get home, get his supper ready for him, get over [to his house], give him his pills, do his eye drops, and pick up his laundry and stuff like that I get home here probably after 5 o’clock. And then I’m gone to bed 9 o’clock!”

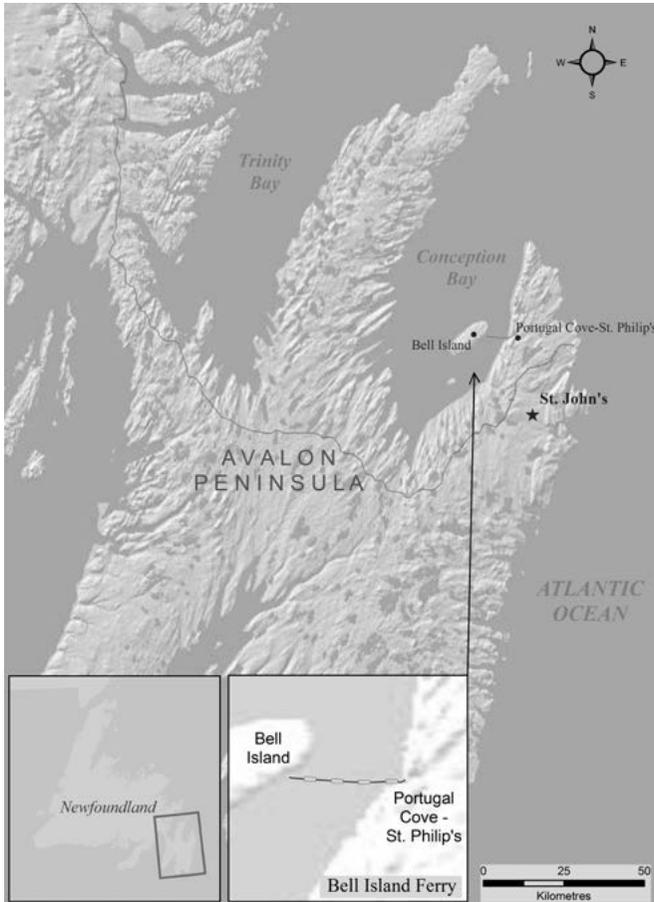


Figure 1. Map of Bell Island, Newfoundland and Labrador. (Cartography by Myron King)

Nell's commitment to caring for others extended beyond a daily evening ritual, as Nell had long opted to work the Saturday shift and designated one weekday for travelling with others to medical and other appointments off-island and back into St. John's. As she told it, this mid-week day was initially set aside to help care for her aging parents, and was now consistently spent with her uncle. Nell's recently semi-retired sister — who had commuted along this same route for over 40 years — now often joined her on the mid-week trips. As they explained, this allowed for a coordinated drop-off at the front entrance of the health clinic while one of them then waited in the car or parked. Together, along with their third on-island sister, they have all long shared in the care of each other, as well as family members across various generations.

Social reproduction is defined as the “reproduction of labour on daily, weekly, and annual temporal scales, as well as through generations” (Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015, 183). Tasks of social reproduction encompass the everyday provisioning practices of food, shelter, clothing, and health care, as well as caregiving, among others (Benzanson and Luxton 2006). As Kate Benzanson and Meg Luxton argue (2006, 6), the effort behind social reproductive tasks “involves a huge and complex amount of labour” (also see Daniels 1987). Feminist scholarship has long called for equal attention to both unwaged reproductive labour and waged employment (Collins and Gimenez 1990). This same issue has been raised more recently within the context of research on work mobilities (Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015) — an area that asserts the centrality of travel for or as a form of work, as part of the “mobility turn” (Cresswell, Dorow, and Roseman 2016).

Although the daily commutes of working Bell Islanders were lengthened and complicated by frequent ferry delays and cancellations producing sometimes extreme “transport disadvantage” (Delbosc and Currie 2011; also see Roseman 2020), it was observed throughout fieldwork that many also put in “second” and “third shifts” (Hochschild and Machung 1989) doing unpaid work both on and off Bell Island, as well as during their “journey to work” (Hanson 1980). Much has been written about unpaid labour at the individual household level (Luxton 1980), whereas this chapter draws on ethnographic fieldwork with working commuters to focus on practices of social reproduction as they extend

into the households of others, as well as into the broader Bell Island community. I show that, despite having paid employment and enduring intensive daily work mobilities, commuters in this context simultaneously maintain long-standing social reproductive practices outside of the home — a form of labour that remains central to “*making community*” (Daniels 1987, 412).

Nell’s social reproductive practices across her decades of commuting range from tasks she has done for members of both her immediate and extended family — as described above — to assistance provided to friends, neighbours, and also lesser known acquaintances. Some of these patterns occurred on Bell Island, including sharing food and assisting in the homes of others with household chores such as cleaning and laundry. But additional unwaged labour patterns emerged as part of her daily off-island journey to work, including fielding information about the boat and road conditions, nearly constant ride-sharing, running errands, and paying bills on behalf of others, as well as dropping off “packages” from the on-island families to hospitalized Bell Islanders temporarily located in St. John’s. “At one point I almost felt like I was a taxi service,” Nell teased. Her amiable approach to this form of work mirrored broader fieldwork experiences on-island, whereby intensive patterns of social reproduction remain historically contextualized and largely normalized among residents — deeply engrained examples of what Arlene Daniels (1987, 403) argues is “invisible work” or work that is otherwise “involved in the social construction of daily life maintenance and development of institutions” that often “disappears from our observations and reckonings when we limit ourselves to the conception work” (Daniels 1987, 403).

The chapter draws on semi-structured and unstructured interviews as well as participant observation with 24 Bell Islanders who relied on the ferry to get to and from their paid employment starting in the 1970s. Those interviewed in 2015 as part of this research were asked to describe patterns of reproduction in both private and public spaces. To get at these patterns I asked participants questions about individual practices such as grocery shopping, child care, ride-sharing, and clearing snow. As more information emerged about such themes in participant observation as well as in initial interviews, I became even more intentional in my approach to record these practices given the extent to

which they were both central and normalized, even “invisible” within commuters’ lives. As Daniels (1987, 413) asserts, examining this form of work allows us to “regard the workers in a new light, appreciating both their effort and their skills.” As such, this chapter emphasizes experiences of balancing intensive commuting alongside social reproduction. Or as Nell so unassumingly put it: “the way I look at it, you know one day I might need help. And I do know, like if I need anything done, people are more than willing to help you and stuff like that. Because, like I said, you do it for other people.”

Practices of Cross-Household and Community Social Reproduction

Practices of cross-household and community social reproduction have long existed on Bell Island, spanning generations and dating back as far as many participants’ memories. Several commuters interviewed as part of this research referred to their on-island upbringings and the ways in which joys and burdens were effectively shared across households, especially among tightly knit extended families. In this way, current practices of social reproduction are continuous with the past. But, as Micaela di Leonardo (1987, 443) asserts, “Maintaining these contacts, this sense of family, takes time, intention, and skill,” and is thus deserving of attention. Raised on Bell Island in the mid-1950s, one long-term commuter reflected on an “inclusiveness,” as she called it, across households among their extended family members. As she explained:

’Cause our grandparents were always there. Every evening, you know after supper. If it wasn’t my grandparents on my dad’s side, my mother’s mother and father. There was always somebody who came. And even if it was just a cup of tea they had, but they always came to see the kids, and to, I guess do any sort of business and whatever was on the go. That kind of thing. But it was so inclusive.

This is an example of di Leonardo’s delineation of “kin work” as part of domestic labour (442), and visiting, “helping out,” and maintaining close bonds across households remains commonplace on Bell Island.

Food Provisioning

At the time of fieldwork, food provisioning was a central aspect of cross-household reproduction among commuting workers. Although many in this sample initially described strategies around picking up groceries on their journey to work — during lunch or on their way back to catch the evening boat — it also became clear that groceries were shared across households, or more often were prepared as meals for others. As described above, Nell described regularly prepared meals for her uncle, but this responsibility is also shared with her two sisters and niece. “So he’s well looked after because someone will always do stuff,” Nell added. “Because lots of days [one of them will call and say] ‘I got fish cooked, he loves fish.’ I said, ‘Go for it. You bring him in fish. That’s alright with me. What I got for him I’ll bring it in another day to him.’” Another former commuter also spoke about these more spontaneous acts of food preparation for her aging parents, noting that she stops in to their place “at least six days a week”:

But for my mom and dad like I always go down and I clean or I do a bit of cookin’ or bakin’. Now my mom still does a lot of cookin’ and bakin’ but sometimes I’ll go down, my dad will say, “Do you know what? I’d love to have apple pie now.” And I’ll say: “Would ya?” “Yes,” he said. I said, “While I’m here now, I’ll make an apple pie for you.” And my mom will come and say, “Now if you had tell me that I would have had that done.” But, you know, you just keep ’em goin’. You clean up. Just the little things, right?

The maintenance of garden spaces also involved sharing tasks across households, usually among kin, and was connected to the past for several commuters (also see Roseman and Royal 2018). A long-term commuter, for example, recalled childhood memories of her family’s shared garden with her grandparents. Decades later, while commuting off-island for work, she helped attend to her father’s garden during evenings in the summer months. She would then meet up with her sisters to “bottle” and preserve the harvest. As she told

it, “Particularly his beets when they’d come up then, he’d say, ‘When they are ready to come we’ll get them bottled.’ I said, ‘You boil them down, we’ll help ya.’ So that’s what he would do. We’d go in [to his house] and preserve them for him.” The preserved beets would then be gifted out to family members for their Christmas Day suppers. Similarly, a male long-term commuter remembered learning how to garden from his father-in-law when he was a newlywed; in semi-retirement, after decades of commuting, he keenly spoke of similarly “going over” to help his adult daughter start her family’s vegetable garden.

Food preparation as part of volunteer work for community organizations on Bell Island was something several commuters described as work they had to “plan ahead.” Late one Monday evening I sat around the kitchen table with three female commuters when our conversation turned into “menu planning” for a Friday potluck at the church, following their regularly scheduled volunteer meeting:

Commuter A: I think most people, well I’m going by myself, like when you come home in the evening you don’t have the energy or the incentive to do anything else. You just prepare for the next day and that’s it. And like I say, come Friday you’re wiped. Saturday or Sunday you might do something, but only if you got to.

Commuter B: That’s like we’re [all] going to a potluck Friday night and I’m saying to myself, “How the hell am I going to arrange this?” 6:00 [p.m.] Friday . . .

Commuter A: What am I going to cook for that? I don’t get home till five.

Commuter B: Yesterday [Sunday] I was cooking so I said “I’ll make some sauce.” It’s easier, then I can do the ground beef on Wednesday, roll out cabbage on Thursday, heat it on Friday and take it with me. Cabbage rolls.

Commuter C: I was thinking about doing wings. BBQ and honey garlic. Fresh wings.

Commuter B: But even something as simple as that now on Friday night when you’re working so you don’t get home till five and six is the meeting and the potluck is after so it takes you a week to get ready for an event Friday night.

Commuter A: I guess I'll have to get stuff Thursday and cook it Thursday night. Maybe I'll get meatballs. Sorry, this is diverging. [All laughing] . . .

Commuter B: We're planning a menu.

Commuter C: This is planning while you're working. This is what we do! [Laughs.] We all volunteer with the church group so we're having the meeting on Friday night, but we're having a potluck so you come from work and you go to your meeting.

Commuter B: But it has to be on your radar because Friday night . . . you can't come [to] Friday night not ready, unless you're going to Costco [on the way home].

Commuter C: And at four [p.m. on Friday] I've got the religion program!

Although this dialogue perhaps exposes a more formal approach to volunteer work than that of kin work, it also demonstrates the tremendous amount of thought and effort required for active participation.

Ride-Sharing

Ride-sharing was another reproductive task that commonly extended across households and into the broader community. For several long-term commuters who participated in organized ride-sharing, it was also an activity connected to their early commuting years in the 1970s and 1980s. One male long-term commuter who frequently transported passengers during this time explained: "They paid for my week going back and forth with gas and so on. That's about it. I didn't ask for much more. I said, 'No, I'd just love to get ya to work.' . . . I'd drop off. It would be a big loop. Where I worked was off Water Street, see? So, I just made a loop and came in and parked by the office. I was in before anyone else." Nell brightly remarked that she has probably hosted a passenger in her car "90 per cent of the time" over her commuting career. Although she did describe driving "regular" passengers to work — one woman commuted with her for five years, for example — Nell also spoke about frequently having someone along with her for short stints or even one-offs. "It be good company and stuff like that," she added. In this way, "the car journey becomes a setting for family, friendship and acquaintanceship . . . transport shifts from being

individualistic to sociable” (Laurier and Lorimer 2012, 209–10; also see Royal and Roseman, 2021).

During fieldwork an even more spontaneous form of ride-sharing was pervasive on Bell Island, especially if you were walking to “catch the boat.” One long-term commuter agreed:

You can’t go for a walk here. Everyone stops you and tries to pick you up. That was one joke we always had. You can’t go for a walk on Bell Island. Everybody stops you. “No, I’m only out for a walk thanks! Bye!” Because everybody knows everybody. You know? . . . If I saw anybody or anybody wanted a run [down to the boat] we always gave ’em one.

As such, practices of ride-sharing have somewhat evolved into less formal arrangements than in the past. Several commuters spoke about being open to “giving a ride” but not wanting to take on regular passengers. As one long-term commuter told it, “Usually I didn’t have any passengers. I didn’t mind giving people a ride, but I didn’t have any full-time passengers because that come with obligations, hey? And I just needed to get to work.” Although this same long-term commuter had described ride-sharing as a passenger in her early commuting years, this shifted once she got her own vehicle.

Clearing Snow

As described elsewhere, Bell Island commuters remain committed to getting to work and home in any weather conditions (Royal and Roseman, 2021). Snow clearing is a necessary part of the morning routine to get off-island in the winter months that is further integrated as a reproductive responsibility. Several commuters helped clear snow for other households, most especially neighbours. One long-term commuter described a scenario where, for years, she and her husband shovelled two driveways on their lane: one for elderly neighbours “in case we need an ambulance,” and the other for a long-distance commuter who sometimes worked outside the province, “while he’s away so we could check on the house.” She then went on to explain a recent shift in these responsibilities

as her across-the-street neighbours — two recently initiated commuters — purchased a truck with a front snowplow to better facilitate their own work mobilities of “catching the boat” well before six in the morning. “He’s done this road and our driveway,” she explained — gesturing to their lane — as well as the other two neighbours’ driveways she normally manages. “[He] was a real saviour when he bought that system.” In previous years, after a snowstorm, this same commuter described opting to walk down their unplowed lane and out to the main road, rather than digging out her car, knowing that another commuter “going to the ferry” was likely to stop and offer her a ride down.

Caregiving

As with Nell’s description of caregiving for her uncle, similar responsibilities were noted by other commuters in my sample — particularly devoted, ongoing commitments to aging or ill parents along with other close family members, most of whom resided on Bell Island. Elder care, in this sense, was framed as being shared between and among siblings or other family members. As one male long-term commuter maintained, “you’re lucky if you got more than one sibling, right? Because if you don’t, you got one person that has to do it all and a lot of the jobs [commuting] doesn’t allow it. And then you have to depend on neighbours and friends, right, that do it.”

Arranging schedules to accommodate for off-island transport to medical and other appointments was another central element to caregiving efforts. Although Bell Island has a medical centre that provides important acute, long-term, palliative, and respite care (Ingram 2013), an off-island commute is required for anything beyond this scope. Several commuters described family members who required regular “treatments” that necessitated near-weekly trips into St. John’s. In these circumstances, commuting workers sometimes leaned on kin for at least “one leg” of the journey, “meeting up” in St. John’s, if their work schedule allowed. Still others, like Nell, arranged to work Saturdays in exchange for a weekday off to cover such routine trips.

Incorporating caregiving as part of the journey to work was less common within the broader sample, although Nell spoke of “dropping packages off to people” who were temporarily hospitalized in St. John’s “and they needed more

clothes.” She also described bringing their “clothes home to be washed” — implying that this practice was just briefly assumed to “help out,” given that she was already “going in that direction.” One long-term commuter described aging parents who had permanently relocated off-island sometime during her decades commuting. As she told it, “First of all they lived in Portugal Cove² and of course I always drop in to see them before I went home. Every single day I always dropped in to see them. . . . I’d always stay for 10 or 15 minutes, then I had to go down and catch the boat. But I’d always drop in.” Her initially brief visits later turned into hours-long intensive caregiving, which continued even when she moved off of Bell Island. “That was more convenient for me now,” she noted.

I’d always go and feed my mother and I remember my brother used to look after dad. Dad was on one floor and mom was on the other. . . . When I’d leave work I’d stop in and I’d feed mom because she was slow at eating and, [of] course, no nurse. . . . I didn’t want anyone to feel that they had to sit there for an hour. Let me do it. I’ll do it. And I kept the patience and that with her. And then Sundays I’d always go up Sundays. I used to do her hair and do her nails. She used to love that. And I’d do that for her. But yes, until she died. We both did it until both of them passed on.

Among female commuters especially, child care was a much-discussed topic. Some commuting workers and their families were also on the receiving end of this form of assistance from kin and neighbours. One young adult commuter worked night shifts in personal home care and, although she and her partner did not receive regular child-care assistance from family members — her male partner was “stay at home” — she maintained that their daughter still enjoyed spending much of her free time with her grandmother, called “Nan.” She commented, “She’s soft like that,” by way of explanation. Over coffee she matter-of-factly explained how she had provided instruction to her daughter on how to check for a pulse and call 911 — even having her conduct a mock call with a friend who is a paramedic. Although this is perhaps a palpable

example of caregiving practices being passed onto the next generation, it is also notable as a skill set developed for her waged labour being translated back into the private sphere for use within the context of caregiving. This commuter asserted that first aid and CPR training should be offered for children on-island — especially given that so many spend much of their time with grandparents.

Several in this sample described regularly commuting to babysit grandchildren in the St. John's area, but that was usually only after exiting work-related mobilities. One young commuter helped enable her grandmother's babysitting practices, however, as she described frequently house and pet sitting for her while her grandmother stayed in St. John's during the week taking care of her cousin's children. As she put it, "So, where she's in town³ all the time, her cat's home by itself I go up and I've got, she's got a three-bedroom house so I have a room set up there and everything." This illustrates the way work commuters' reproductive activities outside of the home can, in turn, facilitate the cross-household practices of others.

Volunteer Work

Above all, this sample of commuters demonstrated an intense willingness to "step in" and "help out" across households on Bell Island. In fact, intensive kin work was a reason cited for not being more active in on-island volunteer work for community organizations — not daily commuting patterns, as I had initially suspected. One former commuter explained:

No. People always ask me, "How come you're not involved? You know you should do that!" And I'm looking at them thinking, "Where do I get the time?" I'm from here to my mom's, right? And like they're in their eighties and to me they're number one. Every spare time that I got, I'm there and I'm helping them. Like I'll go up and do the grass or clean up. I said no, "I don't have time." Now when I'm 65 and I've got nothing else on my plate maybe I'll be able to do that, but I can't do that now.

This was certainly not the experience of all, despite the intensity of work mobilities alongside on-island reproductive activities. Indeed, engagement in volunteer work for community organizations on Bell Island was common in this sample of commuting workers.

Daniels (1987, 408) highlights the importance of considering volunteer work within the construct of unwaged labour outside of the home, maintaining that it also requires “skill and effort” and is part of understanding “how the social fabric of life is constructed.” The perpetual “invisibility” of this work on Bell Island can best be viewed through a trope that began to emerge as research participants would unassertively answer the standard question I asked about their community engagement with something to the effect of “I don’t do much volunteer work,” and then proceed to list extensive board, committee, and other commitments, as well as areas of interest with plans for future involvement. This was the case with Kay,⁴ a long-term commuter who unassumingly prioritized extensive on-island involvement during her commuting years:

Okay. I was President of the Legion. Uh, for a little while I was on the board of the Boys and Girls Club back in the eighties. I started and chaired Lancers for most of the 20 years they were in existence, I was the chair. The breast cancer group, 10 years with them. The Bell Island Breast Cancer Awareness Group. We do big fundraisers in October every year. Like I said, this is our tenth year. . . . We are a very close-knit group. What else did I do? Oh, I’m the secretary on the Co-Op board, which runs the seniors home, and I chair the seniors home board. Where do I get time?

In this way, volunteer work was a more formalized arrangement that required regular time commitments and needed to fit into a commuter’s schedule, as demonstrated in the “menu planning” example in the subsection on food provisioning. Several participants, including Kay, spoke of their volunteer groups adjusting meeting times to better accommodate working commuters. Several men in my sample, in particular, devoted years of time to the Bell Island

Ferry Users Committee, originally named the Commuters Committee. This committee naturally revolved around the intensive work mobilities of their volunteers (also see Roseman 2020).

Moreover, the explicitly pronounced “need” for active and ongoing volunteerism on Bell Island sits in contrast with the more subtle ways in which cross-household practices were produced and reproduced. This contrast was also present in my own fieldwork experiences, as I was quickly invited to join a committee. Community engagement, through volunteer work for community organizations, was viewed with regard by many in this sample as something of great value to the Bell Island community and several commuters spoke passionately and openly about the “cause.” Kay maintained:

Volunteering is such a worthwhile thing to do. I mean it’s . . . I know everybody says it . . . the clichés are worn out, but I get a great deal of satisfaction out of it. Knowing that I did it [during commuting] looking back. I couldn’t do it now. But looking back, you know. So, it’s a good thing to do. And I support other groups. We all do on Bell Island. Like I’ll always support anything that is on the go over here.

Similar to kin work, volunteer work for community organizations was a highly normalized social reproductive practice on Bell Island, with many commuting workers having engaged in this form of work throughout their careers.

Conclusion

This chapter draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2015 with 24 commuters who relied on the ferry to get to and from their paid employment. It draws on their experiences of balancing intensive commuting and social reproduction, starting in the 1970s, to discuss prevalent patterns of this form of labour as it extended outside of the household. These historically contextualized practices of cross-household and community reproduction endure despite intensive daily work-related mobilities exacerbated by long wait times and uncertainties related to ferry repairs, maintenance, and scheduling (also

see Roseman 2020). All commuters in this sample spoke about the general precariousness of travelling on this route — constantly watching the weather, monitoring the schedule due to the state of the boats, and, at times, not being able to come home. The lengthy wait times at either end of the ferry as well as other uncertainties precipitated a common phrase heard on Bell Island with regard to commuting: “working for 12 or 14 hours to only get paid for 8” (also see Roseman 2020, 92).

From food provisioning to ride-sharing, snow clearing, and caregiving, as well as volunteer work within the broader community, this chapter seeks to generate “a keener awareness of the work involved” outside of lengthy commuting days in an effort to further “dignify the labor and engender respect for the workers who do it” (Daniels 1987, 412). Moreover, the narratives of commuting workers in this sample reveal the depth of entanglement between waged and unwaged labour, as well as the ways in which often intense patterns of social reproduction remain normalized, and therefore “invisible.” But as Nell and others demonstrate, these interwoven patterns have long reinforced a deep commitment to one another, as well as to Bell Island as home. As is the case in many small communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, the reproductive work of commuters and others make it possible for people to continue living on the island — even at times bridging key gaps in local services.

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Notes

- 1 A pseudonym.
- 2 The ferry system used by working commuters in this chapter connects Bell Island with the town of Portugal Cove–St. Philip’s on the Newfoundland mainland.
- 3 “In town” is a common way on Bell Island and in other parts of Newfoundland to denote St. John’s and surrounding areas.
- 4 A digital story titled “Stories Would Be Told: The Commuting Career of Kay Coxworthy” (Roseman 2018) can be viewed here: <https://www.onthemovepartnership.ca/results/digital-stories/>.

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“Above Everything Else I Just Want To Be a Real Grandparent”: Examining the Experiences of Grandparents Supporting Families Impacted by Mobile Labour in Atlantic Canada

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Abstract

Until recently, research on interprovincial labour migration in Canada has paid limited attention to the experiences of the family members left behind. The Tale of Two Islands project was a multi-year narrative study that examined how long-distance commuting for work between Cape Breton Island and Prince Edward Island (PEI) and western Canada impacted intergenerational family members, including workers, their spouses and grandparents. As part of this study, conversational interviews were carried out with individual members of 10 intergenerational families in PEI and Cape Breton, including 13 grandparents. Three focus groups, including one with grandmothers ($n = 12$) and another with grandfathers ($n = 5$), were carried out in PEI. This chapter explores the challenges and opportunities experienced by grandparents impacted by long-distance, interprovincial labour migration and their reflections on how this affects their daily lives. Key themes emerging from the interviews and focus groups involving grandparents included the multiple roles and responsibilities grandparents assume as they strive to support their adult children and grandchildren impacted by labour migration; the contrast between their ideal of grandparenting and their lived reality; and the familial and financial pressures they experience. Focus groups included multiple grandparents who have cared for their grandchildren full-time due to parental mental health and addiction problems

often linked to mobile work. Their challenges are highlighted, along with recommended steps to help address these challenges.

Introduction

Circular labour migration is defined as the “repeated migration experiences between an origin and destination involving more than one migration and return” (Hugo 2013, 2). When circular migration occurs for employment, and within the borders of one’s own country, it can be called “internal circular labour migration” (Hugo 2013). Atlantic Canada has a long history of international and internal circular labour migration for seasonal work in construction, agriculture, and other sectors. In recent years, limited local employment opportunities and the introduction of rotational work schedules and employer-assisted mobility between Atlantic Canada and provinces like Alberta have contributed to and somewhat changed circular labour migration patterns between these two parts of Canada. This chapter focuses on two geographical areas in Atlantic Canada with high rates of seasonal and rotational circular migration to Alberta in recent years: Prince Edward Island (PEI) and Cape Breton Island. Limited and often low-paid employment options locally, particularly in rural parts of PEI and Cape Breton, coupled with full-time employment options in the oil and gas sectors of northern Alberta over 5,000 km away, and often employer-assisted travel costs in recent decades, have led thousands of families to accept out-of-province employment opportunities for one or more family members while others stay behind in Cape Breton or PEI. Many mobile workers are young and single, but many others are male partners and parents who leave behind their wives and children; in some cases, both parents travel for work and leave other family members behind, including children in the care of grandparents. As noted in other contributions to this edited collection (Dorow and Jean; Gmelch and Royal; Kelly, Mosquera Garcia, and Dorow; Murray, Skelding, and Barton; Nourpanah and Barber; Ralph; Tejada), the decision to participate in long-distance circular migration stems from a sense of connection to one’s home community, access to extended family and other social support networks, and a desire to not disrupt their families with a permanent move away from their rural communities (Murray, Skelding, and Barton, Chapter 7).

Internal circular labour migration has had both positive and negative impacts on Atlantic Canadian communities. From an economic perspective, there have been financial benefits to these regions, as workers from Alberta send remittances earned through labour migration back to their families. The magnitude of remittances from the Alberta oil and gas industry has been significant. In 2011, workers travelling to Alberta for employment contributed \$1 billion to the Atlantic Canadian economy (Lionais, Murray, and Donatelli 2020). These remittances have helped to sustain rural communities across Atlantic Canada, but a loved one participating in labour migration can be challenging for the family left behind.

There is some limited research on internal circular labour migration, including rotational and seasonal work, in Atlantic Canada and how it is experienced by men in Cape Breton who are leaving for employment (Lionais 2014; Wray 2013) and by the women left behind in PEI (Murray 2014; see also Murray, Skelding, and Barton, Chapter 7). Little is known, however, about how this circular labour migration is experienced by intergenerational family members, especially grandparents. To address this knowledge gap, we conducted a study involving both intergenerational family members with a family member working in northern Alberta and professionals who care for these families across PEI and Cape Breton Island. The Tale of Two Islands project was a multi-pronged, three-year study that took place between 2015 and 2018. It included a systematic literature review, quantitative income and remittances analysis, individual key informant interviews with 11 professionals from various sectors who served and supported labour migration families, intergenerational family interviews, and focus group interviews. Interviewing multiple members of the same intergenerational families awakened us to how the common experience of labour migration influenced perceptions of family roles, cohesion, and evolution among those leaving for employment and those left behind.

To understand how labour migration impacted various members of the family, the Tale of Two Islands' research team worked with 10 families; five on PEI and the other five on Cape Breton Island. A total of 33 intergenerational family interviews were conducted. These interviews were held once, lasted approximately 60 minutes, and included men who were travelling for work

($n = 10$), their female partners ($n = 10$) who remained behind, and extended family members, particularly grandparents ($n = 13$), who were identified as extended family supports. While we did not specify gender when recruiting family members for our study, in all families it was the men travelling for work and their female partners who remained behind. Ten grandmothers and three grandfathers were interviewed. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To further understand the intergenerational experiences of mobile labour, the project team also conducted three focus group interviews on PEI. One of the focus group interviews was with women ($n = 8$) who had a partner participating in mobile work, a second was with grandmothers ($n = 12$), and the third focus group was held with grandfathers ($n = 5$). These interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes each and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The remainder of this chapter presents findings on the role and experiences of grandparents who support their families during periods when an adult child participates in labour migration and travels from PEI and Cape Breton to northern Alberta for employment in the oil and gas sector. Data are derived from 10 individual grandparent interviews and from two grandparent focus groups. We explore why and how grandparents provide support; how they perceive their lives shifting during repeated cycles of family reunification and separation; how they see their caring responsibilities affecting their relationships with the families they are supporting, their friends, and other members of their families. We will also discuss the perceived benefits grandparents derive from this caring work. Particularly revealing in our findings from the two focus groups was how some grandparents had made the transition from being in the role of a grandparent providing supportive care to grandchildren while their adult children engaged in labour migration to becoming a full-time, primary parent to their grandchildren. This discovery was one that we had not anticipated when we entered into these focus groups. These and other focus group findings are presented after the findings from individual grandparent interviews done as part of our intergenerational family conversations.

Findings

Individual Intergenerational Interviews with Grandparents

Individual intergenerational interviews with grandparents focused on how mobile work impacted their family, the benefits and challenges of mobile work, and family roles and responsibilities. The open-ended conversational structure of the interviews invited participants to share their experiences and thoughts of what it is like being a grandparent supporting a family with a loved one working out of province. Three overarching themes emerged from our analysis of these interviews: increased roles and responsibilities; challenges to personal self-care; and relational conflict with other family members. These themes are discussed below using comments made by participants during our conversational interviews. These comments capture the lived experiences as well as the perceptions and challenges faced by these grandparents as they support their families during circular labour migration.

Increased Roles and Responsibilities

Grandparents spoke at length about how challenging it is for the women who are left behind and for their children. Many felt an overwhelming sense of duty or an obligation to always be available to provide support to their grandchildren during times when their adult child or adult child-in-law (usually their son or son-in-law) was working away. Many said their daughters or daughters-in-law had not asked for this support; rather, as the mother/father/grandmother/grandfather they felt compelled to offer it. They talked about feeling a personal sense of duty to lighten the load of their daughter or daughter-in-law, who they realized was under additional stress trying to care for the children at home while also working outside the home in paid employment while their partners worked away. To illustrate, one grandmother said:

I'll just make supper, and then when she gets home then the kids are fed then all she's gotta do is take them home and continue on with her evening. . . . It's me volunteering because I know it will lighten her load a little bit.

Grandparents recognized how their provision of additional support could help alleviate stress on their families. As one grandmother shared:

I think when families have more support it makes their life easier. I think it can be quite hard if you don't have any support. Mentally, you would be overloaded. Not only physically tired, but not having anybody else to support you would be awful.

Another grandmother said that she noticed how tired her daughter-in-law was and how she wanted to be a source of support for her so that things could be easier for her family. Many grandparents noted that they wanted to be there to give a hand to their daughter/daughter-in-law and lessen the load. While seven of the grandparents were still working outside the home themselves, many still helped out with the day-to-day care of the grandchildren, such as by giving nightly baths or meal preparation. Grandmothers often reached out to provide respite for the mother/wife who was at home taking on the full-time responsibilities of the family unit while her partner was away for work. A grandmother explained:

... so at least when there are two of them there you can kind of help each other out. So that's where I think where my role has changed. That sometimes it is like, "OK, I'll run over for an hour. You go for coffee with the girls for a bit." Because I know she needs that.

Many grandparents supported their grandchildren's extracurricular activities, driving them to and from their programs such as hockey and dance classes. All shared a fear that their families would one day make the decision to permanently move away from PEI and take their grandchildren with them making it hard for them, to be part of their lives.

Concerns about Dependence/Codependence and Challenges to Self-Care

Grandparents often shared concerns that their families had come to depend on them, making it hard to say no when asked to help out. Many talked about how stressful it was to constantly feel this sense of obligation and about how these extra demands on their time could lead to feelings of being tired and, for some, resentment as families became more and more dependent on them and the support they provided. A grandmother explained:

I don't think they know how lucky they are to have the help they do. I feel sometimes they really expect their mother to be there no matter what her plans are. She is lucky too because [dad]'s parents are close by. And they will help out as well. That if there is something that I can't do, well, maybe the other grandmother will pick [the child] up.

Some juxtaposed their obligations and current lived realities with what they had imagined retirement and grandparenthood might be like. For example, some shared how they had thought they would travel to the southern United States with their friends for the winters, but their strong sense of duty and obligation to their families disrupted these and other plans. Grandparents felt they could not leave their families for any length of time as long as their loved ones had a family member travelling out of province for work. As a grandparent explained: "I can't go on a trip and I wouldn't dare because that would leave [the mother] stranded." Others shared how they would pass on evening invitations to go out to dinner or to a movie with friends because of their family's reliance on them to drive their grandchild to an after-school activity or to help with nighttime bath and bedtime rituals.

One night I said I was going to say no and take some time for myself like watch a movie, shave my legs, etc. I want to sleep in tomorrow and not have to get up. She started texting and saying do I know who the kid is down the road that I could maybe call to babysit. I'm thinking you're not going

to leave your baby with someone who you don't even know their first name. . . . [The baby] has never had anybody babysit her but me or her other grandparents, and it's very rare her other grandparents babysit.

Grandparents also spoke at length about how their roles and expectations changed when their son/son-in-law returned home from working away. When the family unit was reunited again, grandparents felt like they had permission to help out less. Self-care activities such as medical or personal appointments were planned to occur during these times. A grandmother shared:

I don't have a schedule then and I feel like I want to go out to the mall for a new purse, I can go out and browse around for an hour. Right from the minute my feet hit the floor when he's not home is like I wonder if [mom] or [child] is sick today because if [mom] is sick, I have to go take [child] to daycare and drop her off. If [child] is sick, she needs someone to stay home with her.

Grandparents also used these times to visit with other grandchildren and with other adult children and to socialize with friends. Many spoke about experiencing a sense of relief when their son/son-in-law returned home: "It's like a fifty-pound weight off my shoulder for a few days when he comes home because I know she has someone else to go to for help." In addition to breathing a sigh of relief when their son/son-in-law was home, grandparents also reported feeling exhausted. They are often putting their family members first, before themselves. This can contribute to feelings of exhaustion and, at times, resentment. In the words of three grandparents:

" . . . it is tiring. And the older I am getting it is like, you know, I am tired. Sometimes I just need to have time to myself."

“Sometimes I just want to go home and say I had a really busy day at work. I always do what she needs me to do. I’m just totally exhausted.”

“Nobody cares how I am doing.”

Relational Conflict with Other Family Members

Despite feeling overwhelmed and stressed at times, grandparents appreciated having an opportunity to care for their grandchildren and to be a support for their families. Both grandmothers and grandfathers mentioned the close bond they felt they had been able to establish with their grandchildren because of their supportive role within their families. Caring for them so frequently nurtured their grandparent/grandchild relationship but it could also create tensions in the extended family. With grandparents giving more of their time and energy to one set of grandchildren, this could lead to a decreased amount of time with their other grandchildren. One grandparent recalled her other daughter, who was not involved in labour migration, telling her: “I feel my children are losing out to be with their grandparents. They give more attention to the one that is gone . . .” Another shared that she had an adult son who was jealous of the amount of time she spent with her granddaughter. In response, she would not reveal or would minimize the amount of time that she spent caring for the child. This information was kept “on the down low” in order to keep the peace with other adult children who were not in families with someone travelling out of province for work. She explained:

We have a really special bond for sure and when we go visit the other grandkids it’s really hard not to say that [grandchild] said this or that, right? I don’t want my sons to think that all I talk about is [grandchild]. You have to keep it on the down low. Even my son in Halifax would call and he would ask if she was there all the time. He is like 35 and he is not the jealous type at all, but I know they feel it a little bit.

Grandparents also talked about how they wished they had more time to be available to their other adult children and to spend more alone time with other grandchildren. They did try to spend more time with these other family members when their adult child or son/daughter-in-law was back in the community.

Focus Group Interviews with Grandparents

The focus group discussions with grandmothers and grandfathers explored similar questions to those used to guide the individual conversational interviews, including how mobile work had impacted their families, the benefits and challenges of mobile work, and family roles and responsibilities.

As noted above, during the focus groups we discovered that several grandparents were not only providing support to their children and grandchildren but had, in fact, taken over primary responsibility for their grandchildren. We adopted the term “grand-families” to define this type of family. Grand-families are established for a multitude of reasons, including parental mental health and substance abuse issues, incarceration, long-distance employment separation, early pregnancy, physical disability, and death (Choi, Sprang, and Eslinger 2016; Lefebvre and Rasner 2017; Van Etten and Gautam 2012).

For all participants in our study the formation of their grand-families was in direct response to their adult children’s struggles with mental health and addictions (see also Avery and Novoa, Chapter 13). We acknowledge that mental health and addiction problems can occur at any time and in any location. However, six grandparents participating in our focus group attributed these problems to their adult child or children’s participation in labour migration within the oil and gas sector of northern Alberta. Grandparents indicated they had accepted the responsibilities associated with being both grandparent and primary parent to their grandchildren in order to avoid their placement in the provincial foster care system because both their adult son (or daughter) and the child’s other parent were unable to care for the child. Reasons for this included not having an established relationship to the child, continuing to work out of province, their own struggles with mental health and addiction, being incarcerated, or having died. Grandparents wanted to give their grandchildren the stability of a secure and loving home where they could continue living with

family members who could nurture them and their development. But these combined roles and responsibilities came at a cost to the grandparents.

Their vision of grandparenting and retirement was shattered and replaced with the realities of becoming a parent and full-time caregiver to small children for a second time, while also bearing witness to the family impacts of their adult child/child-in-law's issues with mental health and addictions. Grandparents in this situation struggle with the contrast between their idealized vision of grandparenthood and their actual experience (Martin et al. 2020). One grandmother shared her expectations of being a grandparent and the activities she wished to do with her grandchildren, such as "shopping with nanny or off to the beach for a day or to the park. Little things, but not constant. The fun stuff then sends them back home." Another said she expected to "feed them sweets then send them home with their parents." These are not options in grand-families.

Grandparents in grand-families must constantly function in the dual roles of grandparent and primary parent to their grandchildren. They must also grapple with significant stressors and uncertainties regarding their adult children. While they still love their children, their children's issues with mental health and addictions are why they are unable to care for their children, thus leading to grandparents taking on this additional role. As one of the participants in the focus group revealed, "I want to become a true grandfather. More than anything else." Another grandmother shared, "My kids, I hope to God they turn their lives around so I can just be a grandmother."

All of the grandparents participating in the focus groups talked about the unexpected financial costs and financial strain associated with becoming a grand-family. As one grandparent noted, "you didn't plan on having little children at 57. From whatever money you worked to save or put away, you don't get to retire." They expressed their frustrations over the unexpected financial burden that comes with raising grandchildren and some expressed anger towards their adult children for placing them in a situation where they needed to become parents to their grandchildren. As a result of these increased financial responsibilities, over half of the grandparents participating in our focus group interviews felt like they could not afford to retire and were still

employed in the workforce. As one grandparent offered, “they put this on us, and we are the ones who are financially broke.”

Grand-family grandparents spoke about having to deal with feelings of jealousy from their other grandchildren who questioned why their cousins got to live with their grandparents, whereas their grandparents only visited with them occasionally and for short periods of time. Other adult children resented their siblings for the mental health and addiction issues that led to their parents having to become second-time parents to their nieces or nephews. These feelings of jealousy and resentment were a source of stress and guilt for the grandparents as they struggled to offer support to everyone, albeit in unequal ways.

As with grandparent interviewees, focus group grandparents talked about how most of their peers were now enjoying their role as a grandparent who got to play with and enjoy their grandchildren and then send them home to their parents. They talked about how their peers, who were also grandparents, could not relate to them in their new combined roles as grandparent and full-time parent. Several said their peers would ask them why they chose to be a second-time parent to their grandchildren and would comment on their advanced age and how they should be enjoying their retirement instead of raising children again. One indicated being approached by a grandparent who said, “I don’t know why you are even thinking about doing this because you are past that time in your life. I couldn’t do it if it was my child.” Comments such as these were not seen as supportive but rather as illuminating how little their peers understood about them and their families. Grandparents leading grand-families repeatedly shared that no grandparent would *choose* to raise a grandchild and that they had only accepted the responsibility because their adult child had lost their ability to parent. They felt an obligation to step up for the sake of their families so that their grandchild or grandchildren could continue living with a family member who loved them, and they did so because they did not want the children to be placed into the foster care system.

Discussion

Analysis of the PEI Tale of Two Islands intergenerational conversational and focus group interviews with grandparents highlighted core reflections around

how their lives had been impacted by circular, interprovincial labour migration. Each grandparent's experience was somewhat unique but there were also commonalities in their reflections and experiences. All shared how providing various degrees and types of support to their children's families was both a positive and a challenging experience. All participating grandparents identified challenges related to three overarching themes: increased roles and responsibilities; a struggle between their idealized/anticipated vision of grandparenting and life after retirement and their lived reality; and challenges related to negotiating their relationships with other extended family members.

Grandparents recognized that their support was important to the overall functioning and well-being of their families and had a positive impact on their grandchildren. All shared a similar fear that their families would one day make the decision to permanently move away from PEI and take their grandchildren with them. This was something that no grandparent wished to see happen and was one of the reasons why they sought to lessen the burden of extended labour migration on their daughter/daughter-in-law while their adult son/son-in law worked away.

Grandparents' commitments to their families varied from helping out to, in the most extreme cases, taking financial and personal responsibility for raising their grandchildren through the formation of grand-families. But even those who helped less often felt like they were on call, and some helped out even if they did not always feel like doing so. Participating grandparents believed that even though they were not always thanked, sometimes felt taken-for-granted, were concerned about creating dependency relationships, and were sometimes criticized by other family members and peers for the work they were doing, their support was generally appreciated by their adult children and their grandchildren. The greatest reward they could receive was the strong relationships they were able to build with their grandchildren. They attributed these to the increased time they had spent with these children in the absence of their fathers and sometimes both parents who were away from the home and working out of province or no longer able to care for and support their children. All wondered if they would have ever developed such strong bonds with their grandchildren if their adult child/child-in-law had not made the decision to work out of province.

Conclusion

This chapter presents insights into how grandparents are impacted by the circular and long-distance labour migration of their child or child-in-law. Like other members of families who are left behind during long-distance labour migration, these grandparents adopted additional roles and responsibilities as they strove to offer support to their families, including particularly their daughters/daughters-in-law and grandchildren. They engaged in diverse activities related to helping out and had to adjust to the coming and going of the migrant labourer. A rather surprising finding was the frequency with which participants in our focus groups were grandparents in families dealing with migrant labour who ended up in situations where parents were no longer able to care for and financially support their children due to mental health and drug addiction problems. These grandparents often ended up stepping in to take on the combined role of primary parent and grandparent through the formation of grand-families. These latter situations were particularly challenging.

Functioning in these varied supportive roles meant adapting their level of support depending on whether the adult son/son-in-law was working away or at home again and reunited with the family. In the case of grand-families, it meant adjusting from the role of grandparent to assuming a parental role to their grandchildren. This often led to criticisms from family members and peers around the responsibilities they had assumed.

All grandparents interviewed during the Tale of Two Islands study discussed the general lack of understanding among others in the community (and in some cases, their own families) regarding labour migration and how it can impact families. They noted frequent and often significant challenges in providing additional supports but also noted that the reward of having strong, loving relationships with their grandchildren made the challenges and sacrifices worth the effort. They were often optimistic that the love and support the children received from their grandparents during their childhood would help them succeed when they became adults.

While this research provides new insights into the experiences of grandparents and how they are impacted by circular internal labour migration, findings are somewhat preliminary and more research is needed. The study

shows that policy-makers and practitioners need to pay greater attention to the intergenerational family experience of labour migration. Through increased understanding and collaboration, grandparents, grand-families, and those who serve and support them can work together to discover new opportunities to increase networks of support and resources for families impacted by labour migration. Since this research, some important gains have been achieved in PEI. Some of these gains are discussed in Don Avery's story in Chapter 13.

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A Hidden Chapter in Life We Did Not Expect or Foresee: Sharing the Stories of Grand-Families in Prince Edward Island

Don Avery and Gaby Novoa

Abstract

Over 200 children on Prince Edward Island (PEI) live in grand-families where they are being raised by one or both grandparents. Many pathways lead to the formation of grand-families. This chapter captures Don Avery's conversation with Gaby Novoa about how his family became a grand-family, about the links between mobile work and grand-families in his life and that of others on PEI, and about how these grandparents are organizing to increase grand-family supports in PEI. As an engaged member of his community, with his own family connection to work mobility, and as founder of PEI organizations such as Central East Grandparents Initiative and Building GRAND-Families Inc., Don has observed many of the challenges and commonalities in experiences of these PEI families, family involvement with the mobile workforce, and the grand-family configurations that can result.

Introduction

More than 200 children on Prince Edward Island (PEI) live in grand-families where they are being raised by one or both grandparents. Many pathways lead to the formation of grand-families. These pathways can be cultural or simply by choice, but they can also be through parents' physical and/or mental health issues; addiction or substance abuse issues; incarceration; child neglect, aban-

donment, or abuse; and youthfulness or inexperience of parents. All of these challenges can make it difficult for parents to continue caring for their children and can lead to grandparents stepping in to provide that care (Martin et al. 2020). The disruptions mobile work can have on family lives, sometimes in combination with these other challenges, have played a role in the formation of grand-families in PEI. The reasons grandparents end up caring for their grandchildren in their senior years are manifold, including: their unconditional love for their grandchildren; their recognition that they are the glue keeping their families together; and their hopes for a better future for their grandchild and their adult child.

This chapter shares the lived experience of Don Avery and his ongoing community and advocacy work that aims to strengthen support for and raise awareness about grand-families. In 2016, Don began a social support group for grandparents raising grandchildren in Charlottetown, PEI. This eventually evolved into the Central East Grandparents Initiative (CEGI), which Don established in 2018 with the purpose of advocating to government on behalf of grandparents' rights and need for resources. Don has since gone on to found Building GRAND-Families Inc. and incorporated this organization in August 2020. Since March 2020, he has also been working in partnership with The Vanier Institute of the Family and Dr. Christina Murray, BA, PhD, RN, Associate Professor, Faculty of Nursing, University of Prince Edward Island, on a two-year collaborative research project examining the strengths, challenges, and opportunities facing grand-families on PEI. The collaboration seeks to increase our collective understanding of grand-families and optimize their well-being — in PEI and across Canada. The project builds upon Dr. Murray's Tale of Two Islands research study that examined the experiences of grandparents impacted by mobile work. Please refer to Dr. Murray, Doug Lionais, and Maddie Gallant's "Above Everything Else I Just Want to be a Real Grandparent" (Chapter 12) for further information about this research with grandparents.

As an engaged member of his community — with his own family connection to shifting dynamics resulting from work mobility — and as founder of CEGI and Building GRAND-Families Inc., Don has observed many of

the challenges and commonalities of PEI families, their involvement in the mobile workforce, and the grand-family configurations that are often formed as a result.

Don's Story

Don's dedication to supporting grand-families stems from his experiences as a grandfather and great-grandfather. Don first became a grandparent in 1990, when his daughter gave birth to her son. As his daughter was young and single at the time of giving birth, Don and his wife Catherine took both of them under their wing, living together all in one home and providing financial and emotional support. Don describes this transition in their family arrangement as a natural evolution, a change that was assumed without hesitation.

Don's daughter would later get married and have two more children, and for 10 years her husband travelled back and forth from PEI to work in the oil industry in a remote town in northern Alberta. After nearly a decade of living a life in flux, his daughter relocated to Alberta in search of employment opportunities and to settle their family in one location. Don's grandson, however, wished to finish high school in PEI and, given his close relationship with his grandparents, decided to stay behind and live with them once again. The stability of life with his grandparents and the familiar security of a home he knew well offered his grandson the ability to remain in his school and community.

Unfortunately, the circumstances and conditions of the move out west resulted in challenges for the rest of the family. The town is nearly a nine-hour drive (without traffic) to the closest big city, Edmonton. While the parents were able to obtain work, Don underscores how the town's isolated location was especially difficult for the kids. With their parents busy with work, there was not much opportunity for the kids to keep occupied or engaged, leading to a strain on family well-being and dynamics.

In 2015, Don and Catherine became second-time parents to their great-granddaughter, as their granddaughter, who had moved with her parents to Alberta, was facing mental health and addiction struggles, making her unable to care for her newly born child. His granddaughter had been living with mental health challenges for most of her life, but Don believes that the

meagre conditions of the Alberta town contributed to her substance use, where such behaviour was common.

In 2016, Don first encountered a support group for grandparents in Summerside, PEI, which inspired him to begin another group in his hometown of Charlottetown (and later, led to the creation of CEGI). The stories he heard from others revealed distinct similarities. Many grandparents had children who struggled with mental health and addictions, leading to their assuming the role of “parent” or primary caregiver to the child(ren), which is reflective of larger trends across Canada. In any given year, one in five Canadians experiences a mental illness or addiction issue. Those aged 15 to 24 are the most likely, compared to any other age group, to experience mental illness and/or substance use disorders (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health 2020). This was indeed the case for Don’s granddaughter.

Of the dozen or so families Don has connected with through his community, he estimates that the formation of nearly half of the associated grand-families were linked to their adult children’s experiences of working out of province and, in some cases, permanently moving for work in Alberta. Parental absence for employment and rotational work schedules led to grandparents stepping in to provide care and create a home environment that was stable, reliable, and consistent. Moreover, remote single-industry towns, like the locations many Islanders travel to, are places where workers frequently engage in drinking and drugs, often spurring addictions that would follow them back home. The parents’ adversities created, in turn, the conditions grandparents on PEI report led them to assuming child-care/parenting responsibilities.

Don also notes a lack of financial literacy among parents in the stories he’s heard from families and mobile workers in PEI, especially those who are young, as some move west as young as 17 years old. The motive to move is primarily the opportunity for higher pay. Families adapt to these arrangements with the intention that the employed family member, often the husband or father, will make enough money to send some back home and also accumulate savings. However, many families report that there never seemed to be enough money. Again, a lack of financial literacy and little to do in remote towns seem to contribute to the practice of spending paycheques on alcohol, illicit

substances, and other non-essential purchases such as boats, snowmobiles, and four-wheelers. These spending habits could lead, in turn, to the prolongation of work terms or continued work migration.

While grandparents raising grandchildren is commonly associated with families that experience adversity, Don nevertheless describes this care as extremely rewarding. Don and Catherine were primary caregivers for their great-granddaughter when she was eight months to three years old, from 2015 to 2018. Today, they continue to see her about four times a week and continue to play an active role in supporting her well-being. When faced with the responsibility of parenting again, especially later in life, Don remembers asking himself if he was capable of doing so — mentally, physically, and financially. Even with such concerns looming, Don nevertheless felt that his answer would be “of course,” because of the importance of keeping his grandchildren within the family, and because of his unconditional love for them. Don also speaks to the significance of grandparents and great-grandparents imparting care and nurture, as this will have lasting effects on their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

However, the unique challenges that grand-families face — financial, legal, societal, health, or across family connections — point to the need for formalized supports and formal recognition of their role.

Grandparents in Don’s support groups often cite concerns about foster care intervention. When a parent can no longer care for a child, the current process in PEI involves bringing in child protection services. Don and other grandparents share a common fear that officials will take the kids away from them. The goal of such systems is to find the best possible environment that is the least intrusive or disruptive for the children. It is often the case that keeping children with their grandparents is the best option, but there is, nonetheless, a fear of separation. While there are over 130 grand-families in PEI, Don estimates that closer to 500 grandparents in the province are raising their grandchildren and most are doing this without government interference — or support because of the fear they will lose the children. Moreover, the processes through which grandparents might seek government support for caring for their grandchildren are costly.

Biological parents on PEI have access to free legal advice and services, whereas this aid is not available to grandparents. Furthermore, grandparents

have little to no rights in Canada, making it difficult for them to obtain formal support as primary caregivers. Don estimates he and his wife spent around \$18,000 in court fees alone to advocate for themselves as appropriate guardians for their great-granddaughter. Financial costs are also incurred outside legal contexts and grandparents often talk about spending their retirement or life savings when unexpectedly becoming second-time parents to grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

Sacrifice also extends beyond financial considerations, impacting grandparents' social and family connections, and at times their own health and well-being. Don shared the story of one grandmother who left her seniors' residence to rent an apartment so she could look after her grandchildren. Another grandmother came to a support group celebrating the significance of buying herself a sweater for the first time in months, because most of her money was allocated to the children's needs, such as for their clothing or school supplies. With much focus and emphasis placed on the grandchildren, grandparents in Don's circles also report neglecting their own health — suppressing headaches or forgoing sleep — to care for the children dependent on them.

Grandparents' concerns around their health and aging also pose a unique challenge within grand-families. Grandparents often express fears about what will happen to their grandchildren if and when they are no longer capable of continuing to care for them or are no longer around to do so.

Don shared that, at times, he and other grandparents he knows have intentionally hidden their family situations both from their community and from other family members. As the grandchild becomes central in their lives, there is less time for friends and family functions. Grandparents often experience complex feelings of disappointment, frustration, and, at times, resentment that their child was unable to fulfill a parental responsibility to their own children. When the adult child is dealing with addiction issues, some grandparents talk about fears regarding their possible role in unhealthy enablement. These experiences sometimes result in feelings of shame and can result in grandparents withdrawing from social engagements.

With all these challenges and concerns, Don underscores the significance of support groups like those in Summerside and Charlottetown. He is grateful

for the ways in which his community contributes to upholding and sustaining these groups, for example, by donating the space for grandparents to meet. The exchange of stories and the experiences that are shared within these groups can help grandparents feel less alone in their situations. Finding resonance with other families and fostering a sense of interconnectedness cultivate resilience and greater well-being.

These experiences, personal and shared, contributed to Don's founding of Building GRAND-Families, Inc. The non-profit organization seeks to:

- a) build awareness of grand-families and their unique experiences raising their grandchildren;
- b) build the capacity of community organizations such as schools, clubs, and child-care centres, which focus on or work with children, to recognize and be inclusive of grand-families;
- c) build the competency of professionals, practitioners, and providers such as educators, school guidance counsellors, health-care workers, and mental health therapists around dealing with grand-families; and
- d) build a community around grand-families across PEI, and eventually across Canada.

Looking to the future, Don hopes to see Building GRAND-Families, Inc. become a comprehensive resource through which grandparents and great-grandparents can easily find services, all through one easy point of access. He also wishes to see Building GRAND-Families gain national recognition, with greater support and services for grand-families from coast to coast.

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Grandparents Are Special — A Tribute to Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren

Rolanda Pyle

We gather here to celebrate you for all you've done
For caring for your granddaughter and/or your grandson
You took on this awesome task that no one else could do,
Because no one loves and cares for your grandchild quite like you.
You had the courage to start all over again
Raising your grandchildren at an age when
You thought you might retire, travel and rest
But the children needed caregivers, and they needed the best.

Some came to you in Pampers and most in tears
Needing nurturing and someone who cares.
Others came as toddlers, exploring the world on the run
You couldn't believe this happened — after you thought that you were done.
Still others came at school age, when they needed guidance and direction
Science may have you baffled but you are great at giving affection.
And some of you have teenagers, oh my, what can I say.
Just keep reminding yourself that they won't stay this way.

We know it has not been easy — often quite a heavy load
And there have been many bumps along the road

You've been misunderstood, labelled and denied the services you need
Often criticized and not recognized for your labour or your good deed.
But we are here to honour you who have done so much
To change the lives of children with your special touch
We thank you grandparents: we thank you once, we thank you twice
And know you are appreciated for the rest of your life.

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Young People as Sources of Support and Community-Building in a Context of Mobile Work in Rural NL

Nicole Gerarda Power

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the largely invisible and situated work that young people do in supporting the mobility of others in their family and community. Drawing on focus group discussions with young people and interviews with people delivering programming to youth in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I show that the care work young people do in families and communities, the work they do through their summer employment for towns, and their extracurricular participation in volunteer work and arts and sports programming are examples of practice that binds people in affective relations and makes their communities places worth living in — for themselves and others. Drawing on feminist political economy approaches, I argue that this work maintains the mobility regimes of the oil extraction sector by facilitating the mobility of some and by regenerating community. Given the context where young people’s work is highly exploitative and their movement and access to rural spaces and resources highly constrained, there is a personal cost to their invisible work.

Introduction

Much of the research on young people’s mobility in the context of rural places has focused on out-migration for education or employment. This research has

explained the out-migration of youth in terms of rural deficits (e.g., limited employment and consumption options push young people out of rural places; see Alston 2004; Argent and Walmsley 2008; Drozdowski 2008), or as a consequence of a discursive privileging of urban and suburban spaces (Nairn, Panelli, and McCormack 2003; NíLaoire 2001). Other research has shown how young people's migration trajectories are shaped differently and unevenly by gender, class, and other social inequalities. For example, the kinds of employment typically found in rural regions (e.g., jobs in primary industries such as fishing and forestry, and in industrial resource extraction and processing) tend to privilege men and are not attractive or are largely unavailable to young women (see Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006). A third stream of research focuses on the meanings and emotions associated with staying and leaving rural places, which are often complex and ambivalent. For example, researchers in Tasmania (Easthope and Gabriel 2008), Ireland (NíLaoire 2000), and Newfoundland and Labrador (Power 2017) have shown how out-migration has become associated with success, making it very difficult for young people to stay, even when they have strong attachments to place.

In this paper I shift the focus away from the youth out-migration problematic and towards the work young people do in (re)making their rural communities and supporting the mobility of others in their family and community. This differs from a focus in the literature on the (usually negative) consequences of parental mobility on children and youth, a prevalent theme in the literature on employment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM) and families (for a review of the literature on E-RGM, including the literature on families and children, see Temple Newhook 2011). I draw on focus group discussions with young people in communities on the island of Newfoundland to argue that they, like everyone else, are embedded in relations with others in their community, relations that support others (including but not only the mobility of others), and practices of community-building. This shift requires a decentering of questions oriented towards anticipated, future mobilities of young people in order to bring into view young people's lives in the present. To be clear, I am not attempting to set up a categorical difference between those who leave and those who stay. I draw on the experiences of young people who

take up diverse positions in relation to mobility — some are engaged in mobility for work, others expect or aspire to move, others describe being “stuck” at home, while others are carefully plotting out ways to stay or come home. Instead, the aim is to bring into view the largely invisible and situated work that young people do in (re)making their communities and, in turn, making their communities places worth living — for themselves and others — in a context where “working away” is normalized and pervasive (Barber and Breslin 2020). In doing so, I hope to counter the prevailing discourse that values young people primarily in terms of their potentiality as individualized economic actors (Power 2017). This economic valuation is often found in government and policy discussions that are trying to understand the “problem” of out-migration and to develop strategies to encourage young people to think of rural and coastal communities as places to live and work (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2015a; Skills Task Force 2007). To be fair, policy-makers’ and community leaders’ concerns about the negative impacts of out-migration of youth on rural places are not without merit (Simms and Greenwood 2015; Simms and Ward 2017). However, as I have argued elsewhere, “to reduce the sustainability of rural places to youth out-migration without examining the ways in which young people’s mobilities are mediated by the social, policy and cultural contexts risks a kind of moralizing that serves, intentionally or not, particular neo-liberal and capitalist agendas” (Power 2017, 455).

In shifting attention to the work young people do to support their community, I am drawing on and extending scholarship in the feminist political economy (FPE) tradition. FPE is “an approach that understands social difference — including, but not limited to, gender — to be integral to the functioning of political-economic systems and knowledge production processes. FPE foregrounds how capitalism is reproduced through logics and practices that create and marshal difference into its categories of value” (Werner et al. 2017, 2). One of the key insights of FPE is that capital accumulation depends on women’s subsistence and social reproductive work that remains largely invisible, uncounted, and unpaid. This insight, in turn, undermines the capitalist and neo-liberal ideology that the value of an individual’s work is determined and compensated through the free market. Among others, Kathi Weeks (2011) takes

a broad definition of social reproduction to include “the production of forms of social cooperation on which accumulation depends or, alternatively, as the rest of life beyond work that capital seeks continually to harness to its times, spaces, rhythms, purposes, and values” (Weeks 2011, 29). This definition captures the current political economy of precarious work whereby people may be engaged in a patchwork of activities (e.g., paid, barter, informal, illegal, etc.) to make a living (Smith 2016, 2086), as well as the temporal and spatial aspects associated with acquiring and coordinating work. It brings into view the reach of the economy into most aspects of our lives, as people are left to figure out just how to make a living and a life.

Recently, FPE scholars have considered specifically how mobility for employment is implicated in capitalist social relations. Roseman et al. (2015, 178) have extended FPE theory to account for an “examination of the relationship between employment-related geographical mobility and the relative mobilities and immobilities of workers and their family members, by considering the unpaid as well as the paid labour associated with social reproduction.” E-RGM refers to the full range of spatial and temporal movements related to employment.

In their work on the mobile oil workers in Alberta’s oil sands, including the camp workers who do the cooking and housekeeping, Dorow and Mandizadza (2018) document the stretching out between camp and home of gendered care work required to sustain the mobility regime of oil production. Focusing on the Alberta-bound young workers from the island of Newfoundland, Power and Norman (2019) show how the industrial resource extraction sector relies on a workforce whose mobility is made possible through women’s unpaid reproductive work, as well as through a local gender order that readies young men for manual and blue-collar work. Thinking through how paid and unpaid work are related and spatialized is important for understanding the political economy of industries that rely on a mobile workforce, connections that may be difficult to see if we look only at the worker who is travelling.

I contribute to this discussion by considering how the relationship between mobility/immobility of others and young people’s often invisible and unpaid or underpaid work subsidizes and sustains capitalist accumulation. Just as FPE scholars have argued that, like class, gender is a capitalist form of differentiation

(Smith 2016, 2087), age differentiates who does what and for whom, with youth enrolled in exploitative economic relations that benefit (some) adults (see Côté 2014). And, of course, youth are diverse, meaning the specificity of exploitative relations varies among youth through intersecting inequalities. In this chapter, I focus on how the not-so-visible work of youth in rural communities on the island of Newfoundland maintains broader capitalist E-RGM regimes by supporting the mobility/immobility of others and engaging in work that creates community to which mobile workers return. The work of maintaining and recreating community is an essential, yet often invisible, part of the capitalist mobility regime. This work includes unpaid care and emotional work as mothers, sisters, and relatives, and is in many ways highly gendered, but it also includes the poorly paid work designated for youth, for example, summer jobs repairing community spaces such as churches and trails, and child-minding through organized recreational or sport activities. Young people's "transitional" or liminal status is used to justify this kind of exploitation, in turn naturalizing it and devaluing their economic contributions (Tannock 2001). At the same time, this work is regenerative and binds people in affective communities (Ahmed 2004).

I draw on data from my research with the On the Move Partnership (OTM) that focused primarily on the educational and employment-related geographical mobilities of young people in the province. These data include transcripts from nine focus groups with youth ($n = 72$) who participated in educational and employment programming and services delivered by the Community Youth Network (CYN), a provincially funded program; interviews with five CYN executive directors; and 13 focus groups with youth ($n = 89$) enrolled in skilled trade apprenticeship programs in the province. Here, I focus primarily on conversations with young people between the ages of 16 and 24, though it should be noted that some participants in the focus groups were older, especially in focus groups with students in apprenticeship programs.

The Context of Mobility in Young People's Lives

It is not an overstatement to say that E-RGM is pervasive in the lives of the young people who participated in this research. It was common for young people to have family and friends move back and forth across provinces or

commute long distances intra-provincially for work — indeed, some of the youth themselves have moved for work, especially for periods in the summertime. Extended/complex E-RGM was described as “the reality for a lot of people,” as one youth put it, in the communities where they lived. To say that mobility is “the reality” isn’t just a description of facts and numbers; there’s a sort of normativity being expressed here, a general expectation that young people would leave — perhaps should leave — even if temporarily, at a certain age. As one youth put it, “Not many people stay around here when they get older.” In his work on young people’s educational mobilities in Atlantic Canada, Michael Corbett (2005) made a similar observation that moving for education or employment is a “migration imperative” for young people. While young people certainly expressed their own biographies in relation to this imperative, when discussing E-RGM in their communities, young participants overwhelmingly referred to “the turnaround.” Here, the archetypical turnaround refers to the fly-in/fly-out arrangements associated with Alberta’s oil extraction sector. Typically, men who work in the skilled trades fly to Alberta for work, stay for a period of time living in camps on the worksite, and then fly home in their time off. Turnaround schedules vary, with some working two weeks on and one week off; others 10 days on and four days off, and so on. Other researchers (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Storey 2016) have noted how this new mobile work arrangement has largely replaced the company town model in resource extraction in Canada and elsewhere.

Mobility for work is not a new phenomenon in the province, but a shift in the province’s economy from a reliance on wild fisheries to greater reliance on resource extraction in the oil and gas, construction, and mining sectors is shaping current patterns of workforce mobility within and across provinces. According to an OTM report, in 2002, 17,505 people from the province were engaged in interjurisdictional employment, rising to 25,645 in 2008 and falling to 14,320 in 2016 (Neil and Neis 2020, iii). Analyzing data covering the years 2006 to 2011 from the Canadian Employer–Employee Dynamics Database, Lionais et al. (2020) demonstrate that Atlantic Canada, in particular Newfoundland and Labrador and Cape Breton, was heavily dependent on mobile work in Alberta’s construction and oil and gas extraction and supportive in-

dustries. Importantly, they show that an increasing percentage of these mobile workers' earnings depend on this work, meaning that their work in Alberta is the main employment, not supplemented by seasonal work in their home province. This dependency, they argue, is a response in part to weak labour markets in the Atlantic region. I would add that the move to resource extraction and large industrial projects in Newfoundland and Labrador, and along with that, the training of a skilled labour force for these projects, readied a workforce for intra- and interprovincial mobility.

Acting on the findings from the Skills Task Force (2007), the NL government invested heavily in recruitment of young people and members of equity-seeking groups (e.g., women, Indigenous peoples) into skilled trades training through a number of initiatives, and across different governments, including the Williams government's Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy (YRAS) (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2009), and later, the Population Growth Strategy (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). To accommodate demand for on-the-job apprentice training, the government entered into a number of agreements that facilitate the interprovincial mobility of skilled trades apprentices, including the Provincial-Territorial Apprentice Mobility protocol and the Atlantic Apprentice Mobility Memorandum of Understanding (Department of Immigration, Skills and Labour 2020). These sorts of policies facilitate interprovincial mobility of individual skilled trades apprentices and, in so doing, hide from view the complex of relations that enable or constrain the movement of people. Regimes of mobility are inherently relational, accomplished by relying on the often unrecognized work of others (Cresswell, Dorow, and Roseman 2016; Schiller and Salazar 2013), including that of young people.

For students enrolled in skilled trades programs, mobility is built into the structure of apprenticeship training. After the first block of in-class coursework, students must locate an employer who will provide on-the-job training. When apprentices have completed the required number of hours on the job, they return to campus for another block of in-class instruction, usually for four to six weeks. Depending on the trade, this pattern repeats over the course of a few years until all requirements have been met to write a qualifying exam. This

structure means that apprentices move around, commuting sometimes long distances from home to school or from home to work, or temporarily relocating within the province for school, then commuting or moving again at the end of the block for employment. Youth who participated in focus groups relied on support from family, partners, and friends to help coordinate and manage educational and employment-related mobilities. Take the case of housing. Over the duration of their apprenticeship programs, young apprentices described living for periods of time with parents or partners, in rental properties with classmates, and on the couches of friends and family while working away. For those apprentices with young children, mobility depended on the care work of others, usually wives, girlfriends, and mothers, at home. The mobility of the apprentice structure simultaneously made it difficult for young women apprentices with children to complete their on-the-job training, which required working long hours — often away from home — for extended periods of time. In other words, the mobility structure of apprenticeships depends on gendered divisions of labour that ensure the mobile worker is freed from care and domestic work, thereby reproducing male dominance in the skilled trades (see Power and Norman 2019).

In describing patterns of mobility in their families and communities, young people in the focus groups described the gendered character of long-distance commuting, especially the turnaround. Below is a typical extract from one of the focus groups where participants are talking among themselves about gender and working away:

- Whose moms work away? I don't think any moms work away.
- No, I don't even know of anyone.
- No, I never.
- I don't know anybody whose mom works away.

Young People's Work Supporting Family and Community in the Context of Mobility

In families where one parent (primarily a father) is absent for extended periods of time, it is not surprising that youth take on care work and, again, this work

is gendered. Young women and girls engage in periodic babysitting for family and others in their community, especially in cases where a second parent, typically a mother, is employed locally. Though not widespread, young people also occasionally took on primary care responsibilities for siblings, in turn enabling a parent or parents to engage in mobile work.

Janelle: Growing up in Newfoundland in general, specifically it's really hard to get jobs, depending what you're doing and what you like graduated and went to school and done. But I know growing up, my family had a lot of trouble getting work my whole life. And my mom last year moved to Alberta and got work there and she's been there ever since, and that's mostly . . .

Interviewer: What's she doing?

Janelle: I actually am not 100 per cent sure.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Janelle: But she's up there now and been there for a while, and that's another reason that I'm home because my little brother is here and I look after him most of the time.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Janelle: But . . . so yeah, and my dad, he's on disability claim at the moment. So it's been tough. So yeah, it's kind of hard for job-wise, and a lot of people do leave.

This case is unusual in that it is Janelle's mother who is mobile. Janelle points to an inhospitable local labour market ("my family had a lot of trouble getting work my whole life") as the context for her mother's move to Alberta, and her father is unable to work because he is receiving disability insurance. In her mother's absence, Janelle has taken on primary responsibility for the care of her younger brother. The mobility of her mother is related to Janelle's immobility, which in turn becomes her way of explaining why she remains in her community ("that's another reason that I'm home"). And it may be *because* her mother (and not her father) is mobile that she became primarily responsible

for taking care of her brother. Her responsibility, in part, reflects the intersection of the gender ordering of care work and a lack of alternative child-care services in her community. In her case, though, it is not clear that even if paid services were available the family could afford them.

The lack of reliable and affordable child-care services in rural communities means that most of the child care in communities that rely on mobile work is unpaid and performed by mothers, or is informally paid, underpaid, or unpaid, done by other women and girls in the community. Another, though intermittent form of child-minding is provided by youth hired by town councils and municipalities as part of government-funded summer employment programs (e.g., Canada Summer Jobs program). Typically, these summer employment programs provide jobs to youth in their last year or two of high school. Government-funded summer jobs are the main source of employment for youth in many of the smaller towns. Across the focus groups, one of the most popular kinds of employment included running recreational and arts programming for children in the community. One of the focus group participants explains involvement in the recreational program this way, “You just watch kids and do activities with them.” Another young person explained:

. . . I run like the rec program . . . so I had like the younger kids and like we did a lot of outdoor stuff. So like we did T-ball and that kind of thing. And basically, yeah, you’re just kind of spending time with the kids, making sure they’re getting involved.

Other government-funded jobs included maintaining recreational and municipal spaces in the community, for example, by mowing lawns, painting fences, and so on. As one focus group participant described: “I worked with the town for the past three summers and basically we just went around like the property and we used to cut grass and made it look nice or whatever, for like tourists I guess.” Others were hired to help organize and run community festivals and other annual events:

Yeah, special events is like they hire so many students every year because like we have our [community name] like festival in the summer, and like everything, like we do like certain things throughout the summer. So they hire students to like set up and like plan those events. . . . they would be there like on the wharf setting up the booths and they had to serve food and that kind of thing. Like just pretty much make sure everything gets done for the festival.

In addition to locals, these annual community events attract mobile workers, former residents, and tourists who arrange their schedules and plan vacation time in order to attend. Community festivals and celebrations are characterized by a sense of excitement and fun, and are a time for families and friends to get together to eat, drink, dance, and play. Through their summer work, youth help to maintain and support built and social community infrastructure by making the town “look nice” and creating social spaces of festival and celebration. These are situated, place-based practices (e.g., “on the wharf”) that are constitutive of a community’s affective relations. Sara Ahmed (2004, 119) writes:

[E]motions do things, and they align individuals with communities — or bodily space with social space — through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective.

We may think of the summer work that young people do as part of an affective economy that facilitates (re)connection among people and to place. Yet, at the same time, this work is devalued; it is temporary, low-paid, and in some cases, paid with tuition vouchers. By design, this work is liminal, targeting young people in transition, with no commitment beyond the summer season.

Another example of community-building that focus group participants described is their involvement in extracurricular activities organized through their school or the Community Youth Network (CYN). Young people participated in school sports programs, as well as arts and theatre programs and volunteering initiatives (e.g., at the local food bank) as part of their involvement with the CYN. In fact, participants identified the school and CYN as important and in some cases the only built infrastructure and social spaces designated for young people in community:

That's what the CYN does, though. It works together with AY [Allied Youth] and like the school too. Like the CYN does different activities to try to reach out to youth throughout the town. Like I know they're doing an arts program at the school now on Wednesdays, and so . . . I'm pretty sure a lot of us are going to be there, but like it's also targeted towards the entire community, like the students of the community.

To be clear, institutional programming of the kind organized by schools and the CYN entails a good measure of surveillance and containment of young people's movements, or to put it another way, programming is in part designed to keep young people busy and out of trouble. In fact, contrary to the trope that rurality is a space of freedom, innocence, and happiness for children and youth, research suggests that their experience is constrained severely by adult-youth/child power relations, translating into heavy surveillance of their use of rural space (Jones 2007; Norman et al. 2011). At the same time, these kinds of programming can and do offer space for young people to meaningfully participate in community. Sport and art are constitutive of the relations that connect (some) young people and others in the community by participating in shared affective spaces, though these spaces are unevenly experienced and occupied. For example, participants talked about how older youth aged out of programming, and how it was easier for youth from families earning higher incomes to afford to participate in some costly programs (e.g., hockey).

Concluding Thoughts

One of my objectives in shining light on the often unrecognized and devalued work that youth do as part of families and communities is to shift the discussion away from narratives about the problem of youth out-migration and youth primarily as recipients rather than as agents of reproductive work. Consequently, we can consider more fully the different ways young people are positioned in relation to mobility. In the context of Newfoundland and Labrador, where the experience of “working away” and, in particular, the turnaround associated with resource extraction industries, are normalized, if not normative, it is imperative that we investigate how such arrangements are produced and maintained. I have argued here that the care work young people do in families and communities, the work they do through their summer employment for towns, and their extracurricular participation in volunteer work and arts and sports programming are examples of making home and community. Specifically, the not-so-visible work of youth in rural NL communities maintains the mobility regimes of Alberta’s oil extraction sector through social reproduction work that facilitates the mobility of some. This includes the work that makes the communities to which mobile workers return. In this way, their work is linked to the capitalist mobility regime.

I do not wish to overstate my case. While the work I have described binds people in affective communities (Ahmed 2004), it is highly constrained, operating in a context where young people’s work is exploitative in its pay and precarious structure. And their interests are marginalized. All of these factors come with a personal cost. Governments and municipalities have not prioritized investments in the development of community spaces or infrastructure that would benefit youth and others, such as public transit and affordable housing, and rural schools continue to be under-resourced and understaffed. Focus group participants articulated concerns about cuts to teaching staff and counsellors in their school and the difficulties these cuts posed to course delivery and supporting extracurricular programming. Extractive industries in this province and elsewhere have few to no obligations to the communities from which they draw their labour force. And, while mobile employment in these industries may benefit individual families, it does little to support the

reproductive work of families and communities. For some youth, especially young people who take up local employment to contribute to the household income, there are individual costs:

. . . being someone who works 50 hours biweekly, like went to school, went home, did their homework, volunteered, up 'til two a.m. most nights, there was definitely times where I was just staying home crying because I couldn't go to school.

This comment reminds me of a proposal that feminist, anti-work scholar Kathi Weeks (2011, 13) has put forward. She argues that it isn't more work that we need. Instead, we need more "time and money necessary to have a life outside work." She offers a way forward, that is, to ask "questions about the command and control over the spaces and times of life, and [to seek] the freedom to participate in shaping the terms of what collectively we can do and what together we might become" (23). In the context of understanding the political economy of extractive industries this means asking questions about how paid and unpaid work are related and spatialized to bring into view the reach of the economy into our lives, and how this reach is achieved through mobility.

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Kin and Kilometres: Multi-Generational Family Relationships in Long-Distance Couples

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Abstract

This chapter presents the findings of a qualitative study examining multi-generational family relationships in couples in long-distance relationships (LDRs), in which one partner is living away from the primary residence due to the demands of work, school, and/or family caregiving. Six couples were interviewed, all of whom had been in a voluntary LDR for at least one year, experienced at least one separation/reunification cycle, and lived together as a proximal couple for at least one year prior to becoming long-distance. Multi-generational patterns were identified in work-related travel, work ethic, independence, and commitment to the family of origin. Participants identified how the LDR allowed them to give to their family through caregiving, and that families provided safety and support while they were apart from their partners. Couples identified a recursive interaction of trust and commitment with each other prior to the LDR that strengthened during the experience, and saw the LDR as demonstrating resilience.

Introduction

I was raised in a family where my parents and both sets of grandparents engaged in long-distance relationships (LDRs), defined as situations where committed relational partners live separately due to work, education, or family responsi-

bilities (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Sahlstein 2000). My father and both grandfathers travelled extensively for their work but were typically home on weekends and holidays. My maternal grandmother was raised in a railroading family, with her father living for weeks on the train. I have been in an LDR with my husband for over 25 years. I am the traveller, working my dream job and living 800 kilometres from my husband, who remains in our primary residence with his steady job. We see each other roughly four times a year.

In my work as a marriage and family therapist (MFT), and formerly as an elementary school counsellor, I worked in rural areas with families where one parent, usually the father but not always, lived and worked away from the home due to work or education responsibilities, typically as long-haul truckers, railroaders, custom crop harvesters, and graduate students. I recognized in these families the same multi-generational family relational patterns and beliefs about work ethic, commitment to family, and education (McGoldrick and Gerson 1985) that I saw in my own immediate and extended family. To me, these LDR families were stable and effective, creatively balancing strong commitments to both work and home.



Figure 1. Route 66. (Photograph by xomiele, licensed with CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)

Experiences with colleagues and as a therapy client myself taught me, however, that not all professionals view LDRs as “healthy.” I thus sought a professional understanding of LDRs to balance my admittedly positively slanted perspective through an exploratory study informed by looking at these families through the lens of transgenerational (TG) theory (Roberto 1992; Roberto-Forman 2002). TG theory focuses on the same “intergenerational (long-term, slow-changing) family processes” (Roberto-Forman 2002, 118–19) that I saw in my own family, highlighting the strategies families use to cope with stressors and balance the opposing needs of connectedness and independence in relationships that LDRs literally embody (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Sahlstein 2000). This balance must be calibrated not just with the intimate partner, but with the family of origin (parents, children, and/or siblings) and social support networks, reflecting another principle of TG theory (Roberto 1992; Roberto-Forman 2002). Couples in LDRs find the struggle to achieve this balance becomes overt in their relationship (Gerstel and Gross 1984; Sahlstein 2000) even before they initiate an LDR, because the decision to live separately some of the time and to commute is made as a couple and family, not as individuals (Anderson 1992; Anderson and Spruill 1993; Green, Hogarth, and Shackleton 1999).

In preparing this study, I saw that previous studies of LDRs, with few exceptions (e.g., Forsyth and Gauthier 1991; Forsyth and Gramling 1987, 1990), had focused on individuals rather than on relationships. Studies of relationships between LDR couples and their families are important to fully understand the experience (Bergen 2006). Stafford (2004, 38) comments that having an interest in what helps partners in “sustaining LDRs and in coping with the effects of separations . . . leads directly to consideration of community.” Families of LDR partners are a key part of that community.

The Study

In this study, I interviewed couples in voluntary LDRs where “no higher authority, such as the government or one’s parents, dictates their separations” (Stafford 2005, 42). This distinction is necessary because involuntary LDRs, such as separations for military service (Diamond, Hicks, and Otter-Henderson 2008;

Guldner 1992; Vormbrock 1993), incarceration, relational conflict (Guldner 1992), or deportation are considered to have an element of crisis or threat that may impact research findings.

I sought couples who had a deep understanding of the LDR experience (Patton 2002) and focused on those who were: (a) actively living in an LDR during the study; (b) had experienced at least one separation–reunion cycle; and (c) had lived as a proximal couple for at least one year prior to the LDR. Participants were recruited via social media sites, professional networks, and listservs used by graduate students, because LDRs are common among graduate students (Guldner 1992). Six LDR couples completed two different conjoint interviews, done over the Internet so partners could be interviewed together. Topics focused on how couples saw their families adapting to their LDR, and how they viewed interactions of work, distance, and family dynamics over multiple generations.

The Couples

All couples were Caucasian and heterosexual. Four were married; two had plans to marry. Only one couple had a firm date for the end of their current LDR, but even for them, future LDRs were likely. This sample shares the long-standing limitations common to much LDR research, in which participants are overwhelmingly Caucasian, heterosexual, and white-collar professionals (Gerstel and Gross 1982) — although the present Canadian collection focuses on tradespeople and common labourers. All names are pseudonyms.

Ed & Elaine

In their mid-fifties, Ed and Elaine had been married 33 years with two adult children and one grandchild at the time of the interview. They had lived multiple LDRs during the past 10–12 years, with the current stint lasting one and a half years. Ed worked in Europe, and Elaine resided in their primary residence in the US Midwest, where she was a caregiver for her grandchild and elderly father. The LDRs had allowed Ed to maintain seniority in a volatile industry and Elaine to be with family. Separated by over 11,000 kilometres and 14 hours of flying time, they tried to visit every six to eight weeks, but

Elaine's caregiving responsibilities limited their options. Elaine had no family history of LDRs. Ed's father had been an insurance adjustor in the rural US Midwest who travelled during the week but was home weekends. Both had strong ties to the home location.

Gabriel & Galina

Gabriel (early thirties) and Galina (late twenties), together for seven years, had spent the previous three years in an LDR. They had no children and planned to marry. Galina lived in the Middle East with her family and worked as an architect. Gabriel lived in the western US and was a graduate student working as a translator. They were separated due to the US naturalization process for Gabriel. Living 12,000 kilometres and 18–20 twenty hours' flying time apart, they met halfway between, in a third country, approximately once a year for two weeks. Their future location was uncertain due to Gabriel's immigration status and ongoing instability in Galina's country. Both partners had multi-generational family histories of LDRs related to immigration, economic instability, genocide, and war.

Ursula & Umberto

Both partners were educators in their early sixties in the northeastern US at the time of the interview. Married 44 years, they were in their fifth year as an LDR couple. They had three adult children and eight grandchildren, who all lived close to Ursula. Umberto commuted three hours one way to the city where he worked during the week, returning home on weekends and holidays. Ursula remained in the primary residence. The LDR arose when Umberto went to graduate school and changed careers after a devastating layoff. Ursula remained in their home so that she could be close to family and continue working. Ursula had no history of LDRs or mobility in her family and was the only one in her family to leave her hometown. Umberto's family relocated frequently so his father could climb the corporate ladder. He followed suit, and he and Ursula had relocated multiple times, but had not had LDRs in the past.

Monty & Melissa

This couple in their mid-twenties had been in an LDR for two of their four years together and had plans to marry. Melanie was a graduate student and Monty worked in advertising. They resided in the northeastern US and had no children. They met in college and started an LDR because Monty couldn't find work in their university town after graduation while Melanie continued her schooling. He found work in his hometown and returned there to live with his parents until Melanie finished school. The couple was separated by five hours' driving time on expensive toll roads with difficult winter travel conditions. They tried to visit once a month and alternate the travelling. Neither had histories of LDRs or work-related mobility.

Ken & Karla

This couple in the western US had been married for 13 years, with the last nine and a half years in an LDR. Ken (early sixties) was a sales professional who travelled for his job and Karla (late forties) was an educator. They lived 160 kilometres/2.5 hours of driving time apart. They had no children of their own, but Ken had three adult children from a previous marriage and an undisclosed number of grandchildren. The LDR began after a job transition allowed Ken to get a head start on his post-retirement dream job, while Karla needed to keep her job to provide financial support and caregiving for elderly family members. She thus resided with these family members while Ken had relocated to the city where he was based. The couple's visits were limited by work schedules and the health of Karla's family. Ken grew up in a highly mobile family due to his father's employment in professional sports, and Karla's family immigrated to the US following war and genocide in their home country.

Burton & Brenda

Married 33 years, this couple were in their mid-sixties at the time of the interview. They had weathered multiple extended LDRs over the past 20 years, with their current LDR having lasted two years. Brenda resided in the western US and managed the couple's investment properties. Burton was in the Middle East where he had been working in the construction industry since the loss of his

own firm in a recession. They had three children and seven grandchildren; two children and all grandchildren lived close to Brenda. They were separated by 12,000 kilometres, about 17 hours' flying time, and visited every six weeks, with Burton usually flying to the US. Burton's father served in the military and his family moved frequently. Brenda's family had strong historical ties to the region where she lived and no history of LDRs.

Themes and Patterns

The interviews with these couples highlighted shared relational patterns related to work-related travel and LDRs, including *multi-generational patterns*, adapting through *differentiation*, and *relational give-and-take*. Two additional core themes were also identified: *trust and commitment* between partners prior to the LDR that was strengthened in the LDR, and *resilience*, with couples persevering through difficulties before and during the LDR.

Multi-Generational Patterns

Work-Related Travel

Four male participants had family histories of work-related mobility without LDRs, which they saw as preparation for LDRs.

Burton: Well, my dad was in the Army and we travelled a lot, lived overseas. I was apart from them for a while [when] I was in high school . . . and so, I had an early introduction to being apart. . . . It wasn't too difficult when I came over here. Once you get through the initial two or three months of what the heck am I doing here? (TSBB₂, 265)

Ken: . . . this is my thirty-ninth move in my lifetime. . . . So, as a youngster, we moved a lot. And . . . I got used to moving and living in different places . . . and my family accepted that as part of life, so it was no big thing for me. (TSKK₁, 430)

Even with a family history of work-related travel and relocation, some saw their LDRs as distinct:

Ed: Within our family, there really hasn't been anything like [LDRs] that I'm aware of. My father did travel some for his work, but he was always . . . home every weekend . . . and very rarely gone more than three or four days at a time. So . . . to me, that's a whole different scenario than what we're having to do here. (TSEE3, 138)

Ken: Well, my family has never — I'm the first one to really, other than my younger sister to an extent, but nothing like this — I'm really the first one that's done this. (TSKK2, 370)

On the other hand, Gabriel and Galina both had family histories of LDRs and felt they shared this history.

Galina: I think in both of our families, the concept of being long distance is not a new one. I mean, with Gabriel's mom and his stepfather, at some point in their relationship they were also apart, geographically separated. And I know that my parents, in the first years of their marriage, spent an amount of time apart, due to unavoidable events. And so . . . it's not a new concept. (TSGG2&3, 281)

Independence

All couples identified an independence in their families of origin that helped them adjust to the LDR. This mirrors Stafford's (2004) observation that it is unclear if individuals become more independent during LDRs or if they were more independent to begin with. The women in this study appeared to have been independent before the LDR and became more self-sufficient during the LDR. For example, Brenda had no history of LDRs in her family and stated she was "pretty gutsy . . . and I have always been independent," with LDRs as another example of her independence (TSBB3, 76). Independ-

dence in the family of origin was also credited by Galina, who had a family history of LDRs:

My parents have always both worked. And so we spent a lot of time alone, or with my grandmother. And so from an early age, we've kind of had to learn to manage . . . you know whatever happened, we had to find a way to deal with it. (TSGG2&3, 174)

Ursula gave an insight into how independence helped partners without work-related travel in their families adjust to an LDR. She stated that she learned independence at an early age:

Well, even when I was little, I had to separate myself, I think, because my brothers were like the stars. My older sister had [a health condition] and my other sister had [a health condition]. And although it was painful to grow up with being seen as someone who didn't have many needs, then, I think it helped make me stronger. (TSUU2, 71)

This relational pattern in her family of origin helped her cope with the LDR: "I think it's extremely beneficial. I don't know if my sisters could separate from the family . . . I don't know if they could have separated as much as I did or as easily. It wasn't easy" (TSUU2, 48).

Four male participants stated that their partners' independence helped them adjust to the LDR. Like male LDR partners in previous studies (Erwin 1993; Forsyth and Gramling 1990; Gerstel 1978; Gerstel and Gross 1984), they worried about the safety and well-being of their partners while they were away. But their partners' self-reliance in the LDR told them they were coping well.

Burton: I know Brenda can take care of things and, if she's unable to, she knows where to go to get it done, and that comes down to experience, to facing everything. . . . It's

developed to the situation where she can handle most anything now. (TSBB1, 240)

Awareness of the partner's self-reliance included attention to the emotional stressors of an LDR:

Umberto: . . . there's people that are not as self-reliant and can't handle things on their own . . . even for several days, let alone weeks and months, and Ursula's able to do that, so, I value that greatly. (TSUU1, 495)

Commitment to Family of Origin

All couples identified a strong commitment to their families of origin. Family caregiving was an important reason some of these couples had decided to have an LDR, something found in previous literature (Erwin 1993; Green et al. 1999; Hogarth 1987; Hogarth and Daniel 1987, 1988; Levin and Trost 1999).

Elaine: One of our big issues is — especially with my dad being older and when Ed's dad was alive, we didn't want to move away. We wanted to still be with our parents. . . . I used to help a lot with my grandmother when she was here . . . so moving away . . . we didn't want to when the kids were little, we didn't want to be away from [our] parents. (TSEE1, 252)

Ken: . . . a big part of Karla staying there . . . is helping her family survive, because they have some health issues and some other problems and so, the vast majority of her income goes to support her family. (TSKK1, 228)

Work Ethic

Participants talked about commitment to employers or studies as *work ethic* and linked this directly to their family of origin. First, Ed: "You got to earn everything. I wouldn't say strict . . . but no handout of any kind. You had to go earn it. That's probably the biggest thing I think I got from my family" (TSEE3,

52). Melanie gave a female perspective of work ethic in the family of origin: “My mom was the head of our household. So she taught us as women, if something needs to be done, we do it. . . . Now I have a very good work ethic. I’m a very good employee” (TSMMI, 594). These comments open up LDRs to a family-based view of work ethic (Lau et al. 2012), putting the worker in the context of being a good provider to the family instead of a career-focused individualistic achiever.

Commitments to professions or studies conflicted with loyalty to partners and family. Conflicted loyalties are termed *guilt* in TG theory, and are expected when separated from loved ones, due to questioning whether one is meeting relational obligations (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973). Even though partners understood their dedication to both family and careers, some participants felt “torn between two worlds” (TSBB1, 313), or as if “I’m choosing one over the other. And I am” (TSMMI, 295). Conflicting feelings can arise due to individuals feeling they are not measuring up as parents, spouses, or partners (Bergen, Kirby, and McBride 2007; Winfield 1985). In Burton’s words: “Sometimes I’d feel I’d escaped from [family problems] and it was unfair that I was leaving everything to Brenda. . . . Historically, I wonder if the family will think I copped out on them all because I went overseas” (TSBB1, 401).

Differentiation

In TG theory, an aspect of relational health is *differentiation*, balancing autonomy and connectedness in relationships. This allows honesty without blame when discussing controversial topics. When there were differences of opinion about the LDR, participants voiced their understanding that partners and family members “might have a different perspective” (TSEE2, 456).

Ed: . . . to the best of my knowledge this [a long-distance relationship] isn’t anything that has happened or that anyone has done in her family, uh, so I think there are probably some that are a little skeptical and that don’t understand how we could do that and how we could function like that. (TSEE3, 146)

This understanding prevailed even when these differing views put them in a less-than-positive light:

Melanie: I'm kind of upset because I need a new car and Monty's not here to go look with me. Then [my parents] kinda get mad. Well, he should be there! And then, you know, his role, what he should be doing, he's not doing it. According to them.

Monty: I can't really say that I blame them. Probably I'd have a similar reaction [as] your dad if you were my daughter, to be quite honest. (TSMM1, 559)

Relational Ethics — Give-and-Take

Relational ethics is the recognition of the effort and emotion that partners give and take in relationships. Each balance of give-and-take is unique and cannot be evaluated by someone unfamiliar with the relational system. Relationships can endure large imbalances for short periods and small imbalances over long periods (Krasner and Joyce 1995). LDRs seem significantly asymmetrical over long periods of time, yet the couples interviewed appeared to be thriving. How, then, did these partners perceive they balanced relational give-and-take in the LDR?

Direct Repayment to Parents

As seen, some participants undertook LDRs so partners could care for elderly relatives. TG theory considers this direct repayment one's relational responsibility to elders. A second way to repay elders is by emulating them in behaviour, career, or lifestyle, as did the employees and students in this study who embodied their family's work ethic, or the home-stayers who emulated multi-generational family caregiving.

Investing in the Next Generation

The caregiving assistance with grandchildren that Ursula, Elaine, and Brenda gave may be seen as investing in future generations. LDRs also opened up a

larger world for participants' children and grandchildren. Umberto felt his LDR gave his grandchildren "a sense of a comfort level, to raise the sense of the norm, that — well, you can't do what you want to do here, you go somewhere else to do it" (TSUU1, 168).

The LDR helped participants give to the next generation by demonstrating how relationships transcend challenges.

Karla: I just think that Ken isn't perceiving maybe the effect that he's having on his children the same way that I am. Because I think that maybe his daughter's influenced by our relationship more than he sees.

Researcher: What do you think? What have you seen?

Karla: Just that she was with her current partner, um, maybe more . . . forgiving, maybe more loyal . . . regardless of obstacles. I think there's a more stick-to-it attitude that maybe he doesn't recognize that we're the example . . . of the bond being important, or the expectation that you don't discard someone because of obstacles. (TSKK3, 24)

The Family Gives

The strongest source of support for these couples came from family members, but this support was sometimes contradictory. Consideration of support from family members was on an individual basis because each person in the family "has like a slightly different perspective, and it very much depends on who is . . . who we're talking about" (TSGG2, 263). Participants commented they felt supported as individuals but had to cope with comments from family members critical of the LDR, reflecting findings reported in previous literature (Bergen 2006; Bergen et al. 2007; Sahlstein 2000).

Melanie: My mom still is like, "Well, you know, he's in [State], Melanie. You know, you're gonna have to get married and move there and have kids, and I'm never gonna see them. And you're never gonna come home. And, you know, we

don't get to see him. We don't really know him that well. You know, his family gets to see you all the time." And I definitely have spent more time with his family than he has with mine. (TSMMI, 433)

Safety

The concerns of male LDR partners for the safety of their female partners and children have been documented (Forsyth and Gramling 1987, 1990), as has been the comfort of knowing that extended family are close while the commuter is away.

Ken: . . . if something happened and Karla . . . needed help with something, my family would be right there on the doorstep to help her. And I think that's an important thing for me, because it makes it easier to understand and realize, you know, that I'm not the sole person that has to . . . do those types of things, but the family's always there for backup. Even my kids, which I know you think are sometimes kinda flaky [Karla laughs], they would be there. (TSKKI, 682)

Two female participants commented that they did not have a social support system in their current location and felt on their own when their partner was not there. This mirrors previous literature (Gerstel 1978; Jackson, Brown, and Patterson-Stewart 2002; Jesswein 1984).

Melanie: Monty's in his hometown where he grew up. He knows the area, he has a dentist and a doctor and all of that's right there. . . . I'm here, by choice! . . . I'm happy here. But I'm here alone. I mean, I have friends, I have a support system for me, I'm not isolated, but I definitely don't have the support system that he has. (TSMMI, 367)

Give-and-Take as Couples

All six couples identified how the LDR allowed them to give to the partnership by investing in their own lives (Krasner and Joyce 1995). The LDRs allowed partners to be “doing things that could benefit the other in the long term” (TSMM1, 359), such as advanced studies, earning job seniority, and caring for family. Those who stayed in the primary residence understood that the traveller “really does give up a lot, too, by not being, you know, in his house, in his home, with family” (TSEE1, 579). The home-stayers understood the strain on the traveller, even if they didn’t share “how hard it is sometimes. Like he told me recently about the [many] days apart, how hard it was. He’d never said a word” (TSBB3, 208). Partners also valued the extra effort needed to communicate regularly.

Gabriel: She is . . . very understanding that I may be driving on the [freeway], and stuck in traffic, or have a police officer right next to me so I cannot answer her message. . . . If I’m in school, I will not take the cellphone and start texting. . . . I really appreciate her understanding. Because sometimes all I say to her is, “A+.” Which in French means, “Later.” And two characters? I don’t think a lot of people would take two characters very nicely on the cellphone. So I really appreciate that from her. (TSGG1, 810)

Above all, the partners shared the loneliness. Ed could be speaking for all when he said, “I think Elaine understands it’s difficult” (TSEE3, 100).

Trust and Commitment

Partners identified a strong theme of mutual trust and commitment as key to their decision to undertake an LDR. Once in the LDR, trust and commitment strengthened their relationships. Trust and commitment are considered in family therapy to be patterns transmitted multi-generationally (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Krasner 1986; Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Roberto

1992; Roberto-Foreman 2002). As trust grows, so does commitment (Krasner and Joyce 1995). Increased commitment then heightens trust.

Melanie: I was just thinking that probably the reason why I'm willing to be in a long-distance relationship is because of how I was brought up. The commitment piece, like commitment over everything. . . I probably wouldn't do it, if I hadn't been taught that. . . I really care about Monty, and I love him, but I don't think that would be enough on the phone. (TSMM2, 115)

The mutual trust also led to mutual decision-making about the LDR:

Galina: And so when the time came and we had to decide whether — how we were going to deal with this new — I'm not going to say bump in the road, because it's not a bump, it's like an adventure. . . the only choices we had were to try and find a way to make it happen or stop right there. And stopping right there wouldn't have been an option that worked for either one of us. . . I think the faith that we have in one another made considering a long-distance relationship very easy. (TSGG1, 445)

Trust and commitment became a coping strategy for those in long-distance relationships:

Burton: I never worry about it, her wandering off with somebody else. Which is a good peace of mind. A lot of guys have that worry over here. That's never worried me at all. (TSBB1, 211)

Ursula: I think that I know that I can rely on him for a straight answer most of the time, you know, nobody's perfect, but whether he's near or far, I think I can reach out to him,

and I can — he’s still my partner, and we still can work things through together. (TSUU1, 513)

Finally, the LDR itself tested the relationship and built trust between partners:

Galina: I think one of the essential aspects that keeps us going, the way we’re going on it, is the level of trust and faith that we have in each other that has, I think, exponentially grown through the time that we’ve been apart. (TSGG1, 490)

Resilience

These six couples were in long-distance relationships because responsibilities, such as family caregiving, collided with personal and societal economic downturns and national government requirements regarding migration. Five couples had lost careers, dreams, and/or financial security prior to the LDR. Meaningful work, even though it meant an LDR, helped them overcome these losses.

Brenda: Job conditions for [Burton’s] industry . . . were . . . non-existent almost. . . My husband . . . did different types of work, just to try and get a job . . . anything he could, and there was nothing. We were on the point of financial problems . . . and so he had to go to work. A friend of ours . . . kept telling him to come to work [overseas], and, and he finally did. (TSBB1, 138)

Conclusion and Considerations for Professionals

Two findings from this study are especially important for LDR participants and the professionals who provide services to them. First is the deep commitment and trust participants had in each other. They reported this trust and commitment did not diminish over distance and was strengthened in the LDR. These participants embodied Jesswein’s (1984, 215) observation that a

successful LDR “tends to create two independent and separate individuals who *decide* they want to stay together.”

The second is the flow of multi-generationally transmitted patterns in the families of origin of these couples, which brought resources and coping skills for the LDR. These couples were embedded in family and geographic connections that paradoxically helped them spend time apart from the people and locations they loved. The LDR allowed willing repayment of relational debts to family members through direct care and investments in themselves and the relationship. There was satisfaction as couples spoke of how they crafted healthy relationships at a distance. They were proud of how they had learned to be independent from their families and each other. Yet this self-sufficiency was not the stereotypical rugged individualist type — these LDR couples were deeply connected to each other and to their families.

This connection meant the LDR was a collaborative relational decision, with the needs of each partner and the extended family considered. Observers of LDR couples might see only that one partner separates from the family, missing the possibility that the LDR allows the other partner to remain close to loved ones at home. In this context, the decision of the LDR couple to live separately becomes a more balanced one.

There was a sense that these couples viewed the distance matter-of-factly, as simply another relational challenge to address, in the same way that couples who reside together still face challenges. The distance was not different from the significant stressors they faced when they were in proximity. They built a shared belief that the LDR was a short-term hardship that would bring long-term gain. They were committed to each other — past, present, and future. This recursive commitment was the most important aspect of their relationship and mattered much more than distance. Professionals working with LDR couples and families need to have this same perspective.

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PART IV:

Marine and Coastal Work, Mobility,
and Family-Making

Small Town Girl Working on Big Coast Guard Ships

Alexia Stasha Newson



Figure 1. My first trip with the Coast Guard on the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent*, which I joined as a cadet for my first sea phase. (Photo by Jeremy Goulding)

My name is Alexia Newson, and I have worked for the Canadian Coast Guard for six years. I have had so many life-changing experiences in this field; not many people can say they have sailed across the Arctic Circle, rescued people stranded and surrounded by polar bears, or provided urgent care on a fishing

trawler to people from foreign countries who didn't speak your language. I am currently working on the Canadian Coast Guard Ship *Leonard J. Cowley* as a clerk/storekeeper, which involves a work rotation of two-weeks-on and two-weeks-off, and three-weeks-on and three-weeks-off in the summer. We are a fisheries patrol vessel based out of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, and our main focus is to protect and enforce Canada's Fisheries Act and Coastal Fisheries Protection Act.

As a young girl growing up in the small town of Wheatley River, Prince Edward Island, I always wanted to make a difference and help people. I have also always had a passion for the ocean and everything it has to offer. When I was 12 years old, my father, who was in the military, encouraged me to join the Sea Cadet program in Prince Edward Island, where I was able to develop my seamanship skills and also compete in a variety of water sports, including sailing. Through this program I had the opportunity to travel across the country and even across the pond to the United Kingdom. After a few years as a Sea Cadet, I learned that I had been selected for an exciting deployment opportunity, which allowed me to spend my first semester of high school sailing through Europe on a tall ship. As I learned the ins and outs of the marine industry, I started to realize that this could actually be a career for me.

When I returned from my deployment, I started researching nautical colleges. I eventually decided on the Marine Institute at Memorial University, where I studied nautical science for the first two years. I then switched to a bridge watch certificate, which led me to a two-month work term with the Coast Guard as a deckhand. I really enjoyed this work, and after finishing my post-secondary education in St. John's, the Coast Guard was my top choice for a lifelong career; I felt that working with the Coast Guard was the best way to blend my passion for the ocean with my interest in helping people.

Though this seafaring life has brought me so many incredible experiences, it has also come with many hard sacrifices. Over the years I would not see my friends or family for several months at a time. I often had to miss big life events, such as Christmas, birthdays, and weddings. For example, I was excited to be the maid of honour in my best friend's wedding this coming fall, but I was recently accepted into the logistics officer course with the Coast Guard, which



Figure 2. In Iqaluit, Nunavut, riding in the fast rescue craft. (Photo by Alexia Newson)

is a tremendous opportunity for my career. Training for this program will take place on board the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent* for four weeks in the Arctic, which means that I am no longer able to stand in my friend's wedding. Having to tell her this was one of the hardest things I've had to do, but thankfully she understood that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for my career that I couldn't turn down. Unfortunately, I've lost other friends over the years who just didn't get my lifestyle. But while I may have a smaller group of friends, they've become a part of my family, and I know I can rely on them to understand (or at least try to understand) even if they haven't lived the life themselves.

Not to mention, being a young woman just starting out in her twenties, the dating was nearly impossible to manoeuvre. My options were as thin as "dipping your pen in the company ink" (which is *never* a good idea). Meeting people online or outside of work was also a real pain. The second you met someone and you left for sea there were usually two scenarios, the first one being that the person became overly attached and clingy, wondering why you

haven't texted or called. No matter how hard you tried to explain that communication is limited out in the middle of the ocean, the other person never really seemed to get the picture. The second scenario is that you would have people whose eyes started to wander elsewhere the second you left for sea. In these cases, trust was non-existent. I've also witnessed the flip side of this with people on ships forgetting they have significant others and doing whatever they please while out at sea. This put a sour taste in my mouth for a long time, thinking I would never find a functional relationship with this career path.

Thankfully, I have found a strong relationship with someone who understands the industry because he is in it too. We both have the same outlook on time and distances apart and have developed a deep trust for each other; time and distance have different meanings when you're at sea. There are periods when my partner and I could be away from each other for weeks or even months at a time. At one point, my partner was at sea for five months with no Wi-Fi. In these situations, you have to have both trust and independence. Neither of us has to worry about a wandering eye or an angry text about why the other hasn't responded right away because we both understand what it's like to be at sea. And when we are back together on shore, we are sure to make that time as meaningful as possible before the next rotation begins.

When it comes to relationships, the issue now becomes the future. As we both work on ships, we can easily be set on opposite schedules; this sometimes makes it difficult to plan for our future together. For example, we eventually want to start a family but that would mean the end of my career at sea. It would be almost impossible to raise a family with our current work rotations, which as I mentioned can require us to be at sea for weeks at a time. Therefore, if we choose to start a family, I would likely have to transition to an office-based position on shore. The idea of having to adjust to working a regular nine-to-five job, all while my partner sets out to sea continuing to live the life I once knew, is still hard to wrap my mind around. These are some of the complications that come with being a young woman in this industry. It's a constant battle between your work and your personal life.

There have also been times when my relationships with my colleagues made me question my place on board. I have sailed on ships where I was a little girl

in a man's world, with crew members who were very old-fashioned and did not think that I belonged there, as well as other women who were territorial and didn't like seeing a fresh new face onboard. For example, while my male colleagues were often given exciting opportunities at work, I was left with more menial tasks such as getting the helicopter pilot a sandwich. The bad experiences I've had with these kinds of people made me feel like I had to prove myself and my worth; it always seemed to take that one extra step to succeed as a woman at sea. But over time I realized it forced me to grow up and love myself for who I am and appreciate what I bring to the table. I learned that I *am* good enough, I *do* belong here, and *no one* else can tell me otherwise. Being a woman in a sea of men you need to hold your head high and know that you are just as good as the rest of them.

I know this life might not be for everyone, but it does come with its perks. I am very lucky to currently work on a ship with co-workers who are like a second family to me. The amazing people I've met have become like brothers, fathers, sisters, mothers, and grandfathers. At first you might have to sit there and hear for hours about the weather and how the hunting season is going, but at the end of the day we would do anything for each other. We organize social events such as Bingo, Chase the Ace, retirement parties, movie nights, and theme nights for holidays. We enjoy each other's company, both on and off work hours, and when you're working for two or three weeks straight, it really helps to be with a group of people you can call your family. Living with each other in a small tin can really does bring you closer together. Not everyone is this lucky to have such an amazing crew behind them.

Along with the amazing people I've met there is the fulfillment of helping others, the wonder of the natural environment, and the interest in visiting new communities. I've been lucky enough to experience almost all the different sectors of the Canadian Coast Guard. I became a trained rescue specialist to assist in search-and-rescue operations, which has allowed me to do such things as treating patients from places like Spain and Portugal, assisting in human remains recoveries, and assisting in the recovery of disabled or sinking vessels. One time, I even needed help myself after breaking my foot by dropping a frozen turkey on it.

I've also travelled way up North in the Arctic, sailing on gigantic icebreakers to clear out shipping routes and harbours for ferries and cargo ships so you can get your Amazon order on time. Some other vessels I have been on include research vessels, where I had the opportunity to pick the brains of extraordinary scientists and learn more about our amazing oceans. One sector I look forward to exploring and experiencing is being on ships that work as aids to navigation. However, I've heard that they are some of the most hard-working ships in the fleet.



Figure 3. Icebreaking operations on board the CCGS *Louis S. St-Laurent*. (Photo by Kim Ducey)

The vessel I am currently on, which as I mentioned is a fisheries enforcement vessel that protects our wildlife and oceans, gave me one of my most interesting opportunities: training with the RCMP in Regina, which allowed me to become a member of the armed boarding team. During this training, I learned how to defend myself, how to properly arrest someone, and how to become an expert marksman.



Figure 4. Adventuring the Eureka Weather Station in the northern Arctic. (Photo by Alexia Newson)

I hope I have shed some light on one perspective of working in this industry. It may not be for everyone, but I can't wait to see what the future has in store for me. After working with the Canadian Coast Guard for this long I strive both in my work life and my personal life for "Safety First, Service Always."



Figure 5. Working on deck on the *Louis S. St-Laurent* as a cadet on my sea phase.
(Photo by Jeremy Goulding)

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Lightkeeping and Family-Making

Sharon R. Roseman

Abstract

This chapter draws on one man's story to discuss the importance of family-making relationships and unpaid social reproduction among lightkeepers who commute by boat and helicopter to remote lighthouses in Newfoundland and Labrador. When these lightkeepers work in pairs for 28-day shifts, they share in both work tasks and the concerns of everyday life, including meals or commuting arrangements. This account draws attention to the importance of taking note of these male-dominated work sites alongside others that provide housing for intensive shifts, such as work camps attached to remote mines and construction sites, and offshore wind farms or oil and gas platforms. In the latter cases, the employers often provide for basic daily needs through catering and other paid services. The case of lightkeeping draws attention to how shift workers in these locations develop rhythms of self-care for themselves and their workmates that are layered on top of the rhythms of their paid work tasks.

Introduction

On a cliff's edge on Bell Island in Canada's eastern-most province of Newfoundland and Labrador sits the picturesque Lightkeeper's Café. This facility was opened by Tourism Bell Island in 2014 in the previous home of former lightkeepers (Tourism Bell Island 2020). The transformation of this building into

a café, interpretation centre, and gift shop aligns with broader moves to heritagize lighthouses and associated infrastructure in Canadian coastal provinces (e.g., Hiller 2012). The Lightkeeper's Café sits beside the lighthouse operated by the Canadian Coast Guard,¹ staffed by two keepers who each work alone during sequential week-on, week-off shifts (see Figures 1 and 2). The Bell Island light is one of the remaining 23 staffed lighthouses in Newfoundland and Labrador (Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2019).



Figure 1. Bell Island light, 2015. (Photo by Sharon R. Roseman)



Figure 2. Lightkeeper's Café, Bell Island, with the Bell Island light behind, 2015. (Photo by Sharon R. Roseman)

Lightkeeping is an occupation historically linked with seafaring navigation and safety, weather and sea state monitoring, and search-and-rescue missions. Global reductions in the number of lightkeepers in the second half of the twentieth century were linked to the introduction of new lighting and foghorn technology and navigational aids such as “radar, radio beacons,” and “satellite-based global positioning systems (GPS)” (Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2010, 3). In the Canadian context, the shift to extensive automation began in the 1970s. There are currently 51 staffed light stations in Canada out of 750 historical lighthouse structures and thousands of unstaffed lights, buoys, and fog signals (Canadian Coast Guard 2019; Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2017). The public image of the lightkeeper in Canada is thus often associated with the past, in contrast with air traffic controllers in their towers who are widely understood as the contemporary guardians of safe air travel.

Indeed, widespread concerns about the overall potential loss of the material culture of lightkeeping led Natalie Bull (2012, 4) to compare Canadian lighthouse buildings to “species at risk.” By 2017, over 100 “heritage lighthouses” had been protected by the 2008 Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act, instituted to prevent losses of these structures and their histories (Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2017; Government of Canada 2008; see also Parks Canada 2019).

Just as there are those fighting to conserve and promote the physical infrastructure and legacy of lighthouses and lightkeeping, many strong voices have been raised against further destaffing of coastal lights. These voices include those of lightkeepers, mariners, seaplane pilots, and politicians from coastal areas (e.g., see MacQueen 1990; Rompkey 2010, iii; Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2010, 1, 3). In 1995, for example, former Newfoundland and Labrador Fisheries Minister Walter Carter wrote to the then federal Transport Minister Douglas Young to complain: “How dare these bureaucratic landlocked lounge lizards of Upper Canada . . . decree that the need no longer exists for humans to man lighthouses around the treacherous coastline of Newfoundland and Labrador?” (Cox 1995). The outcry in response to Canadian Coast Guard destaffing proposals in 1998 and 2009 resulted in the retention of some lightkeepers in British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador, contrasting with other coastal provinces, which had by then lost all, or almost all, their lightkeepers (e.g., DeMont 2019; Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2010, 4). The first recommendation in a report on potential further reductions of lightkeepers by the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans strongly advised against any further destaffing without careful, case-by-case analysis (Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2010, i).

Where Canadian lighthouses continue to be staffed, it is not uncommon for keepers to commute to their jobs rather than living in the lighthouses as in the past (Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2019). This commuting can sometimes involve complex trips to remote locations on a turn-around schedule. Reporter Nick Wells’s (2020) coronavirus-themed story highlighted, for example, how keepers in British Columbia were used to the social isolation that was now required of others. Another “human interest” story several months prior

described the helicopter drop-off of federal election ballots to “fly-in, fly-out” keepers on remote islands (Slaughter 2019).

This chapter draws on the account of Bob,² who has worked at the Bell Island light. He was part of a sample of daily ferry commuters I interviewed who had travelled from their homes on mainland Newfoundland to jobs on Bell Island between the 1990s and 2015, as opposed to the much larger number of Bell Islanders who commuted in the other direction (see Royal, Chapter 11). As with all my interviews with ferry commuters, I was interested in learning about individuals’ full life histories of mobility and work, including incremental experiences they had of work mobilities from their formative years onward, including through their parents or in other ways. This chapter focuses on what I am calling *family-making* among lightkeepers. I use the term “family-making” to signal that, while families arise out of past patterns of relating that we have learned, in all social contexts they only come about specifically as a result of individuals’ purposeful actions with and towards other individuals, including those with whom they work. I begin with the analytical framework that sets the stage for this understanding of Bob’s mobility history account, which has embedded within it the idea that lightkeepers’ work assignments often provide a context for family-making in relation to the rhythms of on-shift social reproduction.

Work Mobilities, Family-Making, and the Rhythms of Social Reproduction

A focus on individuals’ mobility histories aligns with Stéphanie Vincent-Geslin and Emmanuel Ravalet’s (2015) comparative European research on primary socialization to “high mobility” or “long-distance labour mobility” during childhood, and similar secondary socialization later in life. As we know from other studies of “mobile lives” (e.g., Elliott and Urry 2010), work-related mobilities that may involve geographical isolation or consistent daily movement often, not surprisingly, provoke strategies that ensure strong levels of cultural belonging, relatedness, and cooperation with workers’ home locations and social networks, as well as with those they form in work locations. In work locations, such strategies are perhaps more often rooted in forms of family-making with work colleagues, the members of host communities, commuting

companions, housemates, and others. We make our various family groupings over and over again daily, weekly, seasonally, through the annual cycle, and, sometimes, over the course of many years. Some of this purposeful making and remaking of families involves tasks of social reproduction, which are “the processes involved in maintaining and reproducing people, specifically the labouring population, and their labour power on a daily and generational basis” (Bezanson and Luxton 2006, 3). These tasks entail specific relationships of relative equality and inequality that “are made and remade through spatio-temporal arrangements like rhythms” (Reid-Musson 2018, 885).

I have previously explored such mobility histories, rhythms, and family-making practices with Newfoundland research participants through audio-visual means. In one of the resulting films, *The Last Generation* (Roseman 2020a), pensioners from Canadian National (CN) — an operation that was closed down in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1996 but had operated trains, coastal boats, trucks, buses, and a telegraph service — frequently noted that the employees “were just like a family.” Forms of family-making also occur among Bell Island ferry commuters, as noted in the digital story *Stories Would Be Told: The Commuting Career of Kay Coxworthy* (Roseman 2018; also see, Royal Chapter 11; Royal and Roseman 2021). Such examples bring to mind the inclusive definition of family adopted by the Vanier Institute of the Family:

any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement, and who together assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following: physical maintenance and care of group members; addition of new members through procreation, adoption or placement; socialization of children; social control of members; production, consumption, distribution of goods and services; and affective nurturance (i.e. love). (Mirabelli 2018)

This understanding of family is helpful for thinking about how lightkeepers who work away from their homes both keep in touch with their spouses,

children, and other family members during their shifts in whichever ways they can *and* practice “family” with other keepers. In this chapter, I focus on family-making in the context of rhythmic practices that Bob and other lightkeepers undertook in relation to their paired assignments to remote locations. I follow Russell King and Francesco Della Puppa (2020, 2) in considering how human-made “rhythms” conjoin “mobility and the underlying forces that order and disrupt everyday lives and spaces.” As Emily Reid-Musson (2018, 883) notes, the French theorist Henri Lefebvre’s (2004) “[r]hythmanalysis lies in apprehending the less perceptible and overlooked rhythms involved in the lived experiences of urban space-time” (also see Neis et al. 2018). In this case, one can of course add rural space-time.

Raewyn Connell (1987) introduced the term “hegemonic masculinities” to emphasize the dominance of some lived experiences and expressions of masculinity over others. The hegemonic masculinities associated with sectors such as fish harvesting, construction, mining, and the armed forces in Canada have been associated with various forms of work mobility as well as ideologies and relationships that tolerate and even celebrate heterosexism, gender binarism, masculinized physical bravery and strength, and forms of interpersonal aggression (e.g., Barrett 1996; Maynard 1989; Menzies 2019; Pini and Mayes 2012; Samuels 2020). However, it is important to emphasize equally the “multiple masculinities” and “subordinated masculinities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 835; Gutmann 1996) that are central in the lives of many individuals who are employed in such jobs and may even be important aspects of their paid employment. Thinking through family-making and social reproduction rhythms in relation to the work-related mobilities of men such as Bob is one way to get at these other aspects of male lightkeepers’ masculinities.

“You Had to Get Along”: Family-Making in Remote Lighthouses

Like many Newfoundland and Labrador men of his and earlier generations, Bob has a rich history of family-making and social reproduction intertwined with jobs rooted in “mobile masculinities” (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018). Bob’s first experience of work mobilities began with his father’s job in seafood harvesting, an occupation that Bob subsequently entered as a teenager in the

1970s. After working as crew on his father's 33-foot longliner, he later took over as skipper and worked with his brother until the licence was sold back to the government in 1999. As with many harvesters, the family-making associated with Bob's job merged with the family he was related to and grew up within (e.g., Menzies 2019; Nemeč 1970). Bob, his father, and his brother fished together for cod, lobster, capelin, and crab at different points in time. As he explained to me, on fishing days the geographical mobility was regularized: "Just steamed back and forth there, about an hour's steam in about 100-fathom water." During the 1990s he overlapped fishing with doing temporary "relief" work as a lightkeeper with the Coast Guard during the fall and winter. He then secured a permanent keeper position and gave up commercial fishing.

For the Bell Island lightkeeper position, Bob commuted, usually daily, from the Avalon Peninsula on the public ferry and by road for his week-on, week-off shifts from Monday to Sunday. At Bell Island, the light and foghorn are automated and the lighthouse is staffed during the daytime when the keeper on duty carries out various tasks, including, of course, ensuring that the light and foghorn are operating fine. With this post, he stayed at work if the ferry was not running or the weather forecast was for rough weather and he was concerned he might have trouble getting back for the next day. He had organized the space to allow for social reproduction during the workday as well as for when he or the other keeper had to stay overnight or for several days. In addition to a kitchen, he had "a bed set up . . . in case . . . sometimes during the winter, if the ferry doesn't run . . . I got no way to get home. So, I got a place there to stay." Similarly, "If I know it's gonna be bad weather [I] call into St. John's and . . . tell them what's on the go."

On some days, what should have been a 15-minute ferry crossing lasted for hours while Bob waited in the lineup at the end of the day, especially when there was only one ferry running or there were mechanical problems (Roseman 2020b). In consequence, what should have been the shortest, easiest, and least precarious commute of his working career was sometimes filled with uncertainty and frustration. A major improvement in his commuting experience came about when he stopped bringing his truck over and switched to being a walk-on ferry passenger. A family member would drop him off at the

terminus in Portugal Cove and he would take a taxi from the Bell Island ferry to the lighthouse and back again at the day's end. This new arrangement allowed him to arrive home to assist with supper preparation and other tasks, catch up with his wife about how her day had gone, and do other family-making and social reproductive tasks in the evening in preparation for the next day of work.

Bob held other keeper positions that involved short-distance, daily road commuting solely by private vehicle. He also worked on two small islands that involved longer-distance, multi-modal commuting. The first was Baccalieu Island,³ where he and another keeper were transported by helicopter for 28-day shifts (see Figure 3). For this lighthouse, four permanent keepers alternated in two-person shifts and relief keepers were brought in when needed to cover vacation periods or illnesses. The second position was on Puffin Island (near Greenspond, Bonavista Bay), which the keepers reached with what he described as a small rowboat. In the case of both these lighthouses, in addition to ensuring that the automated equipment was working properly,⁴ the keepers were responsible for the ongoing operation of the diesel-powered generators.⁵ He reflected on how relevant his background in fishing was when he first got a part-time keeper's job: "a basic knowledge of machinery and equipment and sea conditions . . . You had to know a bit, you know, mechanic work and stuff like that, carpentry and maintenance, . . . so I followed . . . where I own my own boat and I built me own house."

Lightkeeping thus involves a myriad series of regularized tasks that take place over daily, weekly, and longer cycles. In my discussions with Bob, it became clear that the keepers interlaced family rhythms into these essential paid work tasks. Bob's narrative indicated that, in the case of lightkeepers such as himself, setting up private, familial rhythms that intersect with the required rhythms of jobs that entail highly routinized checks and reporting was a way to reinforce order in isolated and sometimes physically precarious contexts. As is indicated below, this also included the organization of the journey to work (see Feldman 1977, 30, cited in Reid-Musson 2018, 883). Such patterns, which emerged from dyadic relationships among paired keepers, could be considered as examples that fed into Lefebvre's "eurhythmia," whereby "[r]hythms unite with one



Figure 3. Lighthouse on Baccalieu Island. (Courtesy of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory, 1993. CC BY-NC 2.0 CA. To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/ca/>.)

another in the state of health, in normal (which is to say normed!) everydayness” (Lefebvre 2004, 16).

It is essential to take social reproduction into account when considering the deployment of paid labour power as part of employment-related geographical mobility and to encompass both the activities that take place in workers’ homes when they are off-shift or absent, but also in work locations (Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015). For shift workers, and frequently those in male-dominated, fly-in, fly-out or boat-in, boat-out collective living contexts such as remote mines, offshore wind farms or oil and gas platforms, or construction sites with work camps, many social reproductive tasks such as catering are performed by employed staff (e.g., Dorow and Mandizadza 2018; Mette et al. 2017). In contrast, lightkeepers who may work alone or in pairs are responsible for their own self-care. Bob described how, in such cases, he and other keepers practised what can be thought of as forms of family-making: for survival, companionship, regular rhythms, and a home ambience.

Bob’s description of how the keepers took care of their food needs on Baccalieu Island gives an excellent sense of how they would collaborate. They had to bring in their own supplies for the 28-day shifts. He explained how important it was to get to know the other keeper’s preferences and habits:

And you didn’t know, like when we were there, we had to cook. Like every second day, a guy cooked a meal, and [you] didn’t know what they liked, and what they didn’t like. On the first trip, you didn’t know. But after, the next time around, you knew what the guy liked.

He explained that, the first time he was stationed there, he had never met the other keeper and so of course had no idea what this person would like to eat. They each handled night and day shifts, switching off every second week. A shared meal was a key temporal turning point to mark the shift change, reflecting how important familial rhythms were in this mobile work posting: “Every day we eat at the same time. Supper hours, right? . . . You would, say around five o’clock in the evening would be supper hour.” On Sundays or at

least every second Sunday they'd make a big effort for the cooked meal "with potatoes and cabbage and turnip and roast chicken or whatever." And then they had other favourites: "And then weekends, I was a pizza maker so I used to make up a pizza, right? Supper hours, fish and chips and stuff like that." New families of all sorts are made gradually in this kind of informal and emergent manner. I was struck by how similar Bob's description was to the type of family-making that can arise out of housemate relationships as much as other forms of friendship, romantic, and parent-child relationships. Rather than being formalized, knowing what someone likes to talk about and what they like to eat, and feeling satisfaction in being able to support them by listening and making them their type of food, develops over time as one gets to know the other person.

On Baccalieu Island, they also had a dog who kept them company.⁶ The principal lightkeeper would bring dog food over with the monthly supplies and they would also feed the dog table scraps. The two men had to tend to the fresh water needs of all three of these occupants:

[T]he water source was a cistern . . . under the house. Used to collect the water from the roof . . . they had a distilling system . . . in the wintertime when the water used to get low, we used to have to spare, right? [When] there was snow, we used to throw snow in the cistern too. . . . you had to spare the water. You couldn't . . . [be] gettin' a bath every day, right?

His commute to reach Puffin Island for similarly long shifts began with a five-hour drive in his private vehicle: "[I]t was a bit of a long hike, especially in the winter going back and forth." We discussed how he managed this multi-modal commute. He had to ensure that he was at the dock on time for the shift changeover, which was usually "[o]n a Wednesday . . . around 10 or 11 in the morning . . . because their shift probably'd end at 10 o'clock, right? And the next shift would start up at two. So the two o'clock shift would be ready to go." The road trip was too long to take on the same day as the shift change, especially given the risk of variable driving conditions. The arrangement that was worked out was a private one shared between himself and the principal light-

keeper, who lived across from Puffin Island. The day before their shift started, Bob would drive and park his vehicle at the other keeper's and sleep overnight at his home. I asked how this arrangement came about and he indicated that it was informal and that the other keeper had initiated the invitation for him to stay over the first time he was stationed there: "He knew I was comin' and I was talkin' to him in advance. To let him know what time I was comin' and what arrangements was gonna be." This gesture by the principal lightkeeper ensured safe and comfortable commuting conditions for Bob. The turn-over and commuting arrangements called for flexibility on the part of all four keepers, given that just one boat was kept on Baccalieu Island. At shift change, "they'd bring the boat across the tickle . . . They'd get off and we'd take the boat and go back." When those ending their shift could not get over, it would be because of wind. In the case of ice, they would "go down and chop the ice and everything away from the slipway and stuff to get the boat off." But the winds were another matter. When their direction and speed prevented a shift change, "You'd sort of have to wait, probably 'til the next day. Even though . . . you were there ahead of time. You'd have to wait until . . . the weather cleared before you could get on the island." Due to the arrangement with the other keeper, this commute felt simpler and more autonomous to him than the helicopter-reliant commute to the station on Baccalieu Island where "[t]here's nothing else around. You couldn't get off of it. The only way is if you got sick or something like that, then you make a phone call and then the Coast Guard makes arrangements to get you out."

Sharing the responsibilities of procuring and preparing food, hauling as well as conserving water when necessary, and organizing commutes and shift changes were all aspects of the overall work context that called for collaboration, trust, and fellowship: "Oh yes, you had to get along. It's no good to go out and fight and argue with people, or it would be a long 28 days, right?" When Bob started on his first relief posting to Baccalieu Island, he wasn't sure how he would feel about it. "I didn't think I'd ever go back there after the first trip 'cause it seemed like a long time, 28 days on an isolated island, you know." However, he came to enjoy the remote stay with the other keeper and, like his first mobile job out on the boat with his father and brother, this first posting influenced his experiences at other lighthouses.

Conclusion

When I listened to Bob's accounts, I could easily imagine the soundscapes that pervaded his postings at lighthouses: from the fog horns to the sounds of the diesel generators, the wind and waves, the helicopters and boats, but also the domestic sounds that attend any job that requires you to inhabit where you work. Domestic sounds would include those of meal preparation, chatting, dishwashing, showers, a bed creaking, and a dog padding along a hallway.

Bob's accounts of social reproductive tasks carried out as part of daily life while on shift in remote lighthouses are an excellent reminder of the many facets of "mobile masculinities" (Dorow and Mandizadza 2018) he has experienced. These include the eurhythmic (Lefebvre 2004, 16) family-making that emerges out of isolated work locations where, unlike large work camps, lightkeepers are responsible for taking care of their own and their workmates' reproductive needs. Moreover, the rhythms of this reproductive work took place during, as well as prior to, arrival on shift, as when keepers would buy groceries they knew would be enjoyable for themselves and the keeper they were stationed with, and as part of the organization of commuting and shift changes that might involve one or more extra nights and days of cohabitation, depending on weather conditions. As an echo of his earlier work as a seafood harvester, lightkeeping has involved Bob working closely with other men. In some cases, he has been stationed in remote locations where they were each other's company for month-long periods.

Bob talked to me with pride about the various Newfoundland lighthouses he has worked on, past and present, showing me maps and photos. He also talked about the ties among the remaining keepers who would meet, for example, for regular training, as well as their times with the Coast Guard alumni. For a few summers, for example, he enjoyed his post with another keeper at the Cape Spear Lighthouse National Historic Site, where the Coast Guard Newfoundland Region, Alumni Association has a public art gallery containing the works of Leslie H. Noseworthy (Canadian Coast Guard Newfoundland Region Alumni Association 2020; Morrissey 2005). As Bob explained: "Les Noseworthy . . . he did all the lighthouses around the province, painted 'em. And he donated 'em all to the alumni." Such details in Bob's narrative indicated that,

in some ways, keepers had a general sense of family ties among themselves, a bond that surely fed into their dyadic relationships on shift.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- 1 Interestingly, numerous lights were built and staffed by the Canadian government prior to Newfoundland joining Canadian Confederation in 1949 (MacLeod 1989).
- 2 A pseudonym.
- 3 This lighthouse began operating in 1859 (MacLeod 1989, 47) and was destaffed in 2002, since Bob worked there.
- 4 In addition to failing, this equipment can become obscured by condensation, ice, or other matter (Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans 2010, 30).
- 5 On Baccalieu Island, for example, the keepers alternated three generators, running each for a week at a time.
- 6 For a recent example of dogs and lightkeepers in Newfoundland and Labrador, see Randell (2019).

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The Working Lives of Bay de Verde, Newfoundland

Photographs by Andrew Lincoln
Text by George Gmelch

Introduction

This photo essay explores the working lives of a dozen Newfoundlanders. Most are from the small, coastal community or “outport” of Bay de Verde. Outports, Newfoundland’s first permanent settlements, emerged in the 1600s.¹ They were usually located on small coves and bays near good cod-fishing grounds, sometimes only accessible by boat. They soon became intimate communities of extended families who lived in simple, two-storey saltbox houses set near the sea. Scattered among the houses and along the shoreline was the material culture of cod fishing and salt cod production: boats, nets, sheds, stages, and drying platforms known as “flakes.” The outport economy depended on cod, supplemented by kitchen gardens, chickens and small livestock, and subsistence activities like gathering berries, hunting, and harvesting timber for wood and fuel.

Bay de Verde’s population reached its peak in the early 1960s with nearly 900 people before beginning a slow but steady decline that followed the waning fortunes of the cod fishery (Dominion Bureau of Statistics 1962). In 1992, the federal government closed the fishery — the infamous cod moratorium — which put 30,000 rural Newfoundlanders out of work and forced many to migrate to larger population centres or to the mainland. Within two decades Bay de Verde’s population dropped by nearly half. It is still declining. Many of those

who stayed were able to do so by entering the world of “mobile work,” which meant everything from long, daily commutes to extended-stay, regional or international travel and weeks away from home. A few were able to continue fishing by switching to new species, notably crab and shrimp, but not without making major adjustments — acquiring larger, more expensive boats (longliners) and using new technology (e.g., hydraulic hoists and booms for the hauling of crab pots). This also meant hiring crew and making longer trips with more time spent at sea. Gone were the open trap skiffs of the former “inshore” fishery in which families fished daily near home, never more than a half-mile from land. Across Newfoundland, the small inshore fisherman has gone the way of the small farmer elsewhere, and with this the cherished social fabric of outport lives has been frayed.

The images that follow were taken by photographer Andrew Lincoln during four visits to Newfoundland between 2015 and 2018. Although he photographed in other communities along the Avalon Peninsula, his focus was always Bay de Verde, where he assisted in the field research being done by myself and colleague Diane Royal for the On the Move Partnership. He also did the drone photography for two documentary films: *A Year in the Field* and *The Village at the End of the Road*. The captions were written by myself with the assistance of the photographs’ subjects.² Some material was drawn from oral history interviews that Diane and I conducted as part of our research.

People and Places of an Outport Community



Figure 1. *Bay de Verde*. Perched on a headland that juts into the North Atlantic, Bay de Verde sits at the northern extreme of the Avalon Peninsula. It is among the oldest settlements in Newfoundland, with European settlers first recorded in 1662. It is a prominent fishing community and has Atlantic Canada's largest fish-processing plant. Much of its population today is elderly, with a median age of 55 — 16 years older than the median age of the population of St. John's (Statistics Canada 2017). Despite the aging population and a fickle economy heavily dependent on fish and fish processing, locals insist that the quality of life is good. "It's where our families came from," said Pauline Sutton. "It's where we made our living. It's where we raised our children. There's a rugged beauty and peacefulness here that I don't think I could find anywhere else in the world."



Figure 2. *Gerald Riggs*. Now retired, Gerald Riggs, a former teacher, school headmaster, and mayor of Bay de Verde stands in Blundon Heritage House, which he founded. Overlooking the town of Bay de Verde below, he points out many houses that now stand vacant:

Some think that people are going to come in and buy these vacant houses as summer homes, but I don't really see that happening. Bay de Verde is right out on a headland, and we're not known for our great weather. We get a lot of bone-chilling northeast wind and heavy fog rolling in from the Grand Banks. Some older folks do come back to live. I suppose they've got memories of their childhood here, and they dream about what it was like back in the day. But everything has changed. In the sixties and seventies Bay de Verde was completely different with all those flakes and stages and all that camaraderie that comes with being a fishing community. We had 50 or 60 men all fishing, all looking out for one another, hauling each other's boats, drawn together out of necessity. It was called survival. But it's not that way today.



Figure 3. *Planting potato beds.* One of the last Bay de Verdeans to have a garden, Richard Sutton plants his “potato beds” (which may also include turnips, carrots, beets, and cabbage). Most villagers abandoned their gardens in the 1950s and 1960s when larger grocery stores opened up in the region and better roads put them within reach. Gardening had never been easy due to the peninsula’s harsh climate, short growing season, and thin, acidic soil. The latter often required enhancing with capelin and kelp hauled up from the shore. In the past, most villagers didn’t have the cash to buy all of their food at a store as they do today.



Figure 4. *Tony Doyle and moose.* Moose is an important subsistence food in rural Newfoundland. After a successful fall hunt, Tony Doyle waits in his twine store (shed) for the arrival of his son, Thomas, to help butcher their moose quarters into meal-size pieces to be shared among family. Sheds like this are places where fishermen like Tony repair and store their gear. They are also the places where men gather to socialize; “shed parties” for both sexes are especially common from November to April when there is no fishing and boats have been taken out of the water.



Figure 5. *Don Keys and “bog bike.”* Don Keys returns from a day on the barrens picking bakeapples. Known elsewhere as cloud berries, bakeapples only grow in northern, subarctic climates, preferring moist tundra and peat bogs. In Canada, they are found mainly in pockets on Newfoundland and Labrador. “Newfoundlanders coming back on vacation go mad for them!” says Don. “They all want to take them and bakeapple jam back to Alberta or wherever they’re visiting from.” Don expected to sell the one gallon container of bakeapples shown here for \$50.



Figure 6. *Tony Doyle on boat.* Tony Doyle shares news with fellow lobster fishermen on a cold, crisp morning in May. In his hand is a V-notched lobster that he will soon toss back into the sea to breed. Fishers cut a notch in a female lobster’s tail if it is “spawny” (full of eggs). The notches grow out in three or four years, and it is illegal to keep a lobster caught while the notch is still present.

Tony stayed with fishing after the 1992 moratorium, shifting to crab, lobster, and squid. He had just purchased a new boat when the closure hit and wasn't willing to walk away from his investment. "But more importantly," he recalls, "fishing was not just making a living, it was a way of life. We didn't just fish. We dreamt about it. We talked about it. We ate it. I began fishing with my father and uncle when I was 12 year old. It's been my life."



Figure 7. Gary Riggs. Sixty-year-old Gary Riggs places cod on a "frame" to dry in the sun for household consumption in winter. Although these fish were caught in the subsistence or "food fishery," Gary has been a commercial fisherman since age 16, about which he says, "I wouldn't trade it for any job on this earth! I guess it's the sense of freedom that I like most. But also the salt air and the fresh breeze . . . even the fog. I'm just happy having been able to follow in my father's footsteps as a fisherman."



Figure 8. *Llewelyn Brookings on crab boat.* Llewelyn Brookings and his brother Len unload their crab catch. They both hold crab licences and each has a crab boat, but they take turns crewing for one another. Down in the hold Llewelyn’s son, David, is boxing the crab. His wife, Virena, in the background, often helps out as extra crew, especially now that their three boys have been raised. The small girl is their granddaughter, Racheal, who had come down to the wharf on this day to visit. Llewelyn has fished for 50 years. When the cod closure hit, he switched from cod to lump, lobster, and crab.



Figure 9. *Inside the crab plant.* Seventy-year-old Selby John Burt at work in Bay de Verde’s crab plant, where his main job is loading the cooker. Before the cod moratorium, Selby John was a fisherman. Selby’s wife, Kathy, also works in the crab plant. The plant, rebuilt after being destroyed by fire in 2016, is today the most state-of-the-art seafood processing facility in Canada. It employs 450 people, 57 who are seasonal

“temporary foreign workers” (TFWs) from Thailand. The Thais live in company housing in Bay de Verde and have been well received by local people, although because of language there is little social interaction between them and the locals.



Figure 10. *Aerial photo of harbour.* In this aerial photograph, the bigger boats in the harbour are “longliners” used for crab fishing. They venture out as far as about 300 kilometres and can be away a week or more at a time. Longliners replaced the open trap skiffs of the old inshore cod fishery. The smaller boats seen here are

called “flats,” as most such boats have flat bottoms. These open or deckless boats are equipped with outboard motors and are mainly used in the lobster fishery. People who take part in recreational and subsistence fisheries also use flats since they are fast and easier to handle than the bigger crab boats.



Figure 11. *Paddy Broderick with model boat.* Paddy Broderick examines the model schooner he is building for his son, Brendan, who has been away from Bay de Verde working in Alberta’s oil patch for the past 15 years. “Every time we talk on the phone, about once a week, the first thing he asks about is the fishery,” says Paddy. “He’d love to come back to Bay de Verde and fish again, but the money isn’t there. It’s hard to make a living at it.” Paddy himself spent five years in Alberta, servicing oil rigs, before returning to Newfoundland in 2010 to fish and do carpentry. Paddy comes from a proud line of boat builders. “Since my descendants arrived from County Cork, Ireland, in the mid-1800s, they only had to buy one boat. All the rest they built themselves.”



Figure 12. *Tony and Tommy Doyle*. Tony Doyle and his son, Thomas, chat on the steps of their twine loft while taking a break from cutting bait for their crab pots. Thomas works 35-day rotations on a modern clam vessel on the Grand Banks, but while home he fishes crab and shrimp alongside his father. “I always wanted to be like my dad,” he says, “and that’s what I’ve done.” Tony is proud that his son is continuing the family tradition, despite the uncertain future of the crab and fish stocks.



Figure 13. *Don and Cecelia Keys*. Now retired, Cecelia and Don Keys spent 10 winters away from Bay de Verde housekeeping in the work camps of Alberta’s oil sands. “Me and the wife was like a team up there,” remembers Don, “doing beds and bathrooms and floors and working in the kitchen, too, sometimes. It was half-decent money. But when the oil prices went down and everything started to go flat, they cut back on our wages. It wasn’t no good no more.”

Before their Alberta years, Don and Cecelia had a crab licence and fished together in a small open boat as one of the few husband–wife teams in Bay de Verde. Now Don spends his time trouting, picking berries, and playing tunes on his accordion. He frequently plays at shed parties and other gatherings, and when tourists come around, Don admits, “sometimes I go down to the waterfront and play some tunes for them.”



Figure 14. *Don Keys on cabin porch.* “After the moratorium people had more free time,” explains Don Keys, “and some wanted to get away from the sea and not be lookin’ at what they’d lost, so they built cabins out on the barrens. The wife and me come out here to get away from town [about five kilometres away]. We make a fire in the stove, have some beers, play some tunes, and get together with friends.” Here Don relaxes after returning from trout fishing at one of the barrens’ many small ponds. “The Canadian flag came free with a case of beer. I like to fly it because I have a son in the Armed Forces. Next month he’s being promoted to sergeant.”



Figure 15. *Bob Sutton pouring tea.* Bob Sutton also enjoys spending time on the barrens in the cabin that he and his brother Gary built. Even though it requires navigating a rough track across a bog to reach it, the cabin serves as a base from which to hunt; more importantly, it has become a gathering place for family and friends to tell stories, play cards, and make music. Bob plays the guitar and sings. Many of the songs are his own creations, and some are now archived in the highly regarded folklore collection at Memorial University of Newfoundland.



Figure 16. *The view from Bob Sutton's cabin.* The cabins of other Bay de Verde families, all built on rented Crown land, are scattered across the barrens.



Figure 17. *Pauline Sutton*. The view from the kitchen of Jimmy’s Place, the Sutton family’s bed-and-breakfast and takeout kitchen, which Pauline Sutton runs with the help of her daughter, Jen. Rather than take out a bank loan to open what became Bay de Verde’s first B&B, Pauline and Bob took housekeeping jobs in Alberta oil sands work camps to raise the money. They spent four seasons “out West,” and draw on the knowledge they acquired there to run their business and promote local tourism.

While Pauline is grateful for the money she and Bob earned and the adventures they had out West, it was tough being away from family, especially their two grown children and Pauline’s two brothers. “Christmas spent out West,” she recalls, “was the saddest time of my life. . . . We spent Christmas Day crying and kicking ourselves in the arse for being out there and away from the kids and me brothers. We vowed we would never again spend Christmas away from home.”



Figure 18. *Aiden Brown*. The son of a fisherman and one of 14 children, Aiden Brown was raised on tiny St. Brendan's Island in Bonavista Bay. In his teens he became a commercial fisherman, working for a time out of Bay de Verde as well as northern Labrador. "When things [the cod fishery] really slowed down and there wasn't good money anymore, I got out and went to school at the Marine Institute in St. John's to get a certificate in merchant sailing." For the past 30 years, Aiden has been a boatswain on international tankers on work rotations of five to seven weeks. "I spend six months a year aboard a vessel and six months at home. The money is good and it gives us a good life," he explains, "but being away from home, you miss out on a lot — your son's birthday, a hockey tournament, graduation, and so on. You just have to make the best of it. You gotta put the good side up." Although Aiden's wife, Zula, is well used to it, she still doesn't like to see him leave home for a new rotation but admits that his going back to sea may be the secret of a good marriage. "You know, absence does make the heart grow fonder."

Today the whole family are mobile workers, with Zula commuting to St. John's approximately 100 kilometres each day to work as a nurse, and their only child, Andre, on a Canadian Coast Guard ship in the Arctic.



Figure 19. *Ryan Gates*. The chief mate on various offshore vessels until 2020, after 15 years at sea Ryan Gates took a shore-based job with the Canadian Coast Guard as a search-and-rescue coordinator. Although he is no longer away from home on three- to seven-week rotations, he is still a mobile worker, commuting an hour each way to St. John's from his new home in North River. "The new job," explains Ryan, "allows me to couple my maritime experience with a desire to help others as I have basically become a detective for when people are in distress [at sea]."



Figure 20. *Ryan Gates and his son, Patrick, at home in North River*. Ryan's wife, Lesley, who used to make the hour commute to St. John's to work as a pharmacist, is now grateful to work at a local pharmacy.



Figure 21. *Courtney picking berries.* Courtney Howell grew up in Louisiana and describes herself as a “Cajun girl.” She met her husband, Newfoundland artist Terrence Howell, while they were both teaching English in Korea. She first came to the Bay de Verde Peninsula on a visit to Terrence’s home and “just fell completely for Newfoundland.” Soon after, they bought a former two-room school in Grates Cove, near Bay de Verde, and invested all their savings into an ambitious renovation. Their Grates Cove Studios (a restaurant, accommodations, and art studio combo) won them the “Restaurateur of the Year” award a few years after opening. Here, Courtney picks berries with their daughter, Phoenix.



Figure 22. *The parish priest.* Reverend Julius Cheidozie Nwosu gives the opening prayer at mass in Bay de Verde’s Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church. Father Julius is one of six Nigerian priests from the Society of Divine Vocations working in rural Newfoundland. He is a mobile worker of a sort, as he travels between his three different parishes to deliver mass, and services aimed at fostering vocations in the priesthood and religious life. About his adjustment to life in Newfoundland, having been raised in Nigeria, he jokes, “You need to be prepared to be fed by many people, everybody wants to give you food — muffins, jam, fish . . .”



Figure 23. *Church service.* Father’s Day and a celebratory mass for a newly graduating First Holy Communion class results in an unusually full service at Bay de Verde’s Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church. “We don’t often see young people in church,” acknowledges Father Julius Cheidozie Nwosu. “We encourage parents to bring the young ones but it’s difficult. If they don’t come it will become a real problem for the future.” Like elsewhere in Canada, the number of Newfoundlanders with no religious affiliation is growing. Average attendance in both Catholic and Anglican churches in Bay de Verde has dropped to 40, mostly elderly, parishioners.



Figure 24. *Catholic cemetery.* Established in 1861, this Roman Catholic cemetery in Bay de Verde — one of four — was discontinued in 1975 when a new cemetery was built further up the road. The community, which is almost evenly split between Catholics and Protestants, also has four Protestant cemeteries and two family cemeteries. Until 10 years ago, says Brendan Doyle, a Roman Catholic church chairman and genealogist, nearly everyone was buried; now, most are cremated.



Figure 25. *Bay de Verde in the snow.* Bay de Verde's first snow, in October of the year. Most rural Newfoundlanders are fiercely attached to community and have no wish to leave the places in which they grew up, at least not permanently. In a survey of Bay de Verde youth attending a regional high school, 80 per cent said they would like to live in the community after graduation. But with few job prospects other than fishing or seasonal work in the crab plant, they expected to move away. Many said, though, they hoped they'd be able to return someday, perhaps in retirement.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- 1 Prior to this, the area was frequented in the summer by migratory fishermen from the West Country of England. The only residents prior to this, notes local historian Gerald Riggs, “were young men called ‘bye boat men’ who were left behind by the migratory fishermen in the fall to watch over their fishing premises and equipment.”
- 2 We wish to thank the people of Bay de Verde, particularly the subjects of this photo essay, for their support and help, in particular Paddy Broderick, Tony Doyle, Brendan Doyle, Gerald Riggs, and Jen Sutton-Walsh.

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“That’s Our Life”: Making Digital Stories with Mobile Worker Families

George Gmelch and Diane Royal

Abstract

This contribution introduces digital storytelling and what the authors learned through this medium about the experiences of mobile workers. The subjects of the digital stories all live in rural Newfoundland and were participants in the authors’ field research on work, mobility, and family. At the time of filming, the subjects were working in “turnaround” jobs in the oil sands of Alberta, on a large-scale construction project in Labrador, on oil rigs and shuttle tankers in the North Atlantic, and in fishing on the Grand Banks. In their digital stories, they describe the experience of departure and return, the work they do, and the impact of distance and frequent absence on family life and marriages.

Introduction

We first learned about digital storytelling while conducting fieldwork in Newfoundland as part of the On the Move Partnership (OTM), a multi-year, multi-disciplinary, cross-national study of extended mobility for and within work.¹ Digital stories are short documentaries that combine still photographs and video, natural sound and music, and the subjects’ voice to tell a personal story (Sanchez-Laws 2010). In the documentary film world, they are sometimes known as “short docs.” Researchers on the OTM team were asked to consider producing digital stories as another way of communicating our research

findings to the public and were offered some basic training through a workshop in how to do this.

Lacking filmmaking skills, we arrived at the OTM workshop in July 2015, curious but skeptical that we would be able to learn enough over five days to produce a digital story of our own. We ended up producing five.² This remains something of a surprise, both to ourselves and to our OTM colleagues, who have not forgotten our early fumbling and hesitancy. To achieve this, we relied heavily on the skills of others — a documentary filmmaker, a videographer, a few tech-savvy undergraduate students, and Memorial University’s Digital Research Centre for Qualitative Fieldwork.³ It also helped that we already knew the subjects from having conducted fieldwork interviews with them and knew, or suspected, who would be good storytellers on camera.

The mobilities of our digital story subjects encompass the spectrum of mobile work found in many rural communities on the east coast of the island of Newfoundland on the Avalon and Bay de Verde peninsulas — the location of our fieldwork. Their work includes “fly in, fly out” or “turnaround” jobs in



Figure 1. Ian McGuire filming Tony and Tommy Doyle cutting squidbait for crab pots. (Photo by Andrew Lincoln)

the oil sands of Alberta and British Columbia, work on a large-scale construction project in Labrador, work on oil rigs and shuttle tankers in the North Atlantic, and fishing on the Grand Banks.

The five digital stories — which our subjects usually refer to simply as “videos” — provide a broad view of the lives of these mobile workers, including glimpses into those of other family members. At the time of filming, all had jobs that required considerable travel to or on the worksite, as in the case of seafarers and fishermen. They worked on two-to-six-week rotations, which resulted in most spending half of each year away from family and their home community.

What the Digital Stories Say about Work and Family

In their digital stories, men and women describe the experience of departure and return, the work they do, the impact of distance and frequent absence on family life and marriages. Typically, the men work away, often on lengthy rotations, leaving their partners and children at home. “I never get used to the fact of him being gone,” Jen Sutton-Walsh notes in *Living the Turnaround Life* (2018) about her husband Scott, a heavy equipment operator on a large hydroelectric project in Labrador. “I get used to the fact that he *has* to go, but not him being gone.” For many, working away is a way of life that crosses generations. Aiden Brown (*A Family on the Move*, 2019) has spent the past 30 years working three-to-five-week rotations on international tankers. Now his son Andre has followed in his footsteps and gone to sea, serving in the Canadian Coast Guard in the Arctic. As Aiden’s wife Zula remarks: “With regards to our son working away, I guess that’s all he ever knew with his father and me. Every second Christmas one of us was gone — he don’t know any different and this is all I know. That’s our life.” “It’s 100 per cent the norm for me. It’s just what we’re used to,” says Jen Sutton-Walsh, whose parents worked in Alberta’s oil sands and whose grandfather was away for months at a time seal hunting and at seasonal jobs on a US military base in Argentia, Newfoundland. In this manner, working away is normalized for most of the featured families.

The men in our digital stories share a respect for their partners’ authority and decision-making in their absence. As Aiden Brown describes, “We have our differences, me and my young fella, because I didn’t raise him. Zula raised

him. That makes a difference. Because I'm gone, I mean I can't come home and try to change something that she's after doing." Ryan Gates, in *Home and at Sea: A Newfoundland Story* (2018), reflects on his wife Lesley's rearing of their two young children: "It's got to be tough on her. When I'm home, I try to help as much as possible. But she's got her system and she makes it work and that's what works for us." Jen and Scott Walsh, who do not have children, reflect on the difficulty of raising children when one spouse is away for half of each year. "It's hard to imagine having kids on top of it all," says Jen. "But I see my girlfriends do it, so I know that it is possible. But they're like superwomen . . . they're really self-sufficient."



Figure 2. Dennis Lanson filming Jen Sutton and her brother Stephen jigging for cod in the food fishery. George Gmelch on far right. (Photo by Andrew Lincoln)

All of the wives in our digital stories speak of their having become very independent as a result of having to make decisions and handle so many household and family matters on their own while their husbands are away. According

to Aiden Brown, “It takes a special lady to stay with a person that goes to sea.” He also notes that not all men can deal with their wives becoming so independent. Ironically, when we asked women during our interviews if they felt they had become “feminists” as a result of having to run their households and make many family decisions on their own, all said no. We suspect this had a lot to do with negative stereotypes in rural places, and had we defined feminism for them, as the belief in the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes, we might have gotten a different answer. In addition to women’s new-found independence and the good wages that most men earned, another upside to rotational work was, some claimed, that regular and lengthy absences actually strengthened their marital relationships. Thomas Doyle in *Working Away* (2018) maintains, “I feel like it keeps our relationship stronger . . .” His wife Angela agrees. Two of the couples we interviewed used nearly identical phrasing: “We tend to fall in love all over again every time he comes home,” Lesley Gates remarks about Ryan’s return. “For sure the romance is still there,” Zula Brown says, smiling. “No doubt about it.” But we also encountered other marriages in our interviews that had been frayed or didn’t last because of the absences required of rotational work.



Figure 3. Aiden and Zula Brown at their home in New Harbour. (Photo by Andrew Lincoln)

All of our families note the considerable personal cost of rotational work, especially having to miss out on holidays and special occasions like birthdays, weddings, and graduations. Bob and Pauline Sutton in *Bob and Pauline's Story* (2017) describe working together “out West” in Alberta during Christmas one year and not even being able to enjoy their turkey supper because they were crying so hard, missing their family. Says Pauline, “We vowed that we’d never again spend Christmas away from home.” Despite being a mobile worker herself who commutes over an hour each way into St. John’s, Zula Brown describes feeling the need to be there for her son when her husband is gone — “to be there for every activity, school activity, hockey, dirt biking, whatever he was into.” Nearly all the rotational workers talk about trying to compensate for their absences and what they missed while working away by spending as much extra and concentrated time with their wives and children when they were home as they can.



Figure 4. Dennis Lanson filming Bob Sutton at his cabin on the barrens near Bay de Verde. (Photo by Andrew Lincoln)

The Meaning of the Digital Stories for Our Subjects

To learn something about the personal impact recording a digital story had on our subjects, we reconnected with them in June 2020 through e-mail and by phone. One of the main questions we asked was whether or not they had acquired any new understanding of their work or its impact on their families by having participated in creating a digital story. Had doing an on-camera interview, viewing the rough cut and then finished film, and hearing the reactions of others who later watched their filmed story resulted in any new awareness or epiphanies surrounding their working lives?

Pauline Sutton, in *Bob and Pauline's Story* (2017), who spent four seasons in western Canada as a housekeeper in work camps, told us:

When I look at the video, it reminds me of all that we did, all that we saw being out West. . . . The camps, the people, the scenery, the travel — the Greyhound bus overturning that could have killed us and once being stranded with sketchy people out in the middle of nowhere and escaping in the middle the night. I think “My God, we did all that.” It was a wonderful adventure, a real learning experience.

But the video also made me realize that there is no place like home. First time we went out West, I left my two brothers in the care of my son, Stephen. Looking back, I can't believe I did that. With all the places we've been — every province in Canada — still at the end of the day, no matter how much I liked it, it's made me realize how important home and [caring for] family is.

Similarly, Pauline's husband, Bob, said that when he watches the video (which he admitted having done over a dozen times) he, too, is reminded and “amazed at all that I lived through, but I think I would do it differently today.”

Jen Sutton-Walsh — featured in *Living the Turnaround Life* (2018) — says, “First, I have to say that the video captured a way of life, a speck, a moment in our existence and who we were as a surviving married couple. We are lucky and fortunate to have that [the digital story].” Now, two years since the completion of their digital story, their life is entirely different. Her husband, Scott Walsh, no longer works away, having been laid off from his job as an equipment operator in Labrador. He now works near home, in the local fish plant in Bay de Verde. For Jen and Scott, their digital story is now a record of their rotational work life, which, because of all the time spent apart, they hope to never have to repeat.

Zula Brown said that her involvement in the production of *A Family on the Move* (2019) “brought an awareness and realization of what we were doing all those many years” — with Zula commuting more than two hours a day to St. John’s and back for 28 years while working as a nurse, and Aiden spending five-week rotations at sea as a boatswain on international tankers. “It wasn’t just the film,” she continued, “but what the many people who saw the film spoke to us about. They commended us for doing the work we did. A lot of people could relate [to our story] as well, because it’s a big part of our culture in Newfoundland to work away from home.”

Thirty-seven-year-old Thomas Doyle said his digital story (*Working Away*, 2018) about working 35-day rotations on the ultramodern surf clam factory freezer ship the *Belle Carnell* on the Grand Banks had “two big impacts” on him:

First, how much time I have missed away from my children’s lives and not being there for them in some of their life struggles and not getting to see them do a lot of their “firsts.” . . . After having a lot of people come to me and say, “I have seen your video and it was amazing. How do you be away from your family for so long?” I sat back and realized I need to stop rushing to get things done and spend as much time as I can with family. . . . The video made me think about finding a new job that’s closer to home, to be home more. But then I think about how good a life I am providing for my family

with the money I am making from working on a factory freezer ship. Fishing is in my blood. I don't know if I would be able to work somewhere else, to be honest. I also wonder what would happen if I was in my wife's space more than I am now. I realize now how independent my wife has become and how strong she has been with me gone for half of the last 10 years we have been together.

Ryan and Lesley Gates's digital story, *Home and at Sea: A Newfoundland Story* (2018), shows a couple similar to Aiden and Zula Brown in that both are mobile workers: Ryan spending 15 years at sea on an oil rig supply vessel and Lesley as a pharmacist commuting an hour-plus each way into the capital city of St. John's. Since the completion of their story, Ryan has taken a shore-based job with the Canadian Coast Guard as a search-and-rescue coordinator. While he is no longer away from home for three- to seven-week rotations, he is still a mobile worker who now commutes daily 90 kilometres each way to St. John's. Lesley's life has also changed since she took a job at a pharmacy near their home in North River.

Conclusion

We found digital stories to be an excellent medium for capturing something of the character of family life of rotational workers. Beyond the actual stories told, having visual and oral records provides added insights through images of the narrators' homes and surroundings, their facial expressions, the sound and cadence of their speech. We believe that short digital stories — ours range from six to 12 minutes in length — are a more accessible and popular medium for communicating OTM's research to the public than a published academic article or book. Within a few weeks of Thomas Doyle's digital story being posted on the OTM website, for example, it had more than 1,400 views and had been widely shared on Facebook, where it had been viewed by many members of Thomas's home community of Bay de Verde. Rarely have we published an academic article that has gotten such immediate attention from its subjects and the general public. All of those featured in the digital stories told us during



Figure 5. George Gmelch discussing digital story filming with Tony and Tommy Doyle. (Photo by Andrew Lincoln)

our follow-up interviews that many people in their community and beyond had seen and listened to their story.

While all the fieldwork we did prior to producing these digital stories was collaborative in that it required cooperation and feedback between us as researchers and the mobile workers we interviewed, none of it involved the degree of collaboration required to produce a digital story. Apart from an initial audio interview, there was the filming at their homes and other locations. Time was usually spent jointly scouring their family albums for still photographs from their youth and times spent away to supplement the visuals. In some instances, we were able to film at their workplace, as in the case of Ryan Gates on a supply vessel. When this was not possible, subjects (Aiden Brown and Scott Walsh) used their cellphones to film their working lives away from home. Once we had a rough cut, our subjects and their families viewed their digital stories and provided feedback. In short, our subjects were consulted and involved at each stage of the process. An added benefit of this collaboration for us personally is the friendships we have developed. A leading proponent of

collaborative ethnography, anthropologist Luke Eric Lassiter (2005), posits that such collaboration constructs a more equitable social science — one that considers the perspectives and voices of the people anthropologists study. We would argue this is particularly true when collaborating with a subject on his or her digital story.



Figure 6. Diane Royal with Pauline Sutton in the kitchen of Pauline's bed-and-breakfast, Jimmy's Place. (Photo by Andrew Lincoln)

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Notes

- 1 See www.onthemovepartnership.ca for more information about the On the Move Partnership.
- 2 All five digital stories can be found on the On the Move Partnership website here: <https://www.onthemovepartnership.ca/results/digital-stories/>.
- 3 At the time of training, fieldwork, and production this resource at MUN was called the Digital Research Centre for Qualitative Fieldwork. It has since been renamed the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Film Unit. More information about this resource can be found here: <https://www.mun.ca/hss/film/>.

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PART V:

International Migration, Work, and Families

A Migrant's Journey: From Fish Plant Worker to Registered Nurse

Marie Antoinette G. Pangan

The Promised Land

Born and raised in the Philippines, I left in 2005 to work in Taiwan. The hardest part of the process was that I did not have an option but to leave my two-year-old son. Like any other parent would do, my goal was to provide and give him a brighter future. After three years, the situation got worse when my husband passed away. I knew I had to strive even more.

In 2009, there was an opportunity to work in Canada as a temporary foreign worker (TFW). My close friends asked me to apply for work. I was thrilled, thinking that when I get a permanent residency in Canada, my son will be able to live with me. With big dreams of living in the “promised land,” I spent a fortune on recruitment agency fees. Fortunately, my TFW visa was approved, and I accepted seasonal/contractual work in the fish plant company called South Shore Seafoods. It is located in Bloomfield, Prince Edward Island (PEI).

It was May 2010 when I arrived in Canada. Everything was different to me — food, culture, language, and weather. During my first winter season, I remember wearing three to five layers of clothing when going to work. It was a fun and challenging experience. Every day, I felt like I was in a battle. I was sad being away from my son and family. My heart broke every time he asked when I would be home, or if I would be returning for Christmas. I was asking myself, am I doing the right thing? How many more birthdays will my son celebrate

without me by his side? Each day was like a year for me, waiting for a perfect time when I could be with him. The “perfect time” meant that my contract would be extended, I would be permitted to apply for permanent residency, and my son could live with me. My fate depended on my employer, the demand for the job that I did, and the government’s decision to grant me a residency.

Lights at the End of the Tunnel

Despite many frustrations, my goals were unshakeable. The hardships of being a TFW did not deter me from carrying on. I was determined not to go back to the Philippines unless my goals were met. Back then, there was no pathway to permanent residency if you were working in seasonal jobs such as those in agriculture and the fisheries industry. I needed a full-time, year-round job to qualify as a permanent residency candidate, and my employer must be willing to support my application. I would also have to prove to the government that I had sufficient savings and was financially capable of supporting my son if I wished to bring him here to Canada. With the help of my partner, family, friends, and the Filipino community, I was able to get a permanent job in Charlottetown, PEI. I worked six different jobs, including at a hotel and a fast-food restaurant. The routine was to work as much as possible, send money for my son, and save some for my residency application. The process was long and expensive, I must say.

The moment I was waiting for finally came in 2014 when I was granted a permanent residency. After a long four years, I went back to the Philippines to visit and take my son to live with me in Canada. I felt enormously blessed that all my hard work had paid off. It was the best travel of my life.

New Opportunities, New Adventure

Being a permanent resident did not stop me from appreciating how grateful I am to be here in Canada. There are so many opportunities in this beautiful country, and despite the hardships I have encountered I never forgot my other dream — the dream of going back to school. I applied to the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) nursing program in 2015. I was hesitant at first. I was 33 years old and had been out of school for almost 15 years. I was quite

nervous, especially when I learned of the wait-list system of the nursing program. Because English is not my first language, I was required to write a language proficiency exam. Thankfully, I was accepted and offered to join the group of 65 nursing students.

My first few years as a mature student were like a roller-coaster ride. It was overwhelming. There were times that I cried because I was stressed and unsure of how to write a research paper again. While some of my classmates were having a hard time shortening their essays, I had a hard time thinking of more English words to meet the minimum number of words required.

I did not stop there. I asked for help from my professors and the writing centre staff, and I spent hours and hours in the library researching ways to improve myself as a student. Despite all these challenges, I just carried on and



Figure 1. Graduation day, where I was valedictorian. (Photo submitted by Marie Antoinette Pangan)



Figure 2. Dr. Christina Murray and I at my graduation. (Photo submitted by Marie Antoinette Pangan)

tried to do my best. I told myself that nothing is impossible if I work hard. I need to have faith and follow what my heart desires.

I am currently humbled and proud that I have achieved my goals and am now working as a registered nurse. It was a long journey. My experiences as a TFW made me realize that the separation of families due to work truly impacts each family member's life. In my situation, separation from family motivated me to work even harder and taught me to embrace the consequences and experience the sweet taste of success as a determined individual.

The new chapter of my life has just begun. There are more challenges and successes in the future. Still, I hope that my story inspires readers, immigrants/foreign workers, and especially the working parents coming from different parts of the globe. I know that most of us have one common goal — we want to become successful in life — so, dream big, aim high!

Crossing Paths: Intersecting Mobilities

Catherine Bryan

Abstract

Located at the intersection of the anthropology of political economy and critical social work research, this chapter elaborates the relationship of gender, social reproduction, and state-compelled mobility. The chapter presents results from in-depth ethnographic fieldwork with migrant workers in Manitoba and their non-migrant kin in the Philippines alongside elements of the author's own family history of mobility. In so doing, it highlights the gendered parameters of migration in both contexts and its near-ubiquitous implications for family and social reproduction. Indeed, it illustrates how the labour of social reproduction, coupled with gendered norms and expectations, are consistently harnessed and simultaneously reoriented to meet the needs of kin and the longer-term projects of state development upon which labour mobility is often predicated. Despite the similarities motivating and accompanying the mobility of those centred in the chapter's analysis, it also stresses the uneven distribution of the long-term risks and benefits associated with mobility for different groups.

Introduction

This chapter brings together several stories of migration. Corresponding to distinct people, points in time, places of origin, and directions of travel, each

story is unique. And yet, reflective of broader patterns of mobility in the twentieth century, read together, they offer insight into the global conditions and dynamics that prompt mobility, determine its parameters, and influence the experience of migration. I have gathered these stories in different ways — some through fieldwork with Filipino temporary foreign workers recruited to work at a hotel in rural Manitoba, others in conversation with my grandmother and mother, and yet others through a deductive process based on my own experiences and growing understanding of the colonial project in what is known as western Canada.

Assembled here, these accounts and the analysis they foster bring together the methodological contributions of anthropology and social work. Despite differing objectives, there is considerable overlap between the theoretical and political projects of social work and anthropology. Both share the intention of understanding and challenging large-scale processes and dynamics through the investigation of individual lives, relationships, and communities (Bryan and Barrett 2020). Though not absent in anthropology, central to social work education and scholarship is the requirement of critical self-reflection (Campbell and Baikie 2013; Fook and Gardner 2013); students, scholars, and practitioners alike are prompted to engage theoretically and critically with the details of their own lives. This practice aims to generate insight into the structural hierarchies and inequalities that condition social location, access to resources, and opportunity. In so doing, it strives for a more fulsome understanding of the self that facilitates a more effective, transparent, accountable, and empathetic engagement with clients and research subjects.

From the author's vantage point as an anthropologist and social work educator, this chapter presents two case studies: one draws on in-depth multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author between 2012 and 2014 with migrant workers in Manitoba and their non-migrant kin in the Philippines; the other, following from critical social work's self-reflective imperative, considers the migration history of my own family and the far-reaching impacts of this history. From these two sets of data, this chapter situates both research and the researcher in the unevenness of global political economy as a means of connecting and differentiating the mobilities demanded of contemporary

livelihoods and familial social reproduction. It also explores how critically informed research can prompt and illuminate the mobile lives and mobility histories of those designated “researcher.” Indeed, reflecting on the narratives of my research participants generated new insight into my own family’s history, which, in turn, has enabled me to more fully understand the systems and structures that compel and influence mobility.

The chapter proposes that the work of documenting and analyzing the conditions prompting labour mobility and transnational configurations of family might benefit from an interrogation of the historic and contemporary mobilities that have shaped the subjectivities and facilitated the social locations of the scholars and researchers engaged in that work. This is not to encourage a flattening of difference, but rather to suggest that paying attention to how manifold mobilities converge over time might offer important insight into those conditions that simultaneously connect, standardize, and differentiate the experiences and outcomes of migration. Such a project might prompt researchers to consider their own lives as embedded in those conditions, making them more responsive to the experiences of those they study while simultaneously revealing the inequities embedded within academic engagements with mobility and mobile people.

The chapter’s first section responds to the substantive theme of families, work, and mobility among temporary foreign workers who come to Canada for work. Motivated by my mother’s long-distance care of my grandmother, my doctoral research sought to contribute to a considerable scholarship that has emerged at the intersection of feminist studies and migration research. Over the last 40 years, this literature has critiqued the structures that have fostered and relied on internationally mobile labour migration (Barber 2008, 2013; Lee and Johnstone 2013; Tungohan 2018). Concurrently, important attention has been paid to documenting and analyzing the experiences of those most immediately affected by those structures and their outcomes: migrants and their families. Much of this work has focused on gender, and how gender ideology, particularly as it relates to care, is utilized and adapted to further the objective of migrant labour export and import (Eviota 1992; Parreñas 2007; Tungohan 2013). More precisely, drawing on my doctoral work, this first section

offers an ethnographic rendering of a small Filipino migrant workforce recruited to a hotel and conference centre in rural Manitoba. A more conventional scholarly rendering, this section focuses on how these workers and their non-migrant kin navigate and negotiate their familial roles, responsibilities, and relationships over considerable distances and, often, over a period of many years.

Responsive to social work's critical self-reflective imperative, Section Two offers a narrative of my familial history of displacement and migration. In it, I trace my maternal grandmother's mobility in Europe in the 1940s, culminating in my mother's immigration to Canada in the late 1960s, and my paternal grandfather's arrival in Manitoba through the British Home Children program in 1925. Here, my capacity to recognize the large-scale political and economic systems and ideological processes that influenced my family's mobility accelerated in light of the ethnographic work I was doing. At the same time, the unevenness of those systems and processes was also revealed in the divergent experiences and outcomes of my family relative to those of my participants.

Drawing, then, on these seemingly discrete cases — that of my own family and those that emerged in the context of my fieldwork in Manitoba and the Philippines — the chapter's third section highlights two insights relevant to mobility scholars, critical social work educators and academics, and anthropologists of migration and political economy alike. In the first instance, it illuminates the near-ubiquitous relationship of gender, social reproduction, and state-compelled mobility. In the second, it argues that despite the similarities that often motivate and accompany migration, the benefits of mobility remain unevenly distributed, corresponding to the persistent inequalities generated and capitalized on by the systems and structures that require it. This, in turn, complicates the relationship between researcher and research subject, prompting an ongoing and deliberate examination of the intersection where researcher and research subject meet.

Section One: Dutiful Daughters, Migrant Mothers, and the Creation of Migrant Families

In this section, I offer a more conventionally academic account that draws on fieldwork conducted with a small group of Filipino migrants recruited between

2009 and 2014 by a hotel and conference centre in rural Manitoba, and their non-migrant kin in the Philippines. Located in Manitoba's central-west, at the intersection of three highways, the Douglas Inn is well frequented by the tourists, construction crews, truckers, and travellers who transit the region. Stopping for a meal or a few nights' rest, these differently positioned mobile people encounter each other and the hotel's workers often on their way elsewhere. Even as their mobility ensures the viability of the town's secondary economic sector (service and hospitality), to these short-term visitors, Douglas, with its clearly delineated boundaries and its relatively static population, appears fixed; unchanged; unchanging — a taken-for-granted fixture of the rural prairie landscape. And yet, Douglas is a site of perpetual mobility, corresponding, at once, to the near-constant flow of people making use of the hotel's amenities and to the protracted histories of human movement, forced displacement, and labour migration that have determined the town's physical, social, economic, and cultural geography (Bryan 2019b).

Most recently, and corresponding to my fieldwork, these histories have come to include those of a small group of Filipino migrant workers and their non-migrant kin. At the centre of the analysis offered here is Violet, who arrived in Manitoba in 2012; her mother, June, who, when I met her, lived in the Filipino province of Cebu but had lived and worked in Hong Kong for nearly two decades; Sheila, who also arrived in Manitoba in 2012; and her aunt, Lalilani, who was living in the Filipino province of Cagayan de Oro when we met, but who had lived for most of her working life in the United States. In each instance, their experiences of migration exemplify the ways in which women take up labour migration as an extension of their socially circumscribed roles as mothers and daughters in the Philippines. At the same time, and consistent with the literature, their employment overseas has shifted the balance of power within Filipino family life, which despite women's relative financial empowerment has tended to follow conventional gender hierarchies (Parreñas 2005). For example, transgressing traditional notions of Filipino motherhood by "leaving the family," June's decision to pursue employment as a domestic worker in Hong Kong in the late 1980s put her at odds with her in-laws. "What they wanted," she explained, "was for me to stay in the Philippines to look

after my husband and our children.” Even as her in-laws were unhappy with June’s decision to migrate, the alternative — remaining in the Philippines — would have proven much more difficult. By the late 1980s, the family, like so many others in the country (Bello et al. 2005), faced significant underemployment and growing economic insecurity. With her husband out of work and only the small income generated by her *sari sari* store to rely on, June felt she had no other option than to migrate:

I had to go because of the financial situation . . . you know, I wanted my children to go to school — especially Violet. I was so lucky because I found a good employer. I had four children that I took care of when I went there. . . . Every two years, I would come back to the Philippines, but if they said “you cannot go back because [we] need you,” then it’s OK, after three years, then.

Over the course of 15 years, June saw her children five times. At 17 years old, her mother still in Hong Kong, Violet began her post-secondary studies in hotel and restaurant management. In contrast to many of her peers, Violet pursued her degree with the intention of securing employment in the Philippines. As both women explained, June had left so that her children could stay. These plans, however, would be forever changed when a fire destroyed their home. All of June’s savings and future earnings were invested in its reconstruction; Violet — forfeiting her objective of local employment — found work as a welder in Singapore. Five years later, her mother exhausted, the family no better off, and her younger brother entering his final year of high school, Violet assumed full responsibility for her family’s financial and material security, as well as the ongoing reconstruction of their house. She was better able to do these things because she had received a job offer from the Douglas Inn in Manitoba. In contrast to her mother’s experience, Violet’s decision to become a migrant worker was met with far less discord. By the early 2000s, the time of her initial departure, overseas employment had been normalized — integrated into the Filipino social imaginary as a viable livelihood strategy and,

moreover, as an extension of women's socially constituted familial role. Violet's grandparents accepted her decision as a routine response to her family's financial need, which, despite the country's improved economic outlook and June's efforts, persisted.

Differently positioned socially and economically, Sheila and Lalilani, the subjects of our second case study, belong to a well-established, middle-class family with strong transnational ties to the United States. Sheila's aunt, Lalilani, left the Philippines around the same time as June — in the later 1980s. Landing first in Nevada and then making her way to New York, Lalilani practised dentistry in the US for over two decades. Lalilani's success in the US became a marker of her family's success in the Philippines so that even as she struggled to meet her own needs in New York, her family's class status was further elevated — an outcome not only of the remittances they received (invested in education), but of the fact that she was able to practise her profession in the US. Retired and once again living in the Philippines, Lalilani now serves as an example to her adult nieces and nephews and their children: work hard, avoid distraction, and accomplish your goals. Never fully living up to her aunt's example or expectations, in the Philippines Sheila was employed — but only, she said, to fill the time, and only then on a casual, on-call basis. She used her small income as “pocket money,” relying on the earnings of her in-laws, who were mostly in California, to meet her family's needs and to cover the costs associated with her children's early education. These remittances, if necessary, were supplemented by assistance from her sister, a tenured faculty member at the School of Nursing at the University of Manila, and her brother, a physician who worked as a nurse in Chicago with his wife. Sheila and her siblings had been educated by Lalilani and so such an arrangement made sense according to both her personal history and the socio-cultural context in which that history was lived.

In our many conversations, Sheila never brags about her privileges; rather, she uses them as a means of underscoring her shortcomings as a daughter, as a sister, and as a mother according to long-standing social idioms. “We had two helpers in the house. I don't know how to cook; I just know how to do a little cleaning task: dusting and sweeping, arranging all those things that are messy.

That's it. That's really it. That's me. That's what I am." Sheila's decision to seek out employment in Canada as a temporary foreign worker in 2012 was, in her own words, unnecessary: her family was already taken care of — moreover, they were taken care of well. When she announced that she had been offered a job in hotel housekeeping by an employer in Manitoba, her family was surprised — pleased, if somewhat puzzled, considering her low-skilled designation. Reflecting on her arrival in Manitoba, Sheila explained:

When I started working at the hotel, I cried; I cried every day because is this what I'm worth now? This is what I am now? My life in the Philippines, back home is just . . . I call it extraordinary because I [was] a princess there. . . . I pity myself; I feel insecure because I walk here. In the winter! When I walk, I cry because I'm thinking of my life in the Philippines. But I survived. I am proud of myself.

For two years, Sheila cycled through feelings of pride and shame. She felt proud of herself for acting and for surviving, and yet, this pride was complicated by the realities of her social location in Douglas, constituted as it was at the intersection of precarity (the outcome of her initial legal status in Canada), servitude (following the gendered parameters of service and hospitality work), and subordination (as a member of a racialized group in the context of predominantly white rural Manitoba). Her family, in turn, came to respect her and describe her positively, though somewhat begrudgingly (according to her husband).

The context of Manitoba offered an additional and unique opportunity that would solidify Sheila's new standing within her family. Through the provisions of the province's immigration scheme, Sheila secured permanent residency for herself, her husband, and their three children. The possibility of permanency in Canada offered Sheila and others like her at the hotel a new way of demonstrating, actualizing, and performing motherhood. Indeed, for many, it represented a new maternal strategy, providing them with a new way of caring for their children and prompting them to refocus their maternal labour

and energies towards the unexpected, though welcome, project of permanent immigration. For Sheila, her capacity to successfully execute this project would dramatically alter her position within her extended family. No longer seen as indolent and frivolous, she is celebrated for her accomplishment.

Section Two: A Personal History of Migration and Mobility

This section offers two sides of my family's migration history. While I had long heard some of these stories, through my PhD work with Filipino temporary foreign workers and their families, I was able to approach these personal histories more analytically. No longer isolated, I was able to situate these histories and their outcomes in the systems and structures that, though differently, influenced the mobility of my Filipino participants. The first narrative traces the mobility of my maternal grandmother during World War II, culminating in my mother's emigration from France in 1968; the second offers insight into my paternal grandfather's arrival in Manitoba in the 1920s. These histories intersect in the 1970s when my parents first meet.

Instructed by the French government to flee when northeastern France fell to the Nazis in 1940, my grandmother, her parents, and two sisters travelled 40 kilometres on foot from their village to the city of Thoinville. Uniquely located, Lorraine — their province of origin — is the only region in France to share borders with three countries: Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany. In the most northeastern part of the region, most residents historically — my family among them — speak Germanic dialects, referred to collectively as *plàtt*. Given the linguistic, geographic, and cultural proximity to Germany, the jurisdiction of Meurthe-et-Moselle has been historically contested, oscillating back and forth between the two European powers. The consequence for my family has been a strong political allegiance and affinity to France, coupled with a linguistic and cultural similarity to Germany. When the war began in 1939, my grandmother was the only fluent French speaker in her family, and so at 19, as they made their way to Free France, she became their breadwinner, translator, and protector.

From Thoinville, they were taken by train to Frouard, from Frouard to Nancy, and from Nancy to Savoie, in Free France in the southern part of the

country. In Savoie, my great-grandparents worked odd jobs where and when they could, while my grandmother — by then 20 — found a position as a clerk in a government office processing the papers of incoming enemy soldiers. There she met my grandfather, an Italian soldier who had been deployed to the Swiss border. He deserted his post and travelled with her, her parents, and sisters to Reims (Occupied France). They remained there, in hiding, for several months, before attempting to escape to Morocco. Crossing the border from Occupied to Free France, they were arrested by the Germans and taken to Fort du Hâ in Bordeaux. Separated, my grandmother remained in Bordeaux until her release several months later; my grandfather was taken to Switzerland where he was eventually exchanged for German prisoners of war captured by the Italians following their surrender to the Allied forces in 1943. In 1946, my grandparents were reunited. My mother was born shortly after but remained in the care of her grandmother in Moselle. In 1954, at the age of seven, my mother arrived in Reims to live with her parents.

In the late 1960s, my mother — at the age of 20 — arrived in Manitoba. When she talks about her life in France and her migration project, she often references growing conflict with *her* mother: a tension generated by her curiosity about the world and its possibilities beyond the middle-class life my grandparents had cultivated in the post-war period; my grandmother, in turn, was staunchly adherent to the norms of their new social location. Thirty-five years after my mother landed in Canada, her relationship with her mother repaired, she assumed primary responsibility for my grandmother, who could no longer safely live independently. In the absence of adequately reliable relatives in France, my mother arranged for her care from Canada. She spent hours on the phone, navigating an unfamiliar health-care bureaucracy, communicating her mother's growing needs, and negotiating with health-care professionals whose interest in being helpful varied.

Relative to my mother's side, I know very little about my father's family. Hardship, violence, dysfunction — these words float around but are never grounded in detail. While conducting my PhD fieldwork in Manitoba, some of this was unexpectedly clarified as I turned to the mobility histories of long-standing residents of the region. Their settler ancestors, bearers of their

own trauma yet complicit in the violence of a colonial project all the same, had arrived from Europe, the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere in Canada (Ontario and Quebec). In Manitoba, their labour would be accompanied by that of tradespeople, temporary migrants of various kinds — already, by 1895, a fixture of Manitoban history (Trumper and Wong 2010; Vosko 2010) — and of British Home Children, or as they're referred to in the region where I conducted my fieldwork, Barnardo Boys. Children and youth considered to be Barnardo Boys were part of a larger, highly coordinated movement of marginalized young people out of England's urban centres (1868–1930) and into the dominions of Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa, under the auspices of the Barnardo Foundation, founded in England in the 1860s by Thomas John Barnardo. Some of these young people were delivered to work in rural Manitoba (Corbett 2002).

Common among the descendants of British Home Children is a sense of detachment and alienation from family — an outcome of trauma, violence, abuse, and separation from family and other important relations. Frequently removed from their own parents under duress or through duplicitous means, brought forcibly to Canada, and compelled to live and work with strangers, Home Children's experiences often departed dramatically from the promises made by the various charitable foundations charged with organizing, managing, and facilitating their migration. Despite knowing very little about Home Children prior to my fieldwork in Manitoba, this history resonated; its social and relational outcomes felt familiar. Pursuing this feeling, I discovered that my paternal grandfather — the source of so much trauma and pain — had landed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1925 on a ship called the *Ausonia*. At the age of 16 he departed Southampton under the charge of an organization called Church Army that, in 1909, had established a Boys' Aid Department intended to find older children employment and training and, in some instances, to assist with emigration to Canada. They ran hostels in cities across Canada, which served as labour distribution centres. The distribution centre in Winnipeg, where my grandfather first stayed, was a receiving home for Barnardo Boys.

Section Three: Intersecting Histories/Uneven Outcomes

Insight One: The Relationship of Gender, Social Reproduction, and State-Compelled Migration

The ethnographic description offered in Section One provides insight into the now iconic *migrant mother* and *dutiful daughter* (Margold 2004). As many feminist scholars of political economy have argued, motherhood as a form of labour and mothers as particular kinds of workers — both waged and unwaged — are pivotal to regimes of capitalist accumulation (Bezanson and Luxton 2006; Gazso 2004; Laslett and Brenner 1989; Mies 1998). Over the last four decades, however, following from the institutionalization of labour export policy in the Philippines, these dynamics have shifted, becoming transnational in configuration and effect and producing and reproducing new forms of motherhood and family. As argued by Pauline Gardiner Barber (1997, 41), the Philippine state directly manipulates “historically resonant, gendered cultural idioms in Philippine culture — dutiful daughters, migrant mothers” — to ensure participation in labour export programs. After all, over the past decade just under 10 per cent of the Philippines’ annual gross domestic product has been accounted for by remittances from overseas workers (Statista 2021). For 2020, this amounted to nearly US\$35 billion. And yet, as revealed in the narratives of Violet, June, Sheila, and Lalilani, migrants are not strictly, or uncritically, constrained by the meanings assigned to them. While categories of Filipino migrant personhood often correspond to the objectives of the Philippine state vis-à-vis labour export, they also map on to family history, circumstance, and aspiration. As a result, despite the best efforts of the state to mould social identities conducive to migratory projects, these efforts are, at times, met with ambivalence and trepidation, even as such projects have become routinized and normalized over the last several decades.

My interest in transnational reproductive projects followed directly from my own experience and observation of my mother’s long-distance care of my grandmother and her participation in what is referred to in the gender and migration literature as “global care chains.” In the original thesis, the global care chain signals the transfer of care from migrant women to non-migrant women (usually kin) who assume caring responsibilities for children and elderly parents

who remain in the country of origin (Hochschild 2015). Though my mother relied on an institutionalized form of care, the pattern and the experience coalesced with this global transfer of care-providing labour, and at the same time it transformed my mother's own labour vis-à-vis her mother. Instead of providing direct, immediate, and embodied kinds of care as she would have had she not emigrated, she managed my grandmother's care in France from Canada. The details of this experience, situated in our family's history and relationship to place and mobility, prompted my scholarly interest in long-distance practices of care.

And yet, even as my mother's experience as a long-distance caregiver was informative, I did not yet think of our lives or family history as bound to the gendered practices or dynamics that I hoped to explore in my academic work. Over time, I came to understand that my mother's care of my grandmother, like my grandmother's care of her family during the war, corresponded to specific gender norms concerning care and social reproduction — that is, the labour, tasks, and responsibilities associated with the maintenance of both daily life and life across generations. Reflecting the material and ideological distinction between productive and reproductive life purposes that, since the establishment and global expansion of capitalist political economy, has largely determined the sexual division of labour (Federici 2012), their manifold labours — though different in detail — are similarly indicative of a system that responsabilizes women for care, while providing them with little support for its completion.

By the time Violet and Sheila arrived in Manitoba, my father's family had been in the province for nearly 100 years — their staggered arrival signalling the longevity and perseverance of the Canadian state's western colonial project, as well as the collaboration of state and capital in the service of that project. Here, the social reproductive efforts of the state and capital regarding population and labour serve as the shared feature of these narratives — my paternal grandfather's arrival to Canada on the one hand, and the arrival of Sheila and Violet on the other. At first glance these narratives and arrivals are relatively discrete and yet, when read together through the lens of the political economy of Manitoba over time, a number of revealing similarities emerge that allow us to connect the province's earliest efforts vis-à-vis labour and economy to those

that determined the migration pathway of the hotel's first cohort of migrant workers from the Philippines. In Manitoba, though separated by decades, their labour would support emergent prairie economies established in response to financial crisis and downturn: my grandfather, and those he arrived with, set to work across the province as farm hands, day labourers, and domestic workers in the service of the colonial agricultural project; Sheila and Violet, many decades later, were recruited to work within the region's newly established tourism and hospitality sector — an economic additive intended to bolster the rapidly changing agricultural sector (Bryan 2019a). Each group of migrants, though differently recruited, retained, and integrated, was profitable according to a particular logic. Labour rendered surplus in one context, their mobility was compelled by states in collaboration with capital in the countries of both origin and arrival. Once in Canada, their status as temporary foreign worker or British Home Child exaggerated their vulnerability to state sanction, deepened their dependency on their employer, and engendered their particular value as workers. At the same time, reflecting the objectives of the state vis-à-vis population and settlement, these differently situated migrants would eventually remain in Manitoba.

Insight Two: The Uneven Distribution of the Benefits of Mobility

Focused on the intersecting, historic, and transitional dynamics and processes prompting the establishment of a small Filipino working class in rural Manitoba, through my PhD research I unexpectedly have been better able to see myself integrated in the systems and structures of mobility and power that I explore in my academic work. I am not, in other words, distinct. I am not separate from the historical global political economy, the workings of the state, or those of capital that compel mobility. Moreover, these have had significant impact on my own life, my relationships with family (or lack thereof), and my sense of who I am. In regard to my mother's mother, I came to recognize the gendered nature of her mobility and labour; the trauma of being so young and responsible for the well-being and survival of family; the fear and anxiety of being separated from significant relations; and the struggle for upward class mobility in the aftermath. Through this, I came to understand the conflicts I

had experienced with my grandmother to be rooted, not only in significant cultural, generational, and social differences, but in her experience of the war, which had prompted unexpected and traumatic forms of mobility and, in turn, a strict adherence to a specific set of French norms, themselves gendered in particular ways, which both my mother and I would eventually reject. Recognizing myself and my father in the stories shared with me of British Home Children during my Manitoba fieldwork, I simultaneously came to understand that, rather than inherent or pathological, my grandfather's capacity and actions towards his family were largely produced at the violent intersection where capitalism and colonialism meet. This is not an absolution of guilt or responsibility, but rather a line into the manifold and historic traumas of the colonial project in what is presently referred to as Canada.

Such an understanding engenders a sense, not only of connection with my participants and perhaps a deeper understanding of the lives of my grandparents, but it reminds me that mobility, with all its challenges and complicated relational outcomes, is not something from which I am immune. Such an insight is important. As my position as objective outsider and researcher is muddled, I am no longer able to see myself as unaffected by my subject of academic study. At the same time, drawing on the critical self-reflection imperative of my adopted discipline, I am required to situate these similarities in the systems and process that historically — and in the contemporary moment — differentiate mobilities and mobile lives. This is the work of reflexivity in the context of mobility research. And so, my grandmother's hardships during the war and the gendered labour she performed during it, while always present for her emotionally, were largely contained to a particular and finite period of time. The mobility she experienced following this period was voluntary and most often for leisure. My mother's emigration from France, though prompted by interpersonal conflict, was otherwise straightforward. It was not protracted, nor was it complicated by the machinations of Canadian immigration policy.

Her arrival in Canada marked my mother's permanency here, and while there were financial and employment-related challenges, these were not exacerbated by racism. Her eventual long-distance care of my grandmother corresponded, in many ways, to the shared experiences of my participants in

Douglas, Manitoba, and the Philippines. Her labour was gendered according to the sexual division of labour so configured under the capitalist mode of production and it went unrecognized by others in our family. Given its transnational organization, it was characterized by intense worry, fear, sadness, and eventually grief. And yet, it was also marked by privilege. Secure, permanent employment meant that when she needed to, my mother could travel to France to do this work in person. Moreover, it meant resources to support this care work when she could not be present. Similarly, though the legacy of his father would have long-lasting consequences, my father largely overcame the conditions of his childhood. Though my own family's history of mobility offers considerable insight into the effects of family separation, transnational kinship, and the social, cultural, and relational complications of mobility, my white European ancestry, Canadian middle-class identity, and status as a settler-citizen in what is currently called Canada have protected me — if not always my ancestors — from the challenges and complications confronted by the migrants at the centre of my academic analysis. Their experiences are differently embedded in the global histories of colonialism, capitalism, and the maturation of neo-liberal globalization.

Conclusion

Bringing together social work's critical self-reflective imperative with the insights garnered through ethnography and anthropological analysis, what becomes clear from this account that, in tandem, centres my family's history of mobility with that of the Douglas Inn's internationally mobile workforce, is the profound unevenness that characterizes mobility and its study. Indeed, the scenarios I describe in my work, and the narratives and histories I draw on to elucidate and contextualize those scenarios, follow from the injustices, inequalities, and vulnerabilities that are generated by processes from which, over time, I have largely benefited. Moreover, my position and social location, following from my family's history of mobility, have facilitated my academic work and the travel it requires. My passport, the relative ease with which I move through global spaces, the institutional resources to which I have access — these are predicated on an unfolding of history that deliberately differentiates. So long,

then, as these benefits are unevenly distributed and capitalized on according to socially and economically constructed hierarchies of race and nationality, my work — and the work of similarly positioned researchers — should be read and scrutinized for the ways in which, in both content and form, it duplicates these hierarchies. This is not to discount the important critique offered by mobility researchers, including those whose mobility is largely unhindered and voluntary. Rather, it is a reminder that our mobility as researchers flows from the same systems and structures that organize, demand, and restrict the mobility of those we centre in our research. In the absence of analysis that contends with this reality, rather than merely documenting and analyzing the conditions prompting international labour migration and transnational configurations of family, mobility researchers run the risk of actively reinforcing those conditions through their own mobility — mobility that is often similarly prompted by livelihood projects, social reproductive responsibilities, and histories of migration.

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“Family. Family. First of All Is Family”: Refugee Movements in Eastern Canada

Shiva Nourpanah and Pauline Gardiner Barber

Abstract

Based on an exploratory qualitative study with refugee claimants and staff of a non-governmental agency (NGO) in Halifax who are mandated to serve them, this chapter discusses the geographical movements of refugee families after their entry to Canada. We focus on the family dynamics and contributing factors, such as social class and employment prospects, that shape or are affected by these movements. Our core research question explores the reasons why refugees, often accompanied by their families, “move onward” from their first point of destination after fleeing their country of origin. Bringing together insights from mobilities, migration, and labour studies, the decision-making processes of refugee claimants who have engaged in such movements in eastern Canada are explored. Refugee secondary movements have caught the attention of civil society advocates and practitioners, and government policy-makers, and we contribute to a more nuanced understanding of such movements in the Canadian context.

Introduction

An enduring fixture on the global socio-political landscape, refugees who flee their country of origin due to danger and insecurity have always been a highly charged and contentious subject in policy, politics, and the media. At the end of 2019, forced migration in one form or another affected 79.5 million people around the globe (UNHCR 2020). Only a fraction of this number finds their

way to Canada, where the UN Refugee Agency reports the presence of 96,986 asylum-seekers in 2019. This chapter discusses the geographical movements of refugee families after their entry to Canada, with an emphasis on family dynamics and other factors, such as social class and employment prospects, that shape or are affected by these movements. The core research question explores the reasons why refugees, often accompanied by their families, “move onward” from their first point of destination after fleeing their country of origin.

The theoretical lens of this study is adapted from Roseman, Barber, and Neis (2015), who bring together insights from mobilities and migration and labour studies with feminist political economy. They develop a framework integrating insights from the “mobility turn” and its close attention to differentiated access to, and the politics of, different modes of transportation and movement with an examination of “gender, class, racialization/ethnicity, and other forms of difference, such as citizenship and legal residency status, as core constitutive elements in migration processes” (Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015, 177–78). This scholarship generally focuses on work-related mobility, including micro- and macro-level movements to and from the workplace or movements undertaken as part of work. However, temporary and precarious legal status play a critical role in shaping such movements (Cedillo, Lippel, and Nakache 2019; Goldring and Landolt 2013). Temporary work permits such as those granted to refugee claimants and temporary foreign workers have strict conditions attached to them. They require intense labour and resources to obtain and keep them valid, all the while navigating a highly complex bureaucratic migration system (Nourpanah 2021).

In the literature, secondary migration of refugees takes place when refugees move on from their first destination. Nelson and Marston (2019) study these movements in the US, demonstrating the increasing number of movements from traditional migration destinations to non-traditional and small urban centres. Breche and Brochmann (2015) study the European scene, emphasizing the refugee aspirations that prompt onward movements. In many instances, access to benefits and state aid, such as welfare payments or housing, is conditional on settling in a pre-determined location, usually away from large cities (van Selm 2014). Both these recent studies point to the paucity of research in

this area, while highlighting the challenges they pose for refugee claimants. Secondary movements typically run counter to official expectations and bureaucratic policies, which often seem to be designed based on the assumption that refugees remain stationary once they have fled their home country and entered a country of refuge. Secondary movements in general may therefore cause bureaucratic complications and delays in processing, and have unforeseen consequences as refugees and their families move to destinations that may not have the infrastructure required to receive them.

Refugee Claimants and Mobility in the Canadian Context

Refugees by definition flee their place of origin for security and protection but it is well known, as with other international migrants, that their motivations are usually “blurry,” consisting of a mixture of economic and political factors (Mavroudi and Nagel 2016). Policy-makers are beginning to acknowledge this blurriness, as can be seen in a 2020 news release from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)¹ announcing the creation of a new Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility (Government of Canada 2020a). This announcement demonstrates awareness that diverse factors shape refugee movements. Its focus on work and labour mobility among refugees is a welcome change from the usual administrative preference for refugees to remain stationary at their first arrival point outside their country of origin, as illustrated by the controversial Canada–US Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) implemented in 2004 “to better manage refugee claimants at the shared land border.” With few exceptions, the STCA requires all refugees to claim protection in the so-called “safe” country they first enter (Government of Canada 2002). Refugee activists and advocates have long been aware of how the immobility imposed on refugees by the STCA can lead to an abuse of their rights (Tinker 2019) and have worked hard for its repeal. They have argued the presumption in the agreement of fair protection for refugees in the US is misguided and takes no account of the reality of the abuse of refugee rights in that country, including the separation of family members, the removal of children from parents, and the unfair denial of refugee claims followed by refoulement (forcible return to a country to face probable persecution). As reported by the

Canadian Council for Refugees (2018), sending refugee claimants back to the US violates rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The efforts of STCA opponents were rewarded in June 2020 when the Canadian Supreme Court declared the STCA unconstitutional (Scherer and Warburton 2020), although as of October 2020 it remained in effect (Government of Canada 2020b).

Refugee claimants and their families travel to Canada through different pathways of entry; they may arrive at officially designated points of entry (airports and seaports), or at unofficial land border crossing points where their crossings are not illegal. When they enter Canada, they must make a claim for refugee status to border officials representing the government of Canada. When filing refugee claims as a family, the individual who has the main or most immediate reason to fear danger and persecution in their home country is named as the Principal Applicant, with any accompanying family members named as dependants and included in the same file. All the people named in the file will have the same refugee rights, such as the right to temporary legal residence and, for those of working age, the right to a work permit issued by the federal government. They will also have access to the same resources and services, such as health care and education. These rights and supports are temporary, effective only while waiting for their hearing with the Immigration and Refugee Board to determine whether they will be officially granted refugee status. Furthermore, although guaranteed by the federal government, these rights must be fulfilled within one or more (if they are mobile) provincial jurisdictions.

Refugee movements are thus subject to intense state regulation. Mobility across internal jurisdictional borders is complicated by reliance on access to provincially controlled services. Despite the regulations and their challenges, refugees often engage in a swirl of mobilities, some of which may be work-related. National governments are encouraged by the United Nations to recognize and respect the labour mobility of refugees based on the argument that labour mobility may lead to the recognition of refugees' right to work:

Reducing refugee situations solely to a humanitarian problem, neglects the fact that refugees are people with skills, poten-

tial, interests and aspirations. It also neglects the need to protect their socio-economic human rights. (UNHCR 2012)

The intersection of precarious migration status such as that of refugee claimants or temporary foreign workers, with mobility has been the subject of a vibrant body of scholarship (Barber 2013; Goldring and Landolt 2012; Nourpanah 2019). This scholarship shows how precarious status both conditions and regulates mobility, including for work, through a complex and demanding maze of administrative, legal, and bureaucratic policies and practices implemented through a variety of state and state-like institutions. The remainder of this chapter explores the complex interplay of family, precarious migration, and work in the context of refugee claimant movements. The international and internal mobility decisions of migrants are typically the focus of family negotiations (Kilkey and Palenga-Möllnbeck 2016; see also Neis, Murray, and Spinks, Chapter 1). The movements of refugee claimants are largely associated with fear of persecution, but also economic and other concerns including the need for work. The study expands understanding of refugee movements beyond the focus on the highly emotive and much-discussed flight from the country of origin into a country of asylum, which has long dominated refugee discourse, and encourages closer attention to the myriad contemporary mobility practices happening in 2019 and into 2020 across Canadian landscapes. Complicating factors such as individual work histories, knowledge acquired through reading online media representations of place, and refugees' extant and evolving social connections and networking are shown to play an important role in decision-making, adding to the "blurriness" of the motives that prompt and shape movement.

From Federal to Provincial Levels:

Canadian and Nova Scotian Refugee Contexts

Canada has one of the most respected refugee protection regimes in the world (Amnesty International, n.d.). It signed both the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the accompanying Protocol of 1967, the two key legal documents that established the international refugee protection regime,

including the rights of refugees and the duties and responsibilities of states towards them. In 1985 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Canadian Charter protected refugee claimants. With some notorious exceptions,² successive Canadian governments as well as the general public have broadly delivered a welcoming discourse towards refugees, avoiding the toxic and xenophobic rantings that have marked the discourse of their counterparts in the US (Anderson-Nathe and Gharabaghi 2017). Despite its strengths, however, there are weaknesses in Canada's handling of refugee affairs (for example, see Government of Canada 2012). Of particular relevance to this chapter, in addition to the STCA mentioned earlier, Canada has been criticized for long wait times for processing refugee claims and cumbersome administrative procedures, as well as for their deleterious effects on refugees (Nourpanah 2019). These weaknesses necessitate constant and significant advocacy and support by local community-based organizations to ensure refugees file their refugee claims correctly (see Panzica 2020) and have access to the services they need, and are entitled to, including temporary work permits, social supports, and medical care (Smith 2019).

The Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC) is a non-government, grassroots agency in the Atlantic region with a mandate to serve refugee claimants on a pro bono basis. The starting point for this research came from observations by HRC staff members indicating a sharp increase in the numbers of refugee claimants moving from Ontario and Quebec to Halifax (executive director of Halifax Refugee Clinic, pers. comm., 15 Aug. 2019). The most recent unofficial numbers from the Clinic suggest that in December 2019, some 62 individual refugees originating from different countries, most of whom were travelling in nuclear family groups, had active files at HRC after initially submitting their original refugee claim and staying in other Canadian cities. In 2019, HRC had 212 people as its active caseload, indicating a significant portion of the clients were arriving in Halifax from elsewhere in Canada. Why were they moving and with what consequences?

Halifax is the provincial capital of Nova Scotia. Although the city's population has grown steadily until very recently, the population of Nova Scotia as a whole has been declining and aging for several decades (Nourpanah et al.



Figure 1. Halifax Refugee Clinic building on Macara Street, Halifax. (Illustration by Rob Cameron)

2018). Local policy-makers, supported by their federal counterparts, have thus expanded their emphasis on provincial immigration and immigrant retention. Related measures have been heralded as successful, with some media and public reports linking Halifax's growth in population and development to increases in immigration (Halifax Partnership 2019; Ziafatti 2020). Despite this success,

Halifax remains a relatively culturally and ethnically homogeneous city in comparison to larger Canadian cities such as Toronto and Montreal.

A recent study on refugee retention across four Canadian provinces ranked Nova Scotia behind the more populous and wealthier provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, although ahead of Manitoba, in terms of refugees staying in the province over a five-year period (Yoshida, Amoyaw, and McLayod 2020). Retention rates have increased, suggesting that its track record on keeping refugees and migrants is improving (Yoshida, Amoyaw, and McLayod 2020). However, services such as health care remain woefully underfunded, to the extent that public demonstrations have taken place to protest the state of affairs (*CBC News* 2019). Furthermore, support for vulnerable people, including asylum-seekers and refugee claimants, is less available than in wealthier Canadian regions, as discussed below. This context is important to understand the framing of our research on refugee decisions to move to Halifax.

Methods and Theory: “It’s a Good Story . . . Because Each Detail Is Crazy”

Our study is based on an analysis of transcripts from 10 qualitative and semi-structured interviews with seven refugee claimants and three HRC staff members who work closely with them. The research design was developed in close consultation with the clinic’s staff members, who were also interviewed by the authors. Refugee participants were recruited directly by the staff, based on their knowledge of their case histories and movements. The Ethics Review Board of Dalhousie University granted approval to our study.

Although our recruitment plan placed no conditions on place of origin, only refugees from South American countries were willing to be interviewed. While HRC regularly also welcomes refugees from African countries, some of whom fulfilled the criteria for this study, all declined the invitation to participate for reasons we can only speculate about. All the refugees interviewed for this research came from middle-class professional backgrounds; they had been teachers, engineers, and government and public officials prior to travelling to Canada. Their backgrounds speak to the confidence observed in the interviews: they were eager to talk about their experiences and often remarked that these were worthy of being shared and studied. Class confidence was also reflected

in interviewees' frequent references to their potential employability and hope for successful work in Canada.

Interview questions focused on the movements of refugees and family members into and across Canada, with no questions about the initial decision to flee their country of origin. It was not our intention to discuss the precipitating conditions or reasons that prompted their initial flight, and this was made clear at the time of recruitment. In sum, our concern was to understand the decisions about and experiences associated with the refugees' journeys subsequent to the flight, with particular attention to the family decisions underlying their movement to Halifax.

Beyond speculation, we have scant knowledge of the causes, challenges, and concerns that may accompany the movements within Canada of refugees and refugee claimants (that is, those who have not been officially recognized as refugees by the Canadian government). Our study extends existing research

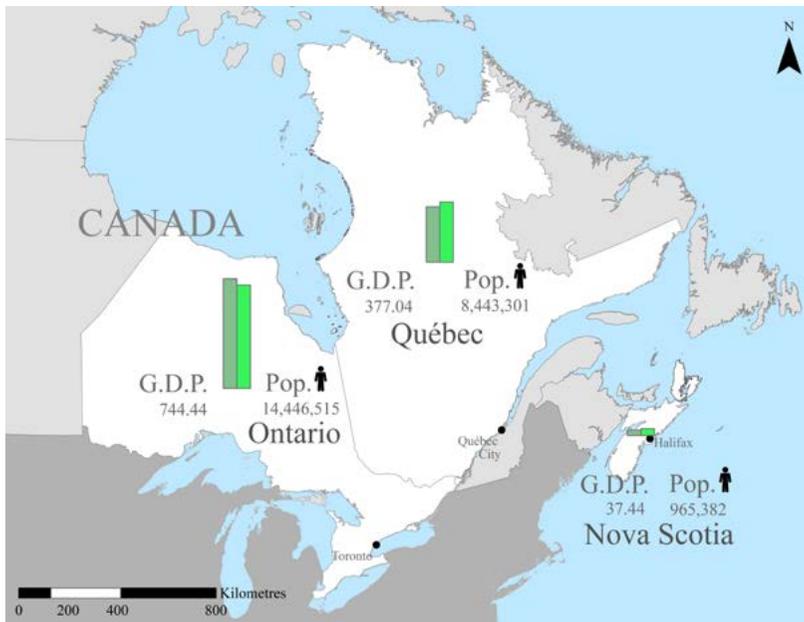


Figure 2. Have and have-not provinces: The populations and GDPs of the provinces of Québec, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. (Cartography by Myron King)

to demonstrate how people on the move transcend the rigidity of the bureaucratic categories they use as migratory pathways. For example, Nourpanah (2019) has shown how nurses from India enter Canada on temporary study visas for short vocational courses, and then subsequently transition to temporary work permits to fulfill their long-term migration projects. Here, we observe a similar dynamic of people moving through the US and entering Canada on short-term visitor visas, and then declaring themselves as asylum-seekers before obtaining temporary work permits and employment, all in the hope of being able to stay permanently and thereby gain freedom from the fearful conditions that motivated their quest for refugee status in the first instance.

Service Provision Challenges

Internal mobilities such as the move to Halifax cause bureaucratic problems for those claimants who have lodged their initial refugee application with the federal government in other provinces before moving to Nova Scotia. Our preliminary consultations with HRC staff indicated that, in any given family, the claimant's legal aid may be tied up with their residence in the province where they made their initial claim, and by leaving that province they are at risk of losing such support. They may also be viewed as a drain on local resources — as observed in the US (Weine et al. 2011). Many local charities and shelters in Halifax are already operating at capacity. In some instances, refugee families who travelled to Halifax had to be provided with shelter in rural Nova Scotia, necessitating a third movement, or more, as authorities and community organization workers scrambled to provide solutions and temporary shelter. Although the federal agency, IRCC, oversees the process of validating refugee claims, a host of issues, such as access to Income Assistance, applying for work permits, receiving medical care, and various other services have to be managed and advocated for at the provincial level. Our preliminary consultations for this research revealed that movement of refugee claimants to Halifax is having effects on local (municipal and provincial) services and supports, which are not, as yet, well understood. The research contributes to understanding these local challenges, while more broadly contributing to discussions about refugee movements in the Canadian context.

What happens when a refugee family shows up at the door of the Halifax Refugee Clinic? And why does it matter if they have been staying in Ontario or Quebec before coming to Halifax? The settlement officer at HRC describes it this way:

There isn't a template or a cookie-cutter model of how we would receive people. There's a lot of listening and info-gathering that happens before we know what services to provide them. So if someone has already made their refugee claim, the first question would be, was it a port-of-entry claim, have they submitted their basis of claim? Is there a clock ticking?



Figure 3. Gillian at work, settlement coordinator and refugee client at Halifax Refugee Clinic, 8 October 2020. (Photo by Lina Hamid, Housing Support Staff, HRC)

Because that would have priority. In some cases, they would have already submitted that. Then [we want to know] did they have counsel already? Can they keep it? That's going to be a big piece, to figure out if there are any deadlines. On my side, the settlement side, questions I ask immediately: Do you have somewhere to stay? Are you hungry? Are there health needs? Medications? The very basic. There is going to be some creative thinking, because someone would arrive with nowhere to stay that night.

Access to legal counsel is challenging. Nova Scotia, unlike Quebec and Ontario, does not offer government-funded legal aid to refugee claimants. The Clinic, which is funded privately through the Nova Scotia Barrister Society, organizes 12 volunteer lawyers to provide counsel for their clients, with the executive director and her staff doing most of the fine-tuning on refugee files. So, in the context of Nova Scotia, having your own government-funded lawyer dedicated to your file is a luxury that should not be dismissed lightly. In the words of the director:

So some people have a legal aid lawyer in another province and they are able to retain that . . . if a person is no longer a resident of Quebec, but they were eligible for a legal aid lawyer and a certificate to a lawyer who takes legal aid certificates has been issued, then that lawyer, who's been paid up until the hearing already, can decide whether or not to keep them on as clients [even though they're no longer living in Quebec]. So that's very encouraging and we've had lots of conversation with the Quebec lawyers, explaining that refugee claimants don't have legal aid here in NS and, can they keep them on? They can but they don't have to. But if their lawyer was a staff lawyer of the Legal Aid clinic, then they would lose that lawyer. So we've been encouraging people, and even talking to lawyers if their clients are moving or

considering moving, saying we have no legal aid here for refugees, can you keep this person on, we only have pro bono volunteer lawyers. Could you please keep this person on? So they can, my understanding is, but they don't have to. But if they had a staff lawyer at a Legal Aid clinic, then they can't.

So we have a few different people with a few different formats that we're working with. . . . Having said that, most people even when they have a lawyer in another province, especially if they stay here for a few months, they end up wanting to retain us. Because there is that degree of trust.

Interprovincial differences in settlement services are also important. A refugee claimant might be receiving provincial financial assistance, for example, under "Ontario Works," a government-run program that provides support to people in need while in Ontario, and use that money to travel to Nova Scotia. Once in Nova Scotia, they would apply for Income Assistance, the similar program run by the government of Nova Scotia. They would need to prove that they no longer receive Ontario Works assistance through confirmation from their caseworker in Ontario. And even after that step, they would not receive the Nova Scotia assistance until the following month, as they could not receive two payments in one month. Relying on these monies for shelter and basic necessities thus puts them in a very financially precarious position, with the HRC often acting as an informal "guarantor" with the shelter system until their Nova Scotia assistance is sorted out. When children are present and at risk of homelessness, Child Protection Services will become involved, sometimes moving the family to hotels or even splitting up the family as there are no family shelters in Nova Scotia:

Very traditional definition of family here, I want to make that understood. When I say family. For a woman and man, if they're a couple there is nowhere they could go. Seasonally there is the Out of the Cold shelter, where men and women could both stay. But we don't tend to refer refugee claim-

ants there because we don't have a strong relationship with that shelter — we haven't met with them to build a relationship, but we should, yes. So there's that issue, whether they understand the barriers that the person's status create. They might make referrals that won't be appropriate [for the refugee], as they would not be eligible. The men's and women's shelters we're working with, they're slowly gaining familiarity with these barriers . . . we've been working with them for many years trying to create understanding and awareness, that [refugees] can't get health care, they can't work right away, they need to wait for a work permit, this type of awareness and information . . . we haven't met yet with Out of the Cold, but it would be good to do that. (Interview with Settlement Officer)

Meanwhile, claimants might not yet have their federally issued work permit and this would affect the amount of Income Assistance they receive in the province. This is a “huge” policy gap:

Settlement officer: But where it gets complicated for refugee claims, an argument that I have used, refugee claimants might not have the work permit yet, so they are not authorized to work in Canada, but then they are treated as people who are able to work . . . there is nothing about legal authorization to work in Canada. So you might be able to, but you don't have a work permit. So you are getting an allowance based on the assumption you are able to work, but if you work you are actually breaking the law.

Interviewer: That's a huge policy gap! How about work permits? They are federally issued, so technically they transfer from province to province?

Settlement officer: Oh yes, so the whole refugee claim process is federal. With the work permit, the process has changed

in the past year. It used to be that when you made your refugee claim you would have to make a separate application for a work permit, after you've done the medical exam and passed. There is a new process, October 2018, I believe, you would check off "work permit" on schedule 12, one of the refugee claimant forms. In theory this sounds fantastic, in practice there have been a lot of problems. . . .

As refugees move and change address, the work permits, which have to be mailed via surface mail, are lost and sometimes need to be reissued, all of which necessitates the investment of time and labour by bureaucratic authorities. These delays are all the more frustrating considering that, as documented in the literature, refugees are generally eager and willing to work in their host country, and view bureaucratic obstacles, which cause them to become recipients of state welfare, with resentment and anxiety (Frost 2006; Piętko-Nykaza 2015). One family interviewed confirmed with some pride that they avoided claiming any form of government assistance during their stay in Canada, engaging in minimum-wage labour as soon as they could while living off savings, as they were afraid that state assistance might somehow damage their claim and "make people think we are only here for money."

With all this happening, it is no wonder that when refugees call HRC from outside Nova Scotia and inquire about the possibility of moving there, staff give realistic expectations of what they can expect, in effect trying to dissuade refugees from leaving the wealthier provinces.

We had a family, you know when people contact us from a province with Legal Aid . . . we say we don't, we don't have adequate, we strongly suggest you stay . . . at least until you can pay for a private lawyer, or until your hearing. In one case there was a deadline, the 15-day deadline, which is what happens when you make the refugee claim at a port of entry — you have 15 days to tell your story and fill the form — we told them we cannot, we actually cannot meet that deadline, but

then they did end up coming. . . . In [another] case, weird, we told a family to stay, stay in [the province where they were], so this family came, I think they had \$4,000 on them so they were ineligible for Legal Aid in that province anyway, so then they came to Halifax, and spent at least half that money for travel. So then this situation, they were ineligible, and then they were eligible, but only if they moved back (to their original province). . . . (Interview with executive director)

Given all of the challenges outlined above, how and why do these refugees who make the move to Nova Scotia constantly disregard the advice to stay where they are?

Decisions to Move: “We Should Go Where We Have Some Knowledge”

In the words of Maria (pseudonyms throughout): “They told us not to come, we have nothing for you. So we got on the train and came [laughter]. And they had everything for us. It was like the opposite of what they said.”



Figure 4. Halifax railway station, 12 October 2020. (Photo by Shiva Nourpanah)

Maria travelled to Halifax with her husband and two children, one of them a young man turning 18. A few months later, her husband's ex-wife and child from an earlier marriage, now a young adult, also arrived in Halifax via Montreal. We interviewed Maria's family together: husband, wife, and the two step-brothers. They left behind a prosperous middle-class life, holidaying frequently in the US and already holding visitor visas for Canada, which enabled them to cross the border into Canada smoothly. One of the adult parents had worked for 10 years with Canadians in an international company in their home country and that "made us think Canada is a great country and gave us a real good reference of Canada, I knew it was easy to build relationships with Canadians." They acknowledge that "the US is a nice place", but "it is not what we need for this moment . . . it is more important for our children to be in Canada." One of the young men, Gabriel, had already spent a summer and a school term at high schools in Manitoba and Calgary, as part of an exchange program, and he had enjoyed it.

Interviewer: So did you suggest to your family that you should move to Calgary, as you already knew it?

Gabriel: I did, but [gestures towards his mom, shrugs and laughs] I was not like fighting, but I said we should go where we have some knowledge . . . but I wouldn't say it was my decision really. And then I read that Calgary wanted to separate itself from Canada, which is really kinda dumb.

Interviewer: And how did you feel about moving to Halifax?

Gabriel: Once we had crossed the border into Canada, I felt safe, and I didn't care about anything else. . . . It was like an adventure, there were some other refugee kids but I didn't care about that, I knew it wouldn't last . . . and the moment I stepped into Halifax, I knew I liked it.

This experience is in line with the movement patterns demonstrated by the other people interviewed: the decision to move to and claim refuge in Canada was made *before* the initial flight, in the home country, but the decision to

move around in Canada and find a city to settle in was made *after* the flight and subsequent entry to Canada, usually shortly after arriving in Toronto or Montreal. Maria recalls how the YMCA, which was helping them settle in Montreal, reacted to their decision to leave: “They were saying, you can have this and that, this much money for a month, this apartment. Then we say, we want to go, we are going to Halifax. So they say, ‘Ok you can’t have anything. We take it all back’ [gestures with her hands drawing in].”

Both the decision to travel to Canada (rather than stay in the US) and the subsequent decision to move to Halifax were informed by knowledge gathered from various connections and from online sources. The executive director of the HRC refers to the famous tweet by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in which he welcomes all refugees to Canada (Ljunggren and Paperny 2017), as well as to a subsequent online CBC article from Nova Scotia highlighting their high acceptance rate (Julian 2018). Both these public pieces have been mentioned by refugees submitting claims via the Halifax Refugee Clinic as instrumental in drawing them to Canada, and then to Halifax. While not referencing these specific pieces, Isabella, a refugee from Latin America who travelled to Halifax with her young family after landing at Toronto, describes their decision-making as follows:

Interviewer: So you had a place to stay in Toronto, you were receiving monthly aid, and social services, why did you decide to move to Halifax?

Isabella: Because that was not our goal, just to get some money. Not just economic support. We wanted support for the whole process, legal support, everything. Toronto is nice, but it is rushed, people don’t take time to explain. Halifax is very different. We found information on the Internet, and we knew a person who moved to Halifax and so we thought, let’s try Halifax. We called [the Clinic] twice, and after the second call, we said let’s go. It was very different, coming from Toronto. People treat us like they already know us. They helped us finish everything [the submission of the refugee claim].

Later on, she says:

If we are going to leave behind everything, it should be for something better. Toronto, we didn't feel we belong. But we feel like that here. We feel they need to help us. Halifax was what we expected of Canada.

Refugee claimants state clearly that they need to go to a place about which they have some knowledge. Diego, travelling with his wife and two children, also carefully researched Halifax as his preferred Canadian city after staying in Toronto, the big metropolis, for a short time: "It sounded like, you know, this is a place where they need labour, where we . . . our children are valued. We can contribute here. And I liked that it was by the sea." Although he knew no one in Halifax, he used his networking skills, talking to travellers in the hotel where they stayed before HRC found them a suitable apartment, looking up prospective employers and making connections. At present, he and his wife are working at a much lower skill level than was the case in their home country, yet he is satisfied with their choice of Halifax and sees them living here long term. Speaking of the uncertainty inherent in the situation of refuge and the interminable waiting for a decision on their claim, he adds, "that is if, of course, they keep us and don't tell us to go back."

Discussion and Conclusion: "A Small City, a Quiet City, Secure. And the Winter Isn't Too Hard"

To be without the protection of your state has been rightly recognized as one of the most vulnerable human situations. The international refugee protection regime calls on states to uphold basic human rights and responsibilities towards those who find themselves in the territory of another state without the protection of their home country. International law does not tie these rights to refugees residing in a specific place in the country where they have sought asylum. Yet administratively, refugees are encouraged or exhorted to remain stationary, with benefits and supports tied to staying in particular places with movement from those places complicated in Canada by federal–provincial jurisdictions.

Despite this, many refugees move. This study adds nuance to the complexities of decision-making processes by refugee families, showing how, for this sample, decisions to move beyond the metropolis to a smaller city, in this case Halifax, are made along the way, after landing in Canada, and by selecting from different sources of information to put together their own interpretation of where they wish to settle. Family dynamics, work experiences and future expectations, local bureaucracies and agencies all form a part in shaping these mobilities, adding to the “blurriness” of refugee movements and their refusal to remain in neat, hard administrative categories. Political fear might be the conventional ignition for refugee flights, but it is not the only factor and it is important to recognize and acknowledge the “messiness” of refugee mobilities and related motivations and decision-making. In light of the significant differences in refugee and temporary foreign work discourses and regulatory regimes, this research contributes to understanding how people navigate precarious and conditional migratory regimes to achieve their aspirations, despite rigid bureaucratic categories and requirements.

In tandem with the construction of the “ideal immigrant” (Barber 2008), we are now observing the emergence of the “ideal refugee.” Ideal immigrants are “ideal” from an immigration policy perspective as they are ready and able to insert themselves efficiently and competently into job markets of destination countries as required, often at the price of down-skilling or working at lower skill levels than their original training. “Ideal refugees,” likewise, although arriving via different migratory pathways and under different regulatory categories, display similar dexterity in navigating the social systems of their selected destination countries, including labour markets. The refugees we spoke with were informed, resourceful, and globally minded. Unable to remain safe and protected in their homeland for personal and political reasons, they used their prior and evolving pool of knowledge, experiences, and skills to make decisions about their future location and activity, where they feel their presence, their contributions, and their labour will be valued and appreciated. Smart policy would acknowledge and respect this vibrant source of humanity and, rather than fussing over categories, forms, and borders, show the same trust and generosity of spirit towards refugees that refugees have shown towards them.

It should also be noted that many refugees lack the resources to navigate through multiple border crossings. From this standpoint the notion of “ideal refugee” represents an ironic reference to Canada’s immigration perspective, which valorizes high-skilled individuals over the essential contributions of so-called lower-skilled workers. Just as the essential work performed by temporary foreign workers remains undervalued to thereby enable their disposability, so, too, the multiple talents of diverse groups of refugees deserve greater acknowledgement.³

Notes

- 1 The Canadian federal government agency.
- 2 In his Speaker’s Notes accompanying Bill C-31, Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act, (2012) then Immigration Minister Jason Kenney lauded Canada’s refugee regime as one of the most generous in the world but at the same time called Canada’s asylum system “broken,” noting a high level of “bogus” refugee claims represented by a 62 per cent rejection, refusal, or withdrawal rate. Bill C-31 saw the introduction of biometrics intended to aid in the identification of false claimants.
- 3 As a result of COVID-19, asylum-seekers in Halifax were among many across the country who contributed essential work, many in the health-care sector. As a result, advocates petitioned for changes to their status, as it turns out successfully for some. At the time of writing, IRCC announced it would grant such people a pathway towards permanency. The barrier of two-step and temporary migration remains in effect for many.

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PART VI:

Mobility, Work, and Military Families

Staying Connected While Mommy or Daddy Is Away: Flat Dad, Flat Mum, and Flat Me

Colonel (retired) Russell Mann

What may have begun as a children's story in the mid-1960s eventually inspired wonderful adaptations to help military children and parents deal with separation in several countries around the world.

In 1964, Jeff Brown released his book *Flat Stanley*, the story of a boy who is flattened by a bulletin board and takes advantage of his flatness to go on adventures, including by mailing himself in an envelope to see his friends. Eventually, one book became a series.

In the 1990s, this character inspired Dale Hubert to develop a classroom project in London, Ontario. Children in classrooms were read the story, given a black-and-white cut-out of Stanley to colour, and asked to write a story about him. They would then send their Stanley to someone in another part of the country, or in another country, and ask that person to take a picture with the cut-out and send it back to the student, describing Stanley's adventure. The project incorporated learning and reading development.¹

Within the military community, Moms and Dads face the challenge of staying connected with their families when they are deployed. Since as early as 2003, some have started to make "Flat" Dads and Moms for their children to help with separation during deployment. At first, life-size photos, usually from the waist up, of Military Dads were laminated on poster board. The military child could then bring "Flat" Daddy with them wherever they went. In the

United States, “Flat Daddy” was even trademarked to try to prevent anyone from profiting from the concept (Zezima 2006).

Here in Canada, “flat” versions of soldiers, sailors, and aviators have made their way into deployment programs within Military Family Resource Centres. Moms and Dads have shrunk so they can be more portable. Their faces have made their ways onto small dolls that children can keep with them while their parent is deployed (LeClair 2018). For example, Audrey Storch was inspired to create a doll for her son to have while she went through cancer treatments. She started making the dolls in 1995, and by 2003 she had adapted the dolls for military families dealing with deployments.

Ways of staying connected have also evolved on the other side of the deployment experience. Some military families have begun to reverse the roles, allowing children to make cut-outs of themselves — “Flat Me” — that they can put into Mommy or Daddy’s barrack box to take with them while they are away from home. At least one Military Family Resource Centre, in Petawawa, Ontario, has made this fun activity part of their programming.²

As systems of love, care, and support, families rely on connections within the family. This is underscored for parent–child relationships. Flat Dad, Flat Mum, and Flat Me offer another way to maintain a sense of connection, to reduce the anxiety of separation, and to build unique and memorable experiences for families together apart.

Notes

- 1 For more on the Flat Stanley Project, see: <http://www.flatstanleyproject.com/>.
- 2 See the Military Family Resource Centre’s Facebook page for more information on the Children’s Deployment Support Program — “Flat Me”: <https://www.facebook.com/pmfrc/photos/a.10150099639999184/10155865610259184/>.

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Mobility-Related Health-Care Disruptions for Military-Connected Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Ashley Williams, Garth Smith, Dawa Samdup, and Heidi Cramm

Abstract

Most military families experience mandatory relocation repeatedly. Mandatory relocation can be disruptive, particularly for families who have children with special needs, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), that require specialized health and support services. Availability and access to these services vary across Canada's regions, which can pose serious developmental implications for these children. Although several American studies have explored this issue, little is known about the Canadian context. We interviewed 14 parents in Canadian military families who had one or more children with ASD to better understand how they access health services during relocation. We found that relocation disrupted access and led to delays in obtaining essential health services that may have negative implications on child health and well-being. The parents also identified factors that facilitated access to services during a relocation. More research is needed to understand this issue and support Canadian military-connected children with special needs during relocation.

Background

In Canada, 8.2 per cent of military families self-identify as having a child with special needs such as ASD (Cramm et al. 2016). ASD is a condition charac-

terized by impairments in social functioning, such as communication problems, as well as the presence of rigid and repetitive behaviours and challenges adapting to change (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Children with ASD require more frequent access to health care and special educational services to address these impairments and promote function and development (Davis and Finke 2015; Diallo et al. 2018; Williams et al. 2004). Children with ASD appear to do better when they have access to early diagnosis and intervention from a pediatrician (Dawson 2008). Transitions increase anxiety and result in emotional dysregulation in these children. Transitions are common in military families (frequent moves, parental absences, school and peer changes, physician changes) with significant emotional consequences (Lord et al. 2018). Children with ASD require more frequent access to health care and special education services.

In Canada, there are approximately 65,000 military families representing approximately 60,000 children under 18 years old (Manser 2018b). Military families experience a unique lifestyle that includes frequent parental absence, risk of parental injury, and frequent relocation (Daigle 2013). Canadian military families move three to four times more frequently than their civilian counterparts (Battams and Mann 2018; Daigle 2013; Drummet, Coleman, and Cable 2003) and research from Canada and the United States indicates frequent relocation is the most difficult aspect of the military lifestyle (Aronson and Perkins 2013; Manser 2018a, 2018b; Mmari et al. 2010; Wang and Aitken 2016). Approximately 10,000 military families relocate each year, with 8,000 of those being interprovincial moves (Manser 2018b). A survey completed by the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services reported that only 1 per cent of military family respondents had been in their current location for more than five years and respondents had an average of 3.28 relocations over the course of the military parent's career (Manser 2018a).

Canadian research indicates that frequent relocation can result in challenges in continuous access to health services for civilian members of military families (Daigle 2013; Manser 2018a). While military members have access to health-care services through the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), non-serving Canadian military family members, including children, access publicly funded

provincial health systems. This differs significantly from the American context since American military family members can access health services via the American military health system (Cramm, Mahar, et al. 2019; Daigle 2013). The disruption in continuity of care resulting from frequent relocation may be particularly pronounced among families who have children with special needs, such as ASD (Daigle 2013; Davis and Finke 2015; Davis, Finke, and Hickerson 2016; Jagger and Lederer 2014).

American studies highlight challenges associated with mandatory relocation with respect to educational and health service access for families with children who have special needs (Aronson and Perkins 2013; Classen 2014; Jagger and Lederer 2014; National Council on Disability 2011), particularly those with ASD (Davis and Finke 2015; Davis et al. 2016). In Canada, even among the general population, access to specialty ASD services can be challenging, with two-year wait times to access specialty pediatricians for diagnosis and other lengthy wait-lists for support services once a diagnosis is obtained (Penner et al. 2017). This problem is magnified in the context of frequent relocation, with variation in availability, access, and eligibility for health services between provinces, or even between regions within the same province, presenting significant barriers for access and utilization of services for military-connected children.

While some Canadian research has explored access to special education services for military-connected children with special needs (Cramm, Tam-Seto, and Ostler 2018; Cramm and Tam-Seto 2018; Ostler, Norris, and Cramm 2018), there has been limited attention to how these families navigate health systems during relocation. In 2015, our team of researchers embarked on a research project aimed at understanding the experiences of Canadian military families with a child with ASD in accessing health services in the context of mandatory relocation. Previously published analyses of these data highlight significant difficulty in accessing health services for diagnoses, intervention, and special education services (Cramm, Smith, et al. 2019) and report on recommendations put forth by the families themselves to improve access (Cramm et al. 2020). In this chapter we closely examine the pathways Canadian military families navigated to access health services for their child(ren) with ASD during relocation(s).

Methods

Design

Given the exploratory purpose of the study and the lack of previous knowledge on this topic, a qualitative design was chosen. A phenomenological approach was used to gain insight into the lived experience of accessing health and other services for Canadian military families who have a child or children with ASD. This chapter focuses specifically on particular pathways to health service access these families followed during relocation.

Participants and Recruitment

Parents in Canadian military families with at least one CAF member, at least one child with ASD, and one military-related relocation were eligible. Participants were recruited through a poster campaign and snowball sampling (i.e., word of mouth). Posters were placed in community organizations serving children with ASD in rural and urban areas surrounding two military bases/wing commands. Social media (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) were also used to share the poster.

A target sample size of 15–20 participants was sought, consistent with guidelines for phenomenological studies (Creswell 2013). Sixteen people inquired about the study and were provided with the study information; one of these declined, three did not respond to follow-up communication, and four had never experienced a move. In total, 10 participants met the inclusion criteria.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted in person or via phone. The interview guide was developed by co-authors Ashley Williams and Heidi Cramm and was loosely structured as per qualitative interviewing recommendations (Lester 1999). Demographic information about the family and their connection to the CAF was collected (e.g., age of the child or children, marital status, information about the CAF parents' service). Participants were asked to describe their geographic mobility and their pathways through the health and education systems during each relocation, barriers and facilitators to service access, and resources that were or could have been helpful in navigating health

and education services. Prompting and probing questions were used throughout interviews to increase depth and ensure a balanced perspective. For this study, pathways through the health-care system in the context of relocations are the primary focus. Sample interview questions can be found in Table 1. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Queen’s University Health Sciences and Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Review Board (#60163307).

Table 1. Sample Interview Questions

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take me through your pathway, from the first point of contact with the health-care system. 2. Please describe your experiences in transferring and accessing health services after your family moved. <p>Prompts related to question 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tell us about how you have been able to determine or demonstrate your child’s eligibility for services in a new community. - What challenges has your family faced in trying to find services in a new community after moving? - Tell us about your experience in accessing health services or accommodations in daycare or educational systems.
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Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, then entered into qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA (VERBI Software 2016). Coding and analysis were conducted using constant comparison (Strauss and Corbin 1998) and coding disagreements were resolved with the principal investigator (Heidi Cramm) to enhance the trustworthiness of the results (Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig 2007). Codes were grouped into themes that, when taken together, represent the “essence” of participants’ experiences. For this chapter, themes and codes specifically related to health service access were examined more closely to shed light on health access pathways during relocation.

Results

Ten participants representing eight Canadian military families and nine children with ASD were included in this analysis. All families were married or cohabiting, included at least one CAF member parent in the Regular Force, and experienced a range of one to three relocations since starting the quest to obtain an ASD diagnosis and subsequent supports for their child. Additional demographic information can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant Demographic Information

Number of participants	10
Number of families (all married/cohabiting)	8
Number of dual CAF families	2
Number of children with ASD	9
<i>Female</i>	1
<i>Male</i>	8
Age (years) of diagnosis (average; range)	4.16; 2–8.5
Current age (years) of child with ASD (average; range)	17.72; 4.5–18
Number of postings after initial contact with health-care system about ASD (average; range)	2; 1–3
Provincial location of diagnosis	
<i>Ontario</i>	8
<i>Manitoba</i>	1
Current provincial posting	
<i>Ontario</i>	8
<i>Alberta</i>	1

Previous provincial posting locations	Ontario Nova Scotia Quebec Manitoba						
Number of parents serving in the CAF	10						
Service element	<table> <tr> <td>Army</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Air Force</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Navy</td> <td>2</td> </tr> </table>	Army	6	Air Force	2	Navy	2
Army	6						
Air Force	2						
Navy	2						
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<i>Non-commissioned</i>	7						
<i>Commissioned</i>	3						
Years of service (average; range)	18.7; 12–35						

Data analysis focusing specifically on health service access pathways revealed that the experience of navigating health systems during relocation is akin to travelling a winding and convoluted route (i.e., pathway) to a desired destination (i.e., ASD diagnosis and related treatments/services). Three aspects of the experience contribute to the convoluted nature of the journey: (1) relocation results in *roadblocks* that thwart access to health services; (2) relocation leads to *detours* and *backtracking* that increase the complexity of the access pathway; (3) *green lights* can facilitate smooth pathways. Figure 1 depicts an example pathway based on an amalgamation of all participants' pathways and is reflective of the gestalt of their experiences.

Relocation Results in Roadblocks That Thwart Access to Health Services

Participants described multiple barriers associated with relocation that disrupted or prevented access to health services that were necessary to obtain either a diagnosis or intervention. These barriers can be characterized as

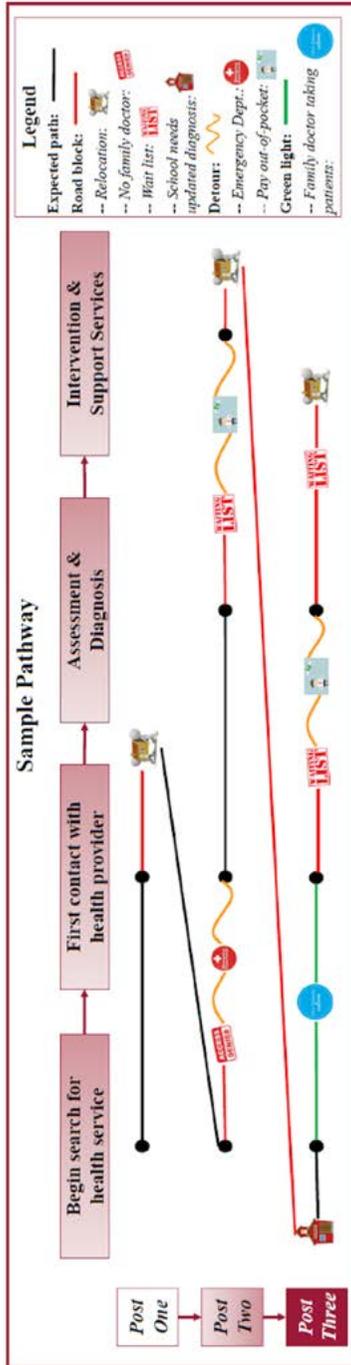


Figure 1. Sample health service access pathway in the context of frequent relocation.

roadblocks that obstructed their health service access pathways, thereby causing protracted delays in access to important services. These delays in access had significant implications for the health and well-being of the children (e.g., behavioural regression).

Multiple roadblocks were identified for all participants. Of course, the move itself presents one roadblock, since the geographic relocation halts any services already in place and wait-list positions are lost. Some participants ($n = 4$) described delays in starting services after a mandatory geographic relocation resulting from disruptions in record transfers or a lack of support in securing new providers in the new posting (i.e., a mandatory relocation). One participant described the delays encountered due to problems with transferring records from one posting to the next:

It was horrible. Our requests got lost between [organization 1] and here. [Organization 1] had all the paperwork that stated they had done the referrals, but for some reason [organization 2] and everyone in [new city] said, “Oh no, we never got them. We never got them.” So we waited for — goodness sakes, he was in school in September before we even got — No, it would have been later than September. Probably closer to Christmas before he actually got any actual therapy.

This was particularly difficult when services in place in the previous posting were not available in the new one, a circumstance discussed by four participants. One participant described this experience:

We realized the school didn’t offer the same things that they do in [other province]. They just didn’t have — There was nothing that they could do, other than knowing that he had Autism and offering us an IEP (Individualized Education Program), where we could go and discuss how he was doing. There wasn’t any — you know, they didn’t have occupation-

al therapists. They didn't have a sensory room. They didn't have anything like that to offer him. . . .

Another participant spoke to the negative impacts these service losses or delays can have on child development when moving from a school with an abundance of support services to another school with comparatively limited supports: "when we started at the school that he's presently at, between September and December he basically lost half of . . . the abilities that he had in [city] . . . their expectations of him weren't there, and so he literally reverted."

Some participants ($n = 4$) reported barriers related to professional differences of opinion and policy issues. For example, some participants described situations where professionals in the previous posting recommended assessments and/or supports but those in the next posting did not agree, blocking their child from receiving services:

So we moved to [city] . . . and [Dr. A] had already done the paperwork to transfer her to [Dr. B]. So we received a call from that hospital and they said that somebody was going to come up and just have a look at [my daughter], see, you know, where she was, like, in their view, on the spectrum. So she came . . . and she looked at [my daughter] and she said, "I don't see no problem here." . . . I said to [Dr. B] . . . "She needs some support" and he said, "Well, no, I don't think that she does." So I, again, was fighting for support for [my daughter]. . . . And then the whole time we were there . . . it was a constant fight with trying to get support.

Another participant described educational policies that called for an updated diagnosis in order to receive support in school; however, provincial health systems did not prioritize referrals for updated diagnosis, leaving the child without school support.

Difficulty finding a family doctor was another roadblock encountered by participants. Lack of primary care presented a barrier to obtaining referrals for

specialist services needed to obtain an ASD diagnosis. One participant whose family had recently moved to a new province spoke to this:

We are in the position where we need to transfer his health card, get ourselves a family doctor, then try to get the family doctor to refer us. I mean this is not something that can be done quickly, even in ideal conditions.

The most common roadblock ($n = 9$) discussed by participants was that wait-lists for services often bumped up against or exceeded the duration of the posting, causing protracted delays in access to health and other support services that compounded with each move. This meant that children would receive service only briefly or not at all before moving and starting the waiting process all over again in a new posting. One participant described this:

We sat on that waiting list knowing that we were not going to make it to the other end of the waiting list, because we were posted. So we were put on that waiting list and we waited, but we knew that we were moving that spring, and so it just wasn't going to happen.

Wait-lists for diagnosis that outlasted posting duration were particularly disruptive since eligibility for services often hinges on the child having an ASD diagnosis, making it difficult to secure services in the new posting. One participant spoke to this: “we were at a standstill from leaving [city] to coming here, and with [my child] . . . in the process of being diagnosed for Autism, that eight-month waiting period — throws everything off.” The participant went on to say:

[W]e contacted [community organization] as soon as we got here, actually. [Worker] from the MFRC (Military Family Resource Centre) suggested that we get in touch with them. But even behavioural therapies for autism, like, they

all need a diagnosis. . . . Any that I contacted — it was really needed, the written diagnosis, something from the doctor. So . . . and we didn't have that.

Relocation Leads to Detours and Backtracking That Increase the Complexity of the Access Pathway

In an effort to push forward in their health service access journey, participants had to find ways around the roadblocks noted above; in other words, they took *detours*. Detours involved abandoning typical access pathways and going around the roadblock in some way. The most common detour ($n = 7$) involved paying out-of-pocket for private health services to avoid long wait-lists in the public system. This was particularly common when wait-lists for publicly funded health services or community services were longer than the anticipated posting tenure, as with this participant:

[Community organization] put us on the wait-list for ABA (applied behaviour analysis) therapy. That wait-list is two years long. So, we were never going to see the end of that wait-list either. So, um, we started paying privately for him.

While this was a common detour, it did appear to put financial strain on families, with some resorting to charitable organizations to assist with payments:

[W]hen we did apply for [charitable fund], it was really just based on the fact that we paid \$1,800 for our son to be privately assessed. And then, once he was assessed, we ended up paying about \$450 a month for occupational therapy for him, and we just, like — And we waited. We waited about six months of paying privately before we, kind of, hit a wall and we requested assistance because we just couldn't continue to pay that, within our budget.

Another detour involved use of emergency or urgent health services (n = 4) for non-emergency issues. This was usually a result of having no access to the most suitable source of health service, such as a family doctor. One participant spoke to this:

If I could just get a family doctor for [our son], that would be great . . . because right now, all his documentations from the hospital is going to one doctor that saw him in the emergency, like, six months ago. . . . And they're getting a little perturbed about it.

Some participants (n = 5) reported asking the military for special posting consideration to avoid roadblocks all together, as with this participant: "Finally, my husband went to his career manager and he said, 'I need to go back to [city A] on a compassionate posting.'¹ So we went back to [city A] and that was, that was the end of [city B]."

When faced with roadblocks, participants sometimes found themselves *backtracking* along the pathway. This often involved relying on health providers in previous postings and/or starting the journey over again in the new posting. Several participants described contacting providers in their former posting and/or keeping their family doctor from a previous posting, some travelling long distances to maintain registration with that provider. Four participants lamented having to start over on new wait-lists for specialist or other services: "that's half our battle. You move and you've got to start back at the beginning." Another participant expressed similar sentiments: "[W]hen we moved from [province] to here, it was like starting our process brand new again. This process that I'd been fighting for a year and a half was started out fresh because of that waiting period to see anybody."

Other participants described having to "start fresh" with new health providers after a move and the toll that lack of continuity and persistent delays can have on the children's well-being:

I would say that, like, the wait-list and the changing the people involved. Like, we lost a year and a half where [our son] could have been receiving services. . . . Because we moved from one place, where the people who worked with him at school identified him as having a special need, and then got to another place where it took them a year of getting to know him before they were willing to do the same thing. And we did. We lost an entire year where we could have been seeking services and support for him and he, kind of, ended up — he had to get — you know, like, I feel like he didn't have to hit the low that he got. Like, he was, it was at the point where I was every two weeks in the principal's office because he could not control himself and he was not doing well . . . he didn't have to get to that point. . . . Like, we could have known more about how to help him if we didn't have to start over. It's just the starting over. . . . you're still starting with new people who need to take that time to get to know him.

One participant described the frustration associated with the detours and backtracking encountered when moving from one province to another while also attempting to have the child assessed for an ASD diagnosis:

It was just, it was extremely frustrating, because when you move, waiting on a doctor, when you have two children and one who needs to see a pediatrician, is not top of your list of what the stresses should be. I figure that should be top priority. If I'm having to move out-of-province for my husband's work, there should be something more accessible, if it's necessary.

Green Lights Can Facilitate Smoother Pathways

While there were many barriers to health access that led to roadblocks, detours, and backtracking along the health service access pathway, other factors — or *green lights* — facilitated a smoother pathway. The most common green light

was advocacy ($n = 8$). This usually involved advocacy on behalf of families by service providers but could also include self-advocacy. Participants described the support of health and other service providers in dealing with barriers to access, including assistance with records transfer, new referrals, and finding support services. One participant spoke about a health-care provider who assisted in securing a spot in a school with exceptional support services. Participants also described self-advocacy, which included persistence in contacting health providers, maintaining their own records, and fundraising to pay for private support services. These efforts often involved acute emotional distress.

Participants ($n = 5$) also described program and policy facilitators who were helpful in navigating health services access. These included relaxed eligibility criteria regarding services (e.g., not requiring an ASD diagnosis for school supports) and immediate access to provincial health coverage after a move, as well as Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) services. One participant described the MFRC special needs coordinator as being very helpful and another indicated that the MFRC provided excellent assistance in finding a family doctor.

When discussing some green lights, such as getting a family doctor or securing a certain sought-after support, participants often referred to these events as the family “getting lucky” in some way or benefiting from serendipity: “The only thing we had to do was secure a family doctor on our own. And that was by luck of the draw. We just happened to be driving by one of the doctor’s offices on our way to our new house and saw that they were accepting patients.”

Discussion

In this qualitative study, we found that frequent relocation associated with the military lifestyle disrupted access to health-care services for Canadian military-connected children with ASD. Many of the access barriers described by our participants, such as long wait-lists and difficulty finding a family doctor, are realities for all families with children who have ASD (Brown et al. 2012; Montes, Halterman, and Magyar 2009; Penner et al. 2017); these difficulties are amplified for military families (Cramm, Smith et al. 2019) because of the frequent relocation associated with military life. Frequent relocation

exacerbates existing barriers, complicates access pathways, and can result in delays in accessing essential services that can have significant implications for the health and development of children with ASD. These results are consistent with research investigating health services access in the context of mandatory relocation for American military-connected children with ASD, which found challenges in continuity and delays in access to the military health services that non-serving American military family members access (Davis and Finke 2015; Davis et al. 2016). Our results suggest a higher degree of complexity in access pathways due to Canadian military families' requirement to access provincial health systems.

In this study, which focused specifically on the impact of frequent relocation on health service access pathways, we found that participants' pathways to health services in the context of relocation were highly variable and convoluted, riddled with roadblocks, detours, and backtracking that created delays in obtaining diagnosis, intervention, and support services. These issues were not singular experiences but were encountered repeatedly with each new move. Moves that occurred during the diagnosis process were particularly disruptive and resulted in delays in access to support services since most school and community organizations require a diagnosis to provide service. In addition, some locations have better support resources than others, and while civilian families may choose to delay a planned relocation or move to a well-resourced community, military families have less choice and flexibility around when and where they will be relocated.

One issue noted by our participants was difficulty finding a primary care provider after relocation. With 15 per cent of the population being without a primary care provider (Commissaire à la santé et au bien être 2014), this is a national issue for all Canadians; however, military families are four times less likely to have a family doctor than their civilian counterparts (Daigle 2013). The 2013 Quality of Life Study conducted by Defence Research and Development Canada revealed that 44 per cent of CAF spouses reported significant difficulty in re-establishing health care after a move (Wang and Aitken 2016), and other government research indicates that finding a new family doctor is the third most important task when relocating (Manser 2018a). Children with

ASD require access to specialized providers, like pediatricians, early on (Dawson 2008), and since primary care is the typical gateway to these services (Hutchison et al. 2011) military-connected children with ASD can be at a disadvantage in accessing services after a move. Indeed, Mahar et al. (2018) found that military families posted to Ontario have significantly higher wait-times to first contact with the health system, including family doctors and pediatricians, compared to civilian families.

In the absence of a family doctor, our participants described using emergency or urgent care for services typically provided in primary care; this aligned with the findings of Mahar et al. (2018) that military dependants were significantly more likely to access the emergency department for the first contact with the health system compared to civilians. Military families' use of emergency departments and walk-in clinics may result in disruptions in routine and preventive care, such as vaccinations and screening, as well as discontinuity in health records (Daigle 2013; College of Family Physicians of Canada and Canadian Military and Veteran Families Leadership Circle 2016; Mahar et al. 2018; Rowan-Legg 2017). This speaks to the potential health implications of frequent mandatory relocation for civilian members of all military families as well as those with ASD and other special needs.

Mahar et al. (2018) also found that children in military families were far less likely than their civilian comparators to have accessed a pediatrician in the last year. Many of our participants reported concerns that frequent relocation caused delays in access to services that may have a negative impact on their child's health and well-being. This concern is warranted considering the literature suggesting that early detection and intervention for ASD are important in promoting positive outcomes (Dawson 2008; Eldevik et al. 2009; Perry et al. 2011). Roadblocks associated with relocation that cause delays in service access present barriers to early intervention and the benefits that go along with early intervention.

In circumstances where participants were likely to face a mandatory relocation before reaching the end of waiting lists for provincially funded services, many participants reported paying out-of-pocket for faster access. This poses a significant financial strain and may not be possible for all families. According to recent

governmental research, financial stress was the second most challenging issue for military families (Prairie Research Associates 2017; Wang, Lee, and Farley 2018). Government reports indicate that relocation had a negative impact on the finances of about half of military families (Manser 2018a; Wang et al. 2018).

Participants also reported on facilitators, or green lights, that smoothed navigation of the health-care access pathways. While the presence of these facilitators is reassuring, many of them seemed to be the result of luck or serendipity (e.g., happening to drive by the office of a family doctor who was taking patients). One concerning “green light” reported by one participant was the need to have “a melt-down” in order to initiate services. This points to the emotional toll that navigating the health system for a child with ASD in the context of relocation can take on parents, which is discussed further in Cramm, Smith, et al. (2019).

One facilitator identified by many participants was health provider advocacy on their behalf. This speaks to the important role of health providers, not just in providing diagnostic and intervention services, but also in assisting patients to navigate the health-care system during and after mandatory relocation. The need for improved access to and quality of health services for military families has been garnering attention in recent years. Recent publications and guidance documents have highlighted the unique needs of children in military families for family physicians and pediatricians (Cramm, Mahar, et al. 2019; College of Family Physicians of Canada and Canadian Military and Veteran Families Leadership Circle 2016; Rowan-Legg 2017).

Provincial and federal government departments have also become increasingly aware of the challenges frequent relocation creates for health service access. The Department of National Defence and the CAF recently announced the “Seamless Canada” initiative (Government of Canada 2018), some provinces have waived the 90-day wait to obtain a health card for military dependants (Government of Ontario 2007; Vogel 2014), and the province of Alberta has taken steps to improve health service access with a recently announced pilot project (Cole 2018). Calian Health established the Military Family Doctor Network in 2016 (Calian Health 2020) and a similar program, Operation Family Doc, is delivered by the MFRC-National Capital Region

(Morale and Welfare Services 2020) to connect military families to primary care providers.

In 2017, the Department of Defence and the CAF announced Canada's new defence policy "*Strong, Secure, Engaged*," which, in recognition of the challenges of frequent relocation, committed additional funding to support military families through relocation via MFRC programs as well as government and industry partnerships to improve coordination of services across provinces. Linked to this new policy is the Seamless Canada initiative, which aims to improve services for military members and their families by enhancing alignment of services, such as health care, that are likely to change across different jurisdictions throughout the country (Government of Canada 2018).

While this attention is promising, more research specifically investigating health-care access for military families with special needs is essential. Health-care access in the context of relocation is important and challenging for all military families and those with children who have special needs such as ASD have a particularly high need. Some Canadian research on access to special education services for military-connected children with special needs mirrors our findings (Ostler et al. 2018). However, very little primary research explores the issue of health service access for military-connected children with special needs, including ASD, in the Canadian context. Moreover, no Canadian data currently shed light on the types of special needs experienced by dependants in military families (Cramm, Mahar, et al. 2019; Ostler et al. 2018), which stymies capacity to inform policy and practice targeting military families. Improving our understanding of Canadian military families is becoming a higher research priority (e.g., Gribble et al. 2018; Vanier Institute of the Family 2019). Our results support the prioritization of research funding to further develop our understanding of these military families. Further research can support the development of programming and policies that can improve access to needed health services and supports for military families.

Limitations

As with any qualitative study, our results are not meant to be generalizable to all military families who have a child or children with ASD. Participants were

primarily from nuclear married families with a single serving parent; this means their experiences may not transfer to other types of families and dual-serving families. No information regarding parental age and child co-morbidities was explicitly collected, which may have provided some additional context around participants' experiences. In addition, participants were self-selected, which may lead to an emphasis on strong perspectives regarding relocation and health-care access.

Conclusion

Frequent relocation creates circumstances that make an already challenging health access experience more tedious and may result in compounding long-term developmental implications for children with ASD living in military families. In this study, frequent relocation disrupted access to health-care services for Canadian military-connected children with ASD. Pathways to health care were variable and convoluted, and the roadblocks, detours, and backtracking associated with relocation led to delays in obtaining diagnosis, intervention, and support services. Given that early diagnosis and intervention can have a critical impact on the prognosis of ASD (Dawson 2008), these delays can have significant negative implications for the health and well-being of Canadian military-connected children with ASD. These results are consistent with similar studies conducted in the US (Davis and Finke 2015; Davis et al. 2016). Additional research is needed to further our understanding of the impact of frequent relocation on health service access for Canadian military families with children who have special needs.

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Note

- 1 Compassionate posting refers to “a posting approved to alleviate the personal circumstances of a CAF member” (National Defence 2017, para. 2).

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Motorcycling Together: Mitigating Military Exit

Karen Samuels

Abstract

Employment-related geographic mobility for Canadian military members involves travel within Canada and around the world for training, international and domestic postings, and deployment for extended periods of time on overseas operations. In many of these contexts, service members work, eat, and sleep together. Sometimes, they fight, bleed, and die together. Consequently, they become like family to each other. Exiting the military is therefore a challenging and jarring process for veterans, often replete with emotional and physical losses. Exiting impacts not just veterans, but may disrupt the lives of their spouses, partners, and children. This research summary approaches a veterans' motorcycle riding organization as a community of support created to mitigate such challenges related to exiting mobile careers. The riding community supports veterans by providing continuity with the military in the form of purpose, structure, and camaraderie, and, by engaging veterans' hyper-alertness and hyper-vigilance, previously embodied through military mobile work, in motorcycle riding.

Introduction

They invited me to join them as a passenger for the first ride of the season, but when I arrived at the meeting place that morning I had to persuade my body

to get on the bike. The previous evening, I had attended the classroom portion of a motorcycle-riding course in which I was enrolled. Here, I became informed on multiple, diverse, gruesome, and horrifying ways in which a human body may be mangled in a motorcycle crash. While we waited for the rest of the group to arrive, my hosts encouraged me with reassuring comments such as, “the back of that Harley is like lounging on a couch,” “you can’t fall off. It’s impossible,” and, “trust me, it’s a really smooth ride” (Samuels 2020, 1–2). By the time we were ready to set off, they had convinced me to get on the machine. They teased me later, but by the end of the day I had enjoyed the ride and their company a lot more than I expected to at that (relatively) early stage of my fieldwork. In the two full seasons I spent riding as a passenger with the veteran riding community, members told many stories about each other’s (non-fatal) crashes and close calls. Most fortunately, I never experienced any such incidents myself. Except for that very first day out.

As we were returning to the city from the picturesque Rocky Mountain foothills hamlet of Bragg Creek, very suddenly, a sport-utility vehicle turned left in front of the Road Captain¹ and me. Before I could really reflect on what was happening, the Road Captain had skilfully manoeuvred us both out of a potentially disastrous collision and brought the machine, safely, to a halt. Later, riding community members told jokes about the bruises I left on him while we were experiencing that unexpected turn, but in the moment, all I knew was adrenaline and very raw fear. However, as the other riding community members emerged from behind us and protectively boxed us in, shielding us from traffic with their bikes and their bodies, that sense of existential vulnerability was almost simultaneously replaced by a sense of existential security. My experience of that instantaneous transition, from sensing threat to sensing safety, enabled me to peripherally appreciate the support that the veteran riding community offered to Canadian Armed Forces members exiting their military, mobile careers.

In the early 2000s, two Canadian Armed Forces veterans created the National Veterans Motorcycle Organization — which I refer to hereafter as the NVMO² — to support other veterans who were experiencing challenges related to military exit. The exit process is often jarring for ex-service members

and replete with both physical and emotional losses. In the lives of its veteran members, the NVMO plays an important role in restoring some of those losses. It provides continuity with veterans' military careers in the form of purpose, structure, and camaraderie, and by engaging veterans' senses in motorcycle riding. This chapter focuses on how participation in the NVMO ameliorates a bumpy transition process. I approach employment-related geographic mobility (E-RGM), family, and sense of loss and isolation as connected to, and embedded in, military exit. First, however, some brief discussion of the membership and how I got to know them.

Membership and Methods

The NVMO is made up of men and women who served in all three branches of the Canadian Armed Forces: Army, Navy, and Air Force. With a single exception, these veterans served as non-commissioned members,³ mostly between the 1960s and the early 2000s. They are Cold War veterans, veterans of United Nations peacekeeping missions, and a few of them are veterans of the Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan. NVMO riding community members ride motorcycles together, fundraise in support of local veterans and their families, and organize, run, and participate in various neighbourhood activities related to Remembrance Day. The membership also includes friends and family who are not veterans but participate as supporter members.

I spent about 18 months with the NVMO when I did my field research with them between 2012 and 2014. During that time the membership was made up of about 40 people — mostly veterans, and some civilian supporters. I collected my data through participant observation, which involved me riding as a passenger during motorcycle rides and volunteering at various fundraising and remembrance activities as a supporter member. I also participated in recreational activities, which included, for example, barbecues, bowling, and visiting local pubs and shooting ranges. I additionally learned about the members of the NVMO and their veteran riding community through countless casual and not-so-casual conversations, as well as individual interviews at local coffee shops and at members' homes and workplaces.

Exiting More Than a Job

As with all Canadian Armed Forces members, while they were serving, E-RGM for NVMO veterans involved travel within Canada and around the world for training, international and domestic postings, and deployment for extended periods of time on overseas operations. Training courses usually require Canadian Armed Forces members to be away from home for a number of weeks, while postings and deployments are measured in months at a time. Appreciating what made the experience of exit from their military careers so challenging for NVMO veterans (and often for their families as well) requires us to imagine veterans' military careers as more than a job. It requires us to envision the military as a multi-layered field of interconnected relationships, between people, geography, thoughts and language, memories, routines, ideas about inside-ness and outside-ness, and the sense of feeling at home in one's everyday practical world (Casey 2001; Jackson 2008). NVMO veterans felt a strong connection between who they thought themselves to be, their sense of worth and purpose, and their military careers. Exiting their careers therefore interrupted both their sense of self and their sense of belonging.

Veteran members of the NVMO represent a range of military careers and military experiences. Some veteran members, for example, self-identified as living with physical and psychological injuries (including post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD), which they sustained while serving outside of Canada on dangerous operations that required them to deploy or witness violence, and while serving at home or on peaceful overseas postings. Other veteran riding community members did not self-identify as struggling with physical or psychological injuries sustained during their military careers. There were veteran riding community members who worked "outside the wire"⁴ on overseas operations and those whose work never required them to leave the operations base. Other NVMO veterans were posted in Canada throughout their military careers.

Despite this diversity of military work experiences, all veteran riding community members, to differing degrees, associated military exit with deep nostalgia and a sense of loss. Exit from their military careers disconnected NVMO veterans from trusted individuals who were like family, and from the sharing of meaningful work that generated those family-like bonds, sometimes very far

from home. The work of some anthropologists who study the processes of relatedness can help us understand how these connections between E-RGM and sense of family away from home are formed (Carsten 1995, 2000; Sahlin 2014).

Marshall Sahlin (2014, 1) describes family as people who are “intrinsic to one another’s existence.” People who are family to each other, from this perspective, participate in each other’s lives in ways that make them interdependent. Family, for example, share each other’s “suffering and joys,” their experiences, they take responsibility for each other’s welfare, and they “feel the effects of each other’s acts.” Importantly, the social processes and behaviours that render people like family to each other are not limited to biological relation (Sahlin 2014, 28). Rather, relatedness — the sense of feeling like family to each other — may be generated when people share and eat food together, live and work together, “love and nurture” and help and support each other, and share the hardships and new possibilities related to migration (Carsten 1995, 2000; Sahlin 2014, 28).

During their military careers, many NVMO veterans participated in each other’s lives in intrinsic ways. Particularly on overseas deployments, they lived, ate, worked, slept, and washed together. They were responsible for each other’s safety. Sometimes, dangerous missions required them to fight and bleed together, and some comrades died. This perspective on social processes that are alternative to biological relation, yet capable of rendering people related to each other, helps explain how NVMO veterans came to feel like family to the people they served with in their pre-exit lives. It also helps explain how their pre-exit work became so meaningful to them.

Sharing work that most civilians could not relate to, in intense training or deployment environments with people who were like family, helped NVMO veterans derive a sense of worth from, and attribute purpose to, that work. Based on my conversations and observations, veterans’ sense of worth and purpose was often related to their perceptions of themselves as people who were organized, efficient, and professional, and who had developed good teamwork and leadership skills. Prior to exit, veterans were people who moved around, inside and outside of Canada. They fixed and built things, and located other moving people, places, devices, and machines. They were brothers, sisters, and helpers, soldiers, sailors, and airmen.⁵

Exiting the military therefore severed veterans' access to daily interaction with people who were like family and with whom they shared unique experiences and memories. Exit also severed veterans' access to work that provided them with definitive narratives for self-identification, along with familiar, regimented everyday activity. I believe that the nostalgia that NVMO veterans have associated with their pre-release lives and the isolation they have described feeling following their military exit are connected to their experience of life in the military as more than a job.

Exit Impacts Families

During our conversations and interviews, several veteran members of the riding community told me that exit also impacted the lives of the civilian family members with whom they shared households. Most veteran participants were married at the time of my research or had been married and were since divorced (and sometimes remarried). Most veteran participants also had children who were of school age when their veteran parent exited the Canadian Armed Forces. Comparatively, a few younger participants in their late thirties or early forties were single and were not parents. Based on my conversations and observations, and informed by research done by some social scientists who study combat-related stress injuries like PTSD, I categorize relevant impacts of military exit on veterans' civilian family members in two ways: contexts of secondary traumatization (Dinshtein, Dekel, and Polliack 2011; Figley 1993; Matsakis 2007) and effects on parenting (Matsakis 2007).

Charles Figley (1993, 59) argues that civilian family members of veterans who struggle with PTSD — spouses, partners, or children, for example — sometimes become, “indirect ‘victims’ of the traumatic event.” Aphrodite Matsakis (2007, 323) writes about children of American veterans who mimic their parent’s reliving experiences and hyper-vigilance and hyper-arousal symptoms, or they become “obsessed with the war-related issues that trouble the veteran.” Further, suggests Matsakis, children may suffer from “nightmares about war or worry a great deal about death and injury.” Examples of secondary traumatization in Israeli (adult) children of veterans include difficulty learning, “hostility,” feelings of guilt, “social problems,” “difficulty coping with stress and

regulating emotions,” and “higher levels of behavioural problems” and “emotional difficulties” compared to children of veterans who did not struggle with combat-related trauma (Dinshtein, Dekel, and Polliack 2011, 110). My own conversation with Wade, a veteran of Canada’s operations in the Balkans in the 1990s, exemplifies these arguments:

My youngest feels guilty because *they don’t* remember me being hurt. *They were* only three years old. The oldest won’t have anything to do with the military because the military hurt me. And the little *one* for some reason thought it was *their* fault. I don’t know why. I mean you don’t know how kids’ minds work. Even today, now. I mean you have huge anger issues. Uh *they have* probably got post-traumatic stress disorder. You know as a result of me, of my injuries. And perhaps my behaviour before I got help. . . . You know that sort of stuff. . . . You know, so very serious, serious issues.⁶

In spouses and partners, according to Yula Dinshtein, Rachel Dekel, and Miki Polliack (2011, 110), secondary traumatization may manifest as “symptoms of depression, anxiety, somatization, fatigue, difficulties to concentrate, sleep disorders, and headaches” as well as “increased social isolation.” Indeed, at least one veteran I spoke with attributed his wife’s ongoing struggle with depression to his own operational stress injuries.

Operational stress injuries also affect a veteran’s ability to parent, according to Matsakis (2007, 324). This occurs sometimes because the pressure to parent has become overwhelming when combined with the veteran’s struggle with trauma. Consequently, the veteran’s spouse or partner may feel like a single parent, “with the burden of their children’s emotional and physical well-being on their shoulders alone” (342). Matsakis further argues that operational stress injuries can impact a veteran’s ability to parent because he or she experienced difficult encounters with children on deployment (342). In their comments below, Ian and his wife Amber provide apt examples. Ian was deployed to the Balkans in the early 1990s:

Amber: . . . He couldn't tolerate being around (*our*) kids when they were crying or anything like that. That really was disturbing for him. So he usually had to leave. . . .

Ian: Yeah, crying kids. They had, they used to sit right outside my shack. Like my sleeping quarters was here, the fence was here, the kids would sit on that side of the fence and there was nothing we could do and they'd cry 24 a day. So anytime you tried to go to sleep they were still there crying. And after six and a half, seven months of that, you . . . like it just, it kinda grates on ya and then the fact that you can see them and they're you know, yeah, they're missing limbs and they're —

Amber: Starving.

Ian: Starving and they're not dressed for the weather and you're going, God . . . Right? And then there's nothing you could do. (Samuels 2020, 106–07)

Greg offered another example of returning home from deployment and its impact on his parenting:

. . . The body is used to being home with the family and then body's not, and then the body wants to be by itself. You know it takes a while to get used to it again. You get used to the kids coming up to you and you know wanting to hold your hand and you keep moving it away. Like that was bad for me when on a couple of tours kids would — [*says his children's names*] would come up and grab my hand I just pull my hand away. "You don't want to hold our hand, Daddy?" And I'm going, oh okay. I'd actually have to remember I had to hold it. I'm, you're not gonna hurt me and I'm not gonna hurt you and oh it takes a while. . . . (Samuels 2020, 107)

Veteran riding community members' accounts of some of the ways in which exiting the Canadian Armed Forces, or exiting overseas deployments, can impact the civilian members of their households further demonstrate how approaching military careers as more than a job can be useful for improving our understanding of the challenges involved in exiting mobile military careers and environments. Importantly, their accounts provide compelling examples of how veterans' struggles with PTSD upon exit have also been the struggles of their families.



Figure 1. NVMO veterans paying attention to another veteran member's Remembrance Day presentation at a local middle school, 2014. (Photo by Karen Samuels)

Old Habits Exit Hard

Another challenge faced by riding community veterans exiting their Canadian Armed Forces careers includes the persistence, in civilian environments, of military ways of doing particular things. For example, through intense and

repeated training, Canadian Armed Forces members learn how to continually push themselves to their physical and mental limits (Whelan 2016, 250). They learn to use surges in adrenaline to maintain alertness and focus in stressful and dangerous situations like combat, and how to instantly and instinctively react in ways that protect each other and advance the mission (Harrison and Laliberté 1996, 19; Whelan 2016, 250).

Canadian Armed Forces veteran and psychologist John Whelan (2016, 16) argues that these reactions become “hard-wired.” Over time, and with a lot of practice, service members learn to perform such hyper-vigilance and hyper-alertness without conscious thought. These skills, deemed essential by leadership for surviving and being effective in combat environments, become automatic. They are “*incorporated*,”⁷ or enfolded, into soldiers’ bodies (Leder 1990, 31). Such skills are necessary and functional in contexts of military training and deployment but are not usually very relevant in civilian environments.

Because these military skills have been so thoroughly incorporated, however, they do not simply fade into non-existence when service members exit the military. Instead, they sometimes interrupt veterans’ everyday activities in civilian environments. The persistence of these military habits can draw unwanted attention onto veterans in civilian public places, and onto the partners, children, siblings, or parents who happen to be with them.⁸ NVMO veterans described numerous examples: having to move tables in a restaurant to be better able to scan the room for threats; being unable to walk on grass for fear of landmines; or pulling loved ones to the ground after hearing a car or lawnmower engine backfire. NVMO veterans described these experiences as isolating and sometimes as embarrassing. Veterans told me that the persistence of their military habits in civilian environments, and the unwanted attention such experiences could draw, contributed to their feelings of no longer belonging in their post-exit lives.

This experience of self-consciousness, of drawing unwanted attention onto oneself, was not limited to the persistence of military habits related to combat. One example that I encountered several times was the experience of getting dressed, post-exit. Gregg,⁹ an NVMO veteran, explains:

. . . Getting back on civvie street, well I found the hardest part was getting dressed. Well it is! You don't know what to wear. For 30 years you get up, you put on uniform of the day — is dress combats or things or whatever. You know exactly what you're wearing. And it's ready. You get up in the morning it's like what the hell am I going to put on today? Jeans again? . . . It takes a while to learn all this again. You know. Kids laugh at me, [*names his wife*] laughs at me. Like, "you wearing that again?" "I'm not supposed to?" "No, change your pants." "Okay . . ." (Samuels 2020, 189)

Veterans told me similar stories about drawing the scrutiny of their family members (and other civilians) with their colourful use of language, another persisting habit they picked up during their military careers:

Victor: When I come home I had a difficult time talking to my parents. You know, every second word was —

Karen: *laughs*

Victor: And, uh, I thought nothing of it and they were sitting there just totally shocked about it. (Samuels 2020, 194)

Victor is referring to the word "fuck." Anthropologist John Hockey (1987) argues that use of this term by British infantry soldiers in the 1980s played a role in the socialization of recruits, operating to differentiate soldiers from civilians and thus encouraging bonding within the military group:

Swearing is indeed a generalized practice with obscene terms being often used in ways more or less devoid of their sexual meaning. Thus, "fuck" can be used positively, negatively, or neutrally; as an adjective, noun, verb, or expletive. Recruits as they assimilate the Army's jargon and argot also pick up and use obscene terms; real soldiers after all are expected to swear! The wholesale use of such language, taboo in much

of civilian life, reinforces and symbolizes their new status as soldiers, constituting a release from certain restraints in wider civilian culture. (Hockey 1987, 36)

Swearing is used similarly among Canadian infantry soldiers and, as noted by Victor, the persistence of the habit in civilian environments can draw unexpected attention on veterans. Such unexpected or unwanted scrutiny contributed to NVMO veterans' feelings of self-consciousness in their post-exit lives, and a sense of nostalgia for their military days.

Road, Risk, Relief

NVMO veterans enjoyed motorcycling because it provided relief from some of the challenges related to exiting the military, including the persistence in civilian environments of hyper-vigilance and hyper-alertness skills they incorporated during their military careers in order to operate as effective and efficient soldiers in dangerous situations like combat. Irrelevant and sometimes disruptive in a restaurant or coffee shop, vigilance and alertness are completely appropriate on a motorcycle. Veterans need to be vigilant and alert to keep the machine upright and to safely navigate it through traffic, inclement weather, and numerous other obstacles that can unexpectedly pop up on the road. On a motorcycle, failing to be sufficiently vigilant and alert can potentially lead to serious injury or even death. Motorcycling affords NVMO veterans the freedom to perform these skills without drawing more discomfort into their post-exit lives, at least for the duration of a ride. Colin explained it to me this way:

Karen: There seems to be something about riding and veterans.

Colin: Yeah. The way [*names another veteran member*] described it to me is because we were in high-risk situations. High stress because of our jobs in the military. That we can appreciate a little bit of danger like riding a bike. Being out there not being protected like in a car. Having to watch things, you know, like a car stopping or cutting us off or something

like that. That's kind of good for us because we're on a bike and we're in little bit of a stressful situation more than safe in a car. So it helps.

Karen: Is it correct to say that to a degree you're maintaining some of those soldiering skills?

Colin: Oh yeah. Oh yeah!

Karen: And that's a part of who you are so letting go of that — the transition would be made easier by being able to hold onto some of those skills?

Colin: Yes. (Samuels 2020, 247)

Equally important, then, riding helped veterans like Colin reconnect with a part of themselves they were missing or, perhaps, that felt lost to them.

Some social scientists have sought to understand why people are drawn to potentially risky activities despite being aware of the inherent hazards (Bellaby and Lawrenson 2001; Librett 2008; Lyng 1990; Natalier 2001). For example, writing about motorcyclists in the UK, Kristin Natalier (2001, 71) posits that the motorcyclists who participated in her research did not simply ignore or deride the dire statistics that have been documented by experts. Rather, they expressed confidence in their ability to exert control *over* the risk. Participants told Natalier that the risk of crashing could be controlled by, for example, administering good riding technique, drawing on previous riding experience, and applying practical knowledge collected in their interactions with other riders (71). Natalier adds that even though a cursory reading of the statistics associated with participants' own accidents rendered "their interpretation unsupportable," their interpretation remains important because it lends insight into how participants sufficiently managed risk in order to continue to enjoy riding (77). Recalling his comments above, Colin similarly applied his soldiering skills to successfully operate a motorcycle through traffic and other unexpected hazards. He, like most of the veteran riding community members I spoke with, seems to value motorcycle riding sufficiently to warrant the risk. Indeed, the benefits of riding for NVMO veterans are full-bodied: physical, emotional, and social.

In the pub, while NVMO veterans took lunch together after a morning of riding, they frequently enjoyed sharing memories about the near misses and non-fatal crashes they experienced riding together as a group. They regaled each other with stories of deft execution of control over risk, expressing, it seemed to me, a sense of achievement and pride in successfully managing such physically challenging situations. Anthropologists Raymond Michaelowski and Jill Dubisch (2001, 168), who rode with a group of American veterans of the Vietnam War, similarly described how veterans bonded both over “the emotional intensity” of overcoming physically challenging road conditions and by sharing stories with each other about those same accomplishments. The authors suggest that American veterans’ co-experience of, and reminiscing over, intense road experiences recreated the kind of intense bonding generated between soldiers in combat situations (169).

Riding together and the sharing of road stories operated similarly in the riding community. Veterans in the NVMO told me they were like family to each other and they often referred to each other as brothers and sisters. In addition to helping them mitigate their sense of isolation since exiting the military, I believe that riding — and sharing and reminiscing about road experiences — played a role in generating that renewed sense of relatedness. Additionally, through riding, based on my interpretations of their road stories, veterans reconnected with a sense of empowerment and worth that some told me they had been missing since exiting the military.

Riding motorcycles together also provided relief for veterans who were dealing with stressful thoughts related to physical or psychological injuries sustained during their military careers. These might include traumatic reliving of experiences or worries related to their hyper-vigilance and hyper-alertness training, such as the anticipation of threats in civilian environments. Other stressful thoughts include worries about (veterans’) benefits claims and other everyday concerns related to work and family. Riding a motorcycle, according to NVMO members, pushed such thoughts out of mind. Riding enabled veterans to focus instead on the present operation of the machine and their immediate environment. Jack described this embodied aspect of riding to me, as well as the relief he believed it offered veteran riding community members:

Jack: For me, it's just the enjoyment of being on the road and riding. I mean my biggest — and this may be why the military likes it so much — is because, for me, I don't think of anything else. I ride, I think about riding. Everything else just goes out of my mind, it's a big stress relief for me, I just get away from day-to-day life and I don't think about anything else. So when I'm on my bike, I'm on my bike. And that's it. So I shut everything else down and all I think about is what I'm doing that day. Even if it's, we stop for lunch, you know, I'm talking to the guys, we're talking about the ride, anything else like that, my day-to-day life never comes into my mind. So that might be part of the reason why they ride. Because they have more to escape than in general? So they may be trying to use that — and that might be what it is. It just, it gets them away from what they have to think about all the time. So that's just one way of escaping.

Karen: If your thoughts . . . kind of are chasing you —

Jack: Yeah, exactly. And that's a good way to get away from that. (Samuels 2020, 251–52)

Riding together offered NVMO veterans further opportunities to mitigate the nostalgia and isolation they experienced after exiting the military. It offered a hierarchical organizational structure — the NVMO was organized to imitate the Canadian regimental system, including a chain of command at national, regional, and local levels. Participation in rides, or any NVMO activity, was regularly scheduled and required of veterans a particular mode of dress, which included a leather vest displaying the group patch and other membership insignia according to particular specifications. Lastly, NVMO veterans could relax around each other — they could swear in the military way — without incurring odd looks, self-consciousness, or misunderstanding. Without feeling like they no longer belonged. This familiarity, veterans told me, was part of the appeal of membership, and provided some relief from a near-constant struggle

to re-familiarize and re-situate themselves comfortably in civilian public and work environments. The familiarity of the ways in which veteran members related to each other, and organized and accomplished tasks, offered veterans a sense of continuity with their military lives.

Riding together, then, restored for NVMO veterans a sense of self and belonging that many said had been lost to them since their exit from the military. Membership in the NVMO also reunited some veterans with a sense of purpose, usually in the context of supporting other veterans and their families throughout the city. In his comments below, Warren talks about how membership in the NVMO made a big difference in his post-exit life:

I for years hid behind a wall of dope smoke and crawled in a whisky bottle. I would go to work and I would come home and I would not get involved with anything more than my immediate pastimes. . . . When I found this group and I found the outlets of charity that we have. And the group of people that we have that for the most part seem interested. . . . We do good work and it makes me feel good. And it makes me feel involved. And people say, several members have said it's not always about the patch but it is about the patch. It's about the work that we do and it's about the work that we're gonna do. And for that, we need to continue. (Samuels 2020, 173)

NVMO members supported other veterans in the city by participating in fundraising rides, helping to organize a charity 10K run, and running an annual Show 'n' Shine.¹⁰ NVMO members also worked with the local veterans' food bank throughout the year, especially in November.

According to Willa, Amber, and Zoe, who at the time of my research were spouses and partners to veterans who self-identified as living with PTSD, membership in groups like the NVMO provides opportunities for civilian family members to minimize the isolation they sometimes experience while their veterans are overwhelmed by the challenges facing them following military exit. Zoe, for example, told me that when she sought support and advice from

other NVMO veterans regarding her struggling (veteran) partner, they supported her in meaningful ways. Similarly, Willa and Amber suggested that membership in groups like the NVMO can help the partners and spouses of exiting veterans connect with other partners and spouses who are experiencing similar challenges. These connections can generate meaningful communities of support in which spouses and partners share, and thereby help to minimize, each other's sense of isolation.



Figure 2. NVMO veterans enjoying each other's company while running a Show 'n' Shine in the parking lot of a local hotel, 2014. (Photo by Karen Samuels)

Motorcycling: A Mobile Solution for a Mobility Problem

Exiting their military careers was challenging and isolating for NVMO veterans because exiting distanced them from people who were like family to them, and from familiar and empowering military ways of doing things. Frequently, exit also disconnected veterans from prior senses of self-identification, purpose, and worth they had previously associated with being Canadian soldiers, sailors, and

airmen. Importantly, military exit did not impact veterans alone. Challenges related to exit sometimes deeply impacted family members who shared households with exiting veterans — spouses, partners, and children, for example — through secondary traumatization and interference in the processes of parenting.

In motorcycling together, veteran members of the NVMO helped each other restore some of these losses. Motorcycle riding engaged vigilance and alertness skills — and other habits related to Canadian Armed Forces members' successful socialization in the military — that while functional and appropriate in military contexts were often out of tune in civilian environments. When veterans experienced the persistence of their incorporated military skills and habits in civilian contexts, they sometimes experienced a simultaneous compounding of their post-exit isolation. Motorcycling together offered riding community veterans relief by powerfully engaging their military skills again. Additionally, membership generated access to meaningful support for veterans' spouses and children who were impacted by their exiting veteran's struggle with operational stress injuries.

Attending to some of the ways in which the mobile practice of motorcycling mitigated particular challenges related to exiting the Canadian military, itself a mobile career, lends insight into how mobilities approaches can help us understand the unique challenges related to exiting employment-related geographic mobility, including the potentially significant impacts that exiting can have on the family members who share households with exiting workers. For numerous NVMO veterans, the mobile qualities of serving with the Canadian Armed Forces made the work into more than a job. By establishing continuity with some of those same mobile qualities and practices following exit, veterans supported each other, and helped each other navigate and also minimize the impact of the numerous, isolating challenges related to exit.

Notes

- 1 The Road Captain decided which routes the group would follow. He rode at the front of the group and maintained control over how the group moved in formation on the road.
- 2 The National Veterans Motorcycle Organization (the NVMO) is a pseudonym.

- 3 According to the Queen's Regulations and Orders (QR&Os), an officer is "a person who holds Her Majesty's commission in the Canadian Forces," "a person who holds the rank of officer cadet in the Canadian Forces," "and any person who pursuant to law is attached or seconded as an officer to the Canadian Forces" ("National Defence" 2018). In the Canadian Armed Forces, non-commissioned members do not hold the Queen's commission. They make up everyone else.
- 4 On military operations, Canadian infantry soldiers often use the term "outside the wire" to refer to locations outside the relative safety of their military base camp or forward operations base.
- 5 While I was doing my field research, there was one veteran of the Canadian Air Force in the NVMO. He self-identified as a man. One Navy veteran riding community member self-identified as a woman, and one Army veteran riding community member self-identified as a woman. The rest of the Army and Navy NVMO veteran participants self-identified as men.
- 6 I have included the gender-neutral pronoun "they" in Wade's comments for anonymity.
- 7 According to philosopher and physician Drew Leder (1990, 31), incorporation describes the processes through which, over time, we learn to perform new skills and habits without consciously thinking about them. Our bodies automatically perform them.
- 8 The challenges related to exiting the military are compounded for veterans who are struggling with physical and stress injuries sustained in military service, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Sometimes, their struggles also deeply affect the family members who care for or share a household with the veteran. See Charles Figley (1993) and Aphrodite Matsakis (2007) for more detailed discussions on secondary traumatization.
- 9 Like all names given for NVMO veterans in this chapter, the name "Gregg" is a pseudonym.
- 10 At the Show 'n' Shine, "members and riders outside the veterans riding community displayed their motorcycles for members of the public to enjoy and rate. Admission to the event went to support various veterans' charities in the city. During my fieldwork, a local hotel and a museum hosted the event" (Samuels 2020, 55).

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PART VII:

Mobility, Work, Families, and the
COVID-19 Pandemic

On the Move in the Midst of a Pandemic: Canada's Essential Mobile Workers and Their Families

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Abstract

Starting in February 2020, COVID-19 drastically disrupted everything from the global economy to everyday life. Key features of the pandemic include its intersecting consequences for mobility, work, and families. An estimated 16 per cent of the Canadian labour force engages in extended/complex mobility to and within work. Many essential workers are members of this large and diverse mobile labour force. As shown elsewhere in this collection, complex/extended employment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM) is often associated with significant challenges for workers and their families, with these challenges unevenly distributed across different groups of workers, family types, and types of mobility. The pandemic and related measures have exacerbated these challenges for many essential mobile workers. With a focus on the mobile labour force and the Canadian context, this chapter discusses work, mobility, and families during COVID-19. It draws on and extends family-related findings from a working paper on COVID-19 and the mobile labour force released in September 2021 and available on the On the Move Partnership website at www.onthemovepartnership.ca.

Introduction

The On the Move Partnership (www.onthemovepartnership.ca) is a major program of research examining the spectrum of extended/complex employ-

ment-related geographical mobility (E-RGM) in the Canadian context. Our focus is those who engage in E-RGM, ranging from extended daily mobility (more than one hour each way) to and within work (as with transportation workers) through interjurisdictional mobility within Canada (as between provinces), to mobility into Canada from other countries, as well as out of Canada for work (as with international labour migrants). We refer to those who engage in complex/extended mobilities as the *mobile labour force* and estimate that they comprised approximately 16 per cent of the Canadian labour force in 2016 (Neis and Lippel 2019). A particular area of concern for On the Move researchers has been the diverse, often volatile and changing dynamics of extended/complex E-RGM and their consequences for different groups of workers and their families.

COVID-19 and associated infection control measures have seriously impacted the lives of all workers and their families, but not all have been affected in the same way. COVID-19 triggered core public health interventions that initially focused on immobilizing as many people as possible in their homes by closing schools, businesses, and banning public events and constraining mobility into and within Canada and other countries. Schools and daycares were closed for prolonged periods with their reopening associated with both fear of the spread of infection (including among teachers and parents) and uncertainty about how long such reopenings will last. The closure of many types of businesses led to widespread unemployment while enhancing and changing demand for certain kinds of services such as cleaning, food retail, delivery services, transportation, and health-related services. Paid work was redesigned to support a dramatic increase in working from home, but this is mainly feasible for white-collar workers.

Many workers were deemed essential for the production, transportation, and retailing of key goods such as food; for the ongoing delivery of essential services including health, social, construction, cleaning, and maintenance services; and for the transportation of workers. Workers employed in sectors like mining and oil and gas extraction who continued to travel to and spend time on work sites, with some also living on-site during off-hours, were deemed essential by many governments. Options for travel (including for work) were,

however, seriously constrained by internal and international border closures and related mobility surveillance, requirements for self-isolation, quarantine, and social (physical) distancing, and changes (often reductions) in available public and private transportation services. Businesses reopened in Canada during the summer of 2020 and mobility for everyone including workers increased, but international mobility into Canada and some interjurisdictional mobility within Canada continued to be constrained. The second, third, and fourth waves of COVID-19 triggered new rounds of targeted closures in fall 2020 and in 2021 and 2022.

According to the Collegium Ramazzini (2020), workers in occupations that put them in contact with infected persons and the public are at greatly increased risk of COVID-19 infection. Workers in many segments of the mobile labour force have been among those deemed “essential” in the context of pandemic management and work in sectors the Collegium indicates would be at very high to high risk of infection. These workers include many in the goods transportation and distribution sectors (seafaring, trucking, home delivery). They also include public and private transportation (buses, subways, taxis, ferries) workers; workers in agriculture and seafood production and distribution; some health-care workers including those in hospitals, long-term care, and home care; and first responders and some members of the military sent in to respond to COVID-19 outbreaks. Some cleaners and many construction and resource extraction workers, including in oil and gas and remote mines in northern Canada and offshore, have also been part of the “essential” labour force. Indeed, the willingness and ability of these workers to travel for work despite serious risks to their health and that of their families played a key role in achieving the main objective of pandemic response: to immobilize the population as much as possible in their homes in order to “flatten the curve,” prevent COVID-19 from overwhelming the health-care system, and limit the number of related serious illnesses and deaths.

This chapter presents some of the key findings from the *On the Move* working paper on COVID-19 and the mobile labour force (Neis et al. 2021; see also Neis, Neil, and Lippel 2020a, 2020b), as well as from associated blogs and key media coverage and publications that refer specifically to pandemic-re-

lated effects on these “essential” workers and their families. Those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic have faced serious financial and other challenges, as have those forced to work from home, particularly in the context of closed schools and daycares and limited access to key goods and services. Many essential mobile workers and their families have faced some of these same challenges (children and other dependants at home with limited support) while also having to engage in work-related mobility and deal with more difficult conditions at work as a consequence of the pandemic. These conditions have threatened their physical and mental health and the health of family members. Just as vulnerability to infection and death from COVID-19 have not been uniformly distributed across the larger population, similarly some groups of mobile workers and their families appear to have been at particular risk of illness and profound disruptions to their daily lives (see African-Canadian Civic Engagement Council and Innovative Research Group 2020; Flood et al. 2020; Huncar 2020; Premji 2020).

The next section begins with a brief summary of existing research on extended/complex mobility, work, and families, noting the diversity of mobility patterns, work situations, and family situations in the mobile labour force. This is followed by an overview of insights into family-related issues confronting international labour migrants coming into Canada during COVID-19, followed by a discussion of those associated with internal extended/complex E-RGM including fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in/drive-out (DIDO) travel between provinces, and with mobility between workplaces among temp agency workers in urban areas. We also consider COVID-19 and family relations in the transportation sector.

Extended/Complex Mobility, Families, and Work

A recently published review of the work–family literature found that the challenges associated with extended/complex mobility for work have been largely neglected. Blind spots include implicit assumptions that work and home are linked by daily mobility, and that work and home are sedentary locations. Work–family literature has looked only at a narrow range of job types and patterns of mobility and family forms (Hughes and Silver 2020).

E-RGM, families, and work environments are diverse and come in different combinations. General claims about how E-RGM interacts with work and family life and with what consequences for families are thus problematic. As indicated elsewhere in this collection, on the positive side, extended/complex E-RGM can provide access to more secure employment and higher incomes for workers and their families. Interjurisdictional (within Canada) and international migrant workers are able to remit vital income to families in regions and countries with lower incomes and fewer employment options. Similarly, at the scale of large cities, long commutes can give those forced (as with poorer, often racialized families living in lower-cost housing areas like northwest Toronto) or who choose to live in areas with fewer employment options (such as suburban and rural areas) the opportunity to balance their housing and other options with their employment needs. On the negative side, even daily extended/complex E-RGM, particularly when coupled with such work schedules as split shifts or evening and night work, can make it very difficult to synchronize work–family rhythms, potentially weakening family connections and adding to the work and costs required to accommodate prolonged and often shifting absences (Neis et al. 2018). Internal interjurisdictional and international labour migration and work in longer-distance transportation can exacerbate these challenges by adding time zone differences, the need to live away at night and on weekends, and prolonged (in some cases weeks- to years-long) absences to the mix. As indicated by other contributions to this collection (see Avery and Novoa, Chapter 13; Mann, Chapter 24; Murray, Lionais, and Gallant, Chapter 12; Murray, Skelding, and Barton, Chapter 7; Newson, Chapter 17; Snow and Fong, Chapter 9; Ryan, Chapter 6), extended/complex mobility for work can make it difficult to start or maintain relationships, can require major shifts and accommodations in parenting roles, and can implicate extended family, friend, and community supports. COVID-19 infections, the risk of infection, and related pandemic control measures have enhanced these challenges (see Howse and Penney, Chapter 4; Ralph, Chapter 29; Walsh, Chapter 28).

Research on the family-related impacts of COVID-19 is limited, but existing studies point to multiple ways COVID-19 has contributed to known stressors for families. Balancing work and family obligations, unemployment,

economic uncertainty, reduced social support, and access to community resources and appropriate housing are threatening family well-being (Badets 2020; Badets, Novoa, and Battams 2020; Evans et al. 2020; see also Vanier Institute of the Family 2020). A July 2020 Statistics Canada report on a study of COVID-19 and families noted that among parents' concerns about their families:

[T]heir top concern was about balancing child care, schooling and work, with 74% of participants reporting feeling very or extremely concerned in this regard. This likely stems from the demands that have been placed on some parents to keep up with their own work responsibilities (either from home or at their usual place of work), take care of their children without any external support such as child care or school, and help their children with academic activities. (Statistics Canada 2020)

Fear of infection has constrained social contacts and support for families, and actual infections and their lingering effects have contributed to stigmatization and to the care burden and stress of workers and family members — often affecting their mental health (Singh, Seglins, and Wesley 2020; Smith et al., “Labour Market Attachment,” 2021; see also *CBC News* 2021). Not enough is known about the impacts of COVID-19 on work, with most studies focused on working from home and its effects. A key challenge in the Canadian context is the lack of data on the number of COVID-19 infections at work and by occupation. However, a review of workers' compensation claims for COVID-19 in Canadian jurisdictions published in November 2020 indicated more than 26,000 claims had been filed and approximately 20,000 approved by that point in time (Singh, Seglins, and Wesley 2020). This is an under-estimate because of lack of eligibility among some groups of workers and due to under-reporting. Similarly, more needs to be known about the impact of COVID-19 and infection control measures during the mobility of Canada's essential workers including to and within work. Despite these gaps, media coverage and some studies highlight serious threats for workers and their families associated with multiple

segments of Canada's mobile labour force and with highly mobile workers in other contexts (for example, see Rasnača 2020). We now turn our attention to some key groups.

International Labour Migrants and Families

Millions of international labour migrants travel to work for prolonged periods in other countries, including Canada. Most international labour migrants are from poorer countries and work in a broad range of sectors. Canada relies on diverse groups of international labour migrants to carry out work essential to the economy and society, including in agriculture, care work, construction, and tourism. As labour migrants, these workers are vulnerable to catching COVID-19 at home, on the road, and as they move through transportation hubs, at work including while living at work, and from nearby communities. In Canada, major outbreaks have happened on farms employing temporary foreign workers (TFWs) since March 2020, and, at the time of writing, at least eight of these workers have died, either after contracting COVID-19 or during their mandatory quarantine period (the causes of death have not been revealed for some of these workers) (Baum and Grant 2020; Grant and Bailey 2021). By January 2021 it was estimated that more than 1,700 migrant agricultural workers in Ontario had contracted COVID-19 (Mojtehdzadeh 2021a).

Workers with families are among those often preferred for programs like Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker and Caregiver Programs. Maintaining family ties and supporting their families is challenging at the best of times for these workers, but particularly challenging in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As non-residents needing to travel long distances across national borders, they are always vulnerable to migration-related interruptions, costs, and other challenges that have been aggravated by pandemic-related border closures and other measures (Mojtehdzadeh 2021b; Taekema and Craggs 2020). In the case of agricultural workers, they are often employed in crowded work environments and live in low-standard, communal accommodations — all poorly designed for prevention/control of COVID-19 (Haley et al. 2020; Mojtehdzadeh 2020d). International labour migrants are screened prior to entry and must quarantine on their arrival. Those who get sick need to stop

working until they get better, have constrained access to health care, and have to grapple with being ill and in isolation while far from homes and families. All of this has potential negative consequences for remittances and for their mental and physical health — particularly in situations where they feel unable to control their work and housing environments and are vulnerable to firing and deportation for complaining about working conditions (Mojtehedzadeh 2020b).

Seasonal agricultural workers only have work permits for a maximum of eight months under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. In December of 2020, agricultural workers in Canada from Trinidad and Tobago found themselves with expiring work permits and no paid work but unable to return home due to travel restrictions in their home countries linked to the spread of COVID-19 in Canada. Most were deemed ineligible for Employment Insurance in Canada and had to use up wages earned on housing and food (Antonacci 2020; Keung 2020). Some were at risk of not seeing their families for Christmas.

COVID-19 has also highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of undocumented workers in Canada, some with families here and others with families elsewhere. The undocumented workforce in Canada was estimated at 500,000 in 2007 and some think there are more now. Without a social insurance number, unemployed undocumented workers were not eligible for federal COVID-19 programs such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit. Without either income or unemployment benefits they faced potential homelessness and other challenges, including to their mental health and that of their families (Haig 2020; Wells 2020). When vaccines became available in 2021, some undocumented workers were afraid that if they received the vaccine their employers or immigration authorities might be made aware of their immigration status, which could put them at risk of being deported or losing their job, adding to the layers of vulnerability in terms of both work and health (Jones 2021).

Some international labour migrants live in Canada and work elsewhere. One group that became visible during the pandemic was the 1,500–2,000 cross-border health-care workers who live in Windsor, Ontario, or Detroit, Michigan, and cross the international border regularly for work. As health-care workers they are at high risk of COVID-19 infection, and infection rates have been higher in the US than in Canada. For instance, on 31 March 2020, *CBC*

News reported that Detroit had 1,800 confirmed cases of COVID-19 while Windsor had only 65, a third of whom were health-care workers working in Detroit (Fraser 2020). COVID-19 infection risk and prevention measures complicated cross-border travel for these workers, but also came with the risk that they would contract COVID-19 in the US and bring it back to infect their families and friends in Canada. Another cross-border employment region is the area around Sault Ste. Marie in Ontario. There, some steelworkers live in one country and work in the other. In one media account, an apprentice machinist steelworker who lived in the US and worked in Ontario as a dual citizen was considered by the Canadian government to be exempt from quarantine, but he was told by his employer he would need to quarantine for 14 days and then live in Ontario if he was going to continue working. His children lived in the US and he had a joint custody agreement requiring him to help care for them. He grieved the policy and won because it forced him to choose between having access to his children and making a living (Blackwell 2020).

Interjurisdictional Labour Migrants within Canada and Their Families

As is clear from other contributions to this collection, Canada also has many workers who engage in complex/extended mobility within the country. These include interjurisdictional workers who live in one provincial or territorial jurisdiction and work in another (Neil and Neis 2020). Some of these are cross-border workers with relatively straightforward commutes for work and travel to see family in the other jurisdiction, but even these became more complex during COVID-19 as provinces and territories set up mobility controls. Workers living in New Brunswick or Quebec with dependent children in the other jurisdiction, for example, appear to have encountered COVID-19-related challenges, as with the case of a New Brunswick-based doctor who travelled to Montreal to pick up his daughter when his wife had to travel internationally. He returned to New Brunswick, went back to work in the local emergency room without quarantining, and was then diagnosed with COVID-19. He was personally attacked for causing an outbreak and subsequently moved to Quebec. It is unclear if he was the actual cause of the outbreak; other health-care workers are reported to have been travelling to Quebec without quarantining as well

at that time (Trinh 2020). In the period prior to vaccinations, some nurses and truckers in Ontario, and in some cases family members of these workers, were reported to have been denied health and dental care services because they were deemed to have potentially come into contact with COVID-19 (Duhatschek 2020; Larson 2021; McCann 2021).

Other interjurisdictional migrants, including FIFO and DIDO rotational workers, travel long distances to work for weeks and months at a time, returning home between rotations. As indicated elsewhere in this collection, FIFO/DIDO work is challenging at the best of times for workers and their families (for example, see Dorow and Jean, Chapter 8; Kelly, Mosquera Garcia, and Dorow, Chapter 5). In the words of Sara Dorow:

FIFO workers carry the weariness of long rotations away from family and friends — and the difficulty of maintaining those relationships — and of long work shifts and travel days. And their families and friends and communities face the challenge of having key members gone for both everyday and special events, and of adjusting to the social demands that the temporal demands of FIFO visit on them. As we are finding in our current research project, the stresses of this regime manifest in breakups, addictions, isolation, and heart conditions. (Dorow 2020)

COVID-19 and related measures have enhanced these challenges by opening up the risk of workers bringing the virus from home or exposures en route into work and work camp communities and of infected workers transferring the virus to often widely dispersed families and communities on their return home (Kurjata 2020; Malbeuf 2020).

Continued operation of mines, construction, and other projects deemed “essential” by many governments has meant rotational workers have had to choose between the risk of infection and loss of their jobs. During the first year of the pandemic, most were allowed to continue to travel across jurisdictional boundaries but they were often the focus of infection control policies such as

requirements for self-isolation on their return home and sometimes before entering a work province/territory or work site. Some of these workers and their families were also subject to shaming on social media in the wake of COVID-19 outbreaks in which a rotational worker was implicated (see Mullin 2020; Smellie 2020; see also Ralph, Chapter 29). This added to the challenges they were facing with COVID-19 measures (Cooke 2020).

In the early days of the pandemic, Newfoundland and Labrador's rotational workers were not allowed to go for a walk or leave their isolation location. Pressure from families led to the loosening of these restrictions so they could go for walks and spend time outside, but as of September 2020 they still had to stay away from public places. After organizing efforts by family members of rotational workers they were allowed to self-isolate for five days and then take a COVID-19 test. If the test was negative, they were able to reduce the constraints on their activities. Outbreaks linked to rotational workers and increasing COVID-19 cases in the province subsequently led to the period of self-isolation being increased to seven days followed by a test, and a suggestion from the premier that perhaps employers could change rotations so that workers from NL could work four weeks on and four weeks off to give them more family time. Media reports suggested workers thought this was unlikely to happen because of the difficulty of coordinating workers coming from near and far and efforts of employers to keep workers in the same cohorts. Some rotational workers self-isolate with family members but others, including those with family members considered to be at risk, self-isolate separately in cabins, tents, and other locations. In August 2020 there was a media report about a rotational worker who lives in NL and works in a mine in Rankin Inlet, Northwest Territories, who had to deal with a double quarantine (travelling to work and on his return) who had been able to see his son and girlfriend only once since the start of the pandemic roughly six months earlier (*CBC News* 2020b; see also Mullin 2020).

Indigenous workers employed at mines and in the oil sands were initially sent home by some companies in order to reduce the threat to their isolated communities posed by poor, limited, and crowded housing and limited health services. Some were paid for the down time in the spring of 2020. Despite these

initiatives, outbreaks at mining and oil and gas extraction sites in Canada and elsewhere have spread infection to some Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities (Alex 2020; Leahy 2020; MiningWatch Canada 2020; Strong 2020). In the first COVID-19 wave there were relatively few outbreaks in these communities, due to Indigenous groups proactively prohibiting mobility into and out of their communities, but some severe outbreaks in northern Indigenous communities in the fall of 2020 put elders and others at risk (Petz 2020). In Manitoba, the positivity test rate among First Nations was almost twice the average for the province as a whole as of 11 December 2020. First Nations were over-represented among those in intensive care and among fatalities in Manitoba, highlighting the risk to Indigenous people in the event of infection transmission into these communities. In December 2020, at least five cases of COVID-19 in the Wet'suwet'en community of Witsset were linked to workers returning from work camps (Hosgood 2020, 2021). Indigenous groups are similarly threatened in other countries as well, including Australia (van Barneveld et al. 2020).

Precariously Employed Urban Mobile Workers

Many precariously employed workers are low-waged, recent immigrants and members of racialized groups who live in large urban centres, often in high-density, poor-quality housing, and engage in extended/complex commutes on public transit to work (Premji 2018, 2020; Premji et al. 2014). They work in retail, health, transportation, food service, warehousing, and other sectors, often in close contact with clients or other workers, at mobility hubs such as warehouses owned by Amazon and other companies with people and goods coming and going (Mojtehdzadeh 2020a). They may work multiple jobs. Some are employed by temporary employment agencies that might send them to different work sites (Lippel 2020). As indicated by the results from a spatial analysis of testing and COVID-19 cases in metropolitan Toronto, their work, living, and travel conditions place these workers and their families at higher risk of COVID-19 infection and they often live in areas with lower levels of testing (Chung et al. 2020; Wallace and Moon 2020). This pattern of inequality was also reflected in access to vaccines, with the most vulnerable neighbour-

hoods in Toronto being the least likely to be vaccinated due to a population-based rather than a need-based vaccination rollout (Jonas 2021; Paradkar 2021; Wallace 2021).

Outbreaks in health-care settings like long-term care (LTC) homes and retirement homes were a key driver of infections and deaths in Ontario and Quebec (De Serres et al. 2020). Health-care workers are at much higher risk of infection than the general population but there are also mental health risks linked to fears of infecting co-workers and family members associated with working in the context of infectious diseases such as COVID-19. A Quebec study of over 5,074 of the 13,581 health-care workers who had contracted COVID-19 during the first wave found a very high level of psychological distress attributed to a variety of factors, including guilt for having contaminated family members, who in some cases had died as a result (De Serres et al. 2020). Between 20 and 30 per cent of respondents worked in multiple facilities (DeSerres et al. 2020, 18). Related mental health problems can be exacerbated by perceived inadequacies in infection control and personal protective equipment and would potentially affect the family lives of these workers (Smith et al., “Perceived Adequacy,” 2020).

A June 2020 report on LTC and COVID-19 indicated 81 per cent of Canada’s COVID-19 deaths occurred in nursing homes — a much higher percentage than in comparable countries. In Canada, a majority of the hands-on care providers have limited training and often work part-time or are casual staff hired on-demand through agencies. They lack paid sick leave, appropriate pay and benefits, or a voice in terms of union representation, and an estimated 30 per cent work in more than one job and are thus mobile in their work (Estabrooks et al. 2020). Having to work in multiple jobs and thus to move in and out of different work sites to make a living has been identified as a risk factor for outbreaks in LTC homes (Lippel 2020). As was revealed on 19 April 2020, Ontario health directives limiting mobility between homes exempted temporary agency workers, who “earn their living floating from home to home” (Mojtchedzadeh 2020c). The rationale for this exemption was the need to ensure a steady supply of labour in the event of an emergency (Mojtchedzadeh 2020c).

In Toronto, LTC homes are clustered in the downtown area but outbreak-associated cases are in areas like the northwest, which are low-income, racialized areas. Since data on infected LTC staff are recorded by home and not work address, the latter could be travelling, including by public transit, from work in the downtown to these neighbourhoods. By early August 2020, the Toronto area of Mount Olive, which has the highest proportion of truck drivers, cashiers, and labourers — those likely to be deemed “essential” and to be precariously employed — had the highest rate of infection from “close contact,” suggesting greater likelihood of spread to other household members in this area (Allen et al. 2020), many of whom would be family members.

Transportation Workers and Their Families

As essential workers, many internationally and internally mobile shipping, cruise ship, trucking, taxi driver, and other land, sea, and air-based transportation workers have continued to work throughout the pandemic. These workers are particularly vulnerable to outbreaks when they are exposed at work, and their employment in mobile workplaces means they can transport infections to new places and back to their homes. This has created serious challenges for many of these workers with the degree of vulnerability decreasing from international migrant workers through local workers and from precariously employed to unionized parts of these sectors.

International seafaring work brings people from different parts of the world to live together in tight quarters on board ships, making ships a high-risk workplace for contracting and spreading COVID-19 should an infection occur (Tobin 2020). Commuting to ports of departure and from ports of disembarkation to their homes can require a combination of flights and ground transportation. Desai Shan’s blogs for *On the Move’s* COVID-19 and the *Mobile Labour Force* series, “People Who Carry Food and Fuel for the World Are Trapped at Sea: A Crewing Crisis in the Context of COVID-19” (2020a) from April 2020, and her July update, “Stranded at Sea in the COVID-19 Pandemic” (2020b), describe how COVID-19 measures led to the denial of shore leave for those on board and constraints on crew changes, leaving hundreds of thousands of seafarers stranded on board vessels and in their home

communities. Communication between ships and home is often a challenge for these workers, many of whom have fought to make their plight known as they struggle for the opportunity to leave their ships and worry about what is happening to their families at home (for example, see Baudet 2020; Davie 2020).

Public transit workers and taxi drivers have continued to work throughout the pandemic, although with reduced employment, and such transit has seen reductions in service. In Toronto, during the early part of the pandemic, bus drivers walked off the job, exercising their right to refuse dangerous work. They were concerned about their limited access to masks, which they wanted to be mandatory. One was quoted as having said to his union representative: “Look I can’t go home at night. I haven’t hugged my child in two months because I am afraid that I may be infecting my family” (*CBC News* 2020a). In the case of taxi drivers, many lost their jobs due to reduced travel. Those who continued working, including transporting people from airports, were at risk of infection. An estimated 10 taxi and limo drivers working out of Toronto’s Pearson International Airport died because of COVID-19 between March and 5 May 2020 (McGran 2020). Of course, all workers who die as a consequence of their work leave families suffering (for example, see Mojtehdzadeh 2020d; Seglins, Rieger, and Singh 2021).

Conclusion

More research is needed on how the pandemic has affected workers who are part of the mobile labour force and their families. Those workers able to work from home, to have goods and services delivered, and to drive in their own vehicle when they and their family members have to travel are much less likely to become infected with COVID-19 than members of the mobile labour force employed in sectors deemed essential. Particularly at risk are those living and working in some types of low-wage work in some urban sectors, those required to travel long distances, across borders, or for long periods of time in public transit, and those who work and live in close contact with clients and other workers in work sites and accommodations with high risks of infection. Impacts range from the fear of and impacts of infection through the disruptions and challenges created by pandemic-related measures in their day-to-day work and family lives.

Work-related injuries and illnesses can lead to major family-related impacts including through their effect on workers' physical and mental health, related loss of income, changing roles in family lives, and the requirement for family members to help care for the injured/ill workers (Senthanar et al. 2020). Most do not, however, directly threaten to make family members sick, as is the case with infectious diseases like COVID-19. The burden of worrying about infection of family, friends, and clients is a key aspect that makes the pandemic somewhat unique.

Overall, despite broadly protecting many but not all of these workers' employment and livelihoods, working in the context of COVID-19 and pandemic-related measures has seriously exacerbated existing challenges and created new ones for members of the mobile labour force and their families. As concluded in the larger working paper, other On the Move resources, and other types of investigations we draw on here, it is essential to address existing and often well-documented problems associated with labour mobility, particularly for racialized international labour migrants, for interjurisdictional labour migrants, and for precariously employed and often racialized frontline workers who are mobile to and within work. Also essential is informed attention to extended/complex E-RGM in pandemic planning, management, and compensation in order to better meet their needs and those of their families, and to support them in their essential service to the rest of the population.

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Walking the Empty City: Feminist Reflections on Life Suspended under COVID-19

Deatra Walsh



Figure 1. Reflections. (Photo by Deatra Walsh)

I'm going for a longer walk, I say to my partner and my daughter as I close the front door.

I congregate on the sidewalk with the two dogs — a husky and a hound. I tighten my scarf; fix my mitts. I adjust my tassel hat.

It's April and I can see my breath. Small liberated exhales as I contemplate where to go.¹ It's still winter in St. John's.

I turn left towards the harbour, dogs pulling ahead in the anxiety of an unfamiliar route.

Normally, we take two to three walks a day — short jaunts around the perimeter of Bannerman Park.² It's just the right distance for an eight-year-old.



Figure 2. Bannerman Park. (Photo by Deatra Walsh)

I've been doing this since January — walking in staccato because my partner works in Nunavut. He's a red seal carpenter and superintendent on several large construction projects.

Living apart together is a recurring theme for us.³ We've been apart for almost two years now.

He's returned from self-isolating and we will be living in the same house for the foreseeable future. Luckily, we both still have jobs and can work from home.

Now, longer walks are possible. They weren't before.

Before, he was on a rotation — six-weeks-on, two-weeks-off. Before that — from August to December—we did not see him at all.

When he left in early March, we had no idea he'd be back so soon.

His work site shut down. He made the pilgrimage home. He self-isolated at our house in central Newfoundland — what used to be my mother's house — days before public health orders decreed that those coming from out of province must do so for 14 days.

We didn't want to take any chances.

His parents and I facilitated a no-contact return. He borrowed one of their cars. They left it at the airport, stocked it with groceries, and waved to him from another car.

Life was different before COVID-19.

Life was busy.

Before, my daughter and I toggled between downtown and Mount Pearl via Pitts Memorial Drive — drama at Gower Street United on Mondays, accordion in Paradise on Wednesdays, and Brownies on Elizabeth Avenue on Thursdays.⁴

Girls laughed and ran in our house on Saturdays, six feet pounding up and down stairs from hide-and-seek shenanigans.

We ate Sunday dinners with my in-laws in Mount Pearl, talking provincial politics over gravy-soaked root vegetables and beef. Dinner occurred between basketball practice on Topsail Road and gymnastics on Commonwealth Avenue.

These were the rhythms of our lives.⁵

We liked them.

After a whirlwind of moving to Norway in 2018 and returning to Newfoundland in 2019 amid the grief of losing my mother, we rooted ourselves in the daily interactions of our lives and the people who punctuated them.

Walking through an empty city reminds me of what is now also lost — the ability to move freely and to gather, even in parks. That grief stockpiles with the other.

Walking seems to be our only recourse to sanity — albeit at a physical distance from one another. That and driving cars.

There are few cars and fewer people on the route I now walk on this first Saturday of the month.



Figure 3. Toslow. (Photo by Deatra Walsh)

I make my way down the stairs past Toslow, a speakeasy that opened in 2018 next to the War Memorial.

An early review described it as a place where you can “actually see and hear each other,” adding that “face to face time is a rare commodity these days, so it’s nice to enjoy it” (Pelley 2018).

How times have changed.

Reflections on changing times are now collective sentiments.

I think about Toslow. I think about all the other small businesses throughout downtown St. John’s still reeling from the effects of the January snowstorm’s state of emergency.

The descent takes me to Harbourside Park — described on a commemorating plaque as a historic landmark, maintained by the City of St. John’s for the “enjoyment of our citizens and visitors to the City of Legends.”

Tourism is taking a hit across the globe. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, the sting is especially sharp. In the wake of the cod moratorium, tourism became the industry upon which an economy was built.

But tourism requires mobility. It needs people to be on the move.

I come to the controversial harbour fence.⁶ Supply ships are tied behind it. Work is happening. I can hear it. Somewhere further down against the backdrop of a low-frequency engine drone, the clang of metal on metal tells me someone is there.

I see the person between the black metal spokes of the fence.

Tucked into the deck of the boat, a fluorescent safety vest operates what looks to be a small crane.

There is no one other than this person. I am relieved.⁷

The thick mooring rope becomes taut. The boat hugs the dock. Another clang rings out. Chains reverberate. I think this must be a winch. Are they going somewhere? Or are they simply hunkering further down, repositioning the anchor, like the rest of us.

The noise of work is oddly comforting. People are doing things out there. They must.⁸

I feel hope. I hear it.

But it's fleeting. I come upon the stairs linking George Street to Duckworth. In all directions is an eerie silence, save for the gulls. Neither a plastic cup nor last night's late-night chip refuse tumbles, wind-born, across the asphalt.

There is nothing but dirty spring snow.



Figure 4. George Street. (Photo by Deatra Walsh)

I walk up through streets and paths I frequented before, past The Rooms and onward to the Basilica. Closed.

I take the footpath beside the empty church into Georgestown.

On Hayward Avenue, the Georgestown Café and Bookshelf stops me in my tracks. The sign reads that it is a “neighbourhood space.”

Neighbourhoods. Something that looks and sounds like something different now. The complete juxtaposition, as others have pointed out, to Georgestown's front-yard fire gatherings featured during snowmageddon. Neighbourhoods. Spaces textured as places to gather.

Neighbourhoods look different now.

But then again, they have been moving in that direction for quite some time as we retreat increasingly inward to our devices and our lives. Let us not kid ourselves, packs of children laughing and playing along neighbourhood streets is a thing of the past. But now this possibility is impossible.

We express neighbourhood through window art, signs, and doorstep pot clanging on preset times.

I interpret these as somewhat dreary thoughts of the long road still ahead.

But as I turn my head to the right, I feel hope, again. I smell it.

Sweet-fragrant steam pours out of the side of the Georgestown Bakery. The shop door is open. Patrons wait to go in. They are appropriately physically distanced. I smile and wave from the other side of the street.

I breathe.

I breathe in the baking of bagels. I breathe in the fresh air of a cloudy day. I breathe in a small slice of normalcy amid pandemic.

And then I walk.

I make my way to Circular Road, now adjacent to Bannerman Park once again.

The dogs calm as they realize that they are back on their route again — back to the parameters of their own lives.

An hour has passed. I open the door.

Notes

- 1 Walking is a particularly important form of mobility. The ability to walk unfettered and unencumbered is something that women rarely have.
- 2 Established in 1864, Bannerman Park is a significant greenspace in downtown St. John's. The park covers an area of slightly more than 12 acres.
- 3 An extensive literature on living apart together or LAT exists.
- 4 The distance from downtown St. John's to the adjacent city, Mount Pearl, along the Pitts Memorial Highway is approximately 15 kilometres. Paradise is a larger community adjacent to Mount Pearl.
- 5 Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis is increasingly used among mobility scholars.
- 6 Throughout 2012 and 2013, plans by the St. John's Port Authority to build a permanent security fence along the St. John's harbour were met with varying

degrees of public scrutiny because it was larger than initially anticipated and it blocked public access to the harbour. Fence construction did go ahead.

- 7 As we adapt to new modes of work, physically distancing is now a part of occupational health and safety protocols.
- 8 My partner was quick to remind me that the work of tradespeople, who are still out building things, fixing things, providing essential services like snow clearing and garbage collection, requires more attention and acknowledgement.

Reference

Pelley, Chad. 2018. "Toslow: Small Spot Fills Big Void in Local Bar Scene." *The Overcast*, 15 July. <https://theovercast.ca/toslow-small-spot-fills-big-void-in-local-bar-scene/>.

Finding Connection in Online Spaces: Newfoundland and Labrador Families Separated by Work

Melissa Ralph

I met my partner in 2003; at the time we primarily worked from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with occasional evenings and weekends. We moved in together and, even if our work schedules conflicted, we were both able to come home at the end of the workday. In 2008, frustrated with the lack of opportunity in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), my partner made the move to Alberta to look for work in the oil field. We committed to maintaining a long-distance relationship, and that year I saw him a total of three times. I moved to Alberta in the fall of 2008, but he still travelled a lot and was away more often than he was home.

We planned to marry and start a family, but we longed to return to NL to begin this next chapter in our lives. In the spring of 2011, he received a transfer back to NL, working offshore. We married later that year and we were blessed with the birth of a baby boy in 2013.

As a new mother, I had little support from my husband, who was working offshore for weeks at a time. To make it even harder, communication was limited. I worried about his safety on the job and feared I could be making it worse for him if a heated conversation or a tearful rant about everything that went wrong for me that day ended up preoccupying his mind. It was difficult for my husband to leave me and our son and to know he could not always be there when we needed him.

I reached out to local parenting groups but was met with snide stereotypes about “oil money” and very little empathy. I gradually realized that support for transient workers, their partners, and families was practically non-existent. To change that, I turned to Facebook where I created a group called “NL Families Separated by Work” to help fill the void.¹

It was initially difficult to find information geared towards supporting individuals impacted by this way of life, but over the years I have managed to compile a list of helpful resources and tools. The Conception Bay South Family Resource Centre provided materials and workbooks from their previously run “Home Again Gone Again” program for posting to the group. Health resources are also included on the Facebook site, including contact information for marital and family counsellors when the struggles of being separated become too much to bear on our own. Local businesses that deliver groceries or do snow clearing and provide other key supports are also highlighted.

My husband and I now have two children, including a beautiful baby girl born in 2015. I work full-time outside of the home and we continue to face new challenges as our children grow and as we both seek to advance in our careers while also trying to stay connected. Maintaining a healthy marriage and family when we are only under the same roof for half the year is very hard work. It is not something we would be able to do without encouragement and understanding, and I have found these in the growing, virtual community on the NL Families Separated by Work Facebook group. Through my connection with other group members, I have learned the importance of recognizing the positives, being grateful for the times we are together, and making that time meaningful.

NL Families Separated by Work has evolved to include people in many different careers, but our experiences and stories continue to bring us together. We have grown from a group with one member (me) to a support system with almost 900 members (as of November 2020). During the early years of the group, most of the exchanges focused on marital and relationship challenges and struggles; on the heartbreak felt by children each time their parent had to leave and the heartbreak of the parents as they struggled between dealing with the sadness brought by separation and the knowledge this was essential to their livelihood. Missing important life events such as births and deaths

was another big topic, along with balancing life with one parent here and then, poof, gone, leaving the other parent behind, often juggling full-time work both inside and outside the home. This juggling is one of the hardest things for the person at home and having someone who understands the loneliness that comes with it and the love–hate relationship people have with this lifestyle is really important (see also Kelly, Mosquera Garcia, and Dorow, Chapter 5). The group provided an opportunity to discuss how you cope or deal and we tried to focus the discussion on the positives of the lifestyle and what people can do to manage the struggles. Indeed, the original focus was very much about spouses and their children.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the focus of the group has shifted more towards helping each other manage the additional challenges and requirements for rotational workers brought on by COVID-19 (for more on COVID-19 and the mobile labour force, see Neis et al., Chapter 27). As well, discussions in the group tend to focus on finding ways to band together and make our voices heard by government and public health officials regarding the challenges and options for rotational workers in the context of the pandemic. A lot of members have written testimonials to Dr. John Haggie, the NL Minister of Health and Community Services, and Dr. Janice Fitzgerald, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, around the impacts of COVID-19 protocols on rotational workers and their families and have included suggestions for alternative rules.

My own partner worked offshore in the oil and gas sector, which has been badly hit by the drop in oil prices, as well as by COVID-19. He lost his job and is now a rotational worker employed in Labrador. Because he is travelling within the province, he does not have to self-isolate when he returns home. But this is not the case for rotational workers who work in other countries and in other provinces within Canada. International rotational workers have had to self-isolate for 14 days on their return (a federal requirement), and travel and the length of the rotation can be disrupted if they have symptoms. Rotational workers coming from other provinces and territories like Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario originally had to self-isolate for 14 days, but during the summer of 2020, this requirement was changed to a self-isolation period of five

days followed by COVID-19 testing. If test results were negative, then workers could transition to a modified self-isolation that allowed them to move more freely in their communities for the remainder of the 14 days. In November 2020, because of the spread of COVID-19 in other provinces during the so-called second wave, and links between rotational workers and increased cases in NL, the period of self-isolation prior to testing was extended to seven days. NL joined the Atlantic bubble in the summer of 2020, and while this was operational, rotational workers employed in other Atlantic provinces — like other travellers within the region — did not have to self-isolate. NL left the Atlantic bubble in November 2020, thus changing this situation. Seasonal workers employed in other provinces, including on seismic crews in Alberta and on the ice roads, are not considered to be rotational workers and were not formally entitled to the shortened self-isolation and testing option.

NL group members have voiced frustration wondering what will happen if they go into another alert level. At the time of writing, rotational workers from Canada can isolate with their family — their spouse/partner can go to work and the kids can go to school, so long as no one is symptomatic, but this might change. In Grand Bank, the wife of a rotational worker was employed in a long-term care facility where they had an outbreak. With these types of COVID-19 “clusters,” there are questions about whether kids will continue to be allowed to go to school if rotational workers are isolating at home. I understand the fear surrounding these unfortunate situations, but how do you create balance between public health and protecting the mental health of rotational workers and their families?

Concerns have also been raised about the cost if they have someone self-isolating who can't stay at home — i.e., who has to self-isolate away from their family, and about where they will go. I know of a rotational worker who lives in British Columbia, has four children, and works offshore in NL. He has seen his kids for only seven days since 13 March 2020 because of the risk of contracting COVID in the course of flights and multiple stopovers, and because after he comes back from BC he would not be able to get in the required two-week isolation period before he has to go back on the rig. So instead of going home, he stays in a hotel in NL on his off time and pays for the hotel himself.

I know of families that are looking for Airbnb's, hotels, and asking friends if they have campers or cabins they can self-isolate in if rotational workers are not comfortable or able to isolate with their families. It is a balancing act. A lot of people don't think there should be different rules for rotational workers — that your job is your choice and if you don't like it, you should quit your job. But that is not practical for a lot of families. It is really difficult to have to balance public safety with protecting people's emotional and mental well-being and that of their children. FaceTime just doesn't cut it sometimes.

Part of what makes it hard is the types of comments you get on social media (see also Mullin 2020; Smellie 2020). Any time there is an article on new COVID-19 cases, all of the comments tend to be about rotational workers — that they should not be allowed to come back or their kids should not be allowed to go to school. People operate on the assumption that all these rotational workers are making big bucks — they go back to stereotypes. People are constantly bringing up rotational workers because all of the cases are related to travel and some have been rotational workers. Many of these social media comments criticize workers for COVID-19 outbreaks in camps, but in reality, rotational workers are living in fear of such outbreaks because of how it will affect their lives.

We don't know how many rotational workers there are right now. NL Premier Andrew Furey was on the news recently asking employers of rotational workers to consider changing their rotations from two-weeks-on, two-weeks-off, to one-month-on, one-month-off. If they had longer rotations, workers could come home and self-isolate and still have a couple of weeks with their families before they have to go back. This is not possible in many places due to the sheer volume of projects, coordination of multiple trades, timelines, and flights. In addition to that, 21-day cycles are common for health and safety regulations — extreme exhaustion can contribute to unsafe work sites.

Newfoundland and Labrador Families Separated by Work has provided a place for people to talk openly and feel safe. It is more active now than ever and more people are joining, mostly to share, but there are also resources on the site for those looking for help. Our group has allowed me and other families to share experiences and support one another throughout this pandemic with-

out judgement. Many social media outlets have highlighted the negative opinions some hold against rotational workers — to see those can be upsetting. For many, this group is the only safe space they have — and to me, that is so important and needed now more than ever.

Note

- 1 The “NL Families Separated by Work” Facebook group can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/610143545741706/?ref=share>.

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Conclusion

Barbara Neis, Christina Murray, and Nora Spinks

Extended/complex employment-related geographical mobility can range from transnational mobility through internal interjurisdictional, regional, and other mobilities, at varying temporal scales. It is widespread and increasing within Canada, as well as globally, and can affect work and family lives along with creating personal risk and compromising well-being during mobility. As noted in the introduction and throughout this collection, there are literatures on work-related mobility and family lives encompassing international labour migration and transnational families; on daily commuting; on extended commuting, including interjurisdictional rotational work; on long-distance relationships, mobility, and deployment within the military; and on work in transportation and other mobile and transient workplaces. Until recently, these literatures have been largely separate. Furthermore, the literature on work–family balance has generally neglected mobility, often operating on the latent assumption that workers travel from a single residence to a single, proximate, and stationary worksite (Hughes and Silver 2020).

Some researchers are now bridging these literatures. They note that different forms of mobility are inherently interconnected. They are bringing together insights from the literature on work and family lives with the growing body of literature on mobility, including work-related mobility (Aybek, Huinink, and Muttarak 2015; Cresswell, Dorow, and Roseman 2016; de

Guzman, Brown, and Edwards 2018; Dorow, Roseman, and Cresswell 2017; Kilkey and Palenga-Möllnbeck 2016; Roseman, Barber, and Neis 2015). These researchers observe that mobility is an inherent part of the lives of most families, including mobilities for school, recreation, shopping, work, and care of extended family and friends. They remind us that these mobilities change over the life course, and that some international migrations entail relatively short distances and daily commutes, as with cross-border mobility. These migrations (outside of COVID-19) can be simpler than some extended daily commutes or internal rotational work, and less challenging for family lives. Similarly, the challenges and burdens for workers and their families of extended/complex daily commutes to low-paid and precarious employment may exceed those associated with well-paid rotational work and business travel (Neis et al. 2018). From this perspective, the separation of international from internal mobility may be somewhat artificial.

Distance, mobility-related times and rhythms, citizenship, employment security, work scheduling, transportation options, family dynamics, and life course all intersect in the lives of workers and their families. Furthermore, recent research, including the contributions to this collection, push back against the tendency to pathologize families with members engaged in extended/complex mobility for work (Baldassar and Merla 2015). This research highlights both the potential benefits of mobility and the agency and frequent resilience of mobile workers and family members who are living with the strains associated with recurrent and sometimes prolonged separations.

Reading across the literature and the diverse personal stories and research accounts found here, a key finding is the degree to which responsibility for managing the significant mental and physical health, social, and economic challenges associated with extended/complex mobility for work falls almost exclusively to workers and their extended families and communities. Neither employers nor the state assume much responsibility for mitigating or helping to address these challenges. With the spread of precarious employment coupled with other drivers of extended/complex mobility for work such as economic vulnerability, environmental degradation and displacement, and increasing housing costs, the scale of mobility and these challenges is likely to increase.

This unique collection contributes to the growing body of integrative literature on families, mobility, and work. It explores intersections between family lives and diverse, complex/extended types of mobility to and within work, with a focus on the Canadian context. It tracks these across multiple populations of workers, regions, sectors, and processes. The contributions range from personal stories, songs, poetry, and photo essays through more traditional academic articles. Most adopt a storytelling approach and include photos and images to encourage engagement by diverse audiences and to combine experiential with analytical, comparative insights. Digital stories and photo essays, particularly when developed collaboratively, are powerful tools for presenting the stories and experiences of families dealing with extended/complex mobility for work, as shown by the contributions of Grzetic (Chapter 3) and Gmelch, Lincoln, and Royal (Chapters 19 and 20) to this collection, and the digital stories behind them available on the On the Move website (www.onthemovepartnership.ca).¹ Research that uses these kinds of methods can help families share their experiences and help members of their communities see their own lives reflected in a new light. It can help reduce the social isolation often experienced by these workers and their families.

Work-related mobilities explored in the collection range from the spatially constrained but complex daily mobilities for work accomplished by Mandy Penney, a woman with a physical disability (Howse and Penney, Chapter 4), through to international labour migration, including refugee migration into and within Canada. Howse and Penney's contribution shows that the focus on accessibility within the workplace in much research and policy misses key challenges physically disabled people face getting to work and being mobile within work as part of their job. These challenges contribute to the disproportionately high rates of unemployment and poverty experienced by people with disabilities in Canada.

Mandy's story of her complex work-related mobilities highlights the significant investment of time and resources she must make to get to work on an ongoing basis. It highlights the critical roles played by others (including biological family and friends acting as family) in that achievement, as well as the tendency for state representatives to assume family and friends will provide

these services, potentially contributing to their dependency on others' goodwill. Mandy's story also speaks to the challenges created by often unnecessary and poorly supported mobility requirements within work, and by the insensitive design and punitive requirements around access to transportation services that can constrain options and add to the persistent pressures experienced by people with physical disabilities.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, international labour migrations frequently entail the formation of transnational families and prolonged periods of absence from children, spouses, and extended family that vastly exceed the periods of absence commonly associated with internal rotational or circular migration and daily commutes. To a significant degree, these absences are the result of state constraints on access to entry and the right to immigrate and to family reunification experienced by multiple categories of temporary foreign workers in Canada. For international labour migrants and refugees, policies often encourage or expect entrants to be immobilized with a particular employer, as with the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, while in Canada and within their province of entry (as with refugees) until their status changes. As illustrated by contributions from Pangan, Bryan, and Nourpanah and Gardiner Barber (Chapters 21–23), motives for these types of international migration are often fuzzy, but tend to be intensely linked to family relationships and efforts to create opportunities for family. Some temporary foreign workers are seeking the right to immigrate and bring their families, yet they have to navigate policy constraints that make them dependent on their current employers' support to gain access to these rights. This has consequences for their vulnerabilities at work. In the case of refugees, while a key driver of migration is persecution or the threat of persecution, they migrate with family into and within countries with diverse family needs forefront in their actions and choices. They can face major challenges after arrival in Canada as they navigate the regulatory and service gaps and limited employment and immigration opportunities across Canada's patchwork of provincial and municipal jurisdictions. All of this is on top of the ongoing threat of deportation should their application for refugee status fail.

Several contributions explore the mobility-related opportunities and challenges in the lives of male and female rotational workers and their families at various stages of the life course (Kelly, Mosquera Garcia, and Dorow, Chapter 5; Murray, Skelding, and Barton, Chapter 7; Snow and Fong, Chapter 9; Ryan, Chapter 6). Kelly et al.'s contribution highlights particular challenges pregnant mobile women tradesworkers and those with children can face in "heavily masculinized workplaces" in the oil and gas sector in Alberta. Their vignettes provide insights into why the proportion of female tradesworkers in this industry, and the construction sector more generally in Canada, remains low. They spotlight the significant investments and sacrifices women can and will make to stay in these kinds of jobs. These women experience the combined impacts of gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, and work-related health problems. They also live with the disruptive effects of distant and extended absence on cycles of care and management of change. These experiences are in addition to the social disapproval and scrutiny they routinely experience from people they leave behind and people they may work with.

Most other contributions on interjurisdictional rotational or long-distance labour commuters in Canada focus on the more common situation of rotational male workers of varying ages and family status, with most leaving Atlantic Canada to find work in Alberta and other western provinces of the country. Kevin Ryan's story lays out his entry into mobile work as a young man and explores how a short-term commitment evolved into a relatively extended "career" as a rotational worker. He is eventually hired as a mobile labour recruiter whose ability to frankly explain the life it entails to potential recruits is seen by his employers as a key asset. With his career marked by larger-scale fluctuations in the oil and gas sector and by life course changes, Kevin eventually searches for ways to exit rotational work, and his entry into a nursing career makes this feasible. We juxtapose Kevin's story with Amber's story (Chapter 7), an amalgam of insights from conversational interviews with women whose husbands and partners are mobile workers. Amber describes how her husband's rotational work permeates all aspects of her life and how his work and their lives evolve as their children transition from toddlers to teens. In their case, the anticipated longer-term trajectory is for her to join her

husband in Alberta once the children have left home. Nicole Snow and Ian Fong describe a somewhat different career trajectory, with one partner (Nicole) engaged in university teaching while the other (Ian) transitions into welding and then into self-employment in an occupation that requires, long-distance mobility. They do not have their own children but engage in extended family and friendship-related “family-making” (see also Roseman, Chapter 18). Other rotational worker career trajectories explored in the collection include those of older workers, including couples like Pauline and Bob Sutton from Bay de Verde, NL, who enter into mobile work to save for retirement or to access the financial resources, and sometimes skills, they need for alternative livelihoods (Dorow and Jean, Chapter 8; Lincoln and Gmelch, Chapter 19; Gmelch and Royal, Chapter 20).

Dorow and Jean note that time is complicated in fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) work as times for travel, rotations, time home, and future planning are “criss-crossed by industry schedules and disruptions, including project deadlines, seasonal work cycles, and historical booms and busts in commodity markets.” Long-distance rotational work inevitably involves living away from home. Dorow and Jean use the device of “letters from camp” from a male oil and gas worker and female housekeeper to highlight key themes emerging from their extensive research on how work, family, and time intersect in the FIFO mobility regime, particularly in work camps. Camp time is associated with routine, isolation, enclosure, and efforts to bridge all of these temporal rhythms and those in their home lives in order to achieve moments of “fragile synchronicity” (Neis et al. 2018), and to manage the emotional and other challenges associated with the dance required to make all of this work. They note that for all workers, camp time is largely cut off from the outside world and that workers manage camp and work time by creating “separate selves” where they seek to protect their mental health by not dwelling on what is happening at home.

Contributions also encompass mobility within work, as well as issues of racial and gender inequality and class. High’s account of the historical work of Black train porters in Montreal in Chapter 2 links the dynamics of racial capitalism and settler colonialism to the work-related mobility histories of Black railway porters based in Montreal. Considerably constrained in their employ-

ment options, Black men found work as mobile railway porters. Excluded from white unions, they organized their own and fought successfully for better wages and working conditions. Their regular and prolonged absence for work, coupled with racism, significantly limited the employment options for their wives, which contributed to the need for better wages. Black women invested in the creation of vibrant Black community institutions and these men and women became important leaders in their community; their children gained access to education, and some had more freedom to pursue non-traditional activities during their father's absence.

Alexia Stasha Newson's story (Chapter 17) tells us about the opportunities for meaningful work, new experiences, adventure, and professional development associated with her work in Canada's Coast Guard. It highlights the important contribution that work and familial experience can make to developing women's interest, skills, and confidence around working in this largely male environment. She touches on the gendered relational challenges she encounters as she strives to develop new relationships with others while also working offshore for extended periods of time. Alexia also identifies the support she has experienced at work and at home and reflects on how having children in the future is likely to change her ability to continue working offshore.

FIFO workers whose travel and accommodations are paid for by the company and who have regular rotations are less vulnerable than the seasonal migrant Newfoundland workers described by Grzetic (Chapter 3), who have little advance notice for when work will start and must pay for and arrange their own travel to low-paid jobs and find their own living accommodations. Those with children may have to choose between leaving them behind with relatives or taking them out of school and bringing them with them. They travel into situations where they are not always welcomed by other workers or by the schools into which they have to place their children, and work as many hours as possible looking forward to going home.

Young couples may move home from places like Alberta to Atlantic Canada when they have children so they will be close to family supports, thus opting to have one or both partners migrate for work. As shown in the contributions on grand-families (Murray, Lionais, and Gallant, Chapter 12; Avery and Novoa,

Chapter 13) and in other contributions (Grzetic, Chapter 3; Power, Chapter 15), the active support of grandparents and other family members can play a key role in offsetting the strains associated with the absence of one or more parents for work. Engagement by grandparents can create opportunities for the latter to develop closer relationships with their children and grandchildren, but also create social and financial challenges resulting in feelings of ambivalence. Challenges are particularly great in situations where grandparents end up taking over close to full responsibility for raising their grandchildren, often without having legal custody and thus without the rights of parents related to education and health care.

Some contributions explore the family-making activities by and with other workers and households that help support and give meaning to mobile working lives. As noted by Roseman (Chapter 18), the term “family-making” signals that “while families arise out of past patterns of relating that we have learned, in all social contexts they only come about specifically as a result of individuals’ purposeful actions with and towards other individuals, including those with whom they work.” These family-making activities include the unpaid social reproduction work around shopping and meal planning and preparation of the lightkeeper described by Roseman, which helped develop and sustain relationships among lighthouse keepers living together, often remotely. They also include the manifold contributions to social reproduction provided by already time-stressed commuting workers to Bell Island households beyond their own, as described by Diane Royal in Chapter 11. Other examples include the processes and benefits explored by Karen Samuels in Chapter 26, where she examines how participation by military veterans in motorcycle clubs can help them adjust to civilian life after exiting their hyper-mobile, culturally distinct, and often hyper-vigilant and stressful working lives. Initiatives of some Military Family Resource Centres and grand-family groups provide platforms and regular programming to help mitigate problems with social isolation, as does Melissa Ralph’s Facebook page for families with members working away, described in Chapter 29. While not family-making per se, these initiatives are helping to inform and provide social supports to the families of military and rotational workers, filling gaps in state and corporate support.

The notion of “home” as distinct from work resonates throughout the collection in reflections on leaving and returning home, a desire for and missing home. As time away — on the road, at work, and often living at work — grows, it cuts into time at home and influences the dynamics of re-entry and leaving again and the opportunities to be part of key events and transitions in family lives, including births and deaths, graduations, and other losses and accomplishments. Other themes that cut across the collection and associated research relate to how families impacted by extended/complex mobility for work, including military deployment and relocation, frequently deal with uncertainty, change, and in some cases, significant disruptions to their daily lives. Achieving often fragile synchronicities requires effort, creativity, and innovation. As has been noted here and elsewhere, it can be particularly challenging for groups like precariously employed immigrant workers in families with young children and limited access to child care, who work irregular and often night shifts and are reliant on public transit (Premji 2018; Thorburn 2018). It is also very challenging for Canadian military families with children with disabilities. In contrast to the US, where not only the person in the military but also their family members have access to specialized military health and other services, in Canada military family members have to rely on often scarce public health-care services or pay out of pocket for services when access is severely disrupted by frequent relocations for work (Williams et al., Chapter 25).

The collection reminds us that the benefits, costs, and challenges associated with extended/complex mobility for work are unevenly distributed among employers, workers, and family members, and that their scale and effects are mediated by state policies, including for family supports such as access to and the cost of child care, economic development, transportation, and housing. Themes related to policy gaps and issues are identified throughout the collection but particularly in the contributions related to employers (Arnold and Spinks, Chapter 10), grand-families, and COVID-19 and the mobile labour force. As indicated by Arnold and Spinks, employers of rotational workers sometimes provide resources to help workers and their families mediate the potential consequences of related effort and costs, but employers may take little or no responsibility for preventing the potential financial, mental, and physical im-

pacts. The growing proportion of workers in Canada who are precariously employed are unlikely to have access even to supports for dealing with personal and family-related effects of extended/complex mobility for work.

The inherent challenges associated with managing day-to-day and life course changes and uncertainties as they intersect with those of extended mobility for work are also often enhanced by larger fluctuations in the availability, location, and schedules for work (as for construction workers), in transportation options, economic volatility, and by the growth in precarious employment. As shown in Neis et al. (Chapter 27) in regard to COVID-19, the combined effects of pandemic-related risks of infection and infection prevention measures and the related economic downturn have dramatically increased the burdens for many “essential” mobile workers.

Despite its scope and diversity, the collection has some limitations. Many of the families whose stories are presented here are heterosexual, coupled families with children. Some diversity is reflected in families headed by single parents (Kelly, Mosquera Garcia, and Dorow, Chapter 5) and others headed by grandparents who formed grand-families when they ended up assuming responsibility for their grandchildren for shorter and longer periods (Murray, Lionais, and Gallant, Chapter 12).

Most but not all families in this collection are Caucasian, with High’s contribution highlighting the racist practices that constrained the options of Black families in Montreal, and on the railway, an exception. The chapters by Pangan (21), Bryan (22), Nourpanah and Gardiner Barber (23), and Grzetic (3) speak to some of the experiences of racialized international labour migrants. They include some exploration of how their mobility experiences intersect with Canada’s history of colonialism, and current and past state-supported and often failed development initiatives on the Canadian prairies and in Atlantic Canada, as well as associated displacement and internal mobility. Bryan reminds us that these intersections encompass the experiences and opportunities available to researchers, professionals, and community and political leaders, and they require critical self-reflection around the origins and effects of privilege.

Indigenous workers are an important and growing segment of the mobile labour force in Canada and deserve more attention than they receive here. There

is some reference to their experiences during COVID-19 (Neis et al., Chapter 27). The Alberta Stories section on the larger On the Move website provides important historical and contemporary reflections on the experiences of Métis in northeastern Alberta.² Clearly, more Indigenous-led research and enhanced efforts to give voice to and learn from their stories are essential if we are to understand and begin to address the relationship between colonialism and racist and genocidal policies and (im)mobility, work, and families among Indigenous peoples in Canada and globally. Similarly, the experiences of LGBTQ workers and their families with work-related mobility are not dealt with here and require more research.

Although it has limits, the collection and the larger body of work on which it is based have already identified some key policy issues and areas for future work. Policy issues include:

1. The need to increase access to accurate, complete statistical information on mobility patterns and family-related benefits and costs across regions, sectors, and the spectrum of mobility, from daily commutes through international labour migration and encompassing mobility within work;
2. The need for more systematic and ongoing monitoring of extended/complex mobility for work, including its drivers (from households through transportation services to employer and investment patterns, child-care support, and social programs) and consequences for workers and their families;
3. The need to identify and implement employer and public policy and other changes designed to reduce and mitigate potential negative impacts of extended/complex mobility for work on workers and their families;
4. The need to identify and find ways to address gaps in supports and services for workers and their families, including those related to child and elder care, mental health and addictions, and other services; and,

5. The need to create and enhance opportunities for families affected by extended/complex mobility for work and for service providers to serve and support each other (Butters et al. 2019; Neil and Neis 2020).

The valued contributions of many have created this rich, open-access collection of stories, images, and research articles that we hope will allow our readers to experience and explore key effects of diverse forms of work-related mobility through a family-centred lens. In doing so, we encourage you to reflect on the historical and contemporary factors driving and mediating the growth and character of diverse forms of such work and mobility and their effects on family lives. The collection reminds us that while families may be the most adaptable institutions in our society, we require evidence-based, evidence-informed, and evidence-inspired workplace practices, community and social supports, public policies, and programs if families are to thrive as they strive to harmonize and synchronize their work, family, and mobility rhythms, including with their broader needs. This collection takes us some way towards that evidence, but much more research and action are needed to understand the intersections of work, mobility, and families in all their diversity, and to design and implement appropriate supports for these workers and their families in Canada and globally. For families impacted by work mobility, we hope this collection offers a glimpse into your lives, your sources of strength and resilience, the challenges you share with others, and what might help mitigate those challenges in the future. For those who serve and support these workers and their families, we are confident that the collection will be a useful resource in your work.

Notes

- 1 On the Move's digital stories can be viewed here: <https://www.onthemovepartnership.ca/results/digital-stories/>.
- 2 For more on On the Move's Alberta Stories, please see: <http://albertastories.onthemovepartnership.ca/>.

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