# EXPERIENCES OF RURAL NEWFOUNDLAND WOMEN: PARTNERS WORKING OUT WEST

by

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**Abstract**

This qualitative study explores the implications of long distance commuting (LDC) for the non-commuting female partner living in rural Newfoundland. The purpose of this research is to identify and potentially address any unmet social or emotional needs of this population. Through in-depth qualitative interviews with eight women from five rural Newfoundland communities, data were gathered around women's use of informal support systems within their communities and how current perceptions of gender roles may influence women's experiences. The research findings indicate that this population encounters higher workloads, increased stress, and unique challenges when their partners are away; however, the findings also suggest that traditional, socially constructed gender norms are becoming more blurred as male commuters are taking on more 'female oriented' responsibilities during their time at home.

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**Dedication**

*For the women of Newfoundland and Labrador,*

## Chapter One: Introduction

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador has held the highest unemployment rates in the country for more than three decades, at times rising to double the national average (Armstrong, 2006). Consequently, many Newfoundlanders have been compelled to find employment outside of their home province, and have resorted to long distance commuting (LDC), primarily within the oil sands of Alberta, in order to provide for themselves and their families (Storey, 2010). This trend, commonly referred to by Newfoundlanders as 'working out West', has had significant social implications for these workers, their families, and their home communities.

Storey (2010), a researcher on the social and economic impacts of LDC, estimates that approximately 6-7% of the Newfoundland workforce is currently involved in this genre of work, which translates into more than 10,000 people who are required to regularly uproot as a condition of their employment. Storey ascertains that more information is needed to better understand the social implications that this lifestyle has for Newfoundland's LDC workers and their families, especially in rural areas of the province where up to one fifth of the community may be involved in the LDC workforce.

Considering that the rates of LDC workers continue to increase each year and that this line of work is an integral part of Canadian economic and employment security (Sharpe & Ershov, 2007), it is essential that research be undertaken to help understand, and ultimately assist, families who may be experiencing social and emotional difficulties associated with a (potentially) demanding and taxing lifestyle. Currently, there is minimal literature originating from Canada on the experiences of women whose partners are involved in LDC,

and there is a significant research gap surrounding the experiences of rural Newfoundland women in particular.

**Research Purpose and Objectives**

This thesis will begin to explore the lived experiences of women living in rural Newfoundland who have partners who commute to Alberta for work. This study was created in order to better understand any unmet social or emotional needs that this population may experience as a result of their unique lifestyle. To accomplish this, I have developed two primary research questions: 1) to what extent do women rely on informal support systems to manage extended partner absences? and, 2) how do current perceptions of gender roles influence women's experiences? These questions will assist in directing the study and will help uncover any potential needs of this population.

This study was also developed with specific objectives in mind. It is my hope that this thesis will:

- Provide Newfoundland women with a platform where they can share their experiences and opinions, and feel empowered in telling their stories.
- Provide information and support to women who may be feeling stressed, isolated or alone due to this lifestyle, by revealing the experiences of others living in similar circumstances.
- Help to initiate positive change in the social and political systems that impact Newfoundland women, both directly and indirectly.

**Personal Standpoint**

I believe it is important, particularly as a qualitative researcher, to state one's own personal views and background as it relates to the subject matter under study. For readers,

this can provide insight into a researcher's personal motives for conducting a particular study, and can also provide researchers with a space to discuss their own inspirations for initiating a project.

Being a Newfoundlander myself, it was a fitting choice, as well as a privilege, to focus my research on women living in rural Newfoundland. This research project provided me with the opportunity to travel, study, and explore Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula; a region where I previously lived, worked, and have an established connection. I, therefore, entered into this research project very much an insider to the population I was studying. Like my participants, I am Caucasian, I am a woman, and I was born and raised in a rural Newfoundland community. I believe that these shared similarities had a significant impact on the way I was perceived and accepted by the women I interviewed.

I approached this project as a feminist researcher. As a woman connecting with other women, I felt that I could provide a medium where women's voices and opinions could be heard. So often, the female perspective can get lost, misinterpreted, or ignored during the process of predominantly male driven research. My intention for this study, in line with those of other feminist researchers, was to place women's concerns and issues at the forefront of the research agenda so that real social and political change can occur in women's lives (Hesse-Bieber, 2008).

I also bring my professional social work experience and personal social work values to this research project. My professional training and experience has broadened my awareness of the oppressive structures and systems that impinge upon the lives of marginalized populations. Working with individuals living with mental illness, substance misuse, and disability has given cause to question the larger political systems that keep these

individuals unemployed, living in poverty, and without necessary services. The women in this study face oppression on many levels, in terms of their gender, province of origin, and rural lifestyle. By upholding my personal values for equality, empowerment, and respect I hoped to ensure that my participants were exposed to a non-oppressive and non-discriminatory experience during this study.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature, with specific reference to the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, the progress of the women's movement within the province, and the evolution of long distance commuting at provincial, national, and international levels. Chapter three discusses the design of the study. This section describes the methodology used, the research participants involved, and how the data were collected and analyzed. In chapter four I present the major findings of the study and describe the themes and sub-themes that emerged from these findings. The fifth chapter includes a discussion and interpretation of the research findings, recommendations for community and policy practice, the limitations of the study, and potential avenues for future research.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

I will introduce my review of the literature by defining many of the key concepts that will be discussed throughout the thesis. In order to holistically represent the circumstances surrounding LDC, I will attempt to integrate varying macro level standpoints, including political, organizational, community, and economic contexts, into my review of the literature, which will assist in providing a richer and more dynamic understanding of this phenomenon (Fook, 1996). To begin, I will provide a historic overview of the Province of Newfoundland, paying specific respect to the Indigenous history of the province, women's influence on provincial growth, and the unique aspects of rural life - three dimensions that are often neglected and omitted in mainstream historical accounts. The evolution of LDC in Canada will then be discussed, with an emphasis on the social implications and community sustainability issues for the Province of Newfoundland. I will also begin to explore the unique circumstances of rural Newfoundland women whose partners are involved in the LDC workforce, and the social and emotional issues that may be connected to their experiences. Finally, I will examine the growing body of international literature that addresses the psychosocial issues experienced by families and communities that are affected by LDC work.

### Definitions

*a.) Long distance commuting*[1] - will follow the widely accepted definition of Storey and Shrimpton (1989) as being;

> 'all employment in which the work is so isolated from the workers' homes that food and accommodation are provided for them at the work site, and rosters are established

[1] Most Newfoundlanders do not use the term 'long distance commuting' when referring to this genre of work. Usually individuals will refer to the specific location out of which they are working. 'Working out West' is the common term when referring to any employment based out of Western Canada.

whereby employees spend a fixed number of days at the site, followed by a fixed number of days at home'.

The terms 'fly in/fly-out work', 'migrant work' and 'mobile work' are also found in the literature to describe long distance commuting.

*b.) Rural-* will ascribe to the Statistics Canada definition of 'rural and small town' (RST), which refers to communities of less than 10,000 people and outside the commuting zone of urban centers of more than 10,000 people (Du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson, 2002).

*c.) Source communities-* will refer to the home communities of workers and their families, often from where the LDC worker will commute.

*d.) Host communities-* will refer to the communities close to the worksites that accommodate workers during the work period.

*e.) Roster/Rotation-* refers to the system by which workers are grouped to determine their work schedule; determines the time period at the worksite versus at home. A common rotational shift is 2/1 (2 weeks on/1 week off).

*f.) Social Need-* refers to a deficiency in positive relationship building opportunities. This may include an individual feeling a lack of social support (e.g. with childcare), a lack of socialization opportunities (e.g. time spent with friends), a lack of community involvement (e.g. involvement in clubs or organizations), a lack of personal time and space (e.g. hobbies or personal interests) or a lack of social services (e.g. counselling or employment assistance).

*g.) Emotional Need-* refers to a deficiency in personal esteem and worth necessary for positive mental health. This may include an individual feeling a lack of closeness, intimacy,

attachment, acknowledgement, validation, understanding, or accomplishment. Emotional needs may overlap with social needs.

*h.) Newfoundland-* refers to both the island and mainland portions of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL); for brevity purposes I will be using the term 'Newfoundland' when referring to the province as a whole, unless specifically referring to the Labrador region of the province.

*i.) Outport-* Refers to a small, geographically isolated community located on the coastal regions of Newfoundland.

*j.) Partner-* This refers to the relationship between the commuting individual and the individual who remains at home. This may refer to marriage or common law relationship.

**Indigenous History of Newfoundland**

In order to provide an accurate history of the Province of Newfoundland it is important to acknowledge the presence and influence of the many Indigenous populations who inhabited the island long before European settlers. Oftentimes, Western based research and literature has a tendency to disregard, whether accidentally or intentionally, the experiences of subaltern populations (Transken, 2002), as countless historical texts describe the 'discovery' of Newfoundland by John Cabot in 1497 as the dawn of the island's rich history, while numerous other reports provide evidence that the Norse Vikings were the first to land on the shores of Newfoundland, hundreds of years before Cabot (Memorial University of Newfoundland [MUN], 1997a). Therefore, in the interest of offering a true and comprehensive account of the province's dynamic history and ancestry, it is necessary to pay credence and respect to the different Indigenous populations, and particularly the strong Indigenous women, who were the original inhabitants of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Figure 1
Image: Shanawdithit (1841)
By: William Gosse

Today, many of these populations exist only in archaeological records, having disappeared long before European settlement; others, notably the Innu, Inuit, Micmac, Métis, and Beothuk, were thriving up until contact (MUN, 1997b). The Beothuk people in particular, were completely devastated by the arrival of settler people, and the disease and war that they brought with them. There has been limited historical recording of the lives and culture of the Beothuk people, and much of the existing information has been elicited from interactions with Shanawdithit and Demasduit – two Beothuk women who were captured by early Europeans (Whitby, 2005). Unfortunately, the invaluable knowledge provided by these women regarding their people, culture, and customs has been repressed and disregarded throughout the history books, and the possibility of learning from them died with Shanawdithit in 1829 – believed to be the last known survivor of the Beothuk people (Winter, 1975).

The Innu, Inuit, Métis, and Micmac people encountered similar violations, abductions, and killings at the hands of settler societies, however, these encounters did not lead to their mass extinction, as was experienced by the Beothuk people. Instead, these nations were 'afforded the opportunity' to become amalgamated with white people through practices such as forced enrollment in Indian Residential Schools[2], forced subscription to Christianity, and forced community restructuring and resettlement. The harsh conditions witnessed by the early Aboriginal peoples of Newfoundland were just the beginning of the

[2] More than one hundred Indian Residential Schools were established throughout Canada from 1840 to 1996, for the purpose of integrating Aboriginal children into White society. These schools were often a place of severe emotional, physical, psychological and sexual abuse and have significantly contributed to the erosion of Aboriginal language, history, and culture.

province's history of unjust treatment towards marginalized populations, as similar oppressive systems have had considerable consequences for the female perspective as well; these issues will be discussed further in the following sections.

## Women's Presence in Newfoundland

To fully appreciate and understand the context in which Newfoundland women are living today, it is helpful to follow their journey throughout history by bridging women's past and present circumstances. It is also through connecting women's experiences, hardships, and achievements over the course of many generations that other, less familiar histories can be revealed and valued. The following sections will begin to explore these stories, paying specific attention to women's exclusion from historical accounts, their pursuit for the right to vote, their ongoing fight for equality, and their role in the Newfoundland fishery.

### Women's absence from (his)torical accounts.

Women's presence and influence within Newfoundland (and Canadian) history have been largely undocumented and neglected in both academic and non-scholarly works; their voices suppressed and their authenticity distorted (Transken, 2005). This is not surprising considering that men are largely over represented as the authors of archival research and have written most of what exists to date; consequently, Newfoundland's historical records have often been filtered through a patriarchal lens (McGrath, Neis, & Porter, 1995). This can be evidenced in the descriptions of Shanawdithit as behaving in a 'sulky' and 'defiant' manner upon her abduction from her people in the early 1800s (Winter, 1975), to present day accounts that devalue and disregard women's contributions to voluntary, charitable, familial, and household work (Power, 2005). It is apparent that not every writer and historian that attempts to relay the experiences of women does so in a way that is well-meaning, accurate,

or empowering. The literature is riddled with discriminatory portrayals of women that further serve to oppress and marginalize this population (Kealey, 1993); perpetuating a prominent discourse that is not unique to Newfoundland women, but familiar to women across the globe.

The writings of Paul O'Neill may be one of the first attempts to document the history of Newfoundland women, however, his descriptions of prominent female figures are rigid and biased as he polarizes them as being either 'princesses' or 'hard tickets' (McGrath, Neis, & Porter, 1995). As Newfoundland women struggled for equal rights, and specifically the right to vote, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they were continuously heckled, ridiculed, and belittled by local politicians, the media, and the general public. Provincial political figures opposed to the suffrage movement have been recorded as saying "that she [women] should not have power in the political arena, not because she lacks political executive ability... but because she risks the burning of bread in the oven while she is attending matters political" and "feminine characteristics are such as do not adapt women to equal rights of men" (Kealey, 1993, p. 223). Although this degree of sexism may not be as blatant and obvious as we explore the more recent literature, the fact that provincial historical accounts are void of (or misrepresent) women's experiences and influence is still an ever-present issue.

There has recently, however, been a slow but steadfast increase in feminist Newfoundland literature, as several local researchers and writers strive to discover and recover women's influence in shaping the history and culture of the province (Griggio, 2009; Norman, Power & Dupre, 2011; Walsh, 2009). From the struggles of the women's suffrage movement in securing women's right to vote, to their essential participation in the cod

fishery, to their experiences navigating through sexist work systems and employment policies, the voices of Newfoundland women, both past and present, are beginning to emerge and gain recognition.

**The suffrage movement.**

In March of 1925, the determination and perseverance of the women's suffragist movement was finally recognized as the women of Newfoundland were granted the right to vote; this law passed an entire seven years after Canadian[3] women were granted this same right. Margot Duly (1993) describes the sixteen-year political battle of Newfoundland women in their quest for voting rights. She notes that the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), formed in 1890 in the city of St. John's, was one of the first formal groups to witness the voices of women's unrest and unease with the status quo. Duly states that the WCTU was originally formed to bring forth issues such as irresponsible alcohol consumption and negligent liquor laws, which had a significant impact on the lives of women and children, as they were often the ones who suffered from the indirect effects caused by alcohol abuse, whether through domestic violence, poverty, or other social problems. Comprising about 60 members, the WCTU began discussing the influence that women could have on political issues if they were granted the right to vote. However, their petitions for voting rights were met with strong opposition, and were shot down by government officials in 1892 and again in 1893; after these rejections, the WCTU began to disengage from the suffrage movement and focused their efforts on other social problems and charitable issues.

The official commencement of the suffrage movement was initiated by the Ladies Reading Room (LRR), which was formed in December 1909 (Higgins, 2008). This

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[3] Newfoundland did not join confederation until 1949, and was considered a separate nation before this time.

establishment of 125 members began the formalization process of women's political, legal, and economic rights and provided women the opportunity to enhance public debating skills, gain confidence, and discuss women's' status in the province. As the suffrage movement began to take shape, there were several influential women who stepped forward to help guide and mobilize the LRR. Duly (1993) recounts the influence of Armine Gosling, one of the founders of the LRR, who was noted for her strong feminist ideals and her passion for the women's suffrage movement. She describes Gosling as being a key leader in the movement, who wrote many speeches, letters, and articles fighting for the rights of Newfoundland women. Unfortunately, Gosling's passionate voice as she publicized the devaluation of women made her the target of many public and political figures who opposed the suffragist movement. Local newspapers rebutted Gosling's advocacy tactics; columnist P.J. Kinsella of the *Daily News* responded with the statement: "politics is a matter of reason, woman does not reason, politics demand mainly consideration- woman cannot give that" and noted that a world that was "at the mercy of woman's fickle sway, would quickly decay and totter" (Kinsella, 1913).

Figure 2
Photo: Armine Gosling
Image reproduced from *The Distaff* 1916, p. 11

Over the course of World War I, Newfoundland women began submitting their own writings and opinions to the feminist oriented newspaper, *The Distaff.* Duly (1993) describes women's rights advocate and editor of the paper, Mabel LeMessurier, as being responsible for publicly recounting women's critical contributions to the war efforts, either as nurses, knitters, or charitable organizers. LeMessurier's efforts influenced the establishment of the Women's Patriotic Association (WPA) in 1914 (consisting of approximately 15,000 women

province wide) which insisted that women's valuable influence during wartime should hold considerable weight towards the suffrage movement. Approximately three dozen Newfoundland women received honorable recognition for their tireless contributions during the war, and suffrage opponents eventually began to reassess their views of the movement.

As Gosling's presence in the movement took a backseat to her husband's ill health in early 1921, the responsibility and leadership of WPA gradually fell to the shoulders of Fannie McNeil, a 'witty and persistent' women's activist (Higgins, 2008). Although it would still take another four years before the women of Newfoundland finally achieved their long awaited victory, McNeil relentlessly pushed the last of the petitions for women's political involvement, and the suffrage bill was finally passed on March 9th 1925 by a less than enthusiastic government (Duly, 1993)

**Continuing the fight for equality.**

This advancement of women's rights in Newfoundland was only the beginning of the ongoing fight for equality and social justice. Pope and Burnham (1993) describe the evolution and formation of several women's groups throughout the province over the course of the following fifty years: the Jubilee Guilds in 1935, the St. John's branch of the Canadian Federation of University Women in 1945 (followed by the Grand Falls branch in 1957), and the Local Council of Women in 1966. In the Fall of 1972, the authors explain that what is now known as the St. John's Status of Women Council-originally established as the Newfoundland Status of Women Council (NSWC)-, was organized by a committee of fifteen women dedicated to women's rights issues and implementing social change in the province. With the assistance of a $3,000 startup grant, the NSWC set to work by raising local consciousness through the implementation of sex education in school curriculum,

opening a women's crisis centre, and giving voice to women's, children's, and community issues. Although the progress made by these organizations was considered to be momentous, Pope and Burnham remark that they were all based out of the urban center of St. John's, and hence, may not have always represented the views and lifestyles of rural women. Additionally, many of the feminist organizations in St. John's were run by women who had moved to Newfoundland from other parts of the country and, consequently, some rural women felt that they did not sufficiently understand the concerns and issues associated with outport life. Therefore, shortly after the formation of the NSWC, other Status of Women Councils were initiated in other (rural) parts of the province in order to address the unique circumstances of each community.

The obstacles and barriers presented to the women of rural Newfoundland in their struggle for recognition and equal rights were often heightened compared to those of city dwellers. However, it was apparent from the commitment and perseverance exhibited by rural women that they were prepared to meet any and all challenges. In the Labrador portion of the province, isolation is a much more prominent issue, as there are fewer services and communities are smaller and more geographically isolated. One Labrador woman was noted to have taken an eight-hour snowmobile trip in order to attend the provincial Status of Women Council conference in Eastern Labrador (Pope & Burnham, 1993). St. John's women, recognizing the geographic barriers that were present for many rural communities, began working in conjunction with rural women throughout the province to address the needs of smaller communities, such as proper nutrition, and addictions and mental health issues. Using a participatory action approach, the women developed strategies and information sessions that were implemented in about 60 communities province wide, and proved to be

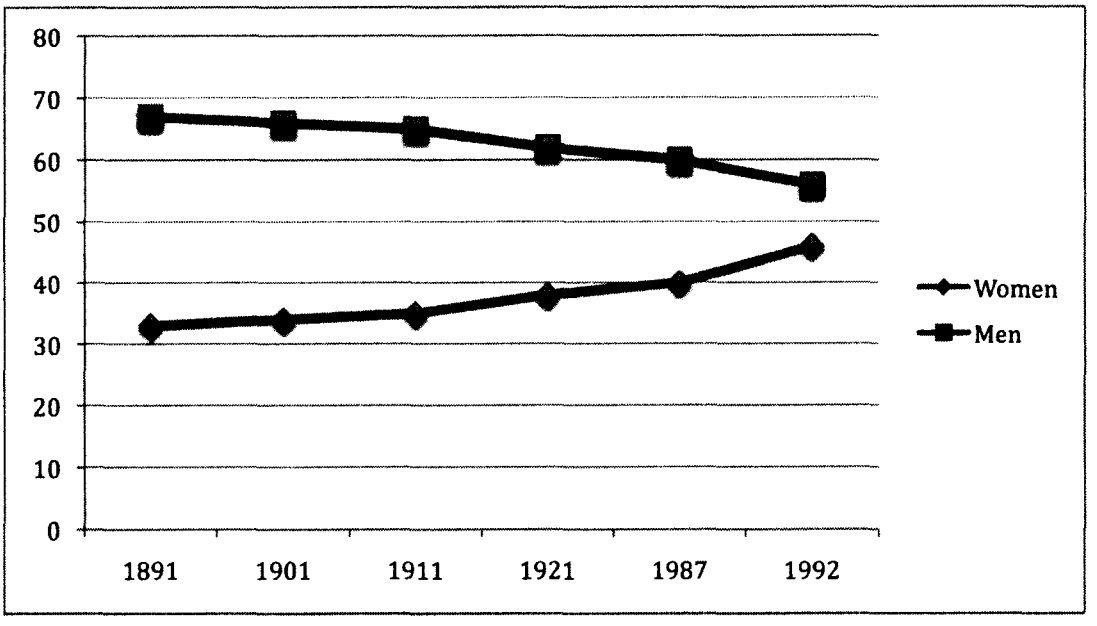
quite effective in responding to unique community needs. Thien and Hanlon (2009) outline this approach to rural caring, reporting that feminist based models of care that challenge unconsciously accepted patriarchal approaches (which value autonomy and separation) are intricately linked to rural geography and space. This is clearly evident in the willingness and adeptness of women's groups across the province to band together in order to assist and address community issues, and has not been an uncommon theme throughout the province's history (Kealey, 1993).

**Women and the Fishery**

Since the early 1800s, the Newfoundland fishery has been the primary industry within the province and has been the bread and butter for most outport communities. The fishery was more than just a means of employment for many Newfoundlanders, but was an integral part of community livelihood and cultural identity.

Figure 3

*Percentages of Men and Women Involved in the Fishery*



Women are virtually disregarded in the chronicling of the provincial fishery even though they were heavily involved and made massive contributions to this industry. Although women were not often found in the fishing boats themselves, they made up the vast majority of the processing and production crew (Wright, 2001). Figure 3 illustrates women's growing presence in the fishery; had the industry continued we might assume that future participation rates between men and women may have become a 50/50 split, if not becoming a female dominated trade.

Women's absence from the fishing boat was not necessarily attributed to their personal preference to decline this work, but rather to the political structures and government policies that were in effect at this time. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) had very strict regulations on women who fished, and there are many documented accounts of restrictions being placed on women's licenses (and sometimes revoked entirely), while men were encouraged and supported to continue fishing (Woodrow & Ennis, 1994). For a significant period of time, there were also provincial stipulations placed on Employment Insurance (EI), which prohibited the wives of fisherman from collecting EI benefits, as women were considered to be only 'helpers' to their husbands, and not legitimate workers themselves (Wright, 2001). This oppressive limitation of EI was eventually revised in the 80s; however, it is a prime example of what Waring (1999) describes as the economic and political disregard and discounting of women's work in the global economic markets; where women's work is seen as secondary, serving only to contribute to that of men's.

Due to rapidly decreasing cod stocks, the federal government placed a moratorium on the cod fishery in 1992. Mitchell and Schmidt (2011) describe the instability and hardship associated with resource dependent communities when the primary resource (in this case the

fishery) deteriorates; one can, therefore, imagine the mass devastation that occurs when this phenomenon is extended to an entire province. As more than 30,000 Newfoundlanders found themselves collectively unemployed, the moratorium has been characterized as the largest mass layoff in Canadian history, the most significant factor in Newfoundland's employment crisis, and has often been perceived as being primarily male affected (Gien, 2000). However, at the time of the fishery closure there were around 15,000 women employed by the industry (either as fishers or fish plant workers) who lost their jobs (Higgins, 2008). Considering the gendered power relations and structures that existed at this time (and to a large degree, still do) men and women were impacted quite differently by the fishery closure. As a group, Newfoundland women experienced lower incomes, decreased employment options, and higher familial responsibilities, which presented greater social and economic barriers in their search for work outside the fishery, when compared with Newfoundland men (Hussey, 2003).

Noting the disadvantaged state of Newfoundland women who had been laid off through the cod moratorium, Woodrow and Ennis (1994) began speaking with these women to better understand their experiences. Through the narratives of 87 rural women, the authors paint an uncensored portrait of the discrimination and despair experienced at the hands of federal and provincial government structures and regulations. The women interviewed discussed the endless training and readiness programs that the government implemented after the moratorium: the Northern Cod Adjustment Recovery Program (NCARP), 'Improving Our Odds', and the Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS), in the efforts to prepare women to enter an alternative workforce. Their experiences with these programs may have helped maintain their sanity and alleviate their boredom for a short time, but many experienced

discrimination and were further oppressed through these, and other, government courses. Women were only financially supported to enroll in a select number of trade options, and were not involved in relevant policy or program development or the decision-making processes that would determine their future; as a consequence, their circumstances were often overlooked and neglected (Hussey, 2003). Bride Jenkinson, an ex fish plant worker who witnessed these sexist practices first hand states, "...there's more jobs for men that retrain than women. How many hairdressers can a community have? Women are getting retrained in low paying jobs like homecare workers. Women are being ignored, and their concerns are not being addressed properly." (Woodrow & Ennis, 1994, p. 5). Women were also routinely denied loans and grants for startup businesses, as their skill sets were not deemed as valuable and they often did not have the initial savings to meet the necessary funding criteria. Instead, they would usually be firmly guided towards other kinds of (female dominated) trades programs, such as secretarial or personal care work.

The rural and isolated nature of many of these outport communities made it difficult for the women of the province to relate to one another and join forces to bring about structural change. Rural women also faced additional barriers in accessing training programs and educational opportunities due to long commutes and transportation issues, and they reported feeling abandoned and alone in their post-moratorium situation (Woodrow & Ennis, 1994).

Today, as we behold significant advances in technology and modest advances in women's rights, the lived realities of rural Newfoundland women present somewhat differently. Neis (2005) notes that gender inequalities and social divisions are still very alive and well within the Newfoundland fishery, and describes how increasing corporate and

government control have contributed significantly to its current state of collapse. She suggests that adopting a feminist approach towards fishing practices and polices, that is holistic, integrative, and which values and supports local knowledge and skills, may help shift current power imbalances from privatized ownership towards a more sustainable future for women, their families, and the fishery. Unfortunately, increasing globalization and patriarchal monopoly have not been limited to the fishing industry. We are now living in an age where massive corporations hold some of the highest levels of power, and whose main agenda is about minimizing costs and maximizing profits. Mullaly (2001) describes how such capitalist gains impact upon marginalized groups, stating that "survival in the global economy now takes precedence over meeting the human and social needs of people"(p. 305). These circumstances were present thirty years ago when globalization strategies began monopolizing the fishery, leaving thousands of local residents unemployed (Davis, 2000), and can also be witnessed today by observing the politics of the Canadian oil and gas industry, which generates multi billion dollar profits (most of which are funneled up to the owners of the oil corporations), but ignores the social needs of its workers and their families (Warnock, 2006). The ties between the women of rural Newfoundland and the large oil extraction corporations based in Western Canada may appear weak and ambiguous at first glance, however, the structural policies and practices of the latter have a significant impact on the former. In order to create change in current corporate practices and to assist the women of rural Newfoundland in empowering themselves, we can learn from the historical accounts and successes of this population. When these women have united in voice and belief their strength and determination have been limitless. It is, therefore, my hope that I

can become an ally in their quest for social change and recognition by providing a stage where there voices can be heard.

**The Evolution of Long Distance Commuting in Canada**

Canada has long been characterized as a wide and vast country, rich in natural resources but modest in population. These traits, particularly common to northern Canada, have offered Canadians (as well as immigrants) plentiful employment opportunities for natural resource extraction, primarily in the mining and oil sectors. Storey and Shrimpton (1989) describe the traditional approaches of the Canadian mining industry, whereby new towns would be developed near remote worksites to house employees and their families throughout the duration of the work project. This system reduced the need for impractical daily commuting to the job site and allowed the family unit to remain together. However, due to the excessive costs associated with the creation and maintenance of resource towns, this practice has become obsolete, as the vast majority of companies today opt to transport employees to and from their home communities and work site on a rotational basis; a trend that has become increasingly popular in the Canadian oil, gas, and mining industries.

Storey and Shrimpton (1989) report that Canadians first began utilizing LDC to meet their employment needs in the 1950s, traveling to the Gulf of Mexico to work on offshore oilrigs that were located extensive distances from the shoreline. The remote nature of this work made the prospect of daily commuting to the rigs impossible, as there were no nearby communities from which workers could avail of accommodations or resources. This prompted offshore oil and gas companies to establish scheduled rotations whereby groups of workers could be flown into the offshore drilling site for extended periods of time. The authors note that the successful implementation of LDC in the offshore industry later became

adopted by the Canadian mining sector in the early 1970s. By establishing basic work camps near the mine sites and transporting employees in and out of these camps, companies could avoid the exorbitant spending associated with building the infrastructure and services associated with creating a new mining town. This was especially beneficial for short term and remote projects, where the continued survival of a mining town was heavily dependent on the success of the mines themselves; as these towns were likely to collapse once the mining project was finished. Over the next twenty years, LDC became a common archetype of the Canadian oil and mining sectors, and became the preferred option for many natural resource extraction projects.

In the past decade, Canada has witnessed a dramatic increase in its LDC population, which can be largely attributed to the development and commercialization of the Athabasca oil sands. As the price of oil and gas continues to soar, the demand for skilled trades workers follows suite. Sharpe and Ershov (2007) describe a 50% increase in the number of LDC workers between 2003 and 2006, and estimate that 370,791 Canadians are currently involved in this genre of work, representing about 1.14% of the country's population. Although these numbers may not seem significant from the outside, they report that the economic benefits have been impressive, as the increasing rates of LDC work have generated over two billion dollars to the Canadian economy in 2006 alone. Furthermore, when one examines the movement of the LDC workforce from home community to work site, a clear pattern begins to emerge, and it becomes apparent that certain regions are much more involved in this type of work than others. Areas of the country that are rich in natural resources (primarily located in northern Alberta and northern British Columbia) offer plentiful employment opportunities but rarely have a sufficient working population to fill their employment needs. As a result,

*interprovincial* LDC has become a popular trend, drawing workers from regions of the country where the unemployment rate is significantly high and there is little opportunity for workers to find local employment. This is common among the Atlantic provinces, an area that is all too familiar with job scarcity, and that has experienced the largest net loss of their able bodied workforce to LDC work (Sharpe & Ershov, 2007). This is especially true for the Province of Newfoundland where the unemployment rate is the highest in the country at nearly double the national average and, consequently, is a prime recruitment target for large oil and gas companies (Armstrong, 2006). Due to this trend, interprovincial LDC patterns in Canada have commonly been described as an 'East to West' movement (CBC, 2008)

**The Implications of LDC for Newfoundland & Labrador**

As previously mentioned, the Province of Newfoundland has been heavily involved in LDC practices in recent years, due in part to plentiful employment opportunities within the Athabasca oil sands. However, this phenomenon is not a new one for the province, as Newfoundlanders have a rich history of traveling extensive distances in their search for work[4]. For generations, Newfoundlanders have been leaving the province in droves, most often gravitating to areas that are

Figure 4
Photo: Lunch atop a Skyscraper (1932)- Charles C. Ebbets

[4] The third and fifth men from the left in figure 4 are native Newfoundlanders, having immigrated to New York City for work.

experiencing significant shortages in labour; such as the offshore fishery of coastal Labrador in the early1800s, the inter-colonial railway in the Maritimes during the mid 1800s, and construction within rapidly growing American cities in the 1900s.

Over the past twenty years, however, Newfoundlanders' involvement in LDC has become less of a choice and more of a necessity as communities throughout the province have been experiencing severe economic and occupational decline. The mass layoffs catalyzed by the cod moratorium in 1992 played a significant role in this state of affairs. Over the course of the following ten years the province witnessed an 18% decrease in its population as more than 48,000 people left the province in search of jobs (the majority being youth between the ages of 15 and 29) with rural communities suffering the greatest losses (Higgins, 2008). The closure of several local paper mills along with the boom of the oil industry in 2003 attracted thousands more and these numbers continue to grow (Sharpe & Ershov, 2007) as 'heading out West' is a common plan for many high school youth upon graduation as they realize the bleak opportunities for employment in their own province. In 2006, the steadily aging population and the dropping fertility rates reached an all time high, as Newfoundland became the first province to record a natural population decline as the death rate outnumbered the birth rate (ESB, 2008). This trend has lead to the disappearance of several rural communities, such as Grand Bruit, where the issue of depopulation became so great that residents were forced to leave their homes and resettle in other communities (CBC, 2009). Due to the continuous erosion of Newfoundland communities, the decision to participate in LDC work (rather than leaving the province permanently or relying on social assistance) is often considered the lesser of these evils, as workers are able to sustain their

home life, while maintaining friendships, family and cultural ties. As many LDC workers have pointed out –"we have to leave in order to stay" (Fergusson, 2011).

**Sustainability Issues for Rural Newfoundland Communities**

Newfoundland was once a province teeming with young adult males during the prime of the fishery, however, there is now a gaping void of this subset of the population, and it continues to grow as Newfoundland men become increasingly involved in the LDC workforce. As a result, many rural communities have suffered the loss of countless local trades people and community leaders. Partners of LDC workers have also stated that they have less time and energy devoted towards taking part in local social and political activities in the community due to the high responsibilities associated with independent childrearing and family caretaking (Storey, 2009). One of the most notable losses is that of key community volunteers. LDC workers have commented that their line of work has led to decreased community involvement, as they no longer have time for coaching school sports teams or operating local fire brigades (Hopkinson, 2011). Sullivan and Halseth (2004) note that voluntary organizations play a central role in the quality of life, sense of community, and the social capital of rural and small towns, however, they must be maintained and fostered in order to survive. The disbandment of these volunteer groups can, therefore, weaken the social ties, trust, and reciprocity between the worker and local residents, which can be detrimental to social cohesion and community capacity as these things are often the "glue which holds communities together" (Hopkinson, 2011, p. 7). These findings can have serious impacts for rural communities with a large LDC workforce, as once tight-knit communities may begin to dissolve, increasing the likelihood of community and social disintegration.

Though LDC work can be highly correlated with many community problems, not all aspects of this type of work are perceived as negative. Once employed, the worker is able to avail of on the job training (usually free of charge) and has the opportunity for quicker career advancement as high employee turnover and the demand for skilled workers enable them to climb the company ladder at a much faster rate than they could in their home community. Considering that most LDC workers from Newfoundland do eventually return home (Storey, Shrimpton, & Thistle, 1986) the experience and skills acquired on the mainland can be used to benefit their home community in the future. The economic advantages of LDC are also significant, and it is most often the primary reason, and usually the only reason, for participating in this type of work (Richling, 1985). Higher wages, higher employment rates, and greater job stability result in significant financial gains for families and the payoffs are visible almost immediately and can be observed by the recent erection of town infrastructure and personal property construction. It is not surprising that communities that have witnessed the greatest loss of their workforce to LDC have also experienced the highest economical growth. Marystown, a rural community with one of the highest levels of LDC workers, has undergone a significant transformation due to western dollars being pumped into the local economy (Armstrong, 2006). Local business owners report that they have been taking in more profits than they've seen in years, as workers and their families are purchasing new trucks, snowmobiles, renovating their homes, and generally have more money to spend within the community (Storey, 2010).

**Social Issues Associated with LDC**

"I could get it quicker than I could get a pizza" reported one LDC worker, referring to the availability of cocaine in the camps of Fort McMurray, Alberta (Ferguson, 2007, p. 2).

These types of statements are not uncommon when speaking with LDC workers employed in western Canada. Fort McMurray has received a particularly bad reputation as being one of the largest drug communities in the oil and energy sector, as well as having a crime level that has soared to over five times the provincial average (Ferguson, 2007; Ruddell, 2011). The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission reported a 25% increase in the rates of substance abuse clients since 2006 and the local police force reported that the use of illicit substances has reached 'epic proportions' (Ferguson, 2007). There are numerous factors that have lead to the drug abusing cultures at many of these work sites and include issues such as, the loneliness and boredom of camp life, the exposure to a wide array of illicit substance and drug using behaviors, and the common fact that workers have few ties to the host community and "have more money than they know what to do with" (Fort McMurray Today, 2006, p. 2). This combination has been one that has resulted in serious addictions problems for some LDC workers who have reported the ease in which they are able to access cocaine, crystal methamphetamine, ecstasy, or other drugs. For some rural Newfoundlanders arriving in Fort McMurray, this drug scene may be strange and unfamiliar and present issues that they may be unprepared to handle, which can be especially harmful for young workers who may be more easily influenced.

As could have been predicted, the increase in the availability of illicit drugs and the high rates of substance abuse were not only a problem for host towns like Fort McMurray, as it didn't take long for addictions issues (and the drugs themselves) to become repatriated to Newfoundland (Ferguson, 2007; Storey, 2010). These developments can present significant consequences for provincial healthcare workers, addictions counselors, as well as community residents, especially youth, who may come into contact with substances that are potentially

dangerous and largely unknown to them (Herridge, 2008). For these reasons, it is important to gain a sense of how *rural* areas of the province may be affected by these trends, in order to inform the development of potential interventions and services, as they may be impacted differently than larger urban centers (Mitchell & Schmidt, 2011).

LDC can also have significant implications for the workers' families, as prolonged parental and partner absence can create many issues for partners and children as they attempt to navigate a new set of family dynamics. LDC can place significant strain on the personal relationships of the workers, leading to relationship breakdown and even family violence (Ryser, Schwamborn, Halseth, & Markey, 2011; Storey, 2010). Other studies have reported increased loneliness and anxiety when the working partner is away, as well as increased incidents of infidelity for both partners (Clark, McCann, Morrice, & Taylor, 1985). Many women who stay in the community while their partner is away at work may experience issues around role transitioning, as they may become responsible for *all* household maintenance, child rearing duties, and possibly their own employment. A recent study conducted by Ryser et. al (2011) indicates that such unequal distribution of household responsibilities is one of the primary concerns for couples involved in an LDC lifestyle. These responsibilities can be heightened for rural families who may not have access to formal services, such as childcare, snow clearing, and public transportation, as these added stressors can put more pressure on the family system as whole. Lewis, Shrimpton, and Storey (1988) also add that while frequent breaks can be perceived as a 'honeymoon period' for some couples and help to strengthen intimate relationships, their research has shown that continuous farewells and reunions can be extremely stressful and upsetting for many families.

**International Perspectives of LDC**

Despite Canada's historic involvement in LDC work, it is not the only country, or even the most heavily involved country, in this industry. The move towards LDC as a valid and efficient employment system has been growing at a global level, particularly in regions that share Canada's low population density and seemingly endless landscapes.

This trend has become extremely popular in Australia, where there has been a surge of literature relating to the short term social impacts that LDC has on families and communities. Although the onset of LDC (which Australians commonly refer to as 'fly-in/fly-out' work or FIFO) is a fairly new phenomenon for Australia, the growth that they have been experiencing in this type of work, particularly with regards to the mining sector, has launched them to the forefront of this industry (McHugh, 2009). Many Australian mining companies have implemented social programs and services for their employees and their families to help with the transition from stationary work life to an LDC lifestyle (FIFO Families, 2011). These services may include connecting families of migrant workers with one another and encouraging the networking of support systems in order to assist with the burdens associated with childcare, loneliness and social isolation. Compassionate leave is also available for workers who are feeling stressed and overwhelmed with LDC work and couples counseling is offered to workers who may be experiencing relationship difficulties. Support groups and activities for 'lone' parents and their children are common and community resources to assist with the stress and difficulties associated with LDC are highly promoted (Mining Family Matters, 2010). It is not difficult to understand why the public perception of LDC work in Australia does not have the same melancholy associations that Canadians have attached to it, especially when one examines the structural supports that have

been implemented to foster family security and wellbeing. In fact, studies originating from Australia have reported that children who have an LDC parent experience no greater increase in negative psychological or social effects than children whose parents have a 'regular' work schedule, and that the extended periods of uninterrupted time that LDC workers are able to spend at home actually equates to larger blocks of quality family time (Kaczmarek & Sibbel, 2008).

The feelings and attitudes that rural Newfoundland communities hold towards LDC work also appear to be in direct contrast to the reported experiences of rural source communities in Australia, where migrant work is a welcome form of employment and many communities actively seek to become source towns[5]. According to Moore (1997) there are numerous advantages in being chosen as a source community. For one, it brings in a significant amount of money that will benefit local businesses, it also diversifies the local economy and increases the town's population as LDC workers and their families are drawn to FIFO designated towns. There is also a high degree of collaboration between many of the natural resource companies and local community governments in order to best meet the needs of the LDC workforce. Moore also explains that Australian companies will often invest in source communities by implementing community projects, such as education or training programs, in order to better support the community and workers. These programs are usually received with enthusiasm and are highly appreciated by government, LDC workers, and local permanent residents. As a result, natural resource companies are often perceived as having a positive impact on the community, as opposed to 'stealing' workers from their families and home life, which is more in line with the Newfoundland ideology.

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[5] In Australia, mining companies have designated towns where workers can be flown in/out. This differs from the Canadian context where workers can be flown into worksites from anywhere in the country.

**Implications for Newfoundland Women**

The Canadian LDC workforce is overwhelmingly comprised of male workers and little data has been collected regarding female representation. Past research indicates that women accounted for only six to fourteen percent of Canada's LDC workforce, and were primarily employed in cleaning, catering, and administrative roles (Storey & Shrimpton, 1989). One could assume that women today would represent a larger portion of this industry, and Sherk (2007) states that this is true for non-commuting employment in the petroleum sector where women have reached 24% of the workforce. However, in terms of actual interprovincial commuting, she notes that women are still significantly underrepresented and their involvement with this lifestyle is primarily represented as the 'stay at home' partner of the LDC couple.

Waring (1999) describes how these women who do not work outside the home (i.e. do not receive financial compensation for their work) are considered by governments to be 'economically inactive' members of society and, therefore, their views are usually not considered in political and economic policy development. She states that most of women's unpaid work, such as childcare, eldercare, cleaning, and gardening, is not factored into regional or national accounts and is, therefore, not recognized or deemed of value by economic and political systems. As a result, it is impossible to prove the need for services (such as childcare or home support) if it is being provided by an economically invisible population, and she concludes that women, apparently, must be incapable of being in need. The discounting and devaluing of women's work is a major factor in maintaining oppressive structures and ideologies that serve to exacerbate issues such as poverty, stress, and domestic violence. Due to these, and similar, existing patriarchal underpinnings and influences of

government systems, occurring at local, national, and international levels, it is critical that further research and exploration be conducted in order to integrate women's experiences and actual needs into the political agenda.

At present, there is limited research that focuses on the experiences of Canadian women who are confronted with extended partner absence, and the existing literature is quite outdated. Newfoundland women have been especially neglected in this research area, as one of the more recent comprehensive studies that purposefully included their views dates back to 1985 (Storey, Shrimpton, Lewis, & Clark, 1989). At this period in time, only 30% of the women interviewed worked outside of the home and the vast majority held more traditional views of gender roles (the woman's role as caretaker and homemaker, and the man's role as breadwinner and provider). The affliction of Intermittent Husband Syndrome (IHS) was also beginning to gain acceptance as a logical diagnosis for women with 'ineffective coping strategies' (Clark, McCann, Morrice, & Taylor, 1985); implying that any problems associated with an LDC lifestyle resonated from flaws within *her* and, therefore, solutions to these problems must arise from changes within *her* as well.

Considering that a great deal has changed over the past thirty years, specifically with regards to traditional gender roles and responsibilities, technological advancements, and general attitudes and perspectives of women, there may be an opportunity for new research findings and increased knowledge in this area. Moreover, the bulk of the existing research has focused on LDC in the offshore oil industry and mining sectors, with little data having been collected on women whose partners are involved in the Athabasca oil sands of Alberta. This may be a significant factor to note when considering the higher levels of substance use,

sexually transmitted diseases, and general risky lifestyle choices that are associated with this region (Ruddell, 2011).

## Chapter Three: Research Design

I chose to use a qualitative case study as the primary research method for this project, and relied on feminist thought and ideology to guide and inform the research process. In the following section I will describe these research methods, my participant sample, community demographics, and the recruitment process. I will also explain how I collected and analyzed my data and discuss the ethical considerations of the research.

### Methodology

I conducted this study using a qualitative approach, as it is well suited for researchers who want to explore the complexity of personal experiences, issues, and perceptions of a population (Marshall & Rossman, 2007). This type of in-depth understanding would have likely been impeded had I used a quantitative approach, which is better suited for collecting large amounts of data that can be generalized to a wider population, but often lacks contextual detail. Marshall and Rossman (2007) contend that qualitative researchers are "intrigued by the complexity of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants themselves attribute to these interactions"(p. 2). This statement closely describes my own research process and intentions, having had the opportunity to listen to individuals recount their personal stories and provide their own interpretations of these stories.

I have used a case study approach as my main data gathering method. Zainal (2007) helps define this approach stating that, "case studies, in their true essence, explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships."(p. 1). In using this approach, I was able to gather a deep and comprehensive view of each participant's LDC

experience that could be analyzed, not only as strong individual accounts, but that could also be compared across all other participant cases.

As previously mentioned, I have approached this study as a feminist researcher and have been actively influenced by feminist thought and knowledge throughout my interactions with participants and my interpretation of the data. While I have relied on the case study methodology to provide direction and structure to the research process, feminist theory has offered a supportive energy that has gently guided this study; allowing space for a different perspective, an alternative point of view, and a new way of understanding. Feminist theory has played a significant role in this study by bringing women's voices together, maintaining women's issues as its primary focus, and by simply revealing the underexposed female experience (Hesse-Biber, 2008). Ultimately, I hope that this unconventional feminist stance on the LDC phenomenon may create opportunities for women to feel informed, engaged, and empowered to initiate and demand social change in their own lives.

**Research Sample**

This study involved the participation of 8 Newfoundland women. There were four criteria that were prerequisites for participation in this project; participants must: 1) be female, 2) be between the ages of 25-60, 3) reside in a rural community[6] within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and 4) have a partner who commutes to the Athabasca oil sands for work (partner must be away for a minimum of a 2 week period).

Although this criterion may appear narrow in scope, the final participant sample was actually quite diverse. Participants varied in terms of age, number of children (if any), family structure, and employment. A breakdown of participant demographics is revealed in the

[6] See page 6 for the complete definition of 'rural'

following table:

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

| Participant | Age | # of Children | Employed | Length of Partner's LDC Involvement | Length of Relationship | Marital Status |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 37 | 3 | Yes | 5 years | 5 years | Married |
| 2 | 42 | 0 | Yes | 7 years | 3 years | Engaged |
| 3 | 42 | 2 | Yes | 6 years | 22 years | Married |
| 4 | 38 | 2 | Yes | 3 months | 18 years | Common Law |
| 5 | 60 | 3 | No | 10 years | 46 years | Married |
| 6 | 27 | 0 | Yes | 3 years | 7 years | Married |
| 7 | 32 | 1 | Yes | 13 years | 13 years | Married |
| 8 | 50 | 2 | No | 6 years | 25 years | Married |

It should be noted that Newfoundland has very little ethnic diversity, and is considered to have the lowest diversity rates in all of Canada; most families are of European descent, and have primarily Irish and English origins (MUN, 2000). Due to the homogeneity among Newfoundlanders, especially in rural areas, I did not encounter any ethnic or cultural backgrounds outside the mainstream White culture. However, had this study taken place elsewhere in Canada, or in a more urban centre, I would likely have had to take participant's ethnicity, language, and cultural diversity into account, as this would have affected my recruitment and data collection process.

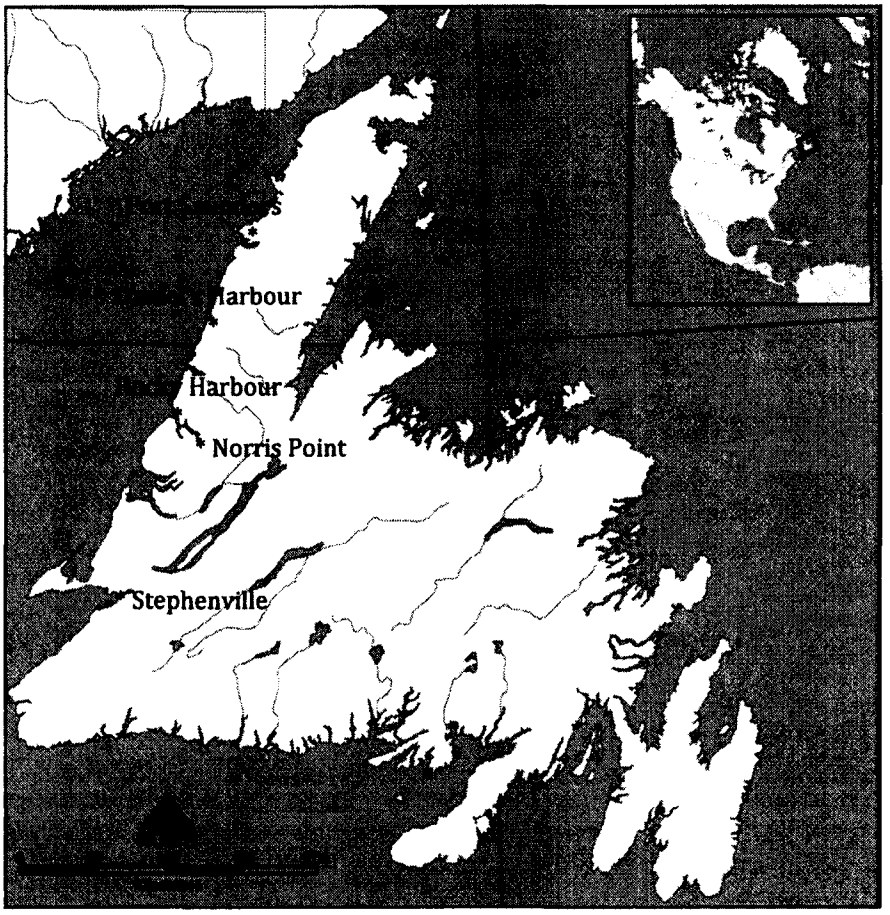
**Community Demographics**

Participants were recruited from five different rural communities that spanned more than 350 kilometers of Newfoundland's west coast and northern peninsula. Although connecting with women over such a wide geographical region was often challenging, it did

allow for greater diversity of experiences and hence, a greater transferability of the research findings. My research participants were recruited from the communities of Port Saunders, Daniel's Harbour, Rocky Harbour, Norris Point, and Stephenville. The location of these communities is displayed in the following map:

Figure 5

*Map of Communities*




All of these communities are located on the coast of Newfoundland and have relied heavily on the fishing industry for employment opportunities in the past; however, due to steadily declining stocks and continued government bans, these communities have witnessed

a dramatic decrease in this industry, and their future in the fishery continues to look bleak. The effects of this crisis can be felt through population loss and significantly high unemployment rates. The table below depicts these trends in the five communities involved in this study:

Table 2

*Community Demographics*[7]

| Community | Population 2011 Census | Population Change from 2001-2011 | Unemployment Rate[8] | Distance from Major Centre |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Port Saunders | 740 | - 14.2% | 16.9 % | 277 km |
| Daniel's Harbour | 265 | - 24.3% | 12.5% | 207 km |
| Rocky Harbour | 980 | - 2.5% | 30.1% | 122 km |
| Norris Point | 685 | -12.7 | 32.3% | 125 km |
| Stephenville | 6,720 | - 8.7% | 18.6% | 83 km |

Although the outmigration and unemployment issues in these communities are alarming, these statistics are on par with other rural areas of the province, as numerous other communities throughout Newfoundland are witnessing similar trends.

**Recruitment Process**

During the Summer/Fall of 2012 I spent several months travelling along Newfoundland's west coast and northern peninsula recruiting participants for this study. I used a snowball sampling method to recruit participants and began this process by connecting

[7] Data for this table obtained from the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency

[8] Unemployment rates from 2006 census report; provincial rate during this period was 18.5%

with community leaders and key informants within the Bonne Bay area[9], a region where I have previously established professional and personal ties. The role of these community informants was instrumental to the recruitment process, as many had lived in their respective communities their entire lives and were privy to community history, family relationships, and resident lifestyles of which I would have been ignorant. Once I had recruited a few participants (through connecting with key informants, distributing my information letter, and even speaking about my research on the local radio station) several were able to introduce other potential participants to my research project. Although this proved to be quite a time consuming process (often after connecting with an individual I would discover that they did not meet all of the study's criteria and, therefore, I could not include their experience in the project) I believe that this was an important part of my research journey, as it allowed me to spend a considerable amount of time living in, and getting to know, these communities. I was able to witness community interactions and family systems, not as a healthcare worker and permanent community fixture, but through the lens of an inquisitive researcher and transient visitor. I felt the recruitment process to be an enriching experience, not only on an academic level, but also on a personal and cultural level, as I was offered a different perspective to learn about my province and its people.

**Data Collection**

My primary data collection tool was a qualitative semi-structured interview. This type of interview allows the participants to freely discuss their opinions and ideas about a topic and share their own stories, however, it also ensures that the interview doesn't lose its focus on certain key areas and that the researcher's questions remain fairly consistent across

[9] The Bonne Bay area covers the communities of Norris Point, Woody Point, Trout River, Sally's Cove, Wiltondale, and Rocky Harbour

participants (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2007). My interview questions were divided into two sections: 1) the gathering of factual information around participants' background, context, and history with LDC, and 2) the personal expression of participants' thoughts, feelings, and opinions of LDC. Many of the questions in this latter section centered around how the family shares household responsibilities, the stressors associated with LDC, and the role of community and extended family in alleviating this potential stress. I did my best to ask open-ended and non-leading questions, and to provide participants with the time and space to share what they felt to be important. I believe that the communication and interview skills that I've developed during my professional experience as a mental health counselor helped to create an open and safe interview environment for participants.

I conducted one (1) interview with each participant, which ranged from 45 minutes to 90 minutes in length. I chose to interview participants individually, as opposed to conducting focus groups or joint interviews, because of geographical challenges (often participants lived several hours from one another) and confidentiality issues. The interview location was left to the discretion of each participant; most interviews took place within participants' homes, however, a few preferred to meet at local establishments or their place of work. With the consent of each participant, interviews were audio-recorded and I would then personally transcribe each interview verbatim.

In addition to the qualitative interview, I also used field notes as a data collection method. This was a useful tool, as during the interview process there were many details that could not be captured by an audio recorder or remain in my memory for more than a few hours. After leaving each interview I would find a quiet space and record my own personal observations, thoughts, and reflections. These writings might include notes about the

physical setting of the interview, my thoughts on observed family dynamics, or certain feelings I had during the interview. These field notes were essential in helping to create a rich description of the research setting, the interview process, and the relationships I formed with participants.

**Data Analysis**

I used a thematic analysis to process my data. This form of data analysis attempts to uncover specific themes, meanings, and patterns that emerge from the raw data, which, in this study, took the form of verbatim interview transcripts (Marshall & Rossman, 2007). Upon reviewing these transcripts, I began a coding process, which involved assigning a code to specific meaning units within the data. These codes were eventually broadened to encompass the general themes and patterns that emerged across the collective of participant experiences (Boyatzis, 1998). In the initial phase of the data analysis process, I had developed an unmanageable number of themes from the data. I, therefore, began to merge themes that were similar and create subthemes when appropriate, in order to more easily depict and handle the research findings.

Some of the themes that I uncovered were pulled directly from the data, what Boyatzis (1998) describes as manifest level themes, and could be readily observed when reviewing participant transcripts. However, there were also several latent themes that began to emerge, which were initially hidden beneath the surface of the data (Klenke, 2008). Uncovering these latent themes involved a deeper exploration and interpretation of the underlying ideas, messages, and meaning within the data. The final selection of the major themes and subthemes will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Ethical Considerations**

The University of Northern British Columbia requires all research projects involving human subjects to be examined and verified for ethics approval (University of Northern British Columbia, 2006). Prior to commencement, this study was submitted to UNBC's Research Ethics Board, as it involved interviewing human participants, and was cleared for ethics approval in July 2011. To help ensure that participants experienced no undue harm or ill effects from their participation in this study, they were provided with full disclosure of the study's intentions, procedures, and limitations. Participants were advised that their involvement in this project was completely voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. Each participant signed a consent form (Appendix C), acknowledging that she understood the terms of the study, and which described the measures taken to secure confidentiality and explained how their information will be used, stored, and later destroyed. All names and other potentially indentifying characteristics have been changed to help protect participant confidentiality.

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

Once I had collected my data, I used a thematic analysis to organize and interpret the research findings. This analysis revealed both latent and manifest level themes. I will begin this chapter by identifying the seven major themes and seventeen sub-themes that resulted from my preliminary analysis of the data, and which were pulled directly from participant accounts (Figure 6). I will then move on to provide a brief overview of the three latent themes that emerged from a deeper interpretation of the data (Figure 7), and which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

### Manifest Level Themes

Figure 6

*Manifest Level Themes and Sub-Themes*

**Challenges.** Throughout the course of my discussions with participants, it quickly became apparent that adopting an LDC lifestyle could present a unique set of challenges for the individuals who remain at home. The most prominent challenges that were reported centered on adjusting to life without their partner, being responsible for higher workloads, and the emotional toll they experienced as a result of extended partner absences.

***Adjustment period.*** When discussing some of the difficulties they encountered adjusting to an LDC lifestyle, many women noted that just the mere fact that their partner is not at home is a challenge in itself, as he will often miss important occasions and holidays, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and stress:

> that was the worst, *that* was the worst, it was when he had to work Christmas… I went to a friend's for my Christmas day dinner…but it wasn't even like Christmas, I never even opened the few gifts I had until Joseph came home, same as any other day here, one year I didn't even put up no Christmas tree, because he wasn't going to be home. (Participant 5).

> Darryl's son, he's up there too, and his girlfriend's due to have her baby next week, so of course he's going to miss the birth of his child right, because he's not laid off and he can't just come home because it's a job right? (Participant 2).

A few participants also noted that adjusting to life without their partner has often made them feel like they are unattached, alone, and 'a third wheel' when spending time with other couples, and they remarked that this is especially the case when attending social events alone:

> You don't even have anybody to rely on, and it always feels like you're just that single person, so I got to say, it is a little bit annoying in that way, because even when you do go out socially, you're always that single person right? (Participant 6).

The facility (or difficulty) with which participants are able to adjust to their partners' return home seems to be quite individual, and there was a broad spectrum of feelings and attitudes when describing this 'shift' from being apart to being back together. Their experiences ranged from a mild adjustment period, where 'things are pretty much the same

when he's home as when he's away' to a more tumultuous experience where 'life is completely different'. Participants described the chaos of trying to squeeze in numerous family activities and errands during his time home and the increase in the amount of household chores that they would became responsible for:

> When he comes home the adjustment of the first week of him being home of having like the extra laundry and his messiness, because he's messy...it's just his untidiness and stuff I got to get used to in that first week [that he's home] right, because I keep everything just so, and when he's home it's not like that. (Participant 1).

One participant noted that she had a tougher time adjusting to her partner returning home than when he was actually *leaving* to go back to Alberta, stating that it would take her a little while to adjust to being in 'couple mode' again:

> You just get used to your own routine, and then someone else comes back and it's like, 'well this is not what I do on Tuesday nights, on Tuesday nights I do this and this and this', you know? So you get used to your own routine. (Participant 6).

***Increased workload.*** All participants noted that their own workloads were higher when their partner was away, and this was particularly noticeable for the six participants who were employed outside the home. These participants were employed in a variety of professions, such as teachers, postal workers, family support workers, employment counselors, and home care workers, and one participant remarked that she was working *three* separate jobs outside the home. Working participants reported low levels of stress from their formal employment, but remarked that having a full time job did make juggling other responsibilities and chores more difficult, and time management was often an issue. Most participants discussed that their primary responsibilities within the home centered around general household maintenance, and included chores such as cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, laundry, and taking out the garbage.

Half of the participants had young children or teenagers living at home (<16 years old) and described that they would spend a significant amount of time fulfilling parenting responsibilities, which included preparing school lunches, helping with homework, transporting children to and from school, travelling out of town for sporting events, and arranging childcare for young children. Nearly all of these participants reported that taking care of their children during their partner's absence is one of the major challenges associated with LDC work:

> [it's hard] sometimes with decisions with the kids, or running the kids around, that sort of thing, because it's tiring and I have to work as well, and during the summer the kids would be out, they'd have a curfew but how would they get home except for me to go get them? and I still had to get up in the morning and go to work right... that's exactly what it's like, [being a] single parent for those weeks. (Participant 3).

> I'm constantly frustrated... how am I going to find the time to come home, get supper, do a project, take the kids on swim meets, because we've constantly have had to travel for that, have a three year old, get groceries...(Participant 1).

Many participants reported that there were no daycares in their community and babysitters were very hard to come by, which often made looking after their children a genuine challenge when their partner was away. Participants also discussed their newly established roles of repairing and caring for their homes and properties, and listed responsibilities such as weather proofing the house during storms, learning how to use a snowplow, and facilitating home renovation projects:

> Oh of course there's more I have to do...I tried to mow the lawn for the first time in my life *(laughs)*. First time in my life! It was a great accomplishment the first time I did it, it was fantastic, it worked great. The second time I did it I pulled my back out and I said 'I'm not touching the damn thing anymore!' (*laughs*). And I always refuse to do the garbage, the garbage was never my thing, I said it's 'man's work, man's work, man's work' but now I have to make sure the garbage is out every Friday morning. And I had to learn how to use the barbeque, I've never touched the barbeque, that was always his thing, now I have to learn how to use the barbeque if I want to barbeque food. (Participant 4).

> Anything went wrong I tried to do what I could. Household chores, Mary Bellows[10] (*laughs*) you had to do some things, and what you couldn't do, well if it wasn't that important you could wait til he got home right? But clearing snow and things like that, yes and mowing the grass, I done all that. (Participant 5).

Participants reported it was often the *fear* of something going wrong that was the most worrisome. Many described 'what if' scenarios of being home alone and their basement flooding or their roof leaking and feeling unprepared to handle these situations. One participant described her anxiety surrounding their plans to build their own home while her partner was still involved in LDC, as she recognized that much of the stress and responsibility of building would likely fall on her shoulders:

> Next year hopefully in the spring, we hope to maybe build our own home, and *that's* when it's going to be really annoying that he's gone, because I will have to pick up the brunt of, well hopefully he's not still gone, but if he is that will be a lot of work. (Participant 6).

Those who have been involved in this lifestyle for many years did admit that while the challenges of household maintenance were quite overwhelming in the early years, over the course of time they have become much more independent and skilled at undertaking these challenges.

In addition to the day-to-day challenges presented by LDC, several participants also described the annoyances associated with their partner's flights back and forth to Alberta. Oftentimes, the responsibility of driving workers to the airport and picking them up falls to the non-commuting partner and participants describe in great detail the stressors associated with this task. The closest major airport for communities on Newfoundland's west coast and northern peninsula is located in the town of Deer Lake, which can be several hours drive from the participant's home community. Many recounted years of having to wake up in the

[10] Television host Mary Bellows' hit 1980s home improvement show "Do it for Yourself" depicted women taking on home repair and renovation projects by themselves, a somewhat avant garde concept for that generation.

middle of the night to drive their partner to the airport, oftentimes having to deal with the stress of night driving, adverse weather conditions, a high risk of moose collisions, in addition to juggling their own full-time job and taking care of their children:

> I mean yes, I'm glad for him to be coming home and stuff, the only downside to it is his flights might be coming in the middle of the night...there's been lots of times that I've gone to the airport [at 3am] and come home, went back to sleep for a couple of hours and then got up and then go to work. (Participant 3).

> That's the worst part for me is picking him up. Oh my gosh I hate it... We always books his flights so it's the fastest he can get here, so it usually means he's getting in at one or three in the morning, so that's me driving on the highway, yep, with moose, and every time I go there's something, there's like fog, or heavy rain, or there's a snowstorm, every time! Oh me nerves! (*laughs*). (Participant 8).

***Emotional toll.*** For participants who found the LDC lifestyle to be particularly challenging, their most commonly reported emotion was feeling lonely, with half of participants stating that feelings of loneliness and a loss of companionship while their partner is away is the most significant drawback of this lifestyle:

> Well the worst part was being alone, being lonely was the worst part. Like no one to talk to, and people don't visit anymore like they used to. I mean one time people used to visit, and now you don't see anybody. (Participant 5).

Feelings of frustration and stress were also reported by several of the participants. These sentiments were often connected to experiencing a lack of support and practical help while their partner is away at work, and not necessarily because they missed his company. A few participants talked about crying often, sleeping excessive amounts, and feeling lost and bored when their partner first became involved in LDC lifestyle:

> I cried and cried and cried a lot. Like I'm gonna quit, I can't do it, or he gotta come home...I'm constantly frustrated how in the hell am I going to do this?...the spring I started another one [part-time job] and he was gone, and it was rough, really rough. I was depressed, I was stressed out... (Participant 1).

> B'y I'll tell you lots of days I used to be bored enough that what I'd do is go to bed and cover up, so that's depressed isn't it? (*laughs*)...probably not go to sleep, just go to bed

> and cover up, long before bedtime, could be in the middle of the day sometimes. (Participant 5).

**Partner's role.** The majority of participants described their partners as workaholics, needing to be busy at all times, always working on a home renovation project, and unable to just wait around for a local job to come along:

> Justin's one of those people who...if he lost his job today, he'd have a new one tomorrow. He'd be the type that 'ok I gotta get a job, I'll work anything right now until I get something better'...but he always has to be busy, and he knows that the income has to be there for us to have everything stable, so he's the type that 'I got to go, go, go til I get what I need'. (Participant 4).

> My husband's not the type of guy to just sit around and wait for something to drop. No, he's not going to stay home, if there's *anything* that he can do, even if it's something that he doesn't really want to do...he always works really hard. (Participant 6).

***Defying gender roles.*** Most of the women interviewed reported that their partners contribute a great deal to household chores and childcare during their time off work. They commented that their partners will help out with laundry, cooking, cleaning, transporting children, and other household chores traditionally characterized as 'women's work':

> [when he's home] he don't stop, he don't stop... like I said, [he'll'] cook supper, laundry, mow the lawn, take Logan while I'm at work, that way I don't got to worry about a sitter, or pay a sitter, things like that. (Participant 7).

> In January, he was home right, and he did all that [chores], and did everything that had to be done with the girls, take them where they had to go, and homework and laundry, and cleaning, and all this kind of stuff. (Participant 1).

Two participants stated that their partners will help out with household duties to a certain extent, pitching in with small chores around the house, but the bulk of household duties still fell on their own shoulders. However, these participants stated that they did not feel as if the housework was unequally shared (as he will contribute in other ways) and were satisfied with the level of help they received from him when he was home:

> Sometimes he wipes the dishes for me, like dries the dishes see, [he'll say] 'you need any help?' but for anything else he never ever had to do it, because I've been always the home maker...but he is pretty unhandy because he's not used to it, he even looks unhandy wringing out the dish cloth, you know he's not used to it right? (*laughs).* (Participant 5).

***Working out West.*** Participants did not report having any concerns regarding their partner's exposure to a potentially high-risk lifestyle. When asked whether they had any concerns about the high rates of illegal drug use in the Athabasca oil sands, participants would often smile or give a small laugh, as if the mental picture of their partner using drugs was quite silly. They asserted that they trusted their partner implicitly and the thought of him using drugs had never even crossed their minds:

> I don't maid [have concerns about drugs], no not even for me three sons, I've never had to worry about that...I never had no problem with that [drug use], not even alcohol, I mean he goes months and don't even have a drink so... (Participant 5).

When exploring this issue further, and asking participants how they feel about the possibility of their partner being exposed to the drug using behaviour of others, many would reference the company's anti-drug policies and zero tolerance standards:

> It's what you call a 'dry camp' so there's no drugs, no alcohol, whatsoever, in the camp. They actually have dogs going around sniffing at random your rooms in the search for alcohol or drugs...I mean at random they'll do a drug and alcohol urine test, at random...the plane that they come home on...is even a dry plane, so there's no service, no alcohol, no nothing on the planes. (Participant 4).

Many participants took comfort in these precautions, because although they trusted their partner's ability to make wise choices, they were aware that the substance use of other workers could jeopardize their partner's safety. Participants had slightly higher concerns for their partner's physical safety than his potential for drug use, and this usually depended on the type of work he did and the nature of his job responsibilities. Most reported that they had *some* worries around their partner's physical safety, however, no participant mentioned

feeling overwhelmed with worry, or having experienced unusual stress or anxiety as a result of safety concerns:

> He's an electrician, so no, I don't really ever [worry about him]. I'm not a worrier by nature, which is good, and of course, you worry a bit, because there's *so* many guys and *so* many people, there's five thousand people or something like that [in the camp], and it's crazy. So I mean you have to worry about some things but I don't ever *really* worry about it. (Participant 6).

It is possible that some of the concerns reported by participants originate from stories that they hear about others working in Alberta, and are not necessarily due to their partner's actual risk. Several participants could recite a few stories about incidents where a coworker was hurt on the job, but stated that their partner never encountered any safety issues:

> The thought [of his safety] has crossed my mind, but you can dwell on that stuff, or not...he called me one time and said there had been an incident... there was another group working above them and somebody dropped something and it landed on one of his coworkers, I mean he was checked out and he was ok and everything but still, it could've been...(Participant 3).

> I used to be more worried when he lived out in town, having to drive the highway, that was scary because you hear of so many accidents, but where he's in camp [now], no...I got no worries. (Participant 7).

Although participants felt that their partners may be put at higher risk, living in and around Fort McMurray where crime and work accidents are generally much higher than in Newfoundland, most had a high level of confidence in the company's safety standards and their partner's common sense to avoid dangerous situations:

> What he's doing *can* be considered dangerous for the simple fact that he's 136 feet in the air *but* the company he's with is doing everything they possibly can to ensure his safety...safety is everything up there so I don't have to worry about his safety. (Participant 4).

These low safety concerns may be attributed to being in daily contact with their partner, which may help to alleviate worry. Also, there seems to be an increase in occupational

health and safety practices and policies within companies, which may put their minds more at ease.

**Parenting.** Most of the participants interviewed had at least one child, and half of them had young children or teenagers still living at home. Participants broadly agreed that entering into this type of lifestyle with children was not something to be decided lightly, as it can have an impact on their emotional wellbeing and social behaviour.

***Children's adjustment.*** All participants with young children reported that their kids went through an adjustment period when their father first began commuting, with the exception of young infants who were unaware of any other lifestyle and who grew up accustomed to their father being away for extended periods of time. One participant described her experience of having an infant *and* a young child when her partner first began commuting:

> [It] didn't impact our youngest one because she's always known it to be her dad goes away and comes back and all that stuff, the oldest daughter she was used to having him around a little bit in the beginning for about four years, and so if he left she had a little adjustment to that. (Participant 3).

Although this type of adjustment period appears to be quite common among young children, there was a consensus among participants that this period is temporary and manageable, and none of the participants reported that their children exhibited any severe behavioural or emotional issues during this adjustment period. Participants noted that their children may experience episodes of sadness or loneliness in the beginning, and will usually have questions about their father's work and his absence, but soon adapt to a new family dynamic. One participant describes her young son's experience adjusting:

> He will get sad and say 'I miss my dad'...[because] Trevor used to wake him up and say good night before Logan went to bed, and then say goodbye...so what we try to do now, is not even say he's leaving, and Logan will wake up and [I'll tell him] 'well dad

> left last night and went to Alberta' and it's that much easier, because he would get really upset and cry. (Participant 7).

Although parents develop strategies to safeguard their children against any ill effects of LDC, many participants have noted that it is often the commuting parent who has the greatest difficulty dealing with parent-child separations:

> Now that Logan's in the picture it's harder for him to go away, and as he gets older now, Trevor used to say 'well daddy's going away to make money to buy you things' and now he's at the age that he says 'I don't want things, I want you home' right? (Participant 7).

Children raised in a household where one parent works away may also have more responsibilities placed on them, as the non-commuting parent often requires extra support maintaining the family household. Several participants claimed that their children are a great source of help around the house and that their children recognize that they may have to make their own sacrifices because of their family's lifestyle but have become accustomed to extra responsibilities:

> My daughters are really, really good, they chip in and help out, and they're wonderful. There's times when they'll babysit for me to run out and get groceries, and they might want to go out and play with their friends, but they know that that's what they have to do in order to get things done. (Participant 1).

As children grow older and enter the workforce it seems that it is not uncommon for them to follow in the footsteps of the commuting parent. For the three participants with grown children (>19 years old), all adult children have had some experience working in Alberta. One participant described how all three of her sons have permanently relocated to Alberta in order to secure employment, and although she finds it difficult being away from her grandchildren, she understands that there is little opportunity for her boys to find work at home. Another participant discussed how she has come to accept that her son will likely remain in Alberta permanently but has some reservations about her daughter following suit:

> Well she went up with him [father] her first summer after college, she went up and worked that summer with him, she just wanted to try it, and she liked it, she'd like to go again but it's a bit rough with a house full of men now, it's not really a great place for her to be... (Participant 8).

***Starting a family.*** For participants who either do not have children, or whose children were already grown once their partner began commuting, the thought of starting a family as a part-time 'single' parent can be intimidating. One young participant discussed some of her financial concerns of raising a child while her partner worked out West:

> It's not so bad for us, it's only the two of us, that's all we have to worry about, but I can't imagine [this lifestyle] with children...I don't even think I'm comfortable with having children and him working away right now. Even with the situation with lay offs and stuff like that. I know nothing is really, really secure but stuff like that makes me a little nervous I have to say, especially if you're going on maternity leave, you know? Two people [not working] that would be a struggle to maintain any sort of lifestyle, so I don't know, I don't think I would be comfortable with that. (Participant 6).

Childless couples who may be unsure about starting a family may not need to look far to get a glimpse of what life might be like once children enter the picture. Many participants mentioned having friends whose partners also commute out West, and who could paint a very real picture of parenting during extended partner absences. One participant described how she's been influenced by the experiences of other mothers:

> My friend has a six month old, and that would kill me, and it kills *him* to go away...it can't be easy because she's getting to stay at home and spend all of this time with him [her son] and she finds it hard because he comes home for a week and it takes Austin, her son, two days to get used to him, and then finally he's used to him and then he goes again, so it's just like a sin right? (Participant 6).

**Informal support.** As all participants previously described, having a partner who is involved in LDC increases their own workload immensely, and as a result they may often require additional support while he is away. As there are rarely any formal services offered to assist individuals in these situations, participants will often rely on their informal support networks for practical and social support.

***Family members.*** Most participants stated that they preferred to call upon their own parents when they required extra support, either in terms of childcare:

> Well my parents are really, really good, they're in Deer Lake, and they help with the travel with the kids for swim meets and stuff... they will either take the kids or come stay with the baby so I can go. (Participant 1).

Or in helping with housing maintenance:

> Well I got to get my father to come in and do things for me cause he [partner] is not here to do it...say if the wind is blowing you gotta make sure everything is tied down and things like that right? (Participant 5).

One caveat to this preferred source of support, as described by three participants, was when their parents reached an age where they were no longer in a position to provide the same level of support as in previous years. One woman explained, "my parents are here but... they're both sixty-six but they have health issues, so I wouldn't want them to be doing too much." (Participant 3). Several participants also noted that they are not as comfortable asking for help from their partner's family, however, if their own family or friends are not available they will (reluctantly) call upon in-laws as a backup support system:

> His parents don't [offer to help]...I have to ask, which really bugs me right...my parents are more at my disposal and I don't have to ask...[his siblings] are busy, busy, busy too and I'm not close to them, they're not people who I would call and ask for help. (Participant 1).

> Joseph got some family here but they're not really close, you know what I mean? Like if something [happened], I probably could call my friend better than I could his family. (Participant 5).

Such hesitancy to approach extended family members may lead participants to take on extra responsibilities themselves and 'make do' without additional help, as a few participants admitted that they would rather take on the work themselves than ask for a favor.

***Friends and neighbours.*** Oftentimes, when their own parents are not available, many participants will then choose to turn to their close friends for emotional and social support:

> ...but you know I'm very fortunate, I have friends who get me out of the house on a Friday night, keep me sane... sometimes I get a little frustrated that you're on your own but that's it, if I didn't have good friends now I'd probably lose my mind... (Participant 8).

> Most of my friends their husbands *are* away, my friend Carla and Sandy, both their husbands work away...we has a girl nights, we calls it 'hens-r-us' (*laughs*) and we get together and we do a craft or movie, or something like that once a month...yeah it's our own little group. (Participant 7).

In addition to family and friends, several participants also mentioned that their neighbours were often ready and willing to help out with household repairs and property maintenance:

> They [family] haven't really volunteered to do anything like that but the neighbours have. They've come up and said 'Carol, I'll mow the lawn, you don't have to worry about it, I'll do it'. (Participant 4).

It seems that the bulk of social and practical support are provided by immediate family, close friends, and neighbours, and these people are usually the primary support persons for the family when partners are away.

**Benefits.** Considering the stressful and often challenging nature of LDC work for both partners, participants were encouraged to describe some of the positive aspects of an LDC lifestyle. The higher salary associated with LDC work was consistently reported as the number one motivating factor for choosing LDC; other beneficial aspects of LDC included the practical and financial conveniences that camp life could offer.

***Financial security.*** Every single participant cited financial security as a benefit of LDC, and seven of the eight women interviewed claimed that it was the primary, and sometimes only reason he is working in Alberta. One participant put it simply:

> [It's] the money, right? That's the only thing [good about it]. Even though he's only gone three times a year, when he goes he makes enough money in those amount of times to be [comparable to] if he worked home probably at fifteen or sixteen bucks an hour, right, for the year. So he makes really good money...there's nothing else, there's no other benefit. (Participant 1).

The response that money was the only major benefit of LDC was nearly unanimous throughout my conversations with participants. It's obvious that there is a wide degree of consensus concerning the primary benefit of LDC, and these findings are not groundbreaking or even surprising, considering that 'money' is likely to be the primary reason *most* people work *most* jobs, regardless of job location. However, what *is* meaningful in the circumstances of LDC families is: to what extent will the benefit of money outweigh the challenges associated with extended partner absences? As one participant candidly stated, "it's only the money, it's only the money, it's only the money, or he wouldn't be gone, he wouldn't be gone without it...it's always the money, why else would you leave your family?" (Participant 4). When probed as to what other benefits this lifestyle may offer (most participants claimed that they were unable to think of any other positive aspects) only two participants were able to identify secondary benefits: the work experience their partner was able to build out West, and the fact that their partner was currently employed. One of them remarked, "I mean I guess you *are* logging hours toward your program, so it is some type of experience, and you're still working and that's great but I can't think of anything else [other than the money]" (Participant 5).

It is readily apparent that most of the benefits that were discussed were of a practical nature: money, job security, and job experience. However, there was one participant who mentioned a different kind of benefit that LDC offered: enhanced relationship appreciation. When asked what she thought was the best part of the LDC lifestyle, she disclosed, "well it

makes you realize how much you miss each other, and when he's gone it makes you realize what you don't have, and makes your life together better, sometimes, yeah." (Participant 7). For this participant, the financial benefit of LDC was only ranked as the third advantage; the second best thing, she joked, is that her house is cleaner when her partner is away at work. It is perhaps not surprising that this participant also reported a higher level of satisfaction with LDC along with lower levels of stress in relation to extended partner absences compared to most other participants.

***LDC conveniences.*** Given the many challenges that participants discussed and the unique difficulties affiliated with extended partner absences, they did share some of the things that they've noticed makes day-to-day life easier. One participant remarked that having to work her full time job during her partner's limited time off was quite frustrating, however, her employer at the time was understanding of her situation and allowed her to adjust her own work schedule around her partner's time at home:

> When I was in St John's I was working with a company that would let me do some flex time and let me really tailor my schedule around him, so every time he was home I'd take time off work, I'd take at least one or two days off, which really, really worked out great. (Participant 6).

Another participant described how her ability to work from home made life easier for her family, as she had the advantage to prepare supper, do household chores, and be with her children throughout her workday. Most participants, however, were not afforded such conveniences and were required to work specific hours that were non-negotiable. Participants also discussed the conveniences that certain oil companies would offer their partners. Working in a camp that covered the cost of the worker's travel, food, accommodation, and added expenses incurred by LDC was a huge bonus that took some of the financial stress off of participants:

> Not only that, it didn't cost him anything to go up, the company paid his way and I mean it didn't cost a cent because he lived in camp...and they flew right from the site and right to Deer Lake... and whatever it was, if anything happened they had to overnight, well the company paid for that, that was all taken care of. (Participant 5).

Other participants noted that him merely being placed in a camp with a decent internet connection and cell phone service was a great convenience, as this was their only means to keep in contact with their partner while he was away. As one participant happily reported, "some camps don't have internet, but he lucked out with all the camps he's been in, they got internet and television, and stuff...the camp he's in is excellent." (Participant 7).

**Coping mechanisms.** When discussing ways in which they deal with extended partner absences, several participants described that they try and look at the positive aspects of LDC - that their partner *has* a job and he is making money. Participants also mentioned that keeping in regular contact with their partner while he's away and counting down the time until his return helps them cope with his absences.

***Inner strength.*** Several participants described using positive self-talk to get themselves through rough patches, telling themselves that things could always be worse and that they will eventually get through this:

> Sometimes the money is a bit different, like the pay, and this was a *really* good gig, so I said [to myself] 'he's not coming home, he's not coming home, I got to tough it out' right? But it's hard... (Participant 1).

> It's a rough go but we always, whenever we get down about it we say 'you know what? If this is the worst thing that life hands us, we're doing o.k.' there's a hell of a lot worst things you could have to deal with...someone could be sick, and we'd have to deal with something *really* tragic. (Participant 8).

***Communication.*** Every single participant reported that they spoke with their partner every single day while he is away. The telephone was by far the most popular medium used to stay in contact with one another. Participants stated that they usually get to talk with their

partner anywhere from once to five times a day, but usually just for a quick check in before he heads to work in the morning or before the family goes to sleep at night. When partners are away for weeks and sometimes months at a time, these phone calls can be a highlight for many families, even if just for a few minutes to hear each other's voices:

> Oh yes, I look forward to that [his phone calls], yes and he's right on schedule my dear, you can tell the time by him...I'd say the most we talk probably is ten minutes, but what do you talk about every night? (Participant 5).

Half of the participants I interviewed reported using a form of video chat, such as Skype, to stay in touch with their partner, however, few mentioned having any luck with this technology and most ended up abandoning it, preferring to talk on the telephone instead.

> We used to Skype but Skype is so annoying because you lose transmission so often we just gave that up, because that was just a pain in the butt...when he was in the camps there was no internet, there was hardly even cell phone service then. (Participant 8).

Several participants spoke of texting one another during the work day in order to keep on top of day to day tasks and errands, while others will send emails, sometimes even attaching pictures of things that are happening at home or at his work site. As one woman explained, "we're...sending pictures back and forth sometimes you know...he wants to know how much snow there is, and what the lawn is like, I do all that, and he does the same." (Participant 8).

Being able to speak with their partners each day is highly important to participants, as it allows them to share information about their children, each others work, and day to day happenings. Participants describe how these connections become a part of their new routine when their partner is away; the regular phone call each morning before work, the text messages throughout the day, and the family check-in every evening before bed, all help participants stay connected with their partners during their time apart.

***Time management.*** Many participants, keenly aware that the time spent with their partners is precious and ephemeral, have developed their own personal mechanisms and routines in an attempt to better manage their family's time. A common practice among many of the participants was of counting down the days until their partner's return, which many remarked, was a helpful tool in coping with his absences. Many reported that having a mental count down, from months to weeks to days, helped to make their time apart more manageable. One participant (whose partner had the longest rotation) found it helpful to break down their time apart into smaller chunks:

> I mean I'm going [to Alberta] every seven weeks so I got something to look forward to, so every seven weeks I know I'm going to see him, and then I go up for ten days or so, and it's only again in October now and he'll be home. (Participant 2).

Instead of perceiving the situation as her partner being in Alberta for six full months, which she saw as hopeless and depressing, she instead divided their time apart into a more manageable timeframe, making it much easier to cope with her partner's prolonged absences from home. Another participant described how time would pass excruciatingly slow the day her partner was due to come home, and would leave for the airport hours earlier than she needed. For her, getting out of town and keeping herself occupied helped to relieve some of the anxiety of waiting for her partner's flight to arrive. Another participant shared her personal coping mechanism of trying to keep herself occupied with personal hobbies and volunteer work when her partner is away. Several others agreed with this approach, attempting to keep as busy as possible to give the illusion that time is passing quickly. One woman speaks about her after-work responsibilities during a typical week:

> On Tuesday evenings I work from six to seven at the gym, we take all the kids up to the school and do gym activities, on Wednesday night it's kids church and I'm a leader at that, and every second Monday we got W.O.W. It's women from the church who get together and do a sociable. So I'm that busy that it [time apart] flies. (Participant 7).

Another participant described how she is constantly updating her 'to do' lists in order to manage responsibilities, and described scheduling all of her family's commitments in a calendar, which she says has really helped her with time management difficulties, "I used to have to write everything down, what I had to do and how I was going to do it, it was the only way I survived, and I cried." (Participant 1).

**Future Plans.** All participants agreed that LDC was not an ideal lifestyle for them or their families, and the general consensus was that partners would continue commuting out West until an appropriate job came up in Newfoundland. Most hoped that LDC would be something short-term but realized that this might be highly optimistic thinking considering current unemployment concerns within the province. A common remark among participants was that nobody chooses to work in Alberta because they enjoy the commute or the lifestyle, but due to the lack of employment opportunities at home:

> I think people do it because it's a necessity, because nobody wants to leave home...and nobody wants to leave their family, for the most part, most people don't, so no one does it because they want to, I guess they have to. (Participant 1).

> They're doing it because they don't have any choice. You knows yourself, everybody rather be working in Newfoundland, working close to their home, but I mean that's not the way it is. That's why three of our sons is in Alberta, because there's nothing here for them. (Participant 5).

***Deciding when to stop.*** Participants reported different time limits of how long they were willing to continue with LDC, and these discrepancies often lay in the type of job (or more appropriately, the salary) that their partners were willing to accept locally in order to quit LDC. One young participant asserted that her partner would do anything to be able to work in Newfoundland, regardless of the money (or lack thereof) that he would be making at home:

> I hope it's short term, but you worry. We've never lived a huge extravagant lifestyle based on the money that he makes up there...so I don't think we've become accustomed to any sort of lifestyle...We've never put a time limit on it [him working away], because you can't really. I mean he can't stay home...I guess there are a lot of people though that leave their jobs here in Newfoundland to go out West because there's more money and things like that. It's never been about the more money for us. It's been out of necessity, for him to have a job and build up to his journeyman, so it's no good for people to tell me to rethink it because there's nothing else! Like if there was anything else I don't think he'd be out there, so it's kind of out of necessity. (Participant 6).

This participant placed more value on having her partner home than the high salary offered by LDC, however, I spoke with several other participants who had perhaps grown more accustomed to the higher standard of living associated with LDC, and would, therefore, be more willing to 'stick it out' until a comparable paying local job came up:

> He would like to get out of it, you know, and have something around here, but you know, financially, right, what's the chances? If something came up around here, yes, that was equivalent in pay, then definitely, but so long as the money is as good as it is... (Participant 1).

Others, who had higher levels of satisfaction with LDC, commented that they were comfortable with this being a long-term career path for their partner, and could see the positive aspects of continuing with this type of work far into the future. While most participants planned to continue LDC, at least for the time being, one participant explained that being apart from her partner for months at a time was too difficult and, therefore, had a different set of plans:

> Yeah, it's hard, I say another year or two and I'll be gone [to Fort McMurray]...we'll probably buy a house and stay up there a couple years...I don't want to go, definitely don't want to go, but like I said there's nothing back here for him and I could get a job anywhere right ?...most people that was here have now moved back up there [Alberta] with their husbands, they're gone, yeah" (Participant 2).

It seems that joining one's partner up in Alberta has become a common trend for many Newfoundland women, and although only one of my participants had definite plans to

relocate out West, most other participants could rhyme off countless names of other women who have already left their home communities to be with their partners.

***Reasons to continue LDC.*** The most common reason participants gave for continuing with LDC was that it allowed their family to maintain their home base in Newfoundland, as opposed to relocating the entire family to Alberta. Participants had different reasons for wanting to remain on the island, for some it was about staying connected with family and being near their children:

> My sister just moved home from Alberta, her husband commutes too...they have two kids now ...and I think it was when she had kids she realized that she wanted to come home [to Newfoundland], wanting her kids to grow up here, and being close with their nan and pop. (Participant 3).

While other participants described that it was their *partners* who wouldn't be able to handle living anywhere other than Newfoundland during their time off, as they perceived coming home as a safe haven:

> I mean he could've yes, stayed in Alberta and I could've went up and stayed with him during his time off you know what I mean? But then...I mean we had our home here, and I mean he didn't really want to be spending all of his time in Alberta. (Participant 5).

A couple of participants remarked that they wanted to continue with LDC as it offered a brighter financial future, where they could build a new home, go on vacations, and afford new 'toys':

> Like I said, we want a house, if it comes down to it, and ok fine, we get our house, and then, it's like lets pay the house off right? And see what happens from there. There's so much stuff we'd like to have, like we want the house, we got the jeep now, so pay the jeep off, and he wants his own truck and then we're looking at the boat and then a new skidoo, and then looking at your four wheeler, so there's always play toys. (Participant 4).

More than half of participants stated that they felt they had a higher quality of life by remaining in Newfoundland, and discussed that being closer to nature, having a strong sense

of community, and a safe environment to raise children as the most attractive reasons for wanting to remain in Newfoundland. Schmidt (2008) describes this sense of interconnectedness among residents as characteristic of smaller communities, and states that "Community members become like a large extended family and their knowledge of personal details can translate into a broader net of support and concern" (p. 5). This perception was common among several participants, as one woman soberly remarked, "I mean if you're living in a bigger place like Fort McMurray you don't even know your neighbours...nope, too frightened [of them] you know?" (Participant 2). Another participant explained her own reasons for wanting to stay in Newfoundland:

> I personally would never move to Fort McMurray or Alberta, it's a little far away for me (*laughs*). I'm a homebody, I like Newfoundland, I like being home, nothing about that [relocating to Alberta] really interests me, and I'm sure it's lovely for the people who are up there, I know a lot of *my* friends are up there, but nothing about that particularly appeals to me. I like to think of going to a lake, going out in the boat, sleeping in my trailer...I don't think he would really want to be up there either. I think we maintain that we would like to make a living here [in Newfoundland], and we're kind of stuck to that. (Participant 6).

***Deal breakers.*** Despite the many reasons that motivated participants to continue with LDC, half of the participants also mentioned certain deal breakers that would give them cause to quit this lifestyle. These deal breakers often centered on issues when work time would infringe upon home time. As one participant stated, "we always agreed that if we came home he wasn't going to do...the six month/eight month rotation that people does, we didn't move home for him to leave me like that." (Participant 4). While another participant added, "Christmas he has arranged right from the end of the previous year...if he didn't get Christmas holidays off he'd quit...that's never happened [yet], never will, he will quit I know he would too." (Participant 8). These types of statements help illustrate that LDC work and, accordingly, a good salary is not always considered to be the highest priority for couples, as

most participants reported that at the end of the day they valued their relationship more than the higher standard of living associated with LDC.

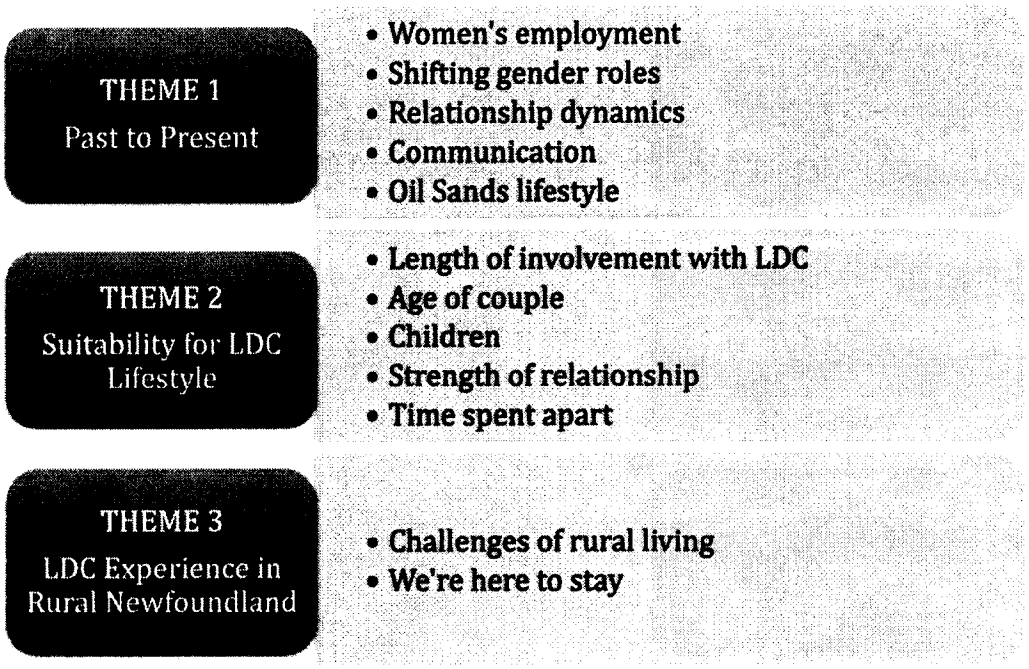
**Latent Level Themes**

After completing my initial analysis of the data, which offered the manifest level themes and sub-themes previously discussed, I began to interpret the research findings at a deeper level. This analysis generated 3 major themes and 12 sub-themes, which are represented in Figure 7. The first theme, 'past to present', compares and contrasts the experiences of women today with those of previous generations. It examines how women's lifestyles, attitudes, and perceptions of LDC may have changed and evolved over the years, and what these changes have meant for women and their families. The second theme that will be discussed, 'suitability for an LDC lifestyle', looks at what factors may assist or hinder women's adjustment to extended partner absences. This theme seeks to make connections between women's individual circumstances and the stressors they may experience as a result of an LDC lifestyle. The third theme that will be presented, 'LDC experience in rural Newfoundland', explores the unique challenges associated with extended partner absences for rural women, and how these challenges are intersected and balanced by women's positive associations for their province.

The following chapter will present an in-depth interpretation of these three themes, and the corresponding twelve sub-themes. Emphasis will be placed on the implications that these themes have for rural Newfoundland women, and what these implications may mean for their future involvement in LDC.

Figure 7

*Latent Level Themes and Sub-themes*




**Summary**

During the initial analysis of the data, there were seven themes and seventeen sub-themes that emerged from the research findings at the manifest level. From these themes I have come to understand that:

- Participants, their partners, and their children *do* encounter an adjustment period upon entering and LDC lifestyle, however, adjustment difficulties are usually temporary and manageable
- Participants have a significant increase in their own workloads and responsibilities, and have found that they receive the most support from maternal family members; followed by extended family, friends, and neighbours.

- LDC workers contribute significantly to domestic chores and childcare when they are home, and are not adverse to taking on traditionally considered 'female oriented' responsibilities.
- Participants are not concerned about potential addictions issues or their partner's exposure to illegal substances when working in Alberta, and are not overly worried about partner's physical safety or work-related hazards.
- The primary reason for entering LDC is because of the higher salary it can offer. Participants do not enjoy this lifestyle, but most will continue with LDC for the foreseeable future, or until a comparable paying local job becomes available.

In addition to these manifest level themes, a deeper analysis of the data uncovered three major themes and twelve sub-themes at the latent level. The following chapter provides a detailed interpretation and comprehensive discussion of these underlying themes.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

The previous section described the themes and sub-themes that were pulled directly from participant accounts and that were clearly visible within the research findings. There were, however, other themes that were initially hidden within the data, and that I wished to explore further to better understand this phenomenon. In the following section I provide my personal interpretation and thoughts concerning these themes, which will focus on three main areas of interest: comparing women's present day experiences of LDC to their experiences in the past, exploring personal suitability and adaptability to the LDC lifestyle, and understanding the unique experience of LDC as it exists in rural Newfoundland. These latent themes and their underlying points of analysis are outlined in Figure 7.

### Past to Present

The experiences of rural Newfoundland women whose partners work out of province have been largely undocumented and represent an area that, I believe, is considerably under researched. The most recent literature that I have been able to uncover dates back to the late 1980s; a time before the Athabasca oil boom and a time where women's lives may have looked quite different (likely due to existing societal perceptions and attitudes toward women). For these reasons, I'm interested in exploring how the experiences of Newfoundland women have changed over the course of a generation and what this may mean for the future. I will be relying on research conducted by Storey, Shrimpton, Lewis and Clark (1989) that studied the effects of LDC on Newfoundlanders employed within the offshore oil industry, to help inform my analysis.

**Women's employment.** A potentially significant difference between the women participating in this study and those involved in past research could be an increase in the

numbers of female participants holding paid employment. The majority of my participants (six of the eight women interviewed) held full time jobs, which they were required to maintain on top of their responsibilities in the home. The rate of employment among women participating in Storey et al.'s (1989) study was considerably lower, as only one quarter held full time employment outside the home. However, these lower rates are also much more representative of the general female population at that period in time, when the employment rate for women was just 35% (Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency, 2006). An increase in the rates of women's employment over the years may suggest that the non-commuting female partner of today may have a potentially higher level of responsibility than in previous generations.

**Shifting gender roles.** As previously discussed, most participants in this study shared that their partners helped out a great deal with childcare and household chores when they were home. These findings may debunk a traditional stereotype that: 1) women are left responsible for *all* household and childcare duties both when their partner is away and when he is at home, and 2) the commuting partner is opposed to performing household and childcare duties. Admittedly, participants reported that they *did* have more responsibilities due to their partner's type of work, but that these responsibilities became more equally shared upon his return home.

These results differ significantly from those of Storey et al. (1989) in which 58% of women polled felt that extended partner absences did *not* lead to a more equal division of household chores and only 29% of male commuting partners reported that they helped out with household chores often. As one male offshore worker commented at that time "The attitude is, 'well I *work* for four weeks. When I go home I don't want to work. My work is

*done*" (P. 101). A female participant from this same study confirmed this statement, replying, "The man's view is that his time onshore is vacation time..." (p. 118). After reviewing this research I was personally quite interested in determining if these kinds of sentiments would be reflected by the participants in my own study, as one of my main thesis questions discussed how current perceptions of gender roles may influence women's experiences. During my own interviews I pointedly asked participants (pulling similar wording from Storey et al.'s participants) if they felt that their partner's time at home was considered his 'vacation time', a time to relax and 'kick his feet up'. Participants strongly disagreed, many replying with the quotes discussed previously that noted the tremendous amount of help he provided around the house and with the children. These differences in the roles of the male commuting partner, even over the course of a single generation, may suggest that traditional gender roles, whereby it is only acceptable for males to work outside the home and females to work within, are becoming more and more blurred.

**Relationship dynamics.** When speaking with participants about the power dynamics within the relationship, many described feeling in control and having a sense of empowerment regarding family decision-making, and felt that their thoughts and opinions mattered in the relationship; several participants provided examples of the influence they had within the family:

> I always wore the pants in the family (*laughs*) when it comes to certain things, like the children and stuff like that, it was always me who had to enforce the rules and stuff like that. And I was always the one that paid the bills and stuff like that, so it's not really that I *need* him for those things, it's just more or less him not being here directly. (Participant 4)

Such comments may differ from typical relationship dynamics of previous generations, when males were largely responsible for family decision making, handling financial matters, and

being the main breadwinner of the family. Today, as many of the participants I spoke with have confirmed, women have taken on a significant piece (or in some cases the entirety) of these responsibilities, further stretching the boundaries of traditional gender roles.

**Communication.** The accessibility of telephone communication is another aspect of LDC that has changed over the years. Past research from Storey et al. (1989) showed that regular telephone contact between Newfoundland offshore oil workers and their wives was practically unheard of, and more than one third of female participants reported that they had *no contact at all* with their partners while they were working. Today, recent technological advancements such as cell phones, computers, and the internet have changed the face of communicating across large geographical distances. Participants' ability to communicate with their partners on a daily basis may play an important a role in supporting healthy relationships among LDC families, as many have noted that they rely on these phone calls for comfort and support, and they are often a highlight in the family's day.

**Oil sands lifestyle.** One of the primary reasons I chose to focus my participant criteria on women whose partners are working specifically in the Athabasca oil sands (instead of perhaps northern Ontario, Labrador, or offshore oil platforms) was because of the record high crime rates and skyrocketing drug use that was reportedly emerging from this area. Due to these types of reports in the media and having similar discussions with the public, I assumed that the non-commuting partner would likely be affected by this phenomenon in some way. However, I was somewhat surprised by the fact that none of the participants expressed any concerns around their partner's potential risk for illegal drug use or addiction issues, given his supposed immersion into a crime ridden and drug using culture.

It is interesting, to say the least, that these participants felt so sure of their partner's immunity from the Fort McMurray drug environment, especially considering the attention this issue has garnered in the media in recent years. I wonder if this nonchalant attitude towards the Alberta drug scene is the case for most LDC families, or if my participant criteria happened to target a low risk population. Perhaps it is the *single* worker who is more apt to use illicit substances, or maybe workers end up separating from their partners *after* they have already fallen into an unhealthy lifestyle. Considering my small sample size and other limitations of this study, I am unable to correlate what factors may place a worker in a high risk population, however, I believe it could be an important area for future research.

**Suitability for LDC Lifestyle**

There are a multitude of factors that may influence how well a family is able to adjust to extended partner absences: the age of the couple, length of their relationship, if they have children, access to support networks, partner's rotation schedule, and the personalities and attitudes of the entire family may all affect how easily one is able to adjust. As my interviews consisted of a fairly small group of women, it would be beyond the scope of this project to hypothesize as to which of these attributes (if any) may lead some women to experience more difficulty adjusting to their partner's work lifestyle than others. Even during my own analysis of the possible factors (both external and internal) that may affect levels of adjustment among my small group of participants, and looking at the similarities and differences between those who reported having little trouble adjusting and those who experienced greater difficulty, there didn't appear to be any glaring correlations to help explain adjustment patterns. In this section I focus on five factors that may affect one's suitability for LDC: 1) the length of involvement in LDC 2) the age of the couple 3) if they

have children 4) the strength of their relationship, and 5) the amount of time spent apart from one another. I did notice that while some of these factors did not appear to affect participant's ability to adjust to LDC, other factors did seem to play an important role in how they perceived the LDC lifestyle.

**Length of involvement in LDC.** There did appear to be a difference in perceptions between participants who were quite new to LDC versus those who've been doing it for 10+ years. One participant whose partner had only completed a few rotations out West, shared with me that she was having some difficulty adapting to this new lifestyle, "it's a little getting used to, we've been together, it'll be eighteen years in November, and this is the longest we've ever been apart." (Participant 4). This participant described the loneliness she felt when she was separated from her partner, something that neither of them ever had to experience over the course of their relationship. During our conversation her sadness was often palpable, especially when discussing the distance that was between them, her eyes brimming as she stared out the window lost in thought. She attributed her difficulty adjusting to being plunged into a situation that was completely foreign to her, but felt confident that she would eventually adjust to this lifestyle and that his departures and returns would become easier with time. These thoughts were often validated when speaking with participants who have been involved with LDC for many, many years, and have grown quite accustomed to its ups and downs. As one of these participants confirmed,

> I'm so used to him either being on the road or working away all of our lives that it wasn't a huge adjustment for me, and I can see if someone always had their spouse at home everyday and then all of a sudden they had to do this, I could see that being a hard, hard adjustment for someone. (Participant 3)

To witness both ends of this spectrum was enlightening but also a little disheartening, as women who may benefit in hearing the positivity and success stories of other families the most, may perhaps not have the opportunity.

**Age of couple.** There was also a difference in adjustment experiences between younger participants and those who were older, which is not surprising considering that these individuals would likely have different perceptions and experiences due to the age discrepancy, regardless of partner's occupation. One young participant noted that she would often look forward to going out with her friends, but would sometimes catch herself making plans without her partner during his time at home, recognizing that she needed to be allotting her free time to spend with *him* during his time off. She discovered that she needed to make adjustments to her own priorities and plans to accommodate her partner's rotation schedule.

> You can really get into your own lifestyle and you forget that you're a part of a relationship, because they come home and it's almost like an inconvenience, because you're like 'oh shit, you're home this week, because I wanted to do this…' which is weird right? Like you shouldn't be like that when you're married…not like 'oh crap…I can't go guys because Jason's home this weekend' you know right? (Participant 6)

This type of situation may have consequences for some couples, particularly for those who are younger and may place a higher value on peer relationships and social networks. This may be especially relevant for the commuting partner who does not have the same opportunities to spend time with family, friends, and the larger community while he is away working. Balancing friend time and couple time did not seem to be an issue for older participants who had smaller social networks and did not seem to have the same desire to spend a lot of time with their own circle of friends when their partner was home.

**Children.** After speaking with such a diverse group of women, many of whom were in very different life stages, it became quite clear that there is a wide range of opinions about

what kind of effect LDC has on children. Participants who did not have children or whose children were grown had reservations about entering this lifestyle with kids. As a mother of two teenagers bluntly stated, "I don't know if I would've done it with small kids, I really don't. That's a sin. They need their daddy." (Participant 2). That being said, participants who had young children reported that their kids experienced no long lasting or serious ill effects from LDC. They asserted that their children were very well adjusted and responsible individuals; perhaps even *because* of their family's particular lifestyle, not in spite of it. Having the opportunity to meet several of these children in their homes I was able to witness the closeness and affection shared between mother and children, as well as a positive family dynamic, despite their father being gone. These participants also commented on the extra effort and attention that their partners will make in order to maintain a strong relationship with their kids, either by speaking with them on the phone every evening, writing emails and sending pictures back and forth, and planning special outings during his time home. One participant describes her family's unique way of staying connected while her partner is away, "we've done this a lot, the kids will make a sign and hold up pictures saying 'hi, we love you' and we'll put it on facebook [for him to see]" (Participant 1). Though many children (and their parents) adapt well to this type of lifestyle, all participants acknowledged that there are extra challenges and stressors associated with LDC when children are involved and that this lifestyle may not be for every family.

**Strength of relationship.** As previous research has documented, extended partner absences can put significant strain on a couple's relationship (Clark, McCann, Morrice & Taylor, 1985; Ferguson, 2011) and after learning about some of the challenges and pressures that rural Newfoundland women face, I would imagine that the strength and quality of their

connection would be critical in predicting the longevity of both their relationship and their partner's involvement in LDC.

Throughout each and every interview, participants reported that they had a close relationship with their partner, and this was also quite apparent by the loving and respectful ways they spoke of them. Half of the participants had actually grown up with their potential partners, going to the same school and living in the same community, and had developed a strong bond with one another over the years. From my own conversations with participants, I did not gain any sense that any of them resented their partners or held any hard feelings towards them for all the time they spent away from home. On the contrary, participants discussed that they were happy to rearrange their own schedules when their partner was home in order to maximize their time together; this was true for the commuting partner as well, who would do the same:

> Lots of times when he used to come home he'd say 'I'm going to do such a thing, is you coming with me? You don't have to do anything...just company that's all.' And what it was, I think he felt guilty, because where he was gone so much and then if he was out doing something I'd still be home by myself, so I'd go with him. (Participant 5).

Given the limitations of this study, it is difficult to determine if this kind of accommodating behaviour by both partners is the norm for LDC couples, as my participant criteria focused only on couples who are still together. One participant shared how her partner's previous marriage did not work out due to his LDC lifestyle, as his ex-wife supposedly wasn't able to cope with his extended absences. Another participant described going through a difficult period with her own partner as well, and discussed how they took proactive measures to ensure that they wouldn't experience a similar outcome:

> He was working in Alberta and he was doing twenty one and seven, and we found that at that point we started to diverge our paths and we were like 'holy shit', so we had a little bit of a rough patch and we said if this is ever going to work, this is what we need

> to do... so we basically said from that point on if there's ever a point where we can't make our relationship work then we'll just call it [LDC] off. So the relationship, it comes first. (Participant 6).

This kind of communication among couples appears to be a key element in their ability to successfully navigate through a potentially demanding lifestyle, and also plays an important role in the level of satisfaction they have in their relationship.

**Time spent apart.** Participants seemed to have a complex understanding of time and shared some of their perceptions and feelings of time as it relates to their partner's transitory lifestyle. They described feelings of disdain for the significant periods of time spent apart from their partner, and the sensation of time slowing down when he was away. As one participant remarked, "My god, I used to get, two days time before Joseph was due to come home I couldn't wait. It was like them days was some long, waiting right?" (Participant 5). Even once their partner has arrived at home, many participants would soon begin counting down the time before he was due to leave once again, the days and weeks together quickly whittling away in their minds from the moment his flight landed. One participant noted that although she was overjoyed to have her partner home, the dreaded thought of his departure always loomed in front of them, "I just can't wait right [for him to come home], but I mean you still know that it's only a matter of six months and he's gone again." (Participant 2). In these types of instances, participants have described feeling as if time is working against them and their families, and talked about the sacrifices associated with maintaining a relationship that is time dependent. Among my group of eight, however, there were two participants who reported lower levels of stress during their partner's returns and departures, and described a smoother transition from 'single time' back into 'couple time':

> No [adjusting to his return isn't difficult], cause I'm still working, then on the weekends we're picked up and gone to the cabin, and we love the cabin, and in the

> winter we go ski-dooing and in the summer we're on the bike, and we just built the cabin so we're still picking at the cabin, so we're busy. (Participant 8).
>
> It wasn't a huge adjustment for me...and I have always worked as well so you're used to doing the fulltime job juggling, and we have two kids... (Participant 3).

Both of these participants share a commonality that is not present among the other cases; in addition to the information shared in their quotes, their partners also have much shorter rotations *and* their rotations had an equal 'time home/time away' ratio –fourteen days on/fourteen days off and eighteen days on/eighteen days off. In accordance with these accounts, the participant whose partner works the longest rotation –six months/six months - admitted a high level of dissatisfaction with this rotation, to the extent that she has planned to permanently relocate to Fort McMurray next year in order to be with her partner. It is probable that less time spent apart from one another and more time spent at home may be conducive to an easier transition period; however, this connection cannot be affirmed from such a small sample size and may be an area that warrants further research.

**The LDC Experience in Rural Newfoundland**

The rural Newfoundland woman whose partner works away may find herself navigating through unknown territory, as there is presently no formal support, information, or services that targets her needs and experiences. Furthermore, rural communities may be considerably isolated from one another, making some informal measures of support unsustainable. As one participant noted, you need to create your own support networks and self-care practices if you want to make this lifestyle work and continue enjoying Newfoundland living.

**Challenges of rural living.** Over the course of my conversations with participants, there was no question that they encounter a higher need for extra family and community

support when their partner is working away. As previously discussed, there is often a significant increase in these women's responsibilities during partner absences, as they are now required to fulfill many of their partner's duties in addition to their own. Women living in a rural Newfoundland community may also experience unique challenges due to the potential lack of services, programs, and amenities associated with rural living; as one participant previously described her community's desperate need for a daycare, which has presented challenges and barriers for many families in her community. Due in part to these types of shortages in formalized services, participants may depend more heavily upon informal sources of support, however, this support may not always be accessible, especially when considering the steadily declining populations of many rural Newfoundland communities. One participant described how her once large circle of friends and neighbours was quickly dissipating and how this impacted her ability to avail of her accustomed support network:

> Well to be honest with you, here now, you can't even pay anybody [to help you] cause there's nobody really here, no young ones here. I mean there's thirty something students for three communities in the school... and the one's that's having the babies are all gone away, they all leaves...the neighbours that I got, well one of them she died there in May, but she don't have neither man, *(pointing in the direction of neighbour's houses)* and *her* husband is dead *(points in the direction of another house)* so they didn't have nobody to do anything for them, so you couldn't very well call the neighbours to do anything because they didn't have anybody to do it for theirselves. (Participant 5).

This participant's experience highlights the dualistic nature of community support in rural Newfoundland. Yes, neighbours may be friendlier and family members may be closer and more accessible than in more urban centers, however, the ever-growing issue of outmigration and low birth rates may soon begin to unravel previously strong ties with familiar informal support systems.

**We're here to stay.** Aside from having a bleak employment future, participants had overwhelmingly positive associations when speaking about their home province. This was especially noticeable when they compared their current standard of living to their perceptions of the quality of life of those living in Alberta. Additionally, several participants reported that their partners often felt homesick for Newfoundland, complaining about the heat, loneliness, and work environment. They reported that their partners would love to find work at home in order to spend more time with family, take advantage of personal hobbies and interests, as well as to avail of better work experience and recognition in their field:

> He would [like to] move back, and he wouldn't go back there no more. He hates it up there...he calls everyday 'I hates it up here, I'm sick of this place'. (Participant 2).

> Oh yes, [he likes] salmon fishing, but you see when he was in Alberta he never had any time for doing it...I don't think he would be able to handle it, for him to move to Alberta and not really have those things to do. To not be able to go in the woods and cutting wood, and in the winter that's when he cuts his wood and hauls it out on skidoo for the next year right. I don't think he'd be able to handle it. (Participant 5).

Although participants recognized that living in rural Newfoundland may often present unique hardships that could be reduced, if not eliminated, by relocating out West, they were not prepared to move away from their home province. Several remarked that while being away from their partners for extended periods is hard, there are too many positive aspects associated with remaining in Newfoundland to consider leaving. Participants discussed having more affordable housing, being closer to extended family, and maintaining cultural and community ties to the province as important values that they wished to maintain.

## Recommendations

Raising a family and running a household while one's partner works away can be a challenging and stressful experience, as evidenced throughout this study. Currently, there is

not a lot of information available that focuses on the experiences of Newfoundlanders who commute back and forth to Alberta for work, and there is even less information aimed at the (most often) female, non-commuting partner. Through my conversations with these women I was able to gain a better understanding of existing service gaps, and I have formed several recommendations that might assist people to more easily adapt and adjust to the LDC lifestyle; potentially increasing relationship satisfaction. These recommendations have been organized under the macro, mezzo and micro level systems that impact the families of commuters, either directly or indirectly.

**Macro Level Recommendations**

There is considerable room for growth in provincial government services that could support women whose partners work away. The development of daycare services and children's programs would be highly beneficial in rural areas of the province where these services are particularly lacking, as they are important to the education and caring sectors of rural communities (Halseth & Ryser, 2004) and most participants have reported that the bulk of their workload (and stress) centers around childcare. Also, government programs, like employment insurance, are implementing stricter rules that may be punitive towards LDC families, either by cutting benefits, decreasing coverage, or imposing ineligibility regulations. These programs may need to be examined to ensure that families are not denied financial support.

Oil and gas companies also play a major role in the mental health and successful functioning of LDC families; although to date they have offered little in terms of supporting community and family wellness. When reviewing the practices of several international companies that recruit LDC workers, it is apparent that Canadian oil corporations are

seriously lacking in this area. Considering that half of Alberta's oil sands workers are commuting from Atlantic Canada (Dorow, 2012), it is important that oil companies have an awareness of the consequences of LDC. This could prove to be valuable in company scheduling practices (participants were in wide agreement that shorter rotations were preferable and more conducive to family life) as well understanding the harmful effects of worker fatigue, as employees will often have to spend an entire day commuting back home after working a 12 hour shift, arriving home to their families exhausted and out of sorts. I believe it is also the responsibility of these large corporations to prepare workers and their families for the reality of an LDC lifestyle, as many of the participants I interviewed struggled with the unfamiliarity of a new family dynamic when their partners first began commuting. This could be addressed simply by offering new employees information packages outlining what their family can expect from this lifestyle, such as common feelings and stressors of extended partner absence, parenting advice, experiences of other LDC families, and contact information of appropriate support persons.

**Mezzo Level Recommendations**

The role of community cannot be disregarded when looking at the needs of LDC families. Halseth and Ryser (2004) describe the benefit of implementing community level services within rural areas, as they can offer support during times of economic and social stress and assist in community capacity and relationship building. The development of community groups which seek to involve and support LDC families who are experiencing adjustment difficulty could, therefore, be an asset for many rural areas of the province. Community led groups could provide opportunities for personal connections among non-commuting partners, and a space where practical and emotional support can be offered. I

also believe that increased education for rural healthcare providers around the impacts of LDC would be beneficial, as these professionals are often the first point of contact for families experiencing adjustment problems, and should, therefore, be properly equipped to offer support, information, and guidance.

**Micro Level Recommendations**

There are also things that families can do to help alleviate stress associated with LDC. In order to maintain and support healthy family relationships, it is important for couples to communicate openly and regularly with one another. The participants in this study highlighted this as being critical for family functioning, and many stated that maintaining a healthy dialogue, both during his absence and his time at home, would be the primary piece of advice they would offer another couple entering into an LDC lifestyle. Practicing open communication and active listening skills may serve to decrease work related stress and help to increase relationship satisfaction for LDC couples.

Another suggestion for LDC couples would be to allocate special one-on-one time with one another during the workers time at home. Time spent reconnecting may help guard against relationship drift and feelings of resentment towards the lifestyle. This recommendation is supported by the experience of one young participant who described how she could lose sight of the relationship during her partner's time away, and provided words of caution against getting swept up in a life that doesn't include him:

> You have to be conscious I think, because... I do maintain my friendships and everything but if you maintain a single kind of lifestyle for the two weeks he was gone and then you know? You could kind of get caught up, I would imagine, going out all the time and being with the girls. Yeah essentially you're going out [without him], you know? (Participant 6).

Finally, individuals and families must recognize their limits. As several participants have commented, this lifestyle can take an emotional toll on everyone involved and may not be suitable for every family. It would be recommended that couples honestly discuss their limits and boundaries with one another, and are able to agree upon any non-negotiable circumstances that would cause them to abandon this lifestyle. By recognizing the potential sacrifices that they may need to be made at the outset, families can enter into an LDC lifestyle feeling aware, informed, and prepared to handle the challenges.

## Limitations

It is important to note that this study, and academic research in general, contain certain limitations, both in the research process as well as the researcher. I have made a sincere effort to minimize these limitations, however, I will discuss those that I was unable to eliminate in this section.

The qualitative nature of this study, in itself, lends to several limitations. As Firestorm (1993) clearly denotes, "one criticism about qualitative research is that it is difficult to generalize findings to settings not studied" (p. 1). For example, although I have gathered eight in-depth and powerful accounts of the phenomenon under study, this small participant sample prevents my research findings from being generalized to *all* Newfoundland women whose partners commute. Also, this study only involved participants residing in small communities along Newfoundland's west coast and northern peninsula, therefore, perceptions from other parts of Newfoundland were not represented in the research.

Additionally, the interpretive approach that I used to analyze my data may have allowed my own opinions, biases, and experiences to influence the way I approached,

documented, and portrayed the research findings. My personal connection to the province of Newfoundland, for example, may have brought forth certain researcher biases as 'being a Newfoundlander' is a significant part of my personal and cultural identity and I have a strong sense of loyalty towards my province, its people and its potential for social change. Consequently, there may have been a potential to subconsciously 'sugarcoat' systemic weaknesses and deficiencies within the province in order to present Newfoundland in a more favorable light, though I have tried to remain an objective researcher at all times. Furthermore, though my Newfoundland background and immersion may have helped me to connect and build rapport with my participants, it may have also lead to a cultural and social blindness, as being an insider studying other insiders may have affected my objectivity as a researcher and my ability to see the larger picture.

Finally, my position as a social worker and feminist researcher may have impacted the outcome of this study. The way I interacted with participants, the questions I asked, how I asked them, and the responses that I felt were important to include in the final report were ultimately at my discretion. This same study conducted by someone from a different standpoint would likely have produced different findings, therefore, it has limited replicability, which could be considered another weakness. However, I believe that the information conveyed in this report revealed an often overlooked perspective of women's lives and experiences that was important to address.

## Directions for Future Research

This thesis was developed in order to better understand the lived experiences of rural Newfoundland women whose partners commute back and forth to the Athabasca oil sands for work. Through the process of in-depth interviewing and field observations I believe that I

have thoroughly explored my two primary research questions: 1) to what extent do women rely on informal support systems to manage extended partner absences? and, 2) how do current perceptions of gender roles influence women's experiences? Although this study provided me with a deeper understanding of these topics, I believe that it also identified several gaps in the existing literature that have not been addressed in this thesis. These gaps could be useful in initiating future research projects, and will be discussed below.

The participant criteria for this study focused solely on women who were currently in long-term relationships. During the recruitment process there were several occasions where I had to exclude potential participants from my sample, as they were no longer involved with their partners and, consequently, I cannot speak to the experiences of these women. However, I do believe that this would be a viable population to consider in future research endeavors, as women who have separated from their partners could offer valuable insight into the stressors that may be associated with relationship breakdown among LDC couples.

In addition to those who have separated from their partners, women who have decided to *join* their partners in Alberta could be another population that may warrant further investigation. Research targeted at this population could help deepen our understanding around their motivating factors for leaving Newfoundland, their experiences as 'newcomers' to Alberta, and what, if anything, could be changed or implemented in order to allow families to remain in Newfoundland.

A final suggestion for future research might explore the experiences of children who have been uprooted from their Newfoundland environment and have relocated to Alberta with their parents. This appears to be a growing population as families continue to shift from eastern to western Canada in search of work. Initiating research in this area may be

beneficial in assessing rural Newfoundland children's adjustment levels, social functioning, and mental well-being as they acclimatize to a new lifestyle in Alberta.

## Summary

This chapter included a discussion of the underlying ideas and interpretations of the research findings, a number of recommendations that have been derived from these findings, the limitations of the study, and several avenues for future research.

The discussion section focused on three main points of interest:

- The comparison of my participant's experiences with LDC to women's experiences in the past. It appears that traditional gender roles are beginning to shift, as today's male commuter is noted to contribute significantly more to household and childcare duties than in previous generations.
- The factors that affect one's suitability and adaptability to an LDC lifestyle. It seems that individuals who have been involved with LDC for longer periods, have shorter rotations, and have a strong relationship foundation may more easily adjust to this lifestyle.
- The LDC experience as it exists in rural Newfoundland. The lack of formal support programs and services combined with growing outmigration issues can put many rural families at a disadvantage, especially when partners are away working in Alberta. However, most women are prepared to deal with the challenges related to extended partner absences, and are determined to remain in their home province at all costs.

There were also several recommendations brought forth. These included:

- Macro level recommendations that called for the development of programs and services that address the needs of LDC families, as well as an assessment of existing programs which may be insufficient and discriminatory towards LDC workers.
- Mezzo level recommendations that promoted community-run groups and educating rural health care providers in order to better support LDC families.
- Micro level recommendations that discussed the importance of good communication skills and establishing quality family time in order to maintain healthy family relationships.

The limitations of this study included its small participant sample, which limited the transferability of the research findings, as well as researcher subjectivity. Some suggestions for future research might involve exploring the experiences of other subsets of the Newfoundland population that are affected by LDC. This could include women who have separated from their partners, women who have chosen to join their partners in Alberta, and children who have relocated to Alberta with their families.

## Conclusion

We live in an increasingly globalized society. The fact that a woman living in rural Newfoundland can be impacted so deeply by the decisions and practices of an oil company more than five thousand kilometers across the country is testimony to this. It seems obvious that key stakeholders involved in the Athabasca oil sands development (both private corporations and government) should have a responsibility to ensure the well-being of those most affected by this industry, however, it is clear that this is not always the case. Hence, the

primary objective of this thesis was to help bring awareness to the needs of a population that has been socially and politically neglected in relation to the LDC phenomenon.

To achieve this, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with participants which allowed an inside look into the lives of rural Newfoundland women whose partners commute to Alberta for work. This method of data collection was successful, as it is through women's stories, perceptions, and first hand accounts that we can begin to understand, and ultimately respond to, any potential needs of this group.

This study helps to enhance our understanding of the challenges and sacrifices experienced by the rural female non-commuter, but it also portrays the unwavering resolve and intrinsic strength of the women who participate in this lifestyle. The research findings show that the value women place on financial security, providing for their family, and maintaining a Newfoundland lifestyle, often takes precedence over 'being together', even at the cost to their own mental health and emotional well-being.

While this study helps to identify the challenges and adversity experienced by this population, it also provides evidence for the increasing shift away from traditional gender roles, particularly for the male commuter; though women take on the bulk of household responsibilities during their partner's absences, men seem to be contributing significantly to domestic duties during their time at home. These findings substantiate the ever changing and evolving nature of socially constructed gender roles within the province, and show that the restrictions that have historically been placed on gender continue to be pushed.

Although this movement is encouraging, there is significant room for future growth, as women still do not have the same opportunities for LDC employment as their male counterparts. Women are disproportionately represented as the non-commuting partner

among LDC couples, and the general expectation is that they own primary responsibility for childcare and household maintenance, usually in addition to their own employment. However, through the promotion of feminist informed research and establishing an open and on-going dialogue with LDC affected women and families, their voices and ideas can become integrated into the mainstream political discourse; allowing not only for a greater recognition of women's needs and issues, but a new way of valuing experiences and learning through inclusion.

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## Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. What is your first name?

2. What is your relationship status?

3. What is your date of birth?
   What is your partner's date of birth?

4. Do you have children?
   If yes, how many? What are their ages?

5. In which community do you live?

6. How would you describe your sense of physical and mental well being?
   How would you describe you partner's sense of well being?

7. Please describe your partner's work pattern (ex: What is his rotational schedule? On call work or fixed roster? Where is the location of his work?)

8. How long has he been involved in this type of work?

9. What made you and/or your partner decide to become involved in this type of work?

10. Do you feel concerned for your partner's safety while he is at work?

11. Were your parents/your partner's parents involved in this type of work?

12. What do you see as some of the stressors associated with this lifestyle?
    (What aspects make life difficult?)

13. What do you see as some of the benefits of this lifestyle?
    (What aspects make life more positive?)

14. How (if at all) does it affect your relationship with one another?

15. How (if at all) does it affect your children? (if applicable)

16. Are you employed outside of the home? If yes, what is your occupation? How many hours per week do you work?

17. Do you have financial concerns for yourself or your family?

18. Do you feel your partner's line of work affects/changes your own role and responsibilities?

19. Could you describe your role/responsibilities within your family?

Could you describe your partner's role/responsibilities within your family? How are these decided?

20. Do you feel family and household responsibilities are shared fairly between you and your partner?

21. How would you describe communication patterns between you and your partner? Does this differ from when he is at home and when he is away?

22. What are some things you may do to help deal with his absences?

23. Do you use email, phone and/or skype to communicate with your partner when he is away?

24. Can you describe what life is like when your partner is home? How is this different from when he is away at work?

25. What are some of your thoughts and feelings when your partner leaves for work?

26. What are some of your thoughts and feelings when your partner returns home from work?

27. How would you rate your level of social support? Emotional support?

28. Where do you obtain this support? (ex: informal/formal avenues)

29. Do extended family, neighbors, or community play a supportive role in your life?

30. Do you feel you would benefit from increased support? In what ways?

31. Would you recommend this lifestyle for other couples? What advice would you give to women whose partners are considering working out West?

32. Do you see your family involved in this lifestyle in the future?

## Appendix B: Participant Information Letter

### Experiences of Rural Newfoundland Women: Partners Working out West

Dear Participant,

My name is Heather Whalen and I am a Master of Social Work student at the University of Northern British Columbia.

I will be conducting a research project that will explore the experiences of women whose partners travel back and forth out West for work. I'm interested in focusing my study on women who are between the ages of 25-55 and who are living in small communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. The purpose of this study is to determine any unmet needs that may exist for this population as a result of extended partner absences.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview, which can take place in your home or another area of your choosing. The interview will run for approximately one hour and will include questions surrounding your thoughts and feelings about your partner being away from home, and how his line of work has affected you and your family. Participation is completely voluntary and it is okay to withdraw from the study at any time should you no longer wish to participate. There are no known risks associated with this project. There are no personal benefits from participating in this project, however, your input will help give a voice to many women in the province who may be living in similar situations. Your insight and experiences may also help develop a deeper understanding of what it's like to have a partner who works away for long periods of time, and may help in identifying significant needs that could be addressed in the future.

All information obtained will be kept completely confidential. The information you provide will be expressed in the final report, however, your name, and any other identifying information, will not be used. The researcher will use a coding process during the course of project to help ensure participant anonymity, and participants may choose a pseudonym to represent their identity in the final report. All information collected will be kept in a locked case in the researchers home or in a password protected computer file; only I (the researcher) will have access to this information. All data will be destroyed/deleted once the research project is finished.

If you have any questions about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached via telephone: 709-643-2508 or email: whalen@unbc.ca. The final report will be available in February 2013. I encourage you to contact me if you wish to obtain a copy of the report at this time. If you have any complaints about this research, please contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or reb@unbc.ca.

Thank-you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you if you choose to participate in this project.

Sincerely,

Heather Whalen

## Appendix C: Consent Form

### Experiences of Rural Newfoundland Women: Partners Working out West

-I understand that my participation in this research project is completely voluntary.

- The researcher, Heather Whalen, has explained the purpose of this study and what my participation will entail.

-I understand that I may withdraw from the study at anytime, without explanation. My information will not be used and will be destroyed upon my refusal to participate.

-I understand that my interview will be audio recorded and that all recordings, transcriptions and field notes will be destroyed once the research project has been approved for publication.

-I understand that all information collected will be kept confidential. All audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes will be stored in a locked case in the researchers home, and all electronic data will be storied in a password protected computer file.

-I am aware that the information I provide will be used for a graduate level thesis.

-I understand that I have the right to review, change, and/or withdraw any information that I provide before the submission of the final report.

**I have read and understand the above form and I consent to participate in today's interview, knowing that I can withdraw at any time.**

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date Signed

_____ _____

Signature of Heather Whalen Date Signed

## Appendix D: Local Resources

**Corner Brook –**
Mental Health Services
35 Boone's Road
Corner Brook, NL A2H 7E5
Telephone: (709) 634-4506

**Deer Lake**
Mental Health & Addiction Services
20 Farm Road
Deer Lake, NL A8A 1J3
Telephone: (709) 635-7830

**Stephenville**
Mental Health Services
127 Montana Drive
Stephenville, NL A2N 2T4
Telephone: (709) 643-8740

**Burgeo**
Mental Health & Addiction Services
Calder Health Care Centre
P. O. Box 614
Burgeo, NL AOM 1AO
Telephone: (709) 886-2185

**Port aux Basques**
Mental Health & Addiction Services
P. O. Box 544
Port aux Basques, NL AOM 1CO
Telephone: (709) 695-4619

**Norris Point**
Mental Health & Addiction Services
Bonne Bay Health Centre
P. O. Box 70
Norris Point, NL AOK 3V0
Telephone: (709) 458-2381, Ext. 266

**Port Saunders**
Mental Health & Addiction Services
Rufus Guinchard Health Centre
P. O. Box 40
Port Saunders, NL AOK 4HO
Telephone: (709) 861-3762