"ALMOST FOND OF THE DAMNED TOWN":

WOMEN'S CONCEPTS OF COMMUNITY IN MACKENZIE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the lives of women in the northern British Columbian town of Mackenzie using theories of rurality and northern-ness as viewed through the lenses of radical and socialist feminism. The central question is: How have women's lives changed in Mackenzie since the 1970s, with regards to forming connections, and building communities? I argue that although there have been some changes and improvements, there are still many ways that women's lives could be improved through better opportunities for building women's networks and connections in Mackenzie, and in the north as a whole. The methods used in this thesis are based on feminist methodologies, including self-reflection and autobiography, participatory research, and women's lived experience. The results of this thesis add to the growing literature of women's voices from the north, and provide direction for town planners and social service providers, as well as to women who relocate to northern towns.

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For
Jo-Anne Fiske and Graham Pearce

Two northern souls who have infused me with their own love of the north and have inspired me in the writing of this thesis.

Thank you.

Preface

I finally found that National Film Board documentary about Mackenzie that I've been looking for for ages . . . . It's about single-industry towns and how they don't meet the needs of women. It was made in 1979, but to tell you the truth, not a lot has changed. It was just amazing to hear these words that I've thought a thousand times since I've moved to Mackenzie articulated by other women. (Personal journal, Apr. 1, 1996)

I moved to Mackenzie in October 1995 with my partner at the time, who had been hired as a chemical engineer at one of the mills. I was planning to enter a Bachelor of Education programme, and had heard that I would be able to work as a substitute teacher in Mackenzie without an education degree. I thought that I would be able to get valuable teaching experience while living there. As it turned out, I was only able to secure part-time work, and only after I had already been there a few months. When I arrived, I was not prepared for the isolation, and although I did try to stay positive about the town, I became quite depressed for the first few months that I lived there. Looking back, I believe that this was due to several factors: I was under-employed, and I was lonely. I was used to living near my family and making friends either at school or at work, and in Mackenzie, I was far away from my family, and not a part of either a school setting or a workplace. I needed to adapt to new ways of making friends and finding self-worth, but, coming from the large urban setting of Vancouver, I did not know how.

The following September, nearly one year after I moved to Mackenzie, I moved to Prince George to attend UNBC as a graduate student. I enjoyed Prince George and UNBC much more than I had enjoyed Mackenzie, but at the same

time, I realized that Mackenzie had been a valuable experience for me. In many ways, I was still processing my experiences in Mackenzie when I decided that I wanted to write my MA thesis in Gender Studies about women's lives in Mackenzie.

In the beginning stages of the project, I decided that what I wanted to show through my research was that Mackenzie was a difficult, alienating place for women to live and that to ease the "problem" of women's integration into the community, a women's centre should be implemented. The town had previously had a women's centre; I knew this from two documents which would eventually become extremely influential to this thesis: the Northern British Columbia Women's Task Force Report on Single Industry Communities[1] (1977) and the National Film Board's No Life for a Woman (1979). From the positive accounts of the women in these documents about how the women's centre had helped them feel less isolated, I decided that this was what women in Mackenzie needed today.

As my thesis changed and developed, I began (with the gentle guidance of my supervisor) to take a less prescriptive, more descriptive approach. Rather than going to Mackenzie and *telling* these women that what they needed was a women's centre, I would instead be *asking* them to describe their lives and find out what they wanted and needed. The top-down approach I had first envisioned would have run contrary to the principles of feminist research. It was not my place to add my voice to the chorus of external voices *telling* women what they need.

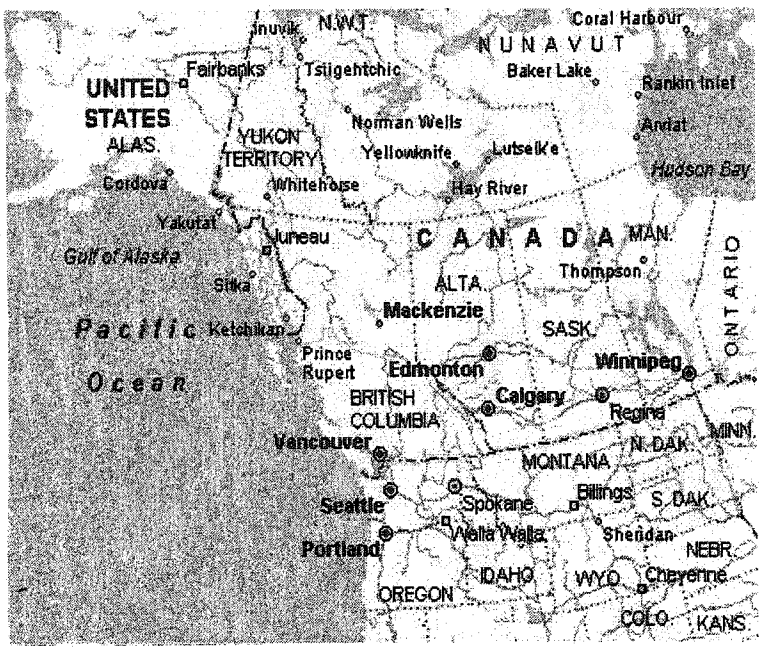
---

[1] Hereafter referred to as the Task Force Report.

I mention this story to illustrate my previous point: my particular experiences as a woman living in Mackenzie have influenced the ways in which I have chosen to approach my thesis. Although I have come to realize that a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, approach is more appropriate to the feminist research methods I have chosen, I know that the experiences I had in Mackenzie continue to influence my work. I have been surprised and pleased that the women I interviewed had many positive feelings about Mackenzie. This research has caused me to examine my own attitudes toward the town, and I have discovered that they have changed during the course of the research.

Map #1: Map of Mackenzie in Canada

(Source: http:\\www.mackbc.com/mcgregor/maps.htm)



Chapter One: Introduction

I didn't think of it till this morning, but we have been in Mackenzie for exactly one month. I feel like we should have a little party or something. Then again, maybe not. (Personal journal, Nov. 22, 1996)

When I first made the journey from Vancouver to Mackenzie, I had never been farther north on Highway 97 than Prince George. I was reasonably familiar with the towns between Vancouver and Prince George: Cache Creek, Hundred Mile House, Williams Lake, Quesnel. However, what came north of Prince George was a mystery to me.

That first night, my partner and I only intended to make it as far as Prince George. We were tired from driving all day, unused to the long stretches of highway. We planned to stop in Prince George and spend the night at a hotel, then drive the next morning to Mackenzie. For some reason, neither of us wanted to get to Mackenzie at night, in the dark. I was very curious to find out what Mackenzie was like, and I suppose I wanted to be able to see it in full daylight, to get a good first impression of it. My only impressions of Mackenzie thus far had come from the promotional video that Fletcher Challenge sent to all of its prospective employees, which I had watched without gaining a real sense of what the town looked like. In the video, the town appeared mostly obscured by swirling snow.

Our plans to stay in Prince George were hampered by the fact that there was a Lorrie Morgan concert in town that night. I did not know who Lorrie Morgan was at the time, but I assumed she had to be fairly popular, because all of the hotel and motel rooms in Prince George were booked. In silence, my partner

and I drove for 45 minutes to Bear Lake, a village located approximately 80 km north of Prince George. We stayed overnight at the Bear Lake Motel.

When we left Bear Lake the next morning, I noticed that the temperature was much colder here than it had been in Vancouver. Until this point, I had not realized that winter comes to northern BC in late October, not in December, like it does in Vancouver. However, I was still fairly excited to get to Mackenzie. At this point, I was filled with anticipation and, although I would not have admitted this to anyone, I had an idea that life in Mackenzie would be like life in the television show Northern Exposure, where quirky and eccentric townsfolk lived in quaint but picturesque little cabins. They were initially suspicious of newcomers but quickly welcomed them once they got to know them. I pictured myself living in a quaint but picturesque little cabin.

What I did not picture was having to drive another 29 km after turning off the main highway in order to actually get to Mackenzie. I knew that the town was not exactly on the highway, but that extra 29 km seemed to suddenly emphasize the isolation of our destination. When we drove into town, the first landmark that caught my interest was the "World's Largest Tree Crusher" that stands near the "Welcome to Mackenzie" sign. The tree crusher had been used to flatten trees when Williston Lake was built. To me, the tree crusher looked like a yellow Tonka toy that had somehow escaped from a child's sandbox and swelled to enormous proportions, finally landing outside the town of Mackenzie. This tree crusher definitely did not fit in with my preconceptions about the pristine, unspoiled northern wilderness. At this point, I did not have a good understanding

of the north's, and indeed, British Columbia's dependence on forest products. I was an ignorant southerner who believed that forests should be preserved and that logging was an environmental sin. My partner and I had many arguments about the forest industry. As an environmental engineer who had worked in mills, I think that he had a better understanding of BC's dependence on forest products.

My partner and I drove down a long, straight stretch of road with grey, boxy buildings on either side. We passed a gas station, what appeared to be some government buildings, and a hotel. I could see small suburban-type detached houses, the kind you might see in Langley or Surrey (suburbs of Vancouver). We continued to drive until the pavement ran out and the road turned into gravel. My partner said, "I think we passed the town." I said, "No we haven't. There must be more. That couldn't have been the whole town back there." It turned out that we had indeed passed the town, and we had to turn back. I realized then that this was not going to be like Northern Exposure.

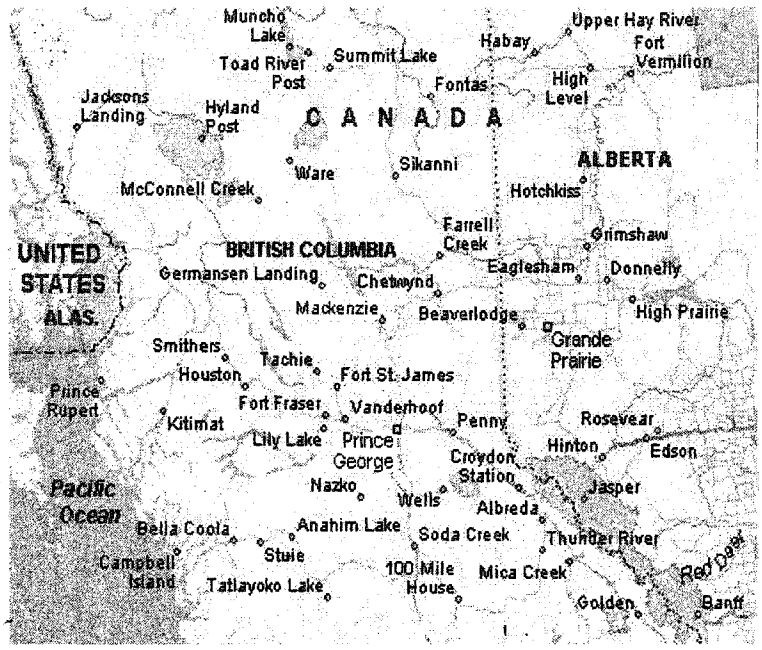
Single industry communities in northern British Columbia are often built around the forest industry, an industry where the employment structure is dominated by male employees (Mackenzie Community Profile 1992, Marchak 1983). Mills often prefer to hire married men over single men, and as a result, many women move to these communities as wives of millworkers (Northern British Columbia Task Force Report 1977, Kreps 1979). Unfortunately, life for some women in these single industry towns can often be lonely and frustrating

when it comes to looking for satisfying work or making connections with other people (Hunter and Whitson 1991).

Mackenzie is a good example of a northern British Columbia single industry forestry town. By road, it is located 969 km north of Vancouver, 755 km west of Edmonton, and 190 km north of Prince George. It lies 29 km west of Highway 97 North, the main highway that runs between Prince George and Dawson Creek. The road from Prince George to Mackenzie is scenic and pleasant to drive along during the summer. In the winter, however, the road's twists and turns can form a kind of treacherous beauty that exemplifies the sometimes uneasy relationship between the northern resident and the environment.

Map #2: Map of Mackenzie in British Columbia

(Source: http:\\www.mackbc.com/mcgregor/maps.htm)



Mackenzie's origins 32 years ago are somewhat different than those of many other small towns in that it was built as an 'instant town'; that is, a resource company took the land and built a mill and a town surrounding it, in a short period of time (Task Force Report 1977).[2] Mackenzie's unique origins as an instant mill town have shaped the demographics of the area, and although these have changed slightly over the past 32 years, it is easy to see a link between the present demographics and employment patterns of the town and the demographics of the original settlers. Because the town was built with primarily the needs of male workers in mind, the women who have come to live in Mackenzie often find that there are aspects of the town that do not take women into consideration.

Many women who move to Mackenzie are following spouses who have been employed by the forest industry. After they arrive, these women may try to find work in town themselves, but because employment is usually limited to the forestry sector, where most of the jobs are traditionally occupied by males (Mackenzie Community Profile 1992), it may be difficult for women to find a job that is relevant to their education or experience. According to Statistics Canada, in 1996 the unemployment rate for women in Mackenzie was 11.2%, significantly higher than the unemployment rate for men in Mackenzie, which was 8.1%. Comparatively, the unemployment rate for women in British Columbia was 6.7%, much lower than that of women in Mackenzie, while for men, the provincial unemployment rate was 8.5%, slightly higher than that of men in Mackenzie. In addition, the average total income of women in Mackenzie (of those who reported

[2] Other instant towns in northern B.C. include Kitimat (aluminum), Fraser Lake (molybdenum), Tumbler Ridge (coal), and the former Cassiar (asbestos).

any income) was $20, 499, while for their male counterparts, the average total income was $45, 576. What these figures show is that during this period there was a higher proportion of women than men who were unsuccessfully seeking employment in Mackenzie, and that for those women who were earning income, it was less than half of the average income for men. Taken together, these statistics paint a less than ideal picture for women seeking paid employment in Mackenzie.

Often, moving to a new town means that family and friends are left behind, and both men and women must form new social support networks. This may be more difficult for a woman in Mackenzie if she is unemployed, or if she does not have children through whom she can meet other mothers. Some women do enjoy life in Mackenzie and make the adjustment relatively smoothly, while others find it hard to make friends and find themselves feeling isolated and frustrated. Many of these feelings of isolation and frustration are present with any sort of a change in location, and it can be difficult to tell whether this feeling of dislocation is due to the place women relocate to, or whether it is due to relocation itself.

In 1977, the Northern British Columbia Women's Task Force Report on Single Industry Communities described the numerous political and economic problems women in these towns faced due to a male-centred style of community planning that did not take the reality of women's lives into consideration. These problems included feelings of social isolation, high rates of female unemployment, and a lack of adequate social, medical and health services. Although this study was done over twenty-five years ago, I know from personal

conversations with women who live or have lived in these towns, and from my own experience living in Mackenzie, that many of these concerns still remain two decades later. In fact, in some cases the situation has become worse. Due to the decline in government funding for a range of social, health, and recreational services, some services which were in existence twenty years ago have since disappeared, as is the case with the Mackenzie Women's Centre. According to both the Task Force Report and No Life For a Woman (a National Film Board documentary about women's lives in Mackenzie and Fraser Lake), the Women's Centre provided a way for newcomers to meet other women and break out of their isolation. The elimination of this service may have taken away an important source of support for women who are new to Mackenzie.

It was my hope in starting this project that by asking newcomer women about their experiences in the first five years of living in Mackenzie, it would give them an opportunity to talk about their situations, share some of their coping strategies with other women, and come to understand how they would develop a plan for providing support to other women who are new to town. I felt that allowing these women to meet and discuss what was important to them with their peers would achieve two things: first, it would give validity to their opinions and feelings about their living situations, and second, it would allow them to voice and hear suggestions about making life in Mackenzie an enjoyable experience. There are too few opportunities for women to meet and discuss their lives in a context that is relevant to them, and I wanted to provide an opportunity for women in this community to do so. In addition to creating a space for other

women to discuss life in Mackenzie, I suppose that I was also trying to recreate Mackenzie as I wanted it to be when I first got there, using my thesis to build my own version of the ideal northern town I had visualized before I moved to Mackenzie. I had all the answers when I started this project: I knew that what women in Mackenzie needed was a women's centre. However, during the course of the project, I began to move through this stage of processing my own experiences with the town and tried to step back and allow the women to express their own ideas about Mackenzie.

The questions that I propose to address are:

- How do women who move to Mackenzie view their geographical location in relation to the kinds of social support networks that are available to them? This includes both formal and informal support networks.
- What support systems do women in Mackenzie use when they are new to town?
- Are there services that are unavailable to them that they would like to see implemented?[3]

I was led to raise these questions as a means to consider why some women make a smooth adjustment to living in Mackenzie within the first five years, while others find it difficult. Some women never come to enjoy life in Mackenzie, and some

[3] Originally, I had worded the first of these questions as "How do women who move to Mackenzie view their isolated geographical location..." and it was not until my committee members pointed out my use of the word 'isolation' that I realized that it reflected my own bias, and not necessarily the viewpoint of the women interviewed. Similarly, I had phrased the final question as "What services are unavailable to them that they would like to see implemented?" Again, my committee drew my attention to the fact that some of the women might not perceive inadequacies in the current services available. I mention these points because they illustrate the discussion in my preface about the inevitability of researcher bias.

come to enjoy it months or years after their arrival. Why is it that some women who do not enjoy this initial experience come to a sense of appreciation at a later time? It is my hope that in discussing some of the reasons for the differences in ease of settlement among women, women can use this knowledge to make the adjustment easier on future newcomers. I have felt a level of comfort in my adjustment to living in Prince George that I wish I could have felt in Mackenzie. In retrospect, I see that I was asking how it was that I came to have a feeling of appreciation for Prince George that I did not have in Mackenzie.

In order to fully appreciate the issues faced by women in Mackenzie, it is important to understand the theoretical frameworks of feminism and geography as they apply to the situation of rural/non-urban spaces. After a brief literature review, I will detail the methods with which I gathered and interpreted data. In the next section of the thesis, I will be comparing the Task Force Report and the film No Life for a Woman with the interviews that I conducted in 1999 (data triangulation), to examine whether any of these issues have been resolved or changed, and whether new issues are facing women in Mackenzie today. Finally, after the analysis of the three documents, I will discuss the issues arising from this comparison, and will detail further directions for future research in this area.

There has been a three-year gap in the time between the focus group interview and the final stages of this thesis. There are numerous reasons for this gap; most significantly, I moved away from Prince George back down to Vancouver. However, in 2001, I moved back to Prince George and had the opportunity to pick up this work again. In the intervening three years between

1999 and 2002, there have been many dramatic changes. There have been strikes and resolutions, a change in provincial government from the New Democratic Party to the BC Liberal Party. Originally, there was a sense of euphoria that accompanied the change in provincial government, but now there are feelings of confusion, anger, disillusionment and loss of control, even, and perhaps especially, among those who voted for the Liberals. The current provincial government is changing the face of provincial policy and economics daily. As I write, some of these changes include outward migration from the north, and from BC in general; changes to medical care facilities; changes to funding for school districts; energy costs that have risen over 100%. There is a struggle to maintain jobs, especially in the north and in the interior; many communities have lost courthouses and government services such as ferries, and with these services, they have lost jobs. The softwood lumber disagreement has crippled not only primary industries in northern and interior BC towns, but also secondary industries.

The interview that I facilitated in 1999 with these particular women is a snapshot of a particular moment in time, both of the lives of these women, and of the life of Mackenzie. In the past three years, Mackenzie, like the rest of British Columbia, has undergone drastic changes. It has gone from being a prosperous, seemingly stable town to a town that is facing the possibility of severe unemployment and rising costs. Since the interview, one of the participants has moved away from Mackenzie, and although she and her family now live in a completely different community (and country), they have been unable to sell their house. They have been renting it out and trying to sell it for two years. This is

not an unusual story. All over BC, and indeed, in towns all over Canada, small communities are dying and people are unable to sell their houses when they move away.

Living in northern BC, researching these issues, meeting northern residents, and listening to their stories has given me a much better understanding of northern and rural issues, although by no means do I feel that my knowledge is complete. However, I have a much better appreciation of the fact that the lives of people who work in the towns of northern BC are often overlooked or undervalued. The province of British Columbia seems to have lost perspective on where its wealth comes from. Although a very large percentage of BC's revenue comes from the north, this is rarely acknowledged (Baxter, 2002). The north is more often regarded as a site for resource extraction and, lately, knowledge extraction. Too often, resources as well as skilled workers seem to be funnelled toward the Lower Mainland, the same way that they are funnelled from Canada to the United States. Rural areas are currently being devalued more and more by the provincial government; rural schools such as those in Hixon and Bear Lake, which are under the jurisdiction of School District #57, have been under threat of closure (although they have won a temporary reprieve), because the number of students in these schools is so low that they are considered to be a drain on school resources. This sends a puzzling and contradictory message to rural communities: on the one hand, they are a vital part of BC's economy because of the role they play in resource extraction; however, they are not important enough to merit basic

facilities such as schools, which are often the hub of a small community and a facility for many activities other than classroom teaching.

Furthermore, I feel that not only are these towns overlooked, the lives of the women who live in these towns are also often overlooked, as their situation is viewed as identical to that of the men who live and work in these towns. The Task Force Report was a way for women in northern BC single industry towns to express their feelings and describe their lives in the late 1970s; similarly, No Life for a Woman was Bonnie Kreps' vision of women's lives in Mackenzie during this same time period. It seems that in the intervening twenty years, there has been a puzzling silence about women's lives in these towns.

It is my intent to focus on how women's views on their geographical location, their support networks, and the services available to them have changed or remained the same since the late 1970s. Many changes have occurred in the intervening thirty years, and many of the most radical changes have come in the past three years. The changes that have occurred in the past three years in Mackenzie are ones that I have experienced only peripherally as a resident of another northern town undergoing similar changes.

This thesis will explore the changes that occurred in the specific period of time between the writing of the Task Force Report and the filming of No Life For a Woman, and the group interview I conducted in 1999. The rest of this thesis will explore the geography of the town, including a physical description, location, housing, and the town's economy. I will then locate the town in the larger context of conceptions of the rural and of the north, as well as concepts of feminist

geography and single-industry resource towns. In the next chapter, I will discuss feminist theory and feminist research methods in relation to the research methods I used. The largest chapter of this thesis involves a detailed analysis of three documents: the Task Force Report, No Life For a Woman, and the transcript of the group interview I conducted in 1999. The final chapter will include a discussion of the three documents, conclusions, and recommendations based on the information in the previous chapter.

Chapter Two: The Town

Well. We . . . have been in Mackenzie for just over a week now. We arrived on the 22nd, a Sunday, and let me tell you, my first reaction was shock, fear and disbelief. This place is fucking small. It's also ugly. Whoever told Darren there are 5500 people here was lying. There can't be any more than 4000 max. The main street consists of a stretch of bare, 4-lane highway with a few drab grey aluminum siding buildings scattered along it randomly. (Personal journal, Oct. 31, 1996)

Introduction

When I first moved to Mackenzie, I was struck by the fact that the town seemed to be laid out on either side of a main street (Mackenzie Boulevard) that ran through the centre of town, straight as a stick. The buildings on either side of the boulevard were boxy and grey, and featured flat roofs that seemed to be impractical in a town with such heavy snowfalls. In the late fall, which is when I arrived, there is a hushed sense of expectation brought on by the fact that the leaves on the trees have already turned colour and most have fallen, leaving the branches bare, waiting for the snowfall that will surely come within the next few weeks. In winter, the town seems to liven up a bit, as the snow facilitates many winter sports such as downhill and cross-country skiing, snowboarding, tobogganing, and snowmobiling. In spring, which really serves mostly as a transition between winter and summer, rather than as a season of its own, the main boulevard turns into a raw, muddy, slushy mess. In summer, however, Mackenzie becomes something unrecognizable from its barren autumn condition: it is sunny, lush, green, fertile, and filled with the sounds of outdoor activity. The population of the town swells with the tree-planters who inhabit the town for the summer months.

Any discussion of the social conditions in Mackenzie will necessitate an understanding of the physical nature of the town. For the woman living in Mackenzie, her physical surroundings are very different from those of her urban sisters, and this will play a role in her social interactions.

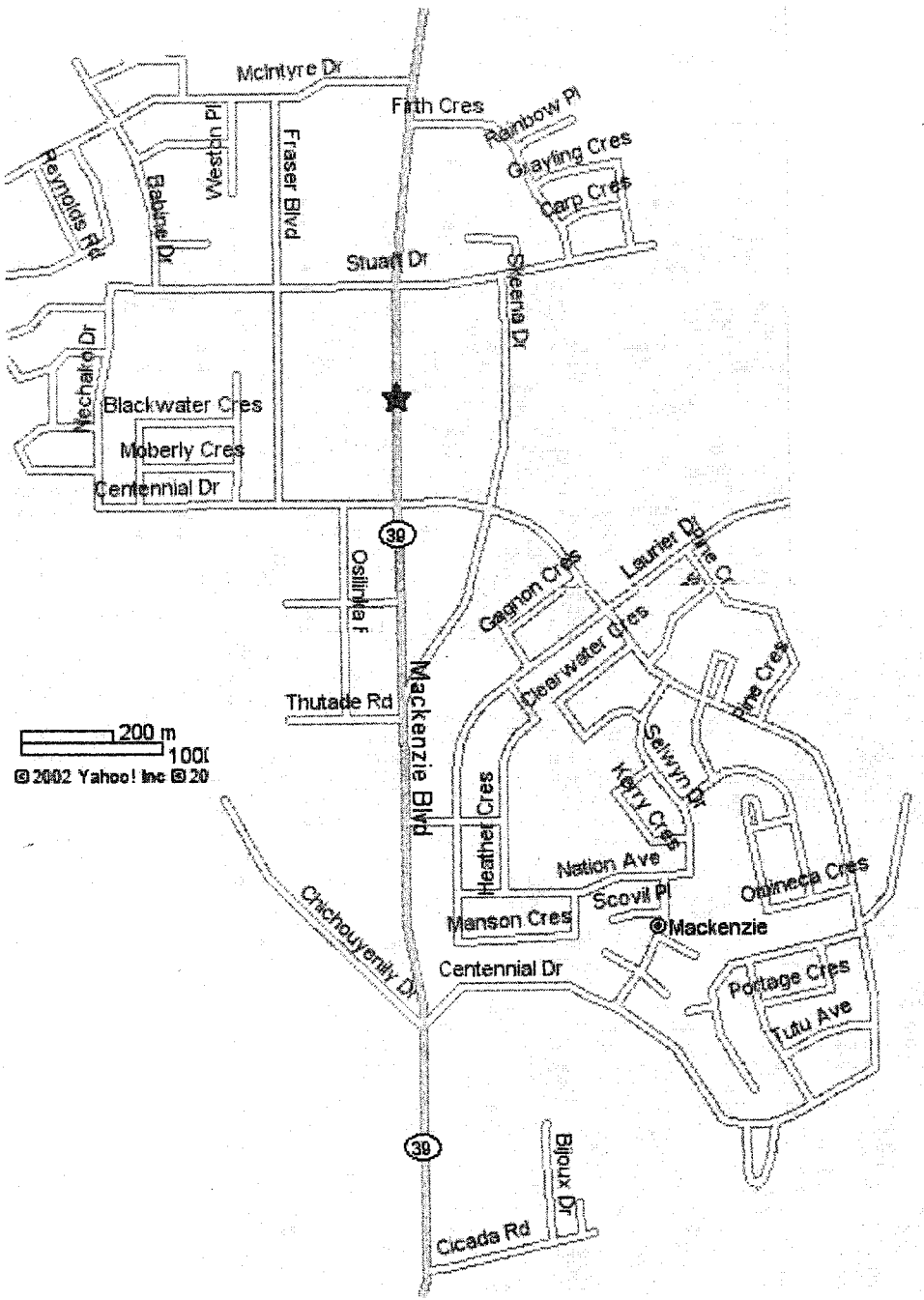
This chapter will describe Mackenzie in terms of its location, geography, physical makeup (buildings, schools, stores, housing), and its economy as it relates to the landscape's resources.

Location

Mackenzie is located 190 km north of Prince George, just north of the geographical centre of British Columbia. The town is 29 km west of the main highway, Highway 97, which runs north from Prince George to Dawson Creek and Fort St. John, and lies at the end of a dead-end road. There is only one paved entrance and exit into Mackenzie, which means that drivers on their way to another destination further north do not pass through the town. Mackenzie has one main street, Mackenzie Boulevard, which runs down the centre of town. Along this street are the Alexander Mackenzie Hotel, the Mackenzie Mall, the post office, the movie theatre, and the Evergreen Mall. Continuing along Mackenzie Boulevard, one comes to the end of the main town site, and, after approximately 5 km, one enters Gantahaz, a subdivision of Mackenzie. There are sidewalks on most of the major residential and town centre streets, and these sidewalks are kept fairly clear of snow and ice throughout the winter.

Map #3: Map of Mackenzie

(Source: http:\\ca.maps.yahoo.com)



Among the public service buildings in Mackenzie are Mackenzie Counselling Services, the RCMP station, a small hospital, a post office, a public health unit, and a fire department. These buildings are all located either along or close to Mackenzie Boulevard (see Map #3). In addition, there is a recreation centre just off Mackenzie Boulevard which houses a pool, library, gym, an arena, and a curling rink. Apart from some industrial buildings on the road to the mills, most shops and non-industrial buildings are located in this central part of town.

Schools

Until September 2002, there were four public schools in town: Mountainview Elementary, Mackenzie Elementary, Morfee Elementary, and Mackenzie Secondary. As of September 2002, Mountainview Elementary has been closed because of a drop in attendance (according to the school board, which made the decision to close the schools after receiving budget cuts from the provincial government). In addition, there is an elementary school in McLeod Lake, the First Nations community located at the turnoff from the highway to Mackenzie. The elementary school in McLeod Lake was scheduled for closure, but received a reprieve after protests from parents and community members. Since there is no secondary school in McLeod Lake, teenagers from the community are bussed to Mackenzie Secondary School.

Despite the fact that Mackenzie is 190 km away from Prince George, all of these schools come under the jurisdiction of School District #57. Consequently, if there are not enough teachers on call (TOCs) in Mackenzie who are available for

substitute teaching, the school district will attempt to find a TOC who is willing to drive to Mackenzie from Prince George for the day. Of course, this teacher would be paid for mileage, but the nearly two-hour drive would probably be a deterrent to most TOCs.

The schools did offer women good opportunities for employment. There were approximately equal numbers of male and female teachers at the secondary school when I was a substitute teacher there, and almost all of the teachers at Mountainview Elementary, where I taught a few times, were women. Most of the other TOCs that I met were women, as well. The closure of one of the elementary schools in town will definitely mean a reduction in women's employment, since elementary schools are primarily staffed by women.

I appreciated the opportunity that working as a substitute teacher afforded me, because I was allowed to work even though my post-secondary education did not include a teaching certificate. The pay was very good, and it was a challenging job, to say the least. However, as a substitute teacher, I never really made any friends among the other teachers. Although I never felt unwelcome as a substitute teacher, I also did not really feel a part of the school because I was there on such a sporadic basis. I did not really make any friends among the teachers, although I certainly became friendly with many of them. This sense of isolation and liminal status was first made evident to me when I was sent to Prince George for in-service training as a substitute teacher with other TOCs from the school district. I drove for approximately two hours to get to Prince George, and met the

other teachers who were being trained as well, but when the training day was over, the other teachers stayed in Prince George, and I returned to Mackenzie.

Housing

Most housing in town consists of single-family dwellings. However, there are also six apartment buildings, two sets of townhouses, and three trailer parks. All of the apartment buildings, except for one, are concentrated in one area of town, close to Centennial Drive, near the Mackenzie Hotel and Mall and the Recreation Centre. The distance between the apartment buildings and services (the mall, grocery stores, the doctors' offices) is easily walkable by an adult, and not too difficult for all but the smallest children. Often mothers will tow toddlers around town in large wagons, which can then hold groceries as well. During the winter, when the snow is high and temperatures sometimes go down to –40 C, it would not be appealing or safe for a mother and children to be walking even short distances. The mills are all quite a distance out of town, not easily walkable, so often husbands will drive one vehicle to work and wives will have another vehicle at home for their use. Sometimes, in a one-vehicle family, the wife will take her husband to work at the beginning of his shift and pick him up at the end of the workday, so that she can have use of the car during the day. Finally, approximately 5 km out of town, there is a housing subdivision called Gantahaz. The houses in this subdivision are larger and on considerably larger property sites than exist in town.

Until the 1980s, many houses in town were owned by the BC Forest Products company and were leased only to millworkers, which created a housing shortage for non-company townspeople (Veemes, 1985). However, all houses in town are now privately owned. Housing prices in Mackenzie are relatively high compared to other northern BC towns with similar populations[4]. However, it has become very difficult for Mackenzie homeowners to sell their houses. Families who move to Mackenzie often find themselves in a Catch-22 situation: there are very few rental units in town, and rent prices are high, so it makes more sense to buy a house as an investment. However, if the town goes through a period of economic instability, it may be necessary to seek work elsewhere. Meanwhile, the family is saddled with an expensive house that no one will buy. One of the participants in this study, moved away from Mackenzie in 1999 to another community, and she and her family still have not sold their house in Mackenzie, which has been on the market for two and a half years.

As of October 15, 2002, there were 59 houses on the market in Mackenzie, according to the Multiple Listings Services Canadian real estate website (www.mls.ca). Of these 59 houses, 36 were listed as below $100, 000, and the lowest-priced house was listed for $37,000, while the highest-priced house was listed for $205,000.

[1]This information is from the Multiple Listings Services Canadian real estate website, where I compared prices of similar-sized houses in Mackenzie, Smithers, and Chetwynd.

Economy

The town's economy is based almost entirely on the forest industry, with three major employers: the Slocan Group, Abitibi-Consolidated, and Pope and Talbot Limited. Together, these three companies are responsible for four sawmills, three planer mills, a pulp mill, and a northern bleached softwood kraft mill. As a result of this extreme reliance on the forest industry, there has been speculation that if/when the forest industry suffers a major blow, the town of Mackenzie will become a ghost town. A strike at Fletcher Challenge (now Pope and Talbot) in 1998 lasted for 8 months and resulted in an economic depression in the town. The strike affected not only those people who worked at the mill, but all townspeople, as the town's mills all form an interconnected web upon which the entire town is dependent. Because mill workers and their families were cutting back on personal spending, several small businesses and services in Mackenzie were forced to close or downsize. Since the service industry is one of the few economic sectors in Mackenzie where women make up a sizable percentage of the workforce, these closures and cuts had a direct effect on women's employment in the town.

With the ownership of the mills in flux over the past several years, Mackenzie has experienced a sense of inconsistency and even more transience than usual. Along with the changes in mill ownership has come a change in provincial government, to a government that seems to be rapidly unfolding a plan of massive changes to social services, education, transportation and health services that directly affect smaller communities like Mackenzie. To many who

live in these communities, the changes have come seemingly without warning, one after the other, leaving communities scrambling to cope with the last change and unprepared for the next one. As this is being written, there is talk of privatization of public assets such as BC Hydro that, if enacted, will directly affect Mackenzie and other communities like it. In addition, the softwood lumber dispute and controversy over raw log exports has caused further instability in the forest industry.[5]

Because of the danger posed by Mackenzie's reliance on the unstable forest industry, many people are trying to encourage diversification in the town's economy. There has been talk of a coal mine and the promotion of tourism in conjunction with the Powder King ski hill, which is approximately 45 minutes north (61 km) in the Pine Pass. The idea behind a partnership with Powder King and the mine is that people who come to ski at Powder King or work at the mine could find conveniently located accommodation and services in nearby Mackenzie. Despite these efforts at diversification, however, the town's economy is still mainly forestry-based.

Conclusion

Mackenzie has undergone several changes to its physical environment and its economic situation in the last few years. The existing landscape and economy have affected the lives of all of Mackenzie's residents, including the women

[5] At the time of this writing (2002), the US and Canadian governments are involved in a softwood lumber trade dispute. The US government maintains that Canadian lumber prices are unfairly subsidized, and has therefore imposed severe trade duties on Canadian lumber entering the US. This has had a devastating impact on BC's forest industry.

involved in this project. The next chapter of this thesis will provide further exploration of the links between our concept of a town's geography and its social situation, especially for women.

Chapter Three: Northern (Under)Exposure: Rurality, Northern-ness, and Gender

The people we have met have been fairly friendly, although I still feel self-conscious and an outcast in town. It's not hard. It seems everyone knows everyone. On my 2nd day here I went to a property management place to look for an apartment and the woman behind the desk asked me where we'd moved from and I said "Vancouver." She then looked me right in the eye and said, "I hate Vancouver." Dear God. (Personal journal, Oct. 31, 1995)

Introduction

In order to effectively discuss women's lives in Mackenzie, one must examine Mackenzie's place in three different contexts: in terms of rurality, feminist geography, and as a single-industry town. What are its specific issues of interest to feminist geographers? How does Mackenzie's status as a single-industry town affect the lives of the women who live there? Before we can answer either of these questions, we must first pose the question: where does Mackenzie fall in the rural-urban continuum?

Rurality

When I moved from Vancouver to Mackenzie, I experienced a profound disruption in my binary classification of 'cities' and 'small towns.' I knew that the place I had just left was a city, but Mackenzie did not fit my preconceived notion of a small town. For one thing, the houses were all too close together, and they all looked like they had been built at exactly the same time. Where were the cute little heritage houses? Also, where were the farms? For me, having grown up in Langley, BC, I equated small town with rural. It was a real shock to me to understand that there were no real farms in Mackenzie, aside from small hobby farms out in Gantahaz.

In "Whither Rural Studies," Cloke (1985) notes that part of the difficulty in pursuing rural studies is the lack of agreement about what constitutes rurality. He argues that the term 'rural' often seems to be synonymous with 'non-urban.' Similarly, in Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places, a study of changing rural communities in upstate New York, Fitchen uses the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of rural as an example of the vagueness, uncertainty and tendency toward defining the rural by what it is not: "The official definition assigned to rural America is a definition by exclusion: Essentially, that which is not metropolitan America is rural America . . . . The very existence of a rural America is thus contingent upon an urban America" (1991, p. 246-7). Therefore, rurality is seen to have no characteristics of its own, only those that are in opposition to characteristics of the urban.

Because the rural is defined in opposition to the urban, there is a certain amount of difficulty that comes with trying to place the single-industry town. The single-industry town is not rural in the same way that a farming community is rural, but it shares with the farming community the fact that its identity is defined as non-urban. In other words, the urban is what is seen as normal, and the non-urban is seen as deficient. What is actually difference is perceived as lack.

Compounding this problem of terminology is the fact that not only is the term rural contentious, but so, too, is the term 'urban.' In Life Spaces: Gender, Household, Employment, Andrew and Moore Milroy (1991) use the term 'urban structure' when discussing a variety of geographical locations, including both large cities, such as Montreal, and small towns, such as the resource towns studied

by Luxton (1980). This creates difficulties. We accept that the rural is often defined as what is not urban. Given that we cannot even agree on a definition of urban, it is little wonder that we cannot agree on what constitutes the rural.

Another problem with using the terms rural or rurality at all is that they often seem to imply a homogenous and static entity (Cloke, 1991). This can lead to confusion when one is searching for solutions to rural problems. A solution to a social, economic or environmental problem in one rural community may not be appropriate for another (Collier, 1984). For example, First Nations rural communities have their own social context, which is different from that of a non-First Nations rural community. A single-industry town whose economic prosperity depends on the current price of pulp will have different issues than a farming community, even though both may be described as rural.

Just as a woman is defined as what she is not (i.e., a man), the rural is usually defined as what it is not (i.e., the urban). I originally viewed Mackenzie as rural, which stemmed from a lack of better terminology and understanding of the need to differentiate between different non-urban settings. I initially carried these misunderstandings and deficits in terminology into my work. Upon further reflection, instead of merely settling for the inadequate label of rural, a more fitting classification might be 'northern single-industry town.'

Northern-ness

However, this use of the term 'northern' in the label 'northern single-industry town' is also problematic, albeit in a different way than the term 'rural.'

Our concept of northern-ness is also a matter of perception. In terms of physical geography, Mackenzie is actually closer to the centre of the province than to the northern end of the province. However, the term northern in British Columbia often tends to apply to any town north of Hope. The term, therefore, has multiple connotations. For someone from Vancouver, on the southern coast of British Columbia, the word northern may carry with it an aura of the frontier: sparsely populated and, of course, cold. To someone who lives in one of the towns in the Central Cariboo, the term northern may be applied proudly, something which marks the town as different from the Lower Mainland. For someone who lives in Fort McMurray, the application of the term northern to a town such as Mackenzie may seem inaccurate, given that Mackenzie is several hundred kilometres south of the BC-Yukon border. The term northern, therefore, is completely relative in this instance.

In addition, the term 'north' is more often a signifier than the signified (Shields, 1991). The symbolism of the north is difficult to name, but one knows it when one sees it. These symbols include tough, sturdy four-wheel-drive vehicles, plaid flannel shirts, Sorel boots, toques, and, of course, snow for as far as the eye can see. While each of these images offers the excitement of romance and possibility, there is also a flip side to each that can remind us of some of the harsher realities that accompany such fantasies. For example, acres of untouched snow may speak of unspoiled natural beauty, or, to the woman at home with three small children and no vehicle, the same snow may represent an obstacle to getting to the grocery store. Fiske (1996), in her essay "And the Young Man Did Go

North (Unfortunately): Reflections on Issues in Gender and the Academy," writes of the north as "[a] space where rivers are dammed against all odds in the name of the collective southern interests, and women's liberation is damned in the name of frontier individualism" (9).

Shields argues that what he terms the "True North Strong and Free" (from the line in Canada's national anthem) is

> a masculine-gendered, liminal zone of *rites de passage* and re-creative freedom and escape. It is a resource and economic hinterland which is simultaneously incorporated in a social spatialisation [sic] as a mythic heartland. (1991, p. 163)

This dualism is a strong recurring theme in the story of Mackenzie as it is lived out in the day-to-day lives of its inhabitants. People who live in Mackenzie may joke about the cold, the snow, and the perceived lack of sophistication, but at the same time, it is seen as a badge of honour (see Appendix E, "You Know You Live in Mackenzie When..."). The ability to withstand temperatures of –40 C is something to be proud of, and the town collectively admires itself for its toughness. Southerners who complain about the cold are scoffed at, (usually) discreetly. Shields asserts that in Canada, the North is an important source for "readily understood metaphors, jokes, images and allegorical narratives" (1991, p. 172). He goes on to cite the SCTV comedy team of Bob and Doug Mackenzie, who "lampoon myths of the North by appearing as two beer-drinking bumpkins in red-checked 'lumberjack shirts' . . . wearing toques (knitted hats)" (172). The potent image of Bob and Doug Mackenzie causes us to ask, what place do women play in the archetypes of the north?

Part of the mythological space of the north is that of the frontier, the as-yet unchallenged (and unconquered). This act of conquering/taming the frontier has been infused with a masculine meaning that has continued to inform our archetypes to the present day (McClintock, 1986), although many feminist historians, like Sandra L. Myres (1982), have argued against this representation. For example, in Jeffrey's explorations of frontier women who travelled from the eastern United States to the west, the role of the pioneer woman travelling on the wagon train was one of seemingly paradoxical requirements. At certain points, the women would need to be "ingenious . . . healthy, and strong" in order to survive the journey west (1998, p. 24). At other points, they would need to use their feminine powers of peacemaking and diplomacy in order to ensure that "contentious behaviour" did not threaten the unity of the wagon train (1998, p. 24). The major strengths needed by these women were the so-called masculine qualities of "strength, resilience, and resourcefulness" in order to survive the trip, and the so-called female qualities of nurturance and patience in order to ensure a smooth, peaceful journey for everyone (Jeffrey, 1998, p. 25).

The northern frontier only works as it does because it marks a border between the safe and the dangerous, the placid and the adventurous, the domestic and the wild, and, finally, the urban and the rural. Is it possible that women who live in northern BC may also feel that they need to embody certain 'male qualities' and certain 'female qualities?' Or have they created a space of their own that embodies qualities that fall into neither of these traditional categories?

As we can see from the discussion above, the term 'northern' is often a matter of perception, and can be contentious when used to label a community. In addition, the term 'single-industry' may also be a misnomer. Certainly the main industry of Mackenzie is timber; however, to call Mackenzie a single-industry town is to fall prey to the mistake of overlooking all of the non-timber industry work that exists in town. It also excludes women, as the majority of women in town do not work for the mill, and either work outside the home in another sector, such as the health care, education, or service sector, or work in the home as a mother or homemaker. In addition, because the timber industry is suffering from a downswing at the moment, Mackenzie is attempting to expand into other industries, such as tourism, mining, and home-based businesses.

Conversely, because of the advances in technology that have accompanied the past twenty years, areas such as Mackenzie, though physically isolated, are more connected to other parts of the province and country, through such means as the Internet, cable, and satellites than at any previous time. There is some strength to this argument, but it must be acknowledged that at the present it is much easier and less expensive to communicate with those in other communities than in the last two decades, and to at least observe, if not directly participate in, events that take place outside of the community. However, this improvement in connections to the 'outside world' can have positive *and* negative aspects for residents of Mackenzie. As citizens of isolated communities observe events that occur in other, less isolated parts of the country, they are certainly better informed than their counterparts were two decades ago. However, these technological

improvements may also create a sense of longing and being 'left out' of these activities that are merely observed from a distance (Nichols, Sexton, and Bayer, 1976).

Feminist Geography

In the early 1980s, the argument being put forth by many geographers was that *where* events occur has an influence on *the way* that these events unfold, and accordingly, where we live determines certain ways in which our lives are shaped (Rose, 1993). Feminist geographers have recently begun to take this concept further, arguing that men and women experience space and place differently because the spaces that women and men occupy are, in fact, different (McDowell and Sharp, 1999; Seager and Domosh, 2001).

There are several ways in which feminist geographers explore why space and place are different for women and men. Radical feminist geography suggests that women and men tend to value space differently. In addition, radical feminism also focuses on issues of women's reproductive capacity and roles as mothers (Johnson, Huggins and Jacobs, 2000). This can inform our examinations of a place like Mackenzie by analyzing the town in terms of whether there are sidewalks in town which facilitate the use of a stroller or baby carriage, whether there are child-friendly spaces such as playgrounds, and whether these playgrounds are safe and accessible.

Socialist feminists, on the other hand, tend to be focused on women's place within the means of production, the interactions of class and patriarchy, and

the role of production in the creation of specific places (Johnson, Huggins, and Jacobs, 2000). For example, a socialist feminist examining Mackenzie might focus on the way that the town is structured around its main industry, in which men are the primary employees, and women tend to work in the home (Statistics Canada, 1996).

In a similar vein, Rose contends that "[for] white feminists, one of the most oppressive aspects of everyday spaces is the division between public space and private space" (1993, p. 17). The domain of men tends to be the public sphere, or the workplace. This is especially true in northern resource towns, which are dominated by industries that hire primarily men. Women tend to be more confined to the private sphere, and as a result, tend to be isolated from one another in individual single-family dwellings. Of course, the isolation of women in the home is not restricted to any one type of community; suburban women who work in the home may also feel that they are isolated within their single-family dwelling. In suburbia, they may experience a range of barriers that share the qualities with the 'suburb' of Mackenzie. However these may appear to be social, they are nonetheless indicated by physical markers, such as fences between houses and the distance between the street and the front door of the house. This domestic isolation is even more acute for farm women, who are physically isolated by greater distances between neighbours.

It is this quality of women's lives, both social and spatial, with which feminist geographers must grapple. It is important when studying geography within a feminist framework to not only examine the ways in which environments

affect women's lives, but also to explore the ways in which women actively influence their environment (Andrew and Moore Milroy, 1991). It is wrong to envision women as passive beings who are buffeted by their geographical circumstances. It is more helpful to study the interplay between women and their surroundings, to look at the ways in which women both adapt to their circumstances and make their environments adapt to their needs.

In addition to physical surroundings, feminist geographers are also concerned with women's routines and everyday activities. Rose writes that women's everyday routines are always important to feminists, though they may seem banal, because "[t]he everyday is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created—and contested" (Rose 1993, p. 17). Thus, the study of women's routines and everyday activities has been the basis for several socialist feminist research projects, especially Luxton's More Than A Labour of Love (1980) and Oberhauser's "The Home as 'Field': Households and Homework in Rural Appalachia" (1997). By recording women's daily activities, researchers are given evidence of the ways that the patriarchy manifests itself in specific situations. By understanding the routine, we can understand the system underlying the routine, and it is only by understanding systems of oppression that we can change them.

What About Race?

Like many other Canadians, my ethnic/racial background is complicated. My mother is the daughter of an Indonesian woman and a Chinese man; she was born and raised in Singapore. She moved to Canada in 1970, met my father while

they were both teaching in Prince Rupert, married him, and gave birth to me, all in the span of four years. One of my earliest memories is standing with my father and younger brother, watching my mother become a Canadian citizen. My mother's parents and sister also immigrated to Canada when I was very young, and for my entire childhood, my maternal grandparents and aunt lived within walking distance from my house. My family celebrated Chinese New Year, ate Chinese food, and spoke a mixture of Chinese, English, and Malay. My father, on the other hand, was born and raised in Maple Ridge, BC, to English-German parents. Although they lived a little bit further away, we also visited my father's family frequently, and I learned a great deal about the history of that side of the family from my father's parents, who had deep connections with rural farm life on the Canadian Prairies. Despite my occasional ambivalence towards being biracial—the cliches about feeling as though one does not fit in completely in either world are true, at least for me—I have always been aware of both of my racial heritages, and generally proud of both.

When I moved to Mackenzie from Vancouver, one of the first things I did after checking into the hotel was go through the Mackenzie phone book to see how many Chinese people there were in town. I found one family listed. This was a sobering thought for me: I had moved from a city with a very large Chinese population to a town where it looked like I would make up a significant percentage of the East Asian population. I felt vaguely worried about discrimination, not fitting in, and, paradoxically, about people not realizing that I had Asian roots and assuming that I was completely Caucasian.

As the days passed, I gradually discovered more and more about the town's racial makeup, a subject which fascinated me, as it was unlike any other place I had ever lived. In addition to the large Caucasian population, there was (and still is) a large South Asian (Indo-Canadian) population. There were a few aboriginal students at the high school, but they were bussed in from McLeod Lake, and the First Nations population in town was non-existent. Most of the town's racial tensions that I observed at the time seemed to be between whites and Indo-Canadians. At one point, I heard one neighbourhood in Mackenzie described as 'the brown side of town,' which horrified me. I railed in my journal against the racism that I heard and saw, none of it (as far as I knew), directed at me, but nonetheless deeply upsetting: "I hate feeling so different here . . . I feel like I'm trapped in some kind of hillbilly nightmare . . . . we have to get out of here and it has to be soon" (Personal journal, Jan. 24, 1996).

I wonder now if one of the ways that I coped with staying in Mackenzie was to submerge the Chinese part of me and focus on the non-Chinese part. It was not very difficult to do; as I was so far from my family, I no longer heard Chinese spoken, ate Chinese food, or listened to my mother's stories about Singapore. I rarely saw the one other Chinese family in town (they owned the laundromat). Of the very few friends I had in town, none were Indo-Canadian.

I also wonder now if this is a strategy that other women of colour employ when surrounded by primarily white women. For example, in the group interview, K. was the only woman there (besides me) who was not white. She mentioned her heritage very briefly when introducing herself, but never once

referred to race or ethnicity in the interview. No one else in the group brought up these topics either. I strongly believe that the topic of race would have been brought up if the racial makeup of the group had been different, if, for example, the group had been made up entirely of women of colour.

I have not really addressed the issue of race in my thesis, although this sense of disconnection that I described above has certainly informed many aspects of the work, from the choice of topic to my approach to the research. Socialist feminism and radical feminism have sometimes been criticized for neglecting issues of race and ethnicity within their frameworks, and these are the primary lenses through which I have chosen to address this work. Perhaps if one were to examine Mackenzie in terms of race or ethnic issues, a postmodernist or poststructuralist theoretical framework would be best; however, I have chosen not to explore these issues in great depth within my thesis, and have also chosen not to employ these frameworks.

As stated at the end of the previous section, it is only by understanding systems of oppression that we can change them. In order to make a change, one must make a choice in order to limit oneself to actions that are doable and not too broad. I have done so as a woman in Mackenzie, reflecting on the issue of gender, not race, in the town. From the beginning, my reflections on Mackenzie, my feelings of disconnection and dissatisfaction, have led me to feminist theory.

Feminist Theory

There is a need for theory as something that takes women's daily experiences into account and then attempts to make systematic links between women's individual, daily experiences and the structures in our society (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990). "[T]heory must be informed by our interaction with our physical and social environment, by our practice. In other words, theory is formulated not simply by formal research, but also according to our daily experience" (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990, p. 11).

Part of feminist theory relies on the idea that women's experiences are different from men's experiences, and that these experiences, and the difference between these experiences, matter. By interviewing four women about their daily lives, their memories of moving to Mackenzie, and their feelings about the town, I do not expect that they will represent the entire range of women's experiences. However, their stories are important, as we begin to piece together links between the individual woman in Mackenzie and the social and economic structures around her.

It is a mistake to think that there is no connection between what we do in our daily lives and how society operates and functions. "The famous feminist slogan 'the personal is political' has had important theoretical implications. Perhaps most significantly, it has meant that individual female experiences count" (Armstrong and Armstrong 1990, p. 12-13). Clearly, Luxton felt that the experiences of the individual women she interviewed for More Than A Labour of Love counted. In her study, Luxton interviewed fifty-two Flin Flon women,

asking them about their day-to-day experiences in order to put together a picture of what life is like for these women who work in their homes. At one point, after having read the completed manuscript for the book, one woman commented,

> You be sure and tell it like it is. A book about what women do at home would be good. It's true that most people ignore housework. They tend to think housewives are a bit not all there. You write all this down, what I'm telling you and make sure you know what being a housewife is really like. (1980, p. 41)

The words of this woman emphasize the importance of documenting women's lives as they are experienced, and documenting the perceptions of the women whom we ask to participate in our studies. Women's lived experience often goes unreported, silent, somehow under the radar of what is considered 'important' in society.

Like Luxton, Smith's standpoint theory concerns itself with the experiences of women whose experience has been situated "outside the institutional order that governs contemporary advanced capitalist societies" (1987, p. 152). According to Smith, it is the standpoint of men that has been represented as universal, therefore negating the experiences of women or viewing them as 'abnormal,' since they do not correspond to men's experiences, which are represented as 'normal.' By interviewing women and facilitating the expression of their stories, we can begin to undo "the brutal history of women's silencing" (1987) in an attempt to define an alternative standpoint: the standpoint of women.

More recently, experiential-based research has moved beyond description of other women's experiences to self-reflection of the researcher. How do the

researcher's experiences affect the research? This question has been posed by Brookes (1992), among others. In a letter to a friend, she writes

> As you know, for a number of years I have struggled with the question of first, *how* to put myself as researcher into the text, and second, *why* I think it is theoretically significant to do so. Dissatisfied with the current trend which uses introductions as a way of adding author intent and experience to a text, I have struggled with what it means to theorize from my own experience: as a researcher, with all kinds of informing social experience, shaping the materials and matters which I critically assess and describe. (1992, p. 158)

Brookes then goes on to discuss the importance she feels that actual autobiography plays in her research and writing. As a survivor of incest, she writes about how her experiences of abuse have informed the ways that she does research, and the way that she has approached her Ph.D. dissertation. She is heavily influenced by the work of Grumet (1991), who writes about the importance of recognizing that narrative and autobiography are not fixed: "Every telling is a partial prevarication . . . . Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so someone can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can" (69). Telling our stories and hearing the stories of others is important not only so that we can see how we fit into social frameworks, but also so that we can see how we fit ourselves into these social frameworks.

Although there are many different feminist approaches to research, one theme is consistent throughout all of them: the necessity for women to be included where they have previously been excluded. How this is to be achieved

varies from theorist to theorist, but the common thread is the creation of new systems in which women have strong, clear voices.

Conclusion

Geographers working with radical and socialist feminism look to the creation of new systems in particular ways. Both radical and socialist feminists are focused on making women visible within their geographical contexts, and emphasizing the fact that women have often been rendered invisible and, as a result, perceived as serving no particular function other than reproductive, whether it is through the production of children or of labour in the household. Both radical and socialist feminists want to make a distinction between the ways in which space is shaped for women and men.

All of these distinctions between women and men's use of space is, of course, relevant to the way in which town planning is carried out. It stands to reason that if men and women use space differently, then in a town with a population made up of both men and women, attention would be paid to the different ways in which both genders use space. Accordingly, that town planning would consider both men's and women's needs with regards to space. In his 1986 literature review and annotated bibliography of Canadian single-industry communities, Robson notes that in order to ensure quality of life within single-industry towns, "it is more important to interpret the needs of the inhabitants rather than simply provide traditional community services" (1986, p. 54).

However, the reality is that all too often, women's use of space has been disregarded, and towns have been planned without women in mind. Robson goes on to describe the demographic makeup of most Canadian single-industry towns as male-dominated, with young families and few older residents. He then states that "if services were to be geared towards the inhabitants' needs, they would be planned for a male dominated, familied population" (1986, p. 55). In other words, the town needs to cater to men and families, but where do women fit into this scenario? They are definitely not men, so they must be included in the "familied population." By neglecting to address women's needs specifically in a discussion about quality of life, Robson ignores and perpetuates the system that caused the original planners of Mackenzie to shape the town into what has been consistently shown to be a very male environment. Male spatial needs and uses are regarded as universal, and what ensues is a town planned by men into which women fit at best uneasily. This creates the question of how we can proceed in our research, which will be addressed in the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Methods

[W]hile I was at the library I finally found that National Film Board documentary about Mackenzie that I've been looking for for ages. . . . It was just amazing to hear these words that I've thought a thousand times since I've moved to Mackenzie articulated by other women. They expressed feelings of loneliness, that it was hard to meet people, that they were bored and there was nothing to do, that they were snowed in and unable to really go anywhere, that they resented their spouses for being able to go off to work and see other people there and have something to do. The only differences between them and me were that they all had little kids to keep them busy, while I have substitute teaching on a sporadic basis. I almost felt like crying tears of complete and utter empathy and recognition and just plain relief that I am not the only person who hates it in Mackenzie. Sometimes I feel like I'm so ungrateful, but it's nice to know I'm not the only one who complains. (Personal journal, Apr. 1, 1996)

Introduction

Not only is feminist theory predicated on assumptions of gender-specific experience, it calls for experientially-based research grounded in women's social and political agendas. It is around a basic assumption of experiential difference that this thesis is built. My assertion is that the experience of living in a single-industry town in northern BC, specifically Mackenzie, is not the same for women as it is for men (Flax, 1993, p. 81). This chapter will outline a description of several different types of feminist methodologies, as well as the methods I used in conducting the research.

Feminist Methodologies

'I' Am Here: Situating Myself as Researcher

Traditionally, students have been discouraged from writing in the first person, especially when writing a formal 'academic' document, such as a thesis. The reasons for this proscription of self-referential disclosure on the part of the

author are several. First, traditional social science strives to present itself as 'objective.' By making the author's voice as unnoticeable as possible, it is assumed that the possibility for bias is lessened. Second, the author's experiences are not usually included in the research material, and the real interest is placed on observing the experiences of 'research subjects.'

In contrast to research which focuses only on the experiences of those who are being researched, feminist research has attempted to bridge the traditional gap between the researched and the researcher. "In developing new theoretical frameworks, feminists have made their own perspective, and the connections to subject, method, and practice, explicit," write Armstrong and Armstrong (1990:12). Taking into account this need to make visible the connections between the researcher and the researched, it is my belief that it is not only desirable for authors to situate themselves in the context of their work, but it is also necessary for them to do so. By hiding her or his own voice, personality, and experiences, the author creates a false picture for the reader. This is accomplished in many ways, one of which is strict adherence to third-person writing. This false picture shows only the researcher's image of his or her 'subjects,' but no researcher. Someone is being written about, but who is doing the writing?

In an attempt to answer the question of who is doing the writing, feminist research has tended to favour use of the first person as a strong critique of the 'silent researcher' prevalent in so much non-feminist research (Reinharz, 1993, p. 258). By using the first person, feminists begin to remove some of the barriers that traditional paradigms have constructed between the researcher and the

researched. The removal of these barriers has frequently led to explicitly subjective methods of research (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990, p. 12).[6]

I believe that it is very important for researchers to situate themselves in their writing. It is important for readers to be aware of the experience and perspective that authors bring to their writing. We can no longer pretend that we are merely impartial observers, because impartial observation is next to impossible. It is an unavoidable fact that our own experiences shape our perceptions. Therefore, it is necessary is that we acknowledge how our experiences and perceptions affect our work. "Feminists have differed from other theorists in stating their goals, not in having goals" (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1990, p. 12). Bias is always present; therefore, it is important to acknowledge rather than ignore it.

It is these beliefs about the need for subjectivity and explicitness about who is doing the research that have led me to locate myself in my thesis. Because my research deals with a community in which I was a resident for a period of time, I believe that it is important for me to acknowledge that I am not coming to this research as a complete stranger to Mackenzie, but rather as someone who is already familiar with the community (as will be discussed later in my methods chapter). Because of this previous relationship with the town, I possessed valuable knowledge of what it is like to live there before beginning this thesis; on the other hand, because my experiences there were not entirely positive, I also

[6] Feminists are not the only researchers who have struggled with these issues of methodology. Researchers in disciplines such as anthropology and sociology have also been working towards changing methods, in much the same way as feminist researchers (Fox, 1991; Marcus, 1986; Van Manen, 1997).

brought some preconceptions and negative bias to the research. At the same time, I also feel that it is important to acknowledge that because I no longer live in Mackenzie, I am not coming to this research as a current member of the community. It is important to acknowledge this liminal state which I occupy in my role as researcher. I am familiar with the community and was part of it at one point, so I am, in some ways, an 'insider,' but as I have not lived there for several years, and therefore, I am also an 'outsider.'

What is Feminist Methodology?

One of the main aspects of feminist research is that many feminists feel that such research must be action-oriented (Reinharz, 1993). In other words, research must be accompanied by change. Feminist research must work to change the status quo, rather than merely describe or demystify it (Allen and Baber, 1992).

There are many different methods by which change may be effected, however, and there is argument over which is the best method. Feminist research has been critiqued by feminists and non-feminists alike for being, in some cases, too subjective and, in other instances, too objective. What, then, are the best methods for feminist research?

There is, of course, no one best method for feminist research. As Harding points out, methods can only be feminist if they are used to explore women and gender (1987). In "As the World Turns: New Horizons in Feminist Geographic Methodologies," Hanson discusses the basis of feminist method(ologie)s as the understanding that both the researcher and the research participants have

something to offer in the research process (1997). She acknowledges that to some this might seem like common sense, but points out that "what is one person's common sense is another person's 'Eureka!'" (1997, p. 122).

One of the strengths of feminism is the way that it embraces difference and acknowledges that there is very rarely one right way to do anything. Context is important, and this is essential to remember when we are doing research as feminists. To attempt to fit anyone into a pre-determined category is to set oneself up for failure as a researcher. Judith Stacey's work Brave New Families (1990) is an excellent example of a research project which ended up being completely different from what the researcher had envisioned in the beginning. To be a feminist researcher, then, is to maintain flexibility. It is unlikely that research will proceed perfectly from beginning to end, with no surprises in between. In fact, the very fact that there are surprises during the research process ensures that it is a dynamic learning process for the researcher and participants.

The Research Process

Doing research, particularly with human participants, is always a learning process, the direction of which is often unpredictable. However, even if the research goes in a completely unpredictable and undesirable way, it does not mean that the project is unsuccessful, because the researcher can then decide what was learned from the process of doing research, and decide how to apply this new knowledge to the next project, or make recommendations to the next researcher who works in a similar area of study.

It is in this light that I now look back on this particular project. Although many of the women's responses in their interviews were not what I had anticipated, they did show me where my biases were and forced me to take a very different approach to my topic. For example, as mentioned in the Preface, I had originally thought that what women in Mackenzie really needed was a women's centre. At the end of the project, I realize that although a women's centre might be a valuable addition to Mackenzie, there are probably other issues which are more central to the wants and needs of the women I interviewed, some of them as unexpected and simple as the reinstallation of a children's slide in the Recreation Centre.

Data Collection

Because this research was intended to be as participant-sensitive as possible, I intended to rely on the contributions of the participants through both individual and group interviews. In order to recruit participants, I posted advertisements (Appendix A) at various locations in Mackenzie (e.g., the post office). The advertisements outlined the research project and asked women who were interested in participating to contact me. The only requirement was that they were over 19 and had lived in Mackenzie for fewer than five years. One of the drawbacks to using self-selection in participants, rather than a random selection of women, is that studies have shown that when participants self-select, it can lead to bias in the participant sample (Reinharz, 1993). This was one of the problems with the No Life For a Woman film, as we can see by the complaints against the

film in Veemes (1985). It would have been ideal to have a random selection of women participate in the interview; however, I feel that it would have been unfeasible, due to my location outside the community. In essence, I was not in a position where I could afford to choose participants; rather, it was a situation where I had to accept whoever was willing to be a part of the project. However, in the group of women I interviewed, there was a variety of opinions about Mackenzie, and the attitudes expressed ranged from negative to positive.

Exactly four women contacted me within two weeks of the advertisements being posted, and, after receiving information letters (Appendix B), all agreed to participate in the project. Each participant signed a consent form (Appendix C) to indicate her consent to being interviewed and the information being used for research purposes.

Eventually, the dynamics of the original group who contacted me underwent one significant change. Without contacting me, one participant actually left town within one month of joining the project. I discovered this when I called this woman's (shared) residence to set up an initial meeting in which I would meet with the participants, detail my project, and give them a consent form to read and sign. The person who answered the phone told me that the woman had left town suddenly to return to her home town. I feel that this incident, which necessitated a search for another participant and created minor difficulties for me as a researcher, is a good example of the transient nature of much of the population of Mackenzie and other towns like it.

After the participants had been selected and the consent process had been completed with each one, I set up a group interview at the home of one of the women. It was very difficult to set up a time during which all women could be present; there were several group interview times set up which I eventually had to cancel, because of the women's various conflicting commitments (generally family matters such as illness or activities). I finally set up a meeting at a time convenient to all the women, but on this day there was a sudden snowfall, and on my way from Prince George to Mackenzie, I had a car accident. The group interview had to be cancelled once again, and it was some time before I could set up another time agreeable to everyone involved. This time, I had the added problem of travel during snowy weather, as I had decided (with the strong encouragement of my thesis committee) not to drive to Mackenzie during inclement weather. Eventually, a mutually agreeable interview time was agreed upon, and I took alternative transportation (a ride with a friend in a four-wheel drive vehicle and the Greyhound bus) to and from Mackenzie. I believe that the difficulties I experienced with transportation to the interview site illustrate some of the difficulties with which northern residents in general are faced, especially during the winter. These difficulties are also faced by Mackenzie residents when they need to access health care or other services which may only be available in Prince George.

My intention in the group interview was to facilitate a discussion in which the four women would feel comfortable generating concerns about support services for women who are new to Mackenzie. The women met in the home of

one of the participants, where the interview was tape recorded. This was the first time the participants had all met, and it was discovered that two of the women actually knew each other through their children. The small population of Mackenzie made it a likelihood (and in this case, a reality) that these women would know each other outside of this research project. Originally, I was concerned that this might cause a certain amount of self-censorship among the participants, but after the interview I did not feel that this had been much of a problem. On the whole, I found the group interview to be a positive experience, during which the women appeared to speak freely and with respect for each other.

Before the group interview started, I told the participants that there were a number of topics that I hoped to touch on during the discussion. The questions I had prepared were as follows:

- Where did you see the poster advertising for participants for this project?
- Why did you decide to join the project?
- What do you hope will come out of the project?
- Where did you grow up? [I wanted to know whether satisfaction with Mackenzie was higher for women who had grown up in towns of a similar size.]
- Tell me about where you lived before you moved to Mackenzie. How would you describe it? [I wanted to know whether the women would describe it as urban or rural.] Did you like living there?
- Why did you move to Mackenzie?
- What did you think of Mackenzie when you first moved here?
- What did your family think / other people you moved here with?
- Who did you meet when you first moved here, and how did you meet them?
- What kinds of things did you do when you first moved here? [for example, groups, activities, church]
- What kinds of things do you do now?
- When I first moved here, I spent a lot of time at the library. Is there any place like that for you, that you spent a lot of time at when you first moved here? [I wanted to see which places in town the women felt were important to them.]

- Do you go to different places now? Are things different for you now? [I wanted to know if/how the women's patterns of movement had changed in the time they had lived in Mackenzie.]
- How did you meet people when you first moved here?
- Tell me about the friends that you have where you lived before and here. [I wanted to know about the kinds of friends and the friend-making process for women who had moved to Mackenzie.]
- Who do you talk to about things that are important to you?
- What kinds of things do you do with your friends here?
- What health services do you know about in town? Do you think people use them very much?

Instead of reading all of these questions to the women, I simply said that I wanted to ask them questions about how they had found out about the project and why they had decided to participate, their experiences when they first moved to Mackenzie, how they felt about Mackenzie now, and their feelings about the social and health services offered in town. In this manner, the conversation progressed naturally from one topic to another, and the women felt more free to talk about issues that did not necessarily 'answer' one of the questions I had prepared. I found that the women answered most of the questions I had prepared with either no direct questioning from me, or only slight prompting on my part.

After the group interview, my intention was to conduct individual semi-structured interviews, in which the women would be encouraged to talk at length about their experiences as newcomers to Mackenzie as they related to the areas of concern raised by the group interview. The rationale behind the individual interviews was mainly to encourage the women to talk about issues that they had not felt comfortable discussing with the other women present. However, I found that little was said in the individual interviews that was not said in the group interview, and the information in the individual interviews mostly confirmed what

was said in the group interview. Therefore, on the advice of my advisor, I ended up sending all the participants a letter along with a copy of the thesis draft, explaining my reasons for leaving out the individual interviews (see Appendix D).

Data Coding and Analysis

The women involved in the interview are identified by their first initial, or, in the case of two women whose names both start with K, one of the women is identified as K2. Before deciding on this coding, I assured the women that they would have anonymity. In retrospect, I should have asked if any of them wanted to be identified, but I was focused on assuring them of anonymity, given that the town is small and names would be easily recognized unless changed or put into initial form.

The first step I followed with regards to the group interview tape was to transcribe the entire conversation. I used a Dictaphone to transcribe the tape, which allowed me to slow the tape down if necessary in order to catch quickly spoken phrases. The only problem with this was that slowing the tape down distorted the women's voices. Since all of our voices were similarly-pitched, sometimes it was very difficult to distinguish between speakers, but this could generally be determined through context, or multiple listenings.

While transcribing the interview, I transcribed not only words, but also pauses, actions (such as laughter or clapping), and changes in tone (speaking more slowly, more quickly, or more loudly, for example) in square brackets. If someone placed more emphasis on a word, I italicized it in the transcript. This

helped me to retain a sense of the interview outside of the words alone when the transcript was on paper.

After the interview was transcribed and I had a hard copy, I read it over several times in order to familiarize myself with the women's words on paper. I had already listened to the tape several times, which allowed me to hear the women's emphasis and tone, and now I could focus on the words the women used. I then colour-coded the transcript according to the several themes I saw emerging during the conversation: friendships and meeting people, health services, shopping, housing, the economy, and resources for mothers with young children. These themes, in turn, informed the ways that I examined the other two documents, the Task Force Report, and the film, that formed the basis of the rest of my research for this project.

Using the method of data triangulation (Reinharz, 1993), I approached the analysis of the interview in a deductive manner, and the analysis of the Task Force Report and the film using an inductive approach. The interview was an examination of women from the most recent period in Mackenzie's history, whereas the previous two documents examined women from the 1970s. In this manner, I was able to look at women in a single geographical location over a period of time. In the documents from the 1970s, the women who were interviewed were the women for whom the town was originally built, even if it was not their needs the planners had in mind. In the interview from the 1990s, the women being interviewed were very different from these original women of Mackenzie. Some of the women I interviewed were employed outside the home;

not all of them had children, and one was single; their situations were different, and their needs were also different, even though there were some similarities that spanned the two eras. In the next chapter, I will discuss the three of these documents and compare the themes and issues found through this data triangulation.

Chapter Five: "Let's Get Out of Here!": Three Different Views of Mackenzie

[W]hile I was at the library I finally found that National Film Board documentary about Mackenzie that I've been looking for for ages. . . . It was just amazing to hear these words that I've thought a thousand times since I've moved to Mackenzie articulated by other women. They expressed feelings of loneliness, that it was hard to meet people, that they were bored and there was nothing to do, that they were snowed in and unable to really go anywhere, that they resented their spouses for being able to go off to work and see other people there and have something to do. The only differences between them and me were that they all had little kids to keep them busy, while I have substitute teaching on a sporadic basis. I almost felt like crying tears of complete and utter empathy and recognition and just plain relief that I am not the only person who hates it in Mackenzie. Sometimes I feel like I'm so ungrateful, but it's nice to know I'm not the only one who complains. (Personal journal, Apr. 1, 1996)

Northern British Columbia Task Force Report on Single Industry Resource Communities: Grassroots Activism

Introduction

The Northern British Columbia Task Force Report on Single Industry Resource Communities was written in 1977 by a group of women researchers in northern BC. The report looks at the quality of life of women living in the single-industry towns of Kitimat, Fraser Lake, and Mackenzie, and is comprised of smaller reports about each of these towns. The general introduction to the report states that

> [t]hese reports reflect our traditional concerns of home and family. In exploring these concerns we have outlined the difficulty of maintaining a family in a community that women have had no part in planning, and of meeting our own and our children's needs in a community designed for employed male workers. These reports also challenge a system that demands we fill only those traditional roles and at all costs. We share a real concern that unless our experiences are taken into account the development plans of industry and government will continue to deliver programmes that reinforce women's role as marginal, dependent, and unimportant. (2)

The Task Force Report represented a significant piece of research which at the time made inquiries into an area formerly accorded little or no interest: the lives of women in 'instant' northern BC single-industry towns. The women who compiled the report recognized that although women lived in these towns alongside the men who worked in the mills and mines, very little had been done to ensure that the towns were suitable for the lives of both men *and* women. For example, Kitimat's town plan included a section which mentioned covered arcades for shopping. However, when the town centre was built, there was no sign of these covered arcades, leaving women with small children to struggle in the often inclement, cold weather (Task Force Report, 1977, p. 16). It is a long, hilly walk from the neighbourhoods to the town centre.

The Women

The researchers from Kitimat describe themselves as

> women who work in their homes, are mothers, and are at various times employed in their community. We are not sociologists or anthropologists, and we have made no pretense at being academic. In trying to set down the life experience of women living in our town, it seemed only logical to us that we should turn not to "experts" (who are also usually men) for information, but to ourselves, our friends, and our neighbours . . . . (11)

In the Fraser Lake report, we get a less clear picture of a group of women who worked together on the project, and more of a sense (at least from the Acknowledgements section) that this was a cooperative town effort between many townspeople, male and female. The coordinator of the Fraser Lake section of the report thanks "members of the Village Council, mine management and employees, people in business, homemakers, and the many others who

contributed to this report" (41). Finally, in the Acknowledgements section of the Mackenzie Report, several individual women are thanked and mentioned, as well as "all the women in the North who shared feelings, stories, hopes and dreams" (72).

The introduction to the Task Force Report as a whole emphasizes the fact that the women who did the research and interviewed women in the single-industry towns were themselves residents of these towns, and the report strives to make it clear that these researchers and members of the Task Force were not 'outsiders' who came from elsewhere to study women's lives, but that these researchers were at the same time the researched, and were participants who shared life experience with the women whom they interviewed (5).

The Main Issues

The women in the Task Force Report cover a wide variety of issues relevant to their lives as women living in northern, single-industry towns. These issues include housing, shopping, transportation, social situation (forming friendships), health care, problems women face upon arrival, employment, concerns of mothers, and daycare. Each of these issues is listed in the table of contents of at least one of the individual town reports, and most of these issues appear in all three. Often issues are intertwined and difficult to separate. For example, the issue of mothers' concerns is reflected in many of the other issues, such as housing, daycare, and health care.

However, there are some points of difference between the three sections of the report, and this is a good illustration of Cloke's (1985) point that the rural

cannot be classified as one homogenous entity, but rather as a series of communities which, although they share some similarities, also possess their own unique qualities. One example of this is the difference in geographical location. Because Kitimat is closer to BC's coastal region, the weather there is more moderate; sometimes it is snowy but also often rainy. However, because Mackenzie is situated in BC's northern interior, it often experiences heavy snowfalls and extreme temperatures during winter months. These different climatic conditions may lead to differences in the perception of isolation among townspeople. On the one hand, being cut off from main highways because of heavy snowfall may lead to feelings of anxiety and 'cabin fever'. On the other hand, heavy rainfall often leaves the skies grey and overcast, which can lead to feelings of depression among sunlight-deprived residents. Therefore, we can see that although the issue of weather is pertinent to all three towns, the problems associated with each town's weather and climate are different.

Despite these individual differences, it cannot be ignored that the same issues reappear in each town's individual report, and that again and again, women speak about the way that planning has not taken 'women's issues' into account. For example, the Task Force Report's section on Kitimat includes a subsection on "Shopping." This is something to which male planners might not give much thought. However, the section details several planning choices which show a stunning lack of regard for the needs of women with small children. For example,

> *There is no elevator in the major department store, therefore, a woman with a child in a stroller must carry both three floors. Often a toddler finds walking the stairs too difficult. This service*

> *could easily have been provided when the store was built as it was expected that the town would have young families. (16)*

In addition, although Kitimat's original town plan included covered shopping areas, these plans were "obviously not carried out as there are areas in the city center that have no covered walkways, causing discomfort to women shopping with small children on the many days it is either raining or snowing" (Task Force Report, 1977, p. 16). In light of this evidence, the report briskly concludes that "Women with small children were obviously not taken into consideration when the center was planned" (16).

It is also interesting to note that both the Mackenzie and Fraser Lake reports have a section in the table of contents which deals in some way with the issue of adjustment to living in a single-industry town. In the Mackenzie report, the section is called "Newcomers;" in the Fraser Lake report, the section is called "Adjustment." Distances and difficulties in transportation affect other areas of concern, such as shopping and access to health care.

No Life For a Woman: Creating Controversy

No Life for a Woman is a documentary which was filmed for the National Film Board of Canada in 1977. The summary on the back of the video cover reads

> No Life for a Woman points out the inadequacies of company towns built primarily around jobs and not around people. Often, little provision has been made for organized activities outside the narrow frame of work. Women from the single-industry towns of Mackenzie and Fraser Lake, B.C., talk about the depression and isolation women often experience there, and about steps being

> taken to overcome these problems . . . . This film offers hope in overcoming the limitations of single-industry towns.

From this summary, we can see that this film appears to have been intended to provide the women who lived in Mackenzie and Fraser Lake with a way to express their feelings and to talk about their experiences of life in a single-industry town. However, it is important to recognize that the filmmakers brought their own interpretation to the interviews; film can be manipulated and edited in a variety of ways to express the director's, rather than the interviewee's, point of view. While this must be taken into consideration, the interviews conducted in the film are still valuable as they provide an opportunity to hear women speak about their experiences in Mackenzie.

Although the film is similar in some ways to the Task Force Report, it also differs in several significant ways. While the film also acts as an outlet for women to discuss their lives in a single-industry town, it refrains from making outright recommendations. We never see the director herself, and we can only vaguely hear her questions and prompts to the interviewees. Kreps, the director who also acts as interviewer, remains off-camera and focuses the gaze on the women themselves. Through the interviews, we gradually become aware of the director's perspective and goal. For example, the director highlights the importance of the women's centres in each of these towns as a main focal point for women's activities in the community, and an apparent panacea for the seemingly relentless cases of depression and cabin fever described by a nurse in the town. This view of the women's centres as the solution for women's problems is achieved through the specific questions asked by the interviewer.

Because the film was created with such specific intent in mind, No Life For a Woman has met with some controversy, particularly in Mackenzie, where a conversation with one of the museum staff yielded an interesting revelation. According to her, many people who lived in Mackenzie at the time that the film was made felt that the director only chose to include interviews with women who had a negative opinion of Mackenzie. The museum worker felt that the women were simply lazy and fond of complaining. She maintained that life in Mackenzie offers plenty to do, if only one takes the time and makes the effort to find these activities. Similar sentiments are noted in Mackenzie BC Turns Twenty, a history of the town, published sixteen years after the film was released:

> There is no doubt that many young women were lonely and homesick for their families. I have talked to some women Ms. Kreps interviewed. Apart from editing the footage, she did not include at all the interviews where the women said they liked it here, were not miserable, and had lots to do, nor did I hear that she talked to any working women . . . .
>
> Needless to say, there were heated discussions in town and letters were written to the editor [of the Vancouver Sun, in which an article about the film had appeared]. The writers, *all women* [emphasis added], took issue with Ms. Kreps [sic] contention that the town as such was responsible for the misery of these women, and questioned the validity of her implications that boredom, depression, loneliness, unemployment, drug abuse, child and wife battering and other such ills are the lot of women in small single industry towns only and do not happen in Vancouver or Toronto for that matter. (Veemes, 1985, p. 111-12)

It is interesting that, according to Veemes, all of the letters to the editor of the Vancouver Sun which were critical of the film were by women. It is also interesting that one of the criticisms of the film was that townspeople felt that it implied that Mackenzie's social problems (domestic violence, boredom, depression, etc.) were unique to single-industry towns and did not exist in big

cities. Of course, these social problems do occur in large cities. However, it is worth noting that even though rural and urban spaces may share many of the same problems, each does not have equal resources nor tools to address these issues.

> It seemed that what everyone minded most was the fact that Mackenzie as such was recognizable. It was felt that as Ms. Kreps, in order to get her social message across, chose to show only one facet of Mackenzie's character, the locale of her film should have been presented as a fictional place. (Veemes, 1985, p. 112)

Of course, this leads to an interesting discussion of a point which was raised in the literature review, that of women adapting their needs to the town, rather than the town planning taking women's needs into consideration. Were these women, who complained on film about feeling isolated and not having anything to do, merely whiny women who were too lazy to seek out activities, or were they women who felt that the activities that they were presented with in town were more geared to the interests of male millworkers and children? One must only remember the woman who spoke about life revolving around the hockey arena to suspect that the latter was the case at least some of the time.

It is interesting to contrast Kreps' vision with that of Veemes in Mackenzie Turns Twenty. Kreps presents the newborn town as alienating and forbidding to the women who move there, whereas Veemes presents the town as a place that is inviting and exciting, a place where women have many opportunities to carve out a place for themselves in the landscape. However, as different as these two women's visions of the town are, both women actually are advocates for building a sense of community. Kreps suggests that one way to combat the feelings of isolation are to build a women's centre; Veemes seems to embody a

pioneer spirit which suggests that the opportunities for creating community are available to women, if only they would seize them. Both Kreps and Veemes choose to ignore certain aspects of life in Mackenzie to suit their own purposes; Kreps' vision of the town is as bleak as Veemes' is optimistic and positive. However, their documents, No Life For a Woman and Mackenzie Turns Twenty, represent two different approaches to the same issue: women's networks and building community in order to support women in an unfamiliar environment.

In retrospect, No Life for a Woman cannot be regarded as a document that provides more than one viewpoint about women's lives in Mackenzie. However, the film does provide evidence that there were at least a few women who were not happy with the situation in which they were living, and who felt strongly enough that they were willing to appear on film to discuss their views. These women talk about the irony in the fact that there is so much money in the town, and yet, with all of these material possessions, some women are still not happy with what they have. When speaking about their unhappiness, the women cite such factors as loneliness, feeling like they have 'cabin fever,' not having anywhere to go where their children are welcome, having little opportunity for employment, and feeling isolated, both literally and figuratively. These same themes are echoed in the Task Force Report and also in the group interview I conducted two decades after the report and the film were completed.

The Group Interview: A Fresh Perspective

Introduction

The group interview took place in the home of one of the participants. As stated in the Methods chapter, I advertised locally for women who were interested in participating in this research project, and had several replies. Eventually, after some changes in the makeup of the participant group (see Methods chapter), I organized this interview.

As the women arrived, there were friendly greetings exchanged, some recognition between certain participants, and we all settled down with coffee and food that I had brought in order to make the interview feel more like a conversation and less like a school assignment. Eventually, after about fifteen or twenty minutes of waiting for everyone to arrive and settling in, I began the interview process, which began with each of the women introducing ourselves.

The Women

B. is a Caucasian woman in her early 30s, a married mother of two children who moved to Mackenzie seven and one-half years before the interview took place.[7] She and her husband moved to Mackenzie together shortly after they were married, before they had children, to pursue careers in forestry, after working in several small northern Ontario towns. She grew up just outside of Toronto.

C., a Caucasian woman in her early 20s, moved to Mackenzie three years before the interview took place. She moved to Mackenzie with her husband, who had a job as a lab technician at one of the mills. At the time of the interview, C.

[7] Originally, I had requested that the participants have lived in Mackenzie for fewer than five years. However, after the unexpected withdrawal of one participant, one of the other participants told me that she had a friend who would be interested in participating, even though she had lived in Mackenzie for longer than five years. As I was now facing time pressures, I changed my sample profile and welcomed the new participant to the group.

was a stay-at-home mother who had two sons under the age of six and was three months pregnant. C. had spent her childhood in a small town just outside of Campbell River, BC, and her adolescence in Campbell River itself. After they were married, she and her husband lived in Victoria for five years while he finished his degree at the University of Victoria. They moved to Mackenzie shortly after he finished his degree.

K., a South Asian woman in her late 20s, is a single woman with no children who had moved to Mackenzie only a few months prior to the interview to take a job at one of the banks in town. Previous to this, she had lived in the Vancouver area. She has lived in several major cities throughout her life, including Montreal and San Diego.

K2, a Caucasian woman in her mid-30s, is a nurse at the Mackenzie hospital. She is married with two young children, and at the time of the interview had lived in Mackenzie for six years. Prior to living in Mackenzie, she and her husband and children had lived in several small northern Ontario towns.

The main issues discussed in the interview were meeting people and making friends, health services, shopping, housing, the town's economy, places for mothers to go with children, and children's safety and education. Transience, while not a separate topic, was interwoven throughout the other topics, and had a great deal of influence in many areas, including friendships, quality of health services, and quality of education.

Friendships and Meeting People

The topic of friendship and meeting people was the first topic we discussed. Several of the women commented on how difficult it had been to meet people, despite their best efforts, upon moving to town. B. commented that the happiness of a newcomer to Mackenzie would depend on many factors, including whether the woman was single or married, someone who worked inside or outside of the home, and someone who was childless or had a family. In her opinion, Mackenzie is "a town made for young families. It's not a town built for single people or for young couples" (B, 5).

However, despite the fact that several of the women felt that it would be easier for a woman with children to find social activities in Mackenzie, they also acknowledged that it was difficult even for women with children to meet other parents. For example, C. told the story of how she had decided, upon moving to town, that she would enroll her children in a variety of activities to ensure that she would meet some other parents. However, when her children were involved in swimming, for example, she found that the other parents who were on the sidelines seemed to form exclusionary cliques. As a result, she found that it was a while before she made any contacts with other parents. One of the other women, K2, said that her initial experiences were similar: "I felt that too, certainly at the swimming . . . . There'd be these ladies who'd sit and talk . . . . I always found play gym the same, like -- no one ever talked to me at play gym. I could go in there and watch the kids and leave, and nobody would say anything to me" (K2, 6). K2 did, however, go on to say that the situation gradually changed for her,

and that eventually she came to know some of the other women to the point where she would sit and talk with them, "but it's taken a while to get there" (K2, 6).

K2's comment about friendships needing a lot of time to develop was something that was echoed in the comments of the other women. However, this recognition that 'instant' friendships are difficult to achieve contributed to a paradox caused by the idea that many women are not willing to take a lot of time to develop a friendship if they perceive it as being only a short-term proposition. For example, C. commented at length on an invisible, but palpable split between self-identified long-term residents and those perceived as short-term residents speculated that this difficulty in meeting others and forming friendships had its basis in the transient nature of Mackenzie's population. Her assessment of the situation is poignant in its honest description of the wariness a newcomer is faced with:

> I've heard from people that have been here for a long time, like fifteen years or whatever, more, and um, they say that they also close themselves off from people, because so many people move in and out, they'd become really good friends with someone and then they'd move, and it just -- disappointment after disappointment of losing a whole bunch of friends, and so they really close themselves off, and so it's hard to meet people.
> (C, 5).

B. elaborated on this point by stating that she felt that good friendships take time to develop, and that many people are simply unwilling to invest time in developing a friendship that may end abruptly when one woman suddenly moves away: "I don't know among men, but among . . . the women friends that I have, that um, some people classify you as, you know, as staying, or . . ." (B, 8).

This difficulty in meeting people was acknowledged as something that could pose problems for newcomers, as one of the women pointed out that although some people were independent and did not seem to mind being on their own, "the majority of people aren't like that, they -- they, you know, want some support . . . network of some kind going" (B, 5).

K, the only single, childless woman who participated in the group interview, actually reported that she had not had too much of a problem developing some friendships when she arrived, but this was mainly due to the fact that she had made contact with people before she moved up to Mackenzie. She described how she had been put into contact with another single woman, approximately the same age, and asked the woman what she could expect in terms of a social life. The woman told K. that there were many activities to get involved with in Mackenzie, and that K. would have at least one friend when she moved there (meaning herself). K. reported that she had developed a friendship with this woman and another woman who had moved to town a few months afterward, and that she considered them to be a close support network.

It may seem slightly surprising that despite the fact that Mackenzie is described by these women as a town built for young families, not for single people, that a young mother would have difficulty meeting friends and that a single woman would form a close support network more quickly. However, this can be attributed to two factors: the fact that K., as a single woman, suspected that she might have difficulty meeting people once she moved to town, and therefore made sure to make at least one contact before arrival. Another factor is that K. is

employed outside the home, while C. is not, and that many people, men and women, tend to form friendships in the workplace, as that is where the majority of the weekday is spent.

Health Services

After this discussion of friendships and meeting people, the discussion turned to health care services. The women seemed divided over whether the health care in Mackenzie was of poor quality or not, but eventually the women agreed that although poor health care was not something that could be attributed specifically to Mackenzie, it seems to be a particular problem in rural and non-urban BC. In other words, many of the problems that the women associated with health care in Mackenzie were not attributable to the specific doctors, nurses and pharmacists in town, but rather to the fact that Prince George, the nearest city of any size, is two hours away by car, and does not itself contain many specialists.

C., the first woman to speak on health care, related an incident that had involved one of her children. She had suspected that her youngest son had a hernia, and C. could not get her son into any doctor's office, including her family doctor, to be checked. Eventually, she phoned the surgeon in Prince George, who told her that her son needed to be checked immediately, in case emergency surgery was needed. C. tried calling the emergency ward after being turned down by the doctors' offices in town and was told that there was no doctor in the emergency ward who could see her son. Eventually C. simply brought her son to the emergency ward and there happened to be a doctor there who could examine him. Her son had surgery for the hernia in Prince George two days later.

C. expressed feelings of frustration at the fact that the doctors' offices in Mackenzie were often extremely busy, with the result that patients had to sometimes wait for a week to be seen. She stated that she felt "like you have to fight with them to get anything done" (C, 11). These experiences with her children's health care had left her feeling like she had "totally lost [her] trust in the doctors up here" (C, 11).

On the other hand, B. felt that she was at "the opposite end of the scale" in her perspectives on the health care in Mackenzie (B, 11). She talked about how, upon moving to town, she was impressed that Mackenzie had five doctors for 5500 residents, because the small northern Ontario towns she had lived in previously "had no real hospital facilities or anything" (B, 11). However, she also acknowledged that her children had had only minor childhood ailments, rather than anything needing major surgery, and that perhaps this had affected her view of Mackenzie's health care. She stated that perhaps it was a matter of quality care for average health problems. B. also acknowledged that it was an inconvenience to have to drive to Prince George for more serious health problems.

K. contributed an experience that she had had on a trip to Prince George to see a specialist. She reported that she had made an appointment with a podiatrist because she knew that she had flat feet and wanted to find out about getting orthotics. K. drove for two hours only to have the doctor look at her feet, comment that they looked flat, and recommend scheduling another appointment to cast her feet for orthotics. K. stated that that was what she had made the appointment for, and when the doctor replied that he hadn't set aside enough time

for that, she responded, "I drove 2 hours for a ten minute appointment that you're charging me $10 for?" (K, 12).

B. responded to K.'s story by stating that she uses that fact that she is from out of town to her advantage, by insisting that she receive more than the usual amount of time:

> I totally take advantage of the fact that I'm from Mackenzie. Like, I say, I'm from Mackenzie. You've got to take me today. And I've had extra-long, all kinds of extra-long appointments in different places just because they know you're from Mackenzie .... (B, 13)

B.'s story is an interesting example of a strategy to turn what can be seen, depending on perspective, as a disadvantage (living in an isolated town and having to drive long distances for health care) to one's advantage. Throughout the interview, B. placed great emphasis on the need to advocate for oneself and for one's family when trying to access quality health care. She acknowledged that "It's definitely tougher in Mackenzie. You have to make tougher choices I think in terms of your health care. You have to be aggressive, if you think there's something wrong" (B, 15).

B. also felt that living in Mackenzie necessitated a planning approach to health care: "You've got to plan things . . . . I mean you might be able to get an appointment within a year, but your surgery wouldn't be for a year and a half, at least --" (B, 15). Of course, in the event of an emergency it is not always possible to plan, and the women spoke of the occasional need to spend the extra money, time, and effort to fly to Vancouver or another big city for their health care.

This exchange about health care highlights two of the many different perspectives which are held on many aspects of living in a small, northern single-industry town. The first perspective compares the small northern BC town unfavourably to the larger cities in the south. On the other hand, the second perspective may be at first reluctant to acknowledge that the differences pose a significant problem. When difficulties do arise, the strategies for overcoming the challenges include using the differences to one's advantage, taking a more active or aggressive role in demanding services, and as a last resort, 'giving in' and accessing health care in the south.

Neither of these points of view is wrong. It is interesting to note that the women espousing the second perspective are B. and K2, who have lived in Mackenzie for the longest periods of time, as opposed to C. and K., who are more recent newcomers. Length of stay in this case may have positive effects, such as the ability to view difficulties and differences as minor facts of life which should not be seen as catastrophes but must be dealt with. On the other hand, the women who have not lived in Mackenzie for very long may bring a fresh perspective, in that they are able to see problems because they are not used to accepting them, rather than long-time residents, who may just have become accustomed to dealing with inconvenience on a daily basis. As a result, long-time residents may be more able to provide strategies for coping with problems for which there are few or no viable solutions, while newcomers may be better able to provide strategies for necessary change.

It is also important to remember that both C. and K. had lived in larger cities before moving to Mackenzie (Victoria and Vancouver, respectively), and were also therefore more used to having many options in terms of health care. Conversely, B. and K2 had moved to Mackenzie from towns that were smaller or the same size, and were more used to having very limited options. K2 mentioned at one point that she had lived in a town where there was "one doctor for 5000 people," and that although at the time she had not trusted that doctor because of a dismissive diagnosis of one of her children, she had not been able to go to another doctor for a second opinion until a second doctor moved to town (K2, 14).

Shopping

The next issue of discussion, shopping, also highlighted the difference between the two different groups of women. K. expressed dissatisfaction with the prices charged by merchants in town, stating that she "would drive to Prince George in a second, to buy some of the things they have here" (K, 17). A discussion followed in which B. stated that in the past, because of the high levels of income in town, residents were simply more willing to spend the money in Mackenzie in exchange for the convenience of not having to make a four-hour round trip to Prince George to go shopping. She acknowledged that this had changed in recent years, especially with the mill strike and the downswing in the forest industry, and her conclusion was that "the merchants haven't adjusted to the times" (B, 18). K. and C. both stated that their strategy for dealing with the high prices in Mackenzie was to go to Costco, a discount/warehouse store in Prince George, and stock up on items.

B. felt that the prices in the Co-op (one of the two local grocery stores) were not actually that bad, but "you always have to buy things when they're on sale" (B, 18). She stated that if items were on sale, then the prices were competitive with Prince George prices, but if they were not on sale, then the prices were expensive. K2 agreed, then stated that that was why "you don't make your shopping by a list. You walk through the store and see what's on sale and buy what's on sale" (K2, 19). In other cities, even if an item is not on sale in one grocery store, there may be option of comparison shopping at other stores, an option that does not exist in Mackenzie.

This is another example which follows almost exactly the pattern shown in the discussion about health care. C. and K., shorter-term residents than either K2 or B., were more likely to bring up the high prices in Mackenzie as a problem, while it took a while longer for K2 and B. to acknowledge this as a major source of concern. C. and K. stated that they were more likely to go to Prince George and shop at Costco, thus proposing a solution that bypasses Mackenzie's economy altogether and instead makes use of resources in the nearest large town. B. and K2, on the other hand, stated that as long as items were on sale in Mackenzie, the prices were competitive with Prince George, and that as a result, they had adapted their shopping methods, not buying according to what they necessarily needed that week, but rather by what was on sale (and therefore a price they were willing to pay). None of the women approved of the high prices in town, and all stated that they would rather not pay such high prices, but the strategies employed by the

women differed, in that C. and K. went to Prince George to reduce costs, while B. and K2 waited until items were on sale and bought locally.

Housing

The next topic for discussion after shopping was the issue of housing. The general consensus among the women was that rental housing in Mackenzie was limited, of poor quality, and expensive. K. stated that when she had compared the price of renting an apartment with mortgage payments on a condominium, it had been less expensive to make monthly payments on the condominium (K, 21). This led to a conversation about housing prices in general, which were agreed to be fairly low at the moment. When I asked if there were many houses for sale, the women answered with an emphatic yes, and K2 explained that "[t]he strike hit people really hard" (K2, 22). It was agreed that this was something that was common to resource towns, such as Prince George and Campbell River, and B. stated that "[p]eople just get nervous, and bail out" (B, 23).

B. elaborated on this point by making a connection between the instability of a town that relies on a single industry for its income and the high risk associated with investing in a house in such a town:

> Yeah, it's always a bit -- actually, it's a bit of a risk, um. When we first -- when we -- we lived in an apartment that was paid for and everything and we knew we were going to have kids, and we decided to buy a house -- we really looked at that, because um, any single-industry town is, it's a risk to buy a house. and -- and it's a -- it's a big risk. But, you just have to decided what the quality of life you want is, I guess, and -- and just do it! (B, 23)

Thus, we can see that the issue of transience also has its effect on the issue of housing availability and prices, as well as the reluctance some people feel about

investing in housing. Because people feel hesitant about investing in a single-industry town with the very real possibility of a mill closure, they may decide to rent rather than buy. The reality in a single-industry town is that once the industry shuts down, it is very possible that the town will become a ghost town. This further increases the feeling of transience in town, and the sense that there is a divide between people who are there to make some money and leave quickly, and those who are there for the duration.

Economy

In the women's discussion of town economy, it was agreed that the town's economy seemed to be worse than it had been in previous years. The reasons for this were several: the town had suffered economically during the recent 8-month long strike at the Fletcher Challenge mill. Union workers were on strike pay, which is much less than they normally earn, and as a result, businesses in Mackenzie had suffered because people had less money to spend. C. speculated that people tend to spend less money in the winter months, also, and that spending would improve once spring arrived. She cited the example of the Ford dealer who told her that "soon as spring comes around that's when we come out and bring our cars, 'cause that's when people start spending their money up here" (C, 27).

This assertion that people are less likely to spend money in the winter was countered by B., who mentioned that many people in Mackenzie liked to spend great amounts of money on skidoos and snowmobiles. Because K. worked in a bank, she had knowledge about what items people tried to get loans for, and she stated that many people wanted loans for snowmobiles and other 'toys,' and then

found that they could not afford them. She and some of the other women expressed disapproval at this attempt to live beyond one's means.

This discussion, about residents having expensive toys and living beyond their means, contrasts in an interesting manner with the descriptions of townspeople's spending habits and financial situations at the time that No Life For a Woman was filmed. At that time, couples and families moved to Mackenzie because of the promise of riches to be made working for the mill. One woman describes people as having houses full of nice furniture, driveways with multiple new vehicles and 'toys' such as snowmobiles, but still feeling unhappy. Now these times of prosperity are over, to be replaced with times of financial change and uncertainty in the future of single-industry towns. Women in Mackenzie today must deal with not only the feelings of isolation experienced at the time that the Task Force Report and the documentary film were made, but also with the stress of a downswing in the town's economy.

Resources for Mothers With Young Children

At this point, K2 changed the topic back to that of services. B. and K2 began to discuss the services that were available for mothers with young children, which included the Parent and Tot Thursday morning drop-ins organized by the Mackenzie Counselling Centre, the 'well-baby' clinics run by the health nurse every week, and the breast-feeding support groups. K2 felt that "Certainly for young families, there's good supports out there," but she was not sure what was offered for single people (K2, 30). The women spoke briefly about the change in focus between a couple who has no children and a couple who has a young

family. B. told the story of how, when she and her husband first moved to town and had no children, they would go to Prince George every weekend:

> "Let's get out of here!" We'd just -- I don't think we spent any money in Mackenzie. We'd work out in the bush, you know, for weeks on end, we'd come in, grab our stuff, go to Prince George, blow a couple thousand dollars, come back . . . . That's all we did for two years. [laughter] (B, 31)

It was acknowledged that this form of leisure by escape was something that was only practical when a couple had no children. Since Mackenzie is mostly made up of young families, this change of scenery is not something that could easily be attempted by most residents. This could possibly lead to feelings of claustrophobia and isolation as women are forced by necessity to stay in town.

The next issues of discussion refer back to the concept of gendered space and the privileging of space that is gendered 'male,' such as hockey arenas and sports bars. As the women talked about spaces that women could go to with children, there was some discussion of a slide that had been in the recreation centre but was eventually removed. B. stated that her "best friend, she was -- she was ready to chain herself to it when they were taking it down. We went to town council meetings, to try and fight for the slide" (B, 31). B. went on to state that she felt that in Mackenzie, there were few places for mothers with young children to go:

> . . . . There's organized things, but there's nothing, like say you're having a really bad day . . . whether it's just a mess, or you're just -- you're not yourself. [laughing] And you -- you don't really -- there's times when you don't feel safe with your kid because you're just not in a good way . . . and -- and I mean I'm probably on the . . . better end of the scale, but I'm sure that there's people who really reach the end of their rope with their kid

> . . . . There's nowhere for a mum to go, um, just when she needs to go . . . where the kids can play, and -- and you can just sit down and have a few minutes to yourself . . . . or maybe strike up a conversation with somebody . . . . That's what I argued when they took the slide out. (B, 32-33)

We can see in this very short, but meaningful, statement, that the slide in the probably symbolized much more than just a place for children to play. If it did not have such significance in the minds of mothers, B's friend probably would not have felt so strongly about it. The women speak of actually attending town council meetings about the slide, in an effort to save it. One gets the feeling that what these women may be trying to save is actually their own peace of mind at having a safe place where their children can play and where they, as parents, can relax and take some time for themselves. It seems ironic that when a town like Mackenzie can spend so much money on skating rinks and baseball diamonds, it refuses to replace something as small as a children's slide that afforded so many women a break during their day.

Furthermore, B. hints at the idea that this slide may symbolize not only a safe place for children to play, but also a place for mothers to regroup mentally, so that their children are safe with them. We can see the slide, then, in terms of a safeguard for women's mental health, and for the perceived safety of their children.

In contrast to the discussion about the situation for mothers and children, K. described her feelings of frustration about the situation for single people in Mackenzie, which was not a lack of activities, but rather the heavy financial penalty carried by single people. As an example, K. spoke about memberships at

the Recreation Centre. She stated that the membership price for a single person was $400, while the membership price for a family of up to 5 people was $546. Although one of the other women interpreted this as a way for the Recreation Centre to make more money, it also emphasizes the high concentration of families in Mackenzie's population. A nurse in No Life For a Woman describes having seen many women come to the doctor for pregnancy tests who are devastated when the test is negative once again. As the nurse states, when it seems that everyone around them is pregnant or has children, it can be depressing to women who cannot seem to get pregnant. This seems to speak of a strong desire to fit in and join the family-based activities offered around Mackenzie. C. spoke early on in the interview about putting her children in organized sports because she thought it would be a good way to meet other parents. However, as discussed earlier, the other side of this drive to have children and be a mother is the possibility of isolation. While there are activities for families and children, this does not necessarily mean that these activities will facilitate adult conversation or a place where mothers can simply take a break from their children's needs during the day.

While Mackenzie may not meet all of the mothers' social needs, one aspect of Mackenzie was highly praised: the fact that they felt that it was a safe place to raise children. C., B., and K2 all made comparisons between Mackenzie and larger cities in terms of child safety, and all three women agreed that in their perception, Mackenzie was a safer place. Both C. and B. had noticed the difference in parent/child behaviour in larger cities and smaller towns:

> Your kids are pretty much safe here, you don't have to worry about them so much, like you're not paranoid. Like I, we were in Victoria for two years, and I was so stressed out, taking my kids to the mall or something -- "Hold my hand," you know, and watching them every second. (C, 45)

B. described an experience she had had in Vancouver at Kitsilano Beach, where she had noticed that although her children had run off to play as soon as they arrived, the other children all stayed "right beside their parents. And you're trained to do that. You stay right beside your parents. So it's a mindset, and that's a, it's a pretty big plus living here to be able to grow up with that kind of, you know, freedom" (B, 48). K2 spoke of the "abductions . . . all the stuff that happens down south, and it's just like, I'd rather shovel snow for an extra two weeks, because I can let my kids go to school, I can let them run around the block . . . . And I'm really not that worried" (K2, 48).

K., who does not have any children, asked the other women about the trade-off between children's safety in Mackenzie and the quality of education, which she had heard was poor. B. felt that much of this had to do with the expectations of the parents themselves, and that because of the transient nature of the town, many parents were not willing to invest as much time in campaigning for their children's education. I asked whether the women felt that the transience of the town also created a problem with high turnover rates for teachers. B. said that she felt that this could be a problem because so many of the teachers were new and inexperienced, so they were actually just getting some experience by the time they started working in Mackenzie. C. pointed out that this was a common problem with many of the helping professionals in town, such as doctors.

The interview ended with the women stating that they hoped that they had answered all of the issues that I had wanted to address, and with some social remarks about leisure activities, including cross-country skiing.

Conclusion

In all, I felt that the interview was a success, both in terms of the data I collected and the opportunity for the women to express their opinions and meet other women. Despite some initial difficulties with scheduling, during the actual interview, I felt that I achieved a rapport with the women and that they felt comfortable with each other as well. The conversation flowed smoothly, with very little prompting from me, and the women had a great deal to say on all of the topics I had initially asked them to address.

Conclusion

After transcribing the interview and reading and re-reading it, I began to see how many of the same themes that had come up in the Task Force Report and No Life For a Woman had been echoed in the group interview. Despite the passage of more than two decades, the women I interviewed still spoke of frustration with city planning, concerns about health care, and feelings of isolation. However, much more than in the other documents, I also felt that the women expressed many positive aspects of living in Mackenzie, and described the journeys that they had made in their own perceptions of the town during the time they had lived there.

I was invigorated by participating in and analyzing the group interview; it confirmed my initial belief that women in Mackenzie still have a lot to say about their situation, and have some good criticisms and suggestions for the town, as did the women who came before them.

Chapter Six: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Sometimes I think that it's frightening how used to living here I have gotten. I take it for granted now that if I don't get what I want from the drugstore before 6:00 pm, I am shit out of luck. I walk around the 'mall' and no longer think, "My God this mall is dinky and pathetic!" It was only when I was in the mall looking for a Father's Day card today, thinking about what it will be like when Mark comes to visit, that I really started to look at Mackenzie through the eyes of someone who doesn't live here and it was kind of a shock to realize that the way I looked at Mackenzie when we first got here is how other people probably look at it when they first come here too. (Personal journal, June 13, 1996)

Introduction

This thesis has attempted to address several issues linked to feminism and women's lived experience. These issues are women's geographies, women's friendships and support networks, and the reality of living in a single-industry resource town.

However, in addition to these issues of women's experiences in the north, this thesis has also been a way for me to learn about my own experiences as a feminist researcher. It has also shown me that a thesis is really a process, in addition to being a product. In a way, this thesis is not only a piece of research which points to certain discoveries about the situation of women in Mackenzie, but also a record of the process by which these discoveries were made. In the introduction to the second chapter of The Everyday World As Problematic, Dorothy Smith describes the amazement she felt upon discovering that an unpublished paper she had written had somehow made it to Hungary, prompting the Hungarian reader to contact Smith. Previously, Smith writes, she had thought of writing papers for publication as "a performance for invisible judges" (Smith, 1987, p. 46). After her experience with the paper that had travelled to Hungary,

she realized that a paper could be a method of discourse between women, a "medium to reach other women and to hear from them" (Smith 1987: 46). This is the spirit in which I submit this thesis, as a medium in which I can say, "This is what I found. You may disagree. What are your experiences on this topic?"

Social Research Outside the Laboratory

If I had known when I started my research what I know now at the end of my research, I would have done several things differently. First, I think that I now have a better understanding of what is actually involved in doing research with real people. For the people who participate in research, the researcher must understand that she is only peripherally a part of their lives (for the most part, for most research projects). These participants have other people and activities that concern them, and are frequently very busy people. Researchers must understand that the participants will try to fit the research into their already busy lives, and will not fit their lives around the research. It can be a real struggle, therefore, to coordinate the schedules of several busy people when doing, for example, group interviews, as I did. Personally, I believe that doing the initial interview as a group was incredibly valuable, and that I gained a great deal of knowledge from the transcript of this interview as a document of women's real lives in Mackenzie. I believe that the group nature of the interview allowed the women to feed off one another's ideas, energy, and enthusiasm. I also believe that it created a sense of community for these women, however temporary these connections may have been. In retrospect, therefore, I would definitely say that attempting a group interview was a very good idea; however, I wish that I had realized the challenges

that this situation would provide in terms of timing and scheduling, so that I would have been better prepared.

The second thing that I know now that I did not know before I started my research was what a long, tedious, and arduous process transcription of oral speech is. I had only done a small amount of transcription before this project, of five-minute individual interviews, and this in no way prepared me for the reality of transcribing a group interview that was over an hour long. In a group interview, transcription proceeds even more slowly, because there are now no longer only two voices, the interviewer and the interviewee, but several voices which may be virtually indistinguishable from each other at times (particularly if the participants' voices are of similar pitch), and which may overlap each other on occasion. It can be difficult to sort out who is saying what in such circumstances.

I also did not predict, when I first undertook my project, the expense that I would incur through my research. I did quickly realize that to expect to conduct interviews in several single-industry towns (Fraser Lake, Terrace, and Mackenzie) would be very expensive, and therefore, I limited myself to only Mackenzie. However, I decided to conduct several interviews, both group and individual, which proved to be very time-consuming and expensive, in terms of trips to the community. As mentioned earlier, on one occasion, an attempt to travel to the community resulted in the loss of my vehicle through an accident. While not a direct cost of the research, having to replace my car, even with the insurance claim, and the resultant increase in insurance fees, was expensive.

In many ways, this thesis has represented a learning process for me. I now have a much better idea of what it means to do feminist research, and I realize that many of the expectations I had when I began were unrealistic and perhaps even undesirable. I thought, when I began, that by the time I had finished my project I would be able to produce a new theory about women and single-industry towns, or that I would have found, with or without the 'help' of the women participating in the project, a solution to 'the Mackenzie problem.' Of course, this was entirely unrealistic and not a suitable feminist goal. The goal of feminist research such as mine should be to enable women to produce their own representations of their needs, not to have these needs imposed on them by researchers or planners (Piche, 1991). One of the negative aspects some women have expressed about living in a single-industry town is a feeling of a lack of control over their environment. This can be seen in all three of the main documents examined in this thesis: the Task Force Report, No Life For a Woman, and the group interview. One way of addressing this sense of frustration is to remove the expectation that we as researchers are there to tell women what they need or want. Rather, it would be more helpful for researchers to facilitate women's examination of gender stereotypes and self-imposed limitations. For example, women may not be able to articulate their own needs until they realize how often they articulate their own needs in terms that refer to their husbands or children (Piche, 1991).

Discussion

The issues in the three main documents that form the basis of discussion for this thesis are slightly different in the report, the film, and the interview. However, there are some common themes which run throughout all three, despite differences in medium and time period. These issues can be grouped into three main categories, which are communication/connection, access to services, and women's spaces. In turn, these categories can also be examined in terms of three main themes: communication/connection, transience, and perspective.

Communication/Connection

Ever since we got hooked up to the Internet I've gotten addicted. I love the Internet! I love e-mailing people; everyone's been writing back and forth to me. I surf the net all the time . . . . (Personal journal, April 12, 1996)

In the Task Force Report, No Life For a Woman, and the group interview, the issue of connection and communication is mentioned repeatedly. In all three of these forums, women talk about the difficulties of being a newcomer in town, of staying connected to friends and family back home, and of meeting people and making new friends.

It is a reality that friendships are an important piece of many women's lives. Often, when women make close friends early on in their lives, they will stay in contact with these friends despite geographical distance and separation. Staying connected with friends and family who live elsewhere may be desirable, but may not always be economically feasible, as long-distance telephone rates may be prohibitive.

Some of the difficulties of keeping in contact with friends and family who live elsewhere have been alleviated with the advent of more effective, cheaper communications technology. For example, there are many long-distance telephone carriers who have started to offer competitively priced flat rates for long distance within the province, or very low rates outside of the province. For some women, these simple measures may mean the difference between speaking to family and friends once a week or once a month to once a day if desired.

Another increasingly important communication method which helps to overcome geographical distance is the Internet. The Internet has become increasingly widely used over the past several years, and can be used to e-mail friends or family, or send 'instant messages.' In addition to these on-line friendships and communities, there are also more formally structured support groups on the Internet which can be very helpful for those who live in remote communities (Grohol, 1997). These on-line groups can be very effective at 1) allowing clients to access information or support about various mental health issues while allowing clients to remain in their own community, without the often prohibitive costs of transportation to a larger centre, and 2) allowing the clients to retain a sense of privacy which many be difficult to achieve in a small community.

Aside from distance, another problem that women may encounter in terms of communication and relationships in single-industry communities is the transient nature of the population. Forming friendships takes time, and, as mentioned in the group interview, often women who are longer-term residents

may feel hesitant to put work into a friendship with another women who may seem unlikely to put down roots in the community.

Connecting with others within the community can be a challenge, but although the women in all three studies acknowledged the difficulty of meeting people at first, women in each of the studies offered several suggestions for overcoming the barriers associated with making friends in such communities. The Task Force Report mentioned various clubs and the women's centre in Mackenzie; the film also mentioned the women's centre, and the women in the group interview also discussed the various ways in which they had eventually made friends with other women in the community, whether it was through their children, through work, or through club activities.

The final factor in the women's level of satisfaction with the connections formed within the community seems to be perspective. By perspective, I mean the context within which these women are considering these issues. The size of community a woman comes from, for instance, will affect how she views Mackenzie. If she recently lived in a much smaller community, it is likely that she will consider Mackenzie to be relatively populated, and, as such, may think that she will have *less* difficulty meeting people and forming friendships than she would have in, for example, a community of a few hundred, rather than a few thousand people. It is important to remember that Mackenzie does not represent the same things to all people, and that past experiences form present expectations about all aspects of living in this town.

Access to Services

Mackenzie is large enough to support a variety of retailers in town. This means that basic items are available: groceries, clothing, and other household goods. There are also a number of retailers who provide more than the basics: there is a pet store, two video stores, an arts and crafts supply store, and a hardware store, to name a few. In the Task Force Report and the group interview, there is little doubt that it is possible to shop for the basics of daily life in Mackenzie. The main problems, as voiced by the women in the group interview, are that prices are often higher than they would be in a larger centre, and that there is not always a wide variety of selection in what is available.

This applies not only to retail services in Mackenzie, but also to health services. There are several doctors who have practices in town, but they are very busy and there is often a long wait associated with going to see the doctor. In addition, if one is dissatisfied with the service provided by one doctor or dentist, it is difficult to switch to another health care provider, because of long waiting lists. Also, there are no specialists, such as podiatrists, obstetricians, or gynecologists, who work in Mackenzie. As with retail services, while there is no doubt that basic care is available, more complex needs may not be able to be met in town, and there is not a wide array of options when it comes to choosing a health care provider.

Since Prince George is within driving distance, many residents who are seeking alternatives to the services available in Mackenzie simply travel the distance and do their shopping or visit a doctor/health care specialist (if one is available) while in Prince George. This often seems like the simplest solution,

but there are some factors that do not always make it the most practical or desirable solution. These factors include the hazards involved in road travel during winter, and the economic effect that shopping outside of Mackenzie has on the town's retailers.

The beginning of winter often comes in November for Mackenzie residents. There is usually snow on the ground by Halloween, and almost always by the beginning of November. This can make highway travel hazardous. Although the roads are well-ploughed, and residents usually have sturdy vehicles with appropriate winter tires, there is always the possibility of a snowstorm, and drivers must navigate the road between Mackenzie and Prince George with caution. This can turn what is usually a two-hour trip in good weather to a three or even four-hour drive. In addition, driving out of town requires additional expense in terms of fuel and mileage on the vehicle.

The second aspect to using services, particularly retail services, in Prince George rather than Mackenzie is the negative consequences that this out-of-town shopping has on in-town retailers. With the advent of Costco and other large warehouse stores in most major centres, many smaller surrounding towns have suffered negative economic effects, however slight. With fewer residents willing to spend money on what they view as inordinately high prices in town, retailers are sometimes forced to reduce stock or close altogether as a result of having fewer customers. Because of these economic realities, there is often a high turnover in the businesses that occupy retail space in either of the two malls in town. This leads to a vicious cycle in which the variety of shops is further

reduced, thus increasing the likelihood that residents will do their shopping elsewhere.

As with most of the issues surrounding satisfaction in Mackenzie, the perspective of residents is an important factor to take into consideration. Those residents who have lived longer in Mackenzie or other small towns seem to have developed strategies that still make use of the town's resources while adapting them to suit their own needs. For example, B. and K2 revealed in the group interview that they usually shop in town for their groceries rather than making frequent trips to Prince George. However, they only buy the items that are on sale that week at the local grocery stores. The strategy that K. and C. used to avoid paying high prices, on the other hand, was to travel into Prince George to buy in bulk at lower prices.

Women's Spaces

All three documents drew attention to the issue of 'women's spaces.' By women's spaces I do not mean women-only spaces, such as women's centres. Rather, I mean those spaces which women frequently occupy and feel comfortable in during the course of the day. Some examples of these spaces include homes, the recreation centre, and women's centres.

No Life For a Woman speaks about the lack of spaces women felt they could comfortably occupy, and about the feeling of being 'cooped up' or having 'cabin fever' when confined by weather or circumstances (very young children) to their own homes. The problem addressed in No Life For a Woman, then, is not about the lack of private space available to women, but rather the lack of public

areas which are woman and child friendly, in which women can meet other women and form friendships and connections. One woman in the film talks about the hockey arena and how her life now revolves around the hockey arena because of her husband and sons. The second half of the film discusses one measure women have taken in Mackenzie and Fraser Lake to remedy this feeling of lacking 'a space of one's own': they have set up women's centres and drop-in groups in these communities, thus affording an easy and accessible way for women to meet others.

The Task Force Report also addresses the issue of women's spaces. Much attention is paid to the fact that many of the public spaces in many of these communities are not designed for women with small children, and that the structure of many of these towns is such that it is difficult for those who are not employed to meet others. Much of the social life of these towns revolves around the single industry that fuels each town's economy. Since most of these jobs are male-oriented, it can often be difficult for women who do not work outside of the home to make connections with other women. The Task Force Report makes several recommendations, including ways to make public spaces in these towns more woman and child-friendly. In addition, the report mentions the same women's centres and drop-in groups that are examined in No Life For a Woman.

The women in the group interview spoke of the lack of places where women with small children can go to have some time to themselves while the children play, or to meet other women with their children. One example of such a place was the slide in the Recreation Centre. The women spoke about the

disruptive nature of its removal, although they did comment that at least it was quieter in the Recreation Centre now that the slide was gone. There was some discussion of whether there were many such places in larger centres, or whether it was just Mackenzie that was lacking such facilities, and although it was agreed that there are more of these places in larger centres such as Prince George, this is still seen as an area in which more development needs to be done.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

As can be seen, there are many issues in the Task Force Report and No Life For a Woman that are also addressed in the group interview I conducted. Just as twenty-five years ago, when women desired friendships and connection with other women, the women of today's Mackenzie are still navigating their way toward forming bonds in a town that is oriented toward the traditional nuclear family unit. Although I believe that this project has provided a valuable forum for women's voices from the north, I also believe that there is much more work to be done, and that there are many areas still to be explored.

One example of a future research question might be, what are the public places in Mackenzie where women and children can spend leisure time safely, and what can be done to develop more such places? Another question might be, how have recent government changes influenced the health care services available to women in Mackenzie? Also, in this thesis I did not have the scope to examine race relations within Mackenzie, but I believe that this would be a ripe area for study, in terms of both women and men of colour and their relation to the town.

Finally, it would be beneficial, now that this thesis has done a chronological study of women in Mackenzie over several decades, to examine women across place, comparing their experiences in other single-industry towns across British Columbia. Extra strains and pressures brought on by the rapid changes the BC provincial government is enacting are placing the future of many such towns in jeopardy, and there are many areas open for examination in the context of the economic crises British Columbia's small towns are facing.

Mackenzie does not seem nearly as awful now to me as it did when we first moved here. I think that it's partly because I'm more used to it, but I also have to say we came at what is probably Mackenzie's ugliest time of year. It wasn't snowing yet, so the town wasn't all white and covered up, and it wasn't sunny either. It was grey and there were no leaves on the deciduous trees. I didn't even know Mackenzie had any other kind of tree besides scraggly looking pine and evergreen, but now that spring is finally here, it seems that it actually has birch trees, which are my favourite kind of tree. . . . As I drove to the grocery store this evening, around 9:00 pm, I noticed the sun just starting to sink a tiny bit in the sky over the mountains, although it was still quite bright (the sun doesn't set here until 10 pm) and people's lawns were all green and there were people out riding their bikes and walking their dogs, and the good-looking tree-planters who only come in the summer were out in their shorts standing by their mountain bikes in front of the grocery store. Mackenzie really is in its most attractive light right now. I feel—dare I say it—almost fond of the damned town. (Personal journal, June 13, 1996)

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Poster

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BC STUDY

- **ARE YOU A WOMAN (OVER 19) WHO HAS LIVED IN MACKENZIE FOR LESS THAN FIVE YEARS?**

- **WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE PART OF A RESEARCH PROJECT THAT DISCUSSES YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A NEWCOMER TO MACKENZIE?**

I am a graduate student at UNBC who is conducting a research project for my MA thesis about women's experiences as newcomers to Mackenzie. The focus is on the support systems and resources which are available to newcomers. I will be conducting group and individual interviews for this project. If you are a woman who has lived in Mackenzie for less than five years, and would like to be part of a five-woman discussion group to talk about your experiences as a newcomer, please leave a message on my private, local voice mail at 997-2172 stating your name and telephone number, and I will contact you as soon as possible.

Melinda Worfolk

Appendix B: Information Sheet

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Melinda Worfolk and I am a Master of Arts student in Gender Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia. I am also a former resident of Mackenzie. I plan to conduct a research project for my thesis on women's experiences as newcomers to Mackenzie. I am hoping to discover what kinds of support systems women who are new to Mackenzie use, and also to find out what kinds of services or support systems they would like to see brought to their town. In order to find out what women in Mackenzie think about these issues, I will be holding group sessions in which we can brainstorm for areas of concern. After this, I will be interviewing each participant individually for her thoughts on these topics of concern. We will meet once more as a group to discuss the ideas brought up in the individual interviews, and then a summary of the research and its results will be written and approved by the entire group before it is distributed to other social service agencies in the North. I will also be sharing my thesis with the group to look over before it is defended at UNBC.

Melinda Worfolk

Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW AND RELEASE INTERVIEW INFORMATION

I agree to participate in one individual and two group interviews about the experiences of women when they move to Mackenzie.

I will participate in the focus group and individual interviews under the following conditions:

- I will allow the interview and focus group meetings to be tape recorded. I understand that they are being taped so nothing is missed and so my words are not changed or misunderstood. I can turn off the tape recorder at any point during the interview, and I can stop the interview any time I want, for any reason.

- I agree to allow Melinda Worfolk to use the information from the interview in her thesis and in the summary of the project and report of the results. However, I understand that my privacy and confidentiality will be protected by the disguising of names and any other identifying information. I also understand that I will be able to review a copy of the thesis and summary before they are printed.

- I understand that I have the right to receive and review the tape recordings and transcripts of the group meetings and my individual interview after they are completed. After reviewing the interviews, I can suggest modifications for accuracy, clarity or more information.

- I understand that I have the right to end my participation in this project at any time and for any reason. If I have concerns with the project or with Melinda as a researcher, I understand that I can contact her UNBC research supervisor, Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske, at (250) 960-6638.

Signature _____

Date _____

* This consent form is based on Appendix D in Patricia Maguire's Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach. (Amherst: The Center for International Education, School of Education, University of Massachusetts, 1987.)

Appendix D: Informational Letter About Changes to Project

Dear _____:

This letter is to inform you of changes to the original thesis project you participated in during February 1999. Originally, I conducted a group interview and individual interviews; I planned to use all these interviews in the thesis, but as my work has progressed, I have found that much of the information in the individual interviews in contained in the group interviews. I thank you all for sharing so much information with me in the group setting! As a result, I will not be using your individual interviews in the final project.

Also, please find enclosed a copy of my first draft of the thesis. If you have any comments on it, or would like me to change anything that you feel I have gotten wrong, please contact me at the following address and phone number (please call collect):

455 N. Patterson St.
Prince George, BC
V2M 3J3
(250) 564-1483

Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Melinda Worfolk

Appendix E: Mackenzie E-mail

(from an e-mail "forward" sent to me by a friend)

My brother has recently taken up residence in Mackenzie, B.C., and has come up with the following 40 WAYS YOU CAN TELL YOU'RE LIVING IN MACKENZIE....

1. You only own three spices - salt, pepper and steak sauce.
2. You design your Halloween costumes to fit over a snowsuit.
3. The mosquitoes have landing lights.
4. You have more miles on your snowmobile than your pick-up.
5. You have 10 favourite recipes for moose meat.
6. You thought "Grumpy Old Men" was a documentary about the Alexander Mackenzie Mall.
7. Superior Video is busier most evenings than a toy store at Christmas.
8. You think Morfee Lake is great for swimming, as long as you keep your body in the top 10 centimetres of water.
9. You've taken your kids trick-or-treating in a blizzard.
10. Driving is better in the winter because the potholes get filled with snow.
11. You think everyone from Prince George has an accent.
12. You owe more money on your snowmobile than your pick-up.
13. The Mackenzie Times covers local, national and international headlines on 1 page, but requires 6 pages for gossip.
14. At least twice each fall, the kitchen doubles as a meat processing plant.
15. The most effective mosquito repellent is a shotgun.
16. Your snowblower sometimes gets stuck on the roof vents.
17. You think the start of moose season is a provincial holiday.
18. You don't go to the mall, you head south to go shopping.
19. You frequently clean grease off your barbecue so the bears won't prowl on your deck.
20. You know which leaves make the best toilet paper.
21. Mayor Tom greets you on the street by your first name.
22. There's one and a half shopping malls in town.
23. The municipality buys a ski trail groomer before a bus.
24. The major church fundraiser isn't bingo it's spaghetti supper.
25. You find -30c a might chilly; you find +20c unbearably hot.
26. The boot room of your trailer doubles as a deep freezer.
27. You attend formal events in your best clothes, your finest jewellery and your Sorels.
28. You can play road hockey on skates.
29. You can tell the difference between a chipmunk and a squirrel from 300 yards away.
30. Shovelling the driveway constitutes a great upper body workout.
31. You know the 4 seasons: Winter, Still Winter, Not Winter, (AKA Bug Season) and Almost Winter.

32. Your snowblower has more kilometres on it than your snowmobile.
33. You are the only person left in town on long weekends or holidays.
34. It's always cloudy but there are two types of weather, heavy snow or heavy rain.
35. You can stagger home from any bar in less than 15 minutes.
36. You've made bets on which 'outside' cat would be next to get eaten by the coyotes or cougars.
37. Your home occasionally has an indoor swimming pool, usually at the end of Still Winter season.
38. You look forward to June every year because the snow will finally be gone from the yard and there are two sunny days in a row without blackflies, no-see-ums, mosquitoes, deerflies, horseflies or gnats.
39. Your neighbour lives in a run down shack but owns a ski boat, a fishing boat, 2 snowmobiles, 2 quads, a fifth wheel trailer, a hot car, a motorcycle and a one ton diesel pick-up; all less than a year old.
40. Your neighbour leaves all his toys unlocked and out in the front yard but writes his phone number on his trash cans so he can get them back when the wind blows them away.