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Why Aren't you Girls Serving the Groomsmen their Cake?

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Abstract

For decades, women from rural communities have been leaving their homes for various reasons, and in the process, have likely been exposed to ideas that challenged their ideas about gender, and gender relations. This study focuses on women like myself who were born and raised in rural Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), and have since moved to more urban spaces. My aim is to find out whether or not other rural women find themselves questioning and challenging the traditional and patriarchal gendered culture of our hometowns and our province. While there is ample existing literature on the construction of gender, and the historical connections between gender roles and rurality, there is little research done on why and how women who grow up in rural communities come to challenge or question patriarchal gender ideologies, and if they experience a difference when they move to urban centers to pursue higher education and/or employment opportunities. Moreover, even less is known about the social consequences of adopting more critical and feminist ideas about gender and rurality. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the prevalence of traditional gender roles and expectations of women in the province, and how their experiences vary from those of women in more progressive, urban locations.

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Preface

In the summer of 2014 I was asked to stand as a bridesmaids at an old childhood friend's wedding. I happily accepted, and booked my trip home to Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada (NL). The wedding took place in the rural fishing community of Botwood, NL. Throughout the weekend of the wedding, I found myself both frustrated and fascinated by the manifest of culturally embedded notions of traditional and patriarchal gendered roles which were still highly prevalent within this particular rural community. Let me start by telling a few short stories.

On the morning of the 'big day', all the women of the bridal party gathered at a salon to get our hair and makeup done. Just as one bridesmaid was getting her hair done by the stylist, she sprung out of her chair and said “Oh my, have to go get my man out of bed and get him some lunch, and make sure he has some socks to wear to the wedding”. My response was, “You're joking right, why can't he do these things himself?” She laughed and said “My dear, he ain't gonna feed himself!”

During the reception the groom's mother approached the table where the bridesmaids were sitting and asked, “Girls, why aren't you serving the groomsmen their cake?” I can't quite recall my exact response. I likely responded to this question with something along the lines of: “Why aren't they serving us *our* cake?” Later that evening, as one of the bridesmaids was walking across the open dance floor with a bottle of beer in her hand, she was scolded by the groom's mother for holding the bottle as it was considered “shockin”, and “not very lady-like of her”. It was instances such as these that I observed during my time home that summer, combined with my background in sociology and gender studies, which inspired my topic of research.

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While acknowledging that most Western cultures do share similar gendered patterns in terms of who does the bulk of the work within the home (including childrearing), and who is the breadwinner, this wedding made me recognize the prominent influence that traditional gendered roles and normative expectations have on women within the province.

I was raised in a rural logging community in Newfoundland and Labrador, a province where traditional and patriarchal gendered roles play a significant role in the construction of its culture and rich history. I moved to Halifax to attend university where I became educated in areas of feminist theory and the social construction of gender and gendered identities. In doing so, I came to wonder how and why I had abandoned the gendered values that my culture holds so dear. Surely, I am not alone in this struggle.

Introduction

For decades, women from rural communities have been leaving their homes to attend university, or for other reasons. In the process, I would argue, they would likely have been exposed to ideas that challenged their beliefs about gender and gender relations. This study focuses on women like myself who were born and raised in rural Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), and have since moved to more urban spaces. My aim is to find out whether or not other rural women find themselves questioning and challenging the traditional and patriarchal gendered culture of our hometowns and the province. While there is ample existing literature on the construction of gender, there is little research on why and how women who grow up in rural communities come to challenge or question patriarchal gender ideologies, and if they experience a cultural disconnect when they move to urban centers to pursue higher education and/or employment opportunities. Even less is known about the social consequences of adopting

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more critical and feminist ideas about gender and rurality. To assess these questions, I have utilized two qualitative methods: auto-ethnography, and interviews with women living in both rural Newfoundland, and more urban Canadian cities including Toronto, New Brunswick, and Halifax. These methods are most appropriate since auto-ethnography is closely related to standpoint feminism, and the interview process will allow me to link my experiences to women whose life course is similar to my own.

Throughout the course of my research I hope to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How and why do women reared rurally come to challenge patriarchal ideas about gender and gender relations after moving to urban areas and attending university?
- 2) How do women still living in rural NL experience patriarchal ideas about gender, if at all?
- 3) In which ways do rurally raised women and those still residing in rural NL practice a more egalitarian and feminist gendered culture?
- 4) Do they come to accept and practice their new identity based on more progressive ideas about gender once moving to an urban center?

Traditional gendered and patriarchal roles within the province of Newfoundland have had a significant impact on the ways women are valued within their rural communities, and on how they value themselves. Recognizing that this is a bold and generalized claim to make, I do not intend to undermine or devalue the lives of women who are currently living in rural communities of NL, and are not negatively affected by the influences of culture in terms of gendered expectations and patriarchy. I am suggesting however, that those who chose to leave “The Rock” as Newfoundlanders say, are more likely to succeed in advancing their career and educational opportunities. Thus, I argue that those who leave most often reject the ideals of Newfoundland's traditional

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culture, and challenge the traditional and patriarchal gender roles embedded in their heritage in order to achieve these goals.

Theoretical Framework

When conducting qualitative research, it is important to understand and identify the standpoint in which the one takes in relation to the research topic. As a researcher, I can relate with my participants in the sense that we likely share similar lived experiences from growing up in a small rural communities in NL.

The Feminist Standpoint Theory, popularized by writers such as Sandra Harding and Dorothy E. Smith, holds that gender is based on the assumption that in a hierarchically structured social world, different standpoints are necessarily produced. Smith suggests that “people develop different versions of the world based on gender categorization that they embody and their corresponding space in the social structure” (Smith, 1996 in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, 193). Therefore, women residing in rural communities would likely hold different perspectives and interpretations regarding their life experiences than women who have since moved to more urban spaces. According to Hekman (1997), the feminist standpoint theory has two primary components. First, the idea that knowledge is situated and perspectival. Second, she argues that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced (343). Hekman also argues that the power of this feminist method enables readers to connect everyday life with analysis of the social institutions that shape that life. This allows us to respect and admire differences and experiences (1997, 343). Feminist standpoint theory is also wholly compatible with my primary research method, auto-ethnography, meaning it is research based on my own lived experiences.

Literature Review

Gender as a Social Construction

In Lorber and Farrell's (1994) work on the social construction of gender, they explain how the concept of gender is so pervasive in our society that we assume it is bred into our genes (276). Like culture, gender is a human production that depends on people perpetually "doing" gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987 in Lorber & Farrell, 1994, 276). To demonstrate how people can change how they "do gender", the authors use the example of a father on a subway in NYC carrying a baby. "Seeing men taking care of children in public is becoming increasingly common, at least in New York City" (276)- therefore suggesting that gender is not a predetermined and static behaviour, it is a performance that is capable of change. Lorber and Farrell continue, "gender signs and signals are so ubiquitous that we usually fail to note them or are ambiguous" (1994, 277). In other words, the roles of women are often taken-for-granted by their partners, and their communities. This is something that will be further discussed in the section about my own personal experiences.

More generalized literature on the topic of gender suggests that every culture maintains and transmits ideas about the roles that women and men perform, rights they have in relation to each other, and values associated with their attributes (Bonvillain, 2001, 4). These ideas then represent culturally shared and accepted models of gender. Bonvillain also explains how social constructs of gender are reinforced through day to day interactions between families, local communities, and in wider social arenas (2001, 4). Through the assignment of gender roles learned within particular social and cultural spaces, and evaluation of worthiness, girls and boys then acquire their gendered identities.

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Gendered divisions of labour then, often determine or influence the range of daily work that an individual carries out (Bonvillian, 2001, 7). These influences are especially prominent in areas such as parenthood and in the work place as well. Lorber and Farrell (1997) explain, “the work that adults do as mothers and fathers and low-level workers and high-level bosses, shapes women's and men's life experiences, and these experiences produce different feelings, consciousness, skills- ways of being that we call masculine and feminine” (Lorber, 1997, 277). In legal terms, gender is also a process of creating distinguishable statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities (Lorber & Farrell, 1997, 280). Unfortunately, these statuses in which rights are honoured, are most often unequal and primarily serve the interests of the male in legal disputes.

Judith Butler, another prominent scholar who writes about the social construction of gender and masculinities, agrees that gender designations such as masculine and feminine are never settled- they are constantly in the process of being remade (Butler, 2004, 11). However, women are often expected to maintain the image of femininity while exhibiting the image of a hard-working woman both inside and outside the home. I would argue, the “ideal woman” for many men would be one who maintains feminine characteristics but is capable to take on roles and jobs that men are traditionally responsible for, on top of their roles and duties within the home. Previous research on gender relations also suggests that the strength of gender double binds is constraining women's actions and reproducing dominant gendered systems (Denissen, 2010, 1051). Denissen states, “men's actions often evoke dominant cultural ideologies and gender dualisms that define women as 'other' by constructing them as different or inferior” (2010, 1052).

With regards to gendered interactions in rural communities, the literature on logging culture in rural Canadian communities suggests that the women in these areas

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have often been characterized as “traditional, dependent, conservative, maternal, regressive, or simply victims of their exploitation within systemic power relations” (Boucher, 1994,; Warren, 1993 in Reed, 2003, 10). Marilyn Porter however, (1985) offers a critique to popular research focusing on male dominance and patriarchy in rural communities. She suggests that feminist research has found that this patriarchy is diminishing and the women in these communities are strong and independent; both economically and politically (107).

Gendered Divisions of Labour in Rural NL

There is also a significant amount of research on the division of labour in rural communities as briefly mentioned above. With regards to research specific to Newfoundland, some of the most prominent contributions within this field can be credited to the work of Dona. L. Davis. In one of her many ethnographic Newfoundland cultural studies, she concludes that historically in rural Newfoundland communities, the division of labour has always been normalized, as men worked at sea and women worked on the land in their households (1993, 457). The characteristics and traits valued in men, particularly fishermen, focused on their abilities which made them good fishers. These qualities included their work ethic, their stamina, and their courage which allowed them to pursue such a dangerous and unpredictable occupation (Davis, 1993, 458). More importantly, however, women were expected to be emotionally fit, and hard-working in order to take charge of the day-to-day running of the household and their communities. In Davis's later ethnographic study, she suggests that a woman's worry (nerves), sacrifice, and endurance was instrumental to the health of the fishery, the well-being of its workers, and the community (Davis, 1997, 9).

The literature on the gendered impacts of “The Crisis” in the Newfoundland

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fishery by Davis (2000) explains that there are five concrete dimensions of gendered relationships within analysis's of women's interactions with their environments (Davis, 2000, 343). These dimensional frameworks include: gendered divisions of labour, access and control over property, knowledge and strategies for survival, environmental movements, and policies (Davis, 2000, 343). Throughout her study, Davis observed that the cultural logics of the locals in the community of Grey Rock Harbour, NL, combined with the gendered impacts of the dying industry, influenced the five dimensional frameworks. She suggests that this particular local context also shows dramatic changes in terms of embodied constructions of masculinity and femininity; gendered use of community space; the emergence of female-headed households and the gendering of class. (2000, 352). A short piece of literature by Linda Cullum (2008) concludes that the gendered segregation of labour, with poor wages and less secure jobs attached to women's work, was and is buttressed by gendered ideologies and practices of employers, unions, and male workers. (1).

Family Patterns

Aside from the physical separation of sexes within occupational domains, the nuclear family remained extremely important to the male and female workers in these communities. Marriage was considered universal, and divorce was considered unthinkable (Davis, 1993, 461). Most couples married early and looked forward to the life of gender specific work that was produced by the fishery. Another ethnographer, Glynis George, conducted a study on Women's Activism in a rural community located on the southern shores of NL. George states,

The hegemony of a masculine public and a feminine private intersects with the expression of Newfoundland identities, and socially embedded labour. Spheres of family, work place, and community constitutes key discursive arenas through

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which women's identities and social relations are produced (2000, 1).

The ways women came to view themselves in rural Newfoundland was highly influenced by the hegemonic masculine discourse that was known and accepted by the public.

Corbett (2006) suggests that the gendered structure of labour social relations in rural communities may also result in women being less mobile and less able to break away from traditional and patriarchal gender roles (308).

Maureen Reed (2003) argues that the impacts of geographic and social isolation, the lack of employment opportunities, financial and emotional dependence of spouses, and limited social services have had a greater negative effects on women than on men (11). A common theme throughout her interviews subjects was that women in these communities reported that they felt a sense of isolation from the rest of the island (18).

This is similar to what Corbett (2006) reported:

“factors such as lack of jobs requiring higher education, a lower return on educational investments in rural areas, lower levels of parental education and distance from post-secondary institutions combine to produce lower levels of engagement and completion in higher education for individuals in rural communities” (430).

Why Leave?

With regards to rural Newfoundlander's access to adequate post-secondary education, Reed explains how “children are taught that they “need an education” while in the same breath they are told that there is “nothing for you here” (Reed, 2003, 18). This is something that I experienced in my own teenaged years growing up in an industry based community in rural Newfoundland. This is the primary motivating factor for women who chose to leave the province, and abandon traditional gender roles and practices embedded within their culture.

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In the majority of existing literature on gender and rurality, it is evident that women tend to migrate away from their rural origins at a higher rate than men. As a sociologist and researcher, I cannot help but to wonder how and why women such as myself, who leave the province often choose to reject the cultural expectations placed on them as women, and what factors influence their gendered ideals and values.

Despite the bulk of literature surrounding the construction of gender, and gendered relations within rural communities, there is a lack of research exploring how women challenge patriarchal gender once they leave their rural communities, and how they re-negotiate their new gender performances or identities. There is even less documented on the social *consequences* faced by rural women when they return home after rejecting the values of their culture and traditions, and think more progressively in terms of gender and gender relations.

Methodology

Myfanwy Franks argues that there is no universal agreement between feminists from various cultural backgrounds, therefore there is no universally appropriate feminist research methodology (2013, 38). Thus, it is integral to remain as neutral as possible regardless of which standpoint you take so the research does not produce an unequal power dynamic within the research that could affect the subjects and/or the findings. It is also clear that the majority of the research in the fields of gender and rurality are qualitative in nature, therefore I found it necessary to take a qualitative approach in my own research as well. The information used was compiled using mixed-methodologies; autoethnography and semi-structured interviews. As a female reared in rural Newfoundland, I found the prevalent gendered roles and relations to be quite normal as I was growing up. It wasn't until I moved away to attend university that I noticed the

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influence that the traditional roles and expectations have on women, and in turn, the functioning of their communities. In turn, autoethnography is relative to the feminist standpoint theory, as I have formed my own personal stand point and opinions surrounding traditional gender roles in NL based on my own experiences and observations from growing up in, and visiting rural Newfoundland. Drawing upon these lived experiences, I analyze the gendered interactions and traditionally rooted patriarchy that I have observed throughout my life. In doing so I have gained a comprehensive understanding of the range of activities that local (rural NL) women partake in, and the roles that they play on a day-to-day basis within my own home-community surrounding areas. An autoethnographic methodology is appropriate for research in the fields of sociology, cultural studies, and gender because it provides readers with a first-hand account of the experiences of women both in the province and those who have chosen to leave. Additionally, ethnographic feminist field work can be considered a form of social activism as it sets a goal for social change and/or empowerment of those within a given social context or setting. It is also the most ethically sound way of conducting research on specific social groups because it is based solely upon observation and is unobtrusive to the participants. Therefore, risk of ethical harm or confidentiality breaches are not an issue of concern as no personal or private information is disclosed in autoethnographic research.

To expand upon my own observations and personal lived experiences, I have also facilitated interviews with both women who currently live in rural NL, and those who have once lived in rural NL and have since moved to an urban space. The women who have volunteered to participate in this study are between the ages of 20-25 and have all disclosed that they have experienced the pressure placed on them to follow and reinforce

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their gendered culture and traditions. Two of the women interviewed were raised in rural Newfoundland, and have since moved to urban spaces for reasons such as pursuing a higher education, or for greater employment opportunities, while one has once lived in an urban space, and has returned to rural Newfoundland to raise her family. I analyze narratives of women who have experienced both egalitarian and progressive ideals of gender and can recognize the influence that the patriarchal values ingrained in Newfoundland culture have had on the women of the province.

I found the interview process to be rather enlightening and empowering, as I was able to compile stories, experiences, and perspectives of strong independent women who often struggle with, or in some cases challenge the male patriarchy that surrounds them within their small communities in Newfoundland. As illustrated by speaker Brene Brown (2010), “stories are just data with a soul” (TEDTalk). Consequently, I felt that informal interviews would best describe the feelings, and the experiences, and essentially stories of the women participating. In turn, my research questions are also constructed to reflect the gendered experiences of women in both rural and urban contexts in a non-intrusive manner. Each participant was also required to read and sign the letter of informed consent before sharing their stories, in the interests of promising confidentiality, anonymity and respect throughout the research.

For the interview portion of the study, I followed a list of general questions, and expanded upon them as the discussions progressed. The questions included:

- 1) Are Newfoundland's traditions and its culture gendered?
- 2) What aspects of the culture in rural Newfoundland do you believe to be 'gendered'?
- 3) What are some traditional roles of women in NL? What are the traditional men's roles? Are they still in practice today?

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- 4) Do you feel like you can relate to women in rural NL?
- 5) If applicable, what motivated you to make the move from rural NL to an urban space?
- 6) Are you married or do you have children?
- 7) Are gender roles more apparent in rural NL or in more urban spaces? Is there a difference?

I was particularly interested in better understanding how these women experience relationships, and how they negotiate different gendered relations within their own personal lives (i.e.: married or single, work inside or outside the home, who is responsible for childcare, education attainments, etc.). Although I followed the questions as a guide to the discussions with my participants, I was always surprised with where the conversations would stray and how much each participant wanted to share about each question. In the process of discovering why and how women who move away from rural communities are more likely to challenge or resist their gendered cultural values and norms, I do my best to honour and respect the culture of Newfoundland as well.

As with any research method, there are limitations associated with my methodologies. Aside from the typical issues with research such as time, funding, and ethical considerations, I have considered a number of possible implications that could sway the data in one way or the other. First, the majority of my participants were recruited through the university by word of mouth. Therefore, my sample population are primarily students (excluding one participant) who have moved to an urban space for the purpose of pursuing a higher education. Therefore this research will pertain primarily to rural NL women who have attended post-secondary education, and likely excludes a number of rural women who may have moved for other reasons, or may not have moved at all.

Ethics

The moral integrity of any researcher is crucial for gaining the trust of the public and other scholars who share academic interests, and for validating academic work. Most importantly, as a researcher I must treat the researched community with the utmost respect and express concern for the welfare of the participants if need be. Since it is important to ensure that no personal or identifying information is exposed throughout my research, I have assigned each participant a pseudonym in the interests of differentiating their narratives and responses to the interview questions and to maintain confidentiality and autonomy.

The autoethnographic portion of my research will also cause no harm to the observed community, as no identifying personal information will be revealed, and information is collected strictly on personal observations. Therefore, there are no foreseeable or immediate risks or ethical harms associated with this part of my research for anybody involved.

With regards to the interviews, it was important to be mindful of how the questions were portrayed, and how they could potentially be received by the participant. I have ensured that no harm or disrespect can arise when asking such discussion provoking questions by paying close attention to the language used in constructing them. It was also mandatory for my participants to sign an informed letter of consent. By signing the letter of consent, I was able to assure everybody involved in both my autoethnographic experiences, and my interviews that absolutely no personal, sensitive, or identifying information would be disclosed, and that confidentiality and anonymity were of great importance to me. I also informed the participants of the types of questions and things I wanted to discuss, and made sure that it was a discussion that they wanted to engage in

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before allowing them to sign the letter of consent.

Personal Experience and Observations

Until I graduated high school and moved away from my parental home at the age of 17, I had never really noticed the gendered culture of the province of Newfoundland. I had only ever previously lived in two small communities, where I came to normalize the traditional gendered roles and began to feel the pressures of such roles myself. I remember feeling panicked before I completed high school because I had not been in a steady, long-term relationship like the majority of my friends. I felt like that was something that was expected of me at this point in my life. A number of my close friends and classmates already had children, were engaged to their partners, and ready to be married within a year or two after graduation. Although that wasn't the lifestyle that I had planned for myself, I felt like it was "just the way it was" in my hometown. In turn, I often felt feelings of guilt for wanting to leave to escape these feelings and expectations that were placed upon me by the community.

After I made the decision to move to a more urban location in the province, St. Johns, I felt a sense of rejection and exclusion from my friends and even some family members back home. When I would return home for visits, the first question I would be asked family and friends would be, "did ya find yourself a man yet?" This was incredibly frustrating because in actuality, I had no interest in "finding a man" at this point in time, or having a committed relationship. In fact, I moved only for the purpose of pursuing my education at Memorial University. Of course, the only aspects of my life that were ever in question from those close to me were related to my relationship status. It felt as though, in the eyes of many members of my community, finding a partner was the ultimate purpose of my move to the city, and that my education was meaningless. To me, this shows that

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having a heteronormative relationship holds more value within traditional Newfoundland culture than attaining a higher education or the relative success of women in a male dominated society. I am fortunate enough that I have not experienced this kind of pressure, (or had these expectations of “finding a man”) placed on me by my own parents, for which I am forever grateful. However, I certainly did feel the contention and worry from many friends and other family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, and family friends.

After living in the capital city of Newfoundland for a couple years, I relocated to Halifax, Nova Scotia to attend Saint Mary's University, where I studied Sociology and Criminology. My sociological background might have played a role in my realization that these gendered roles can, and do influence the ways in which women perform their everyday tasks and activities, and how they determine their life paths. Looking back at my hometown, it seems that only those who have left the province, or at least their rural communities, have challenged or rejected the gender roles that are and have been traditionally imposed upon them. I have noticed that many women do this by working or studying in traditionally male dominated fields or occupations, focusing on their education and career goals before getting married and having children, renegotiating gender roles within their own homes, and advocating for feminism and gender equality.

Throughout my first years away from home, as I'm sure most university students would agree, I truly came to both recognize and appreciate the role that my mother played within my own family and household as well. At the same time, I noticed the contrasting role that my father played, which perfectly demonstrates the unrecognized prevalence, and the normalization of gender roles within the province. I say that these roles go unrecognized because my father for instance, has no intention of playing a role in the

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patriarchy within the home, but does significantly influence the gendered dynamics that unfold on a daily basis. Though the expectations felt by my mother are placed upon her by him, yet he rarely notes his own role in the shaping of gender roles and responsibilities, as they are so “natural”, or taken-for-granted within the culture of the community. For example, for as long as I could remember, as in most nuclear households, my father was responsible for the roles outside of the home, while my mother was responsible for the well-being of the domestic labour inside the home. Without question, it was expected that my mother would have a different home-cooked meal on the table each night as my father would arrive home from work. She would then clean and do the dishes, and boil the kettle so my father could have his cup of tea while he watched the 6 o'clock news. On the nights that she works late, or has prior commitments she is still expected to prepare a meal for my father before-hand, so he will have something to warm up when he returns home. Even during a recent phone conversation, before we said goodbye she stated, “Well I better go. I have to make your father some supper before I can go to my Yoga class”. My response was, “I'm sure he can fend for himself!” to which she chuckled doubtfully.

Years later, I can finally understand the gendered behaviour that my mother has demonstrated throughout my life, and continues to engage in, and where it stems from. I recall the way my grandmother used to tend to my grandfather. “She couldn't even sit down to the table for a second, she was up and down like a yo-yo getting things for Dad” my mother stated. In turn, the roles played by my mother in my home were, and are essentially mirrored by those of my grandmother. I now recognize that these expectations that have been imposed on her for decades have become such normal aspects of her daily routine. Despite her personal awareness of the patriarchy that foregrounds her daily

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routines, my father will likely never admit nor recognize his own contribution to the patriarchal structure of the home, and the gendered culture of NL families. Although I have nothing but respect and appreciation for my mother and the work that she does both inside and outside the home for myself, my father, and everyone else she cares for in the community, I don't often find myself acting in accordance to these normalized traditions.

In my own relationship, and within my own home here in Halifax, I have noticed that the roles with regards to domestic labour more equal than those in rural NL, if not, reversed. For instance, I am currently in a long-term relationship and have been living with my partner for a number of years now. While attending school, or when I'm working there are times where I do not get home until later in the evening. In these instances he often takes on the domestic role and prepares supper, washes dishes. To be entirely truthful, he takes on more of the roles that are traditionally assigned to women than I do myself; once again proving that gender roles are not static, and they can change across varying cultural contexts.

Interviews

Ashley was born and raised in a rural fishing and logging community, and has since moved to Halifax, NS to pursue a higher education at both NASCAD and Dalhousie University. Aged 25, she is single and has no children. Melissa, also 25, is from rural Newfoundland and is now studying law at the University of New Brunswick. She is also single, and does not have children. The third interviewee, Katie, also 24, is currently living in rural Newfoundland with her two young children and her fiancé. She is currently unemployed and enjoys being a stay-at-home parent.

When asked “are the traditions and the culture present in rural Newfoundland communities gendered?” the answer from all participants was consistently “Yes”. I then

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asked them to explain their answers further, to tell me which aspects of the culture that they find to be the most gendered, and what they feel is the biggest contributor to the patriarchal patterns that they have recognized. Ashley stated,

“I think that what it comes down to in Newfoundland is the majority of careers that are gendered- there is still a lot of focus on what makes a man's job compared to what a woman should be doing. Don't get me wrong, the province has come a long ways overall but we are still really behind in becoming adapted to change and having genders treated as equals” - *Ashley*

Melissa agreed that the division of labour in rural communities is one of the most prominent aspects of Newfoundland's gendered culture. As she put it, “you really notice it when you go away and come back- even if you didn't grow up noticing gender roles, now you just pay a little more attention to them”. She proceeded, “in smaller communities it's the way it's always been: you know, this is what men do and this is what women do”. Myself and Melissa were lucky in a sense, because we both grew up in one of the bigger, more industrial rural communities in the province. However, although it was larger and had more resources than many other rural communities, it still held those same traditional gendered values as the rest of rural Newfoundland. This town which was once known for its pulp and paper industry, brought in a lot of opportunities for women and the rest of the town as well, (despite being a male dominated industry). In turn, our community was much 'better off' economically than some of the smaller out-port communities allowing for young women to seek greater opportunities (i.e.: travel, education) for the future.

“You can even see it more when you drive just a half-hour away to a smaller town; there are very few women who get a secondary education. Once they get a husband they stay home and take care of the kids, and rarely do too much afterwards, you know?” -Melissa

Melissa also spoke of the generational ideals of gender and how her ideals are

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much different than generations of family members before her.

“I think of my parents and grandparents; fishing, logging, outdoor work was traditionally done by men so they were the breadwinners, and women stayed home to take care of the household doing things like having dinner on the table when their men came home. But my future husband...well he wouldn't even be my future husband if he expected dinner on the table”- *Melissa*

Another question I asked participants was whether or not they could relate to women in rural Newfoundland; why or why not? The responses for this question varied. One woman stated that she can relate to women in the rural areas of the province because she can “understand why they never left... it’s just such an amazing place and if you live in a little hidden gem of a town, why would you leave?” (Melissa, 2016). I have to agree with her on this statement; it was an extremely difficult decision for me to make to leave my home province as well. Although I have challenged the gendered culture, I still miss my home every day. Melissa continued to explain however, that she also feels very far removed from these places and the culture that surrounds them as well.

“Everyone has the power to do what they want with their lives, but I get sad when I see someone with a lot of potential taking that early marriage route and think of that as the be all end all. I think I'd be extremely unhappy if I stayed in NL and got married before I got an education, and just accepted that that’s how my life would be forever. -*Melissa*

She also stated,

“I will not be getting married so my husband can have all of the things that he expects of me. That’s not the end goal for me. Marriage isn't necessarily how I envision happiness. Traditionally these are the kinds of things that are expected of women in Newfoundland, especially in small towns”- *Melissa*

When I asked her if she could ever see herself married or having children, she said,

“I'm not saying that I don't want these things, I just want to achieve them in a different way and at a different time in my life” (Melissa, 2016).

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Another difference that the participants reported between rural and urban women is the value that they place on marriage and the idea of starting a family. Getting married and having children are values that young women often hold dear. When the participants were asked what aspects of the culture was gendered, this was something that was mentioned on a number of occasions. “Not to sound rude, but I think that getting married and having kids is like...the be all end all for a lot of women back home... that's just what you do” (Melissa, 2016). She continued to explain that others who chose to leave (including herself) often feel guilt for doing things for themselves such as getting an education or accepting a great job opportunity and rejecting their culture's traditions and the expectations that are often placed on them.

“It's nice to see the women of Newfoundland explore other parts of the world or even just reach out to other cultures and experience what else is out there before getting "stuck," for lack of a better term” -*Melissa*

Also, in relation to the concept of marriage, it was quite interesting that the only participant who had been in a long-term relationship and was due to be married was Katie, which emphasizes the importance and value of marriage within the culture of the province as well. From my own personal experiences, and observations, I find that those who are rurally reared and stay in their home province also marry at a much younger age than women residing in an urbanized culture. For example, at the wedding mentioned in the preface, when the groom was asked “when did you know you were going to pop the question?” his response was, “It just time, I was tired of callin' er my girlfriend I suppose”

When I asked the women who did leave why they decided to move away from Newfoundland, their responses were:

“I wanted to branch out and deciding to move to Halifax was really one of the greatest experiences. It may seem small now that I've been here for a while, but the people I've met and lessons I've learned have gotten me to where I am today

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and I appreciate it so much. I wouldn't change a thing.” *Ashley*

“NL is its own little bubble and culture and I think it’s really important to get out and see other things. Once you're out of that bubble you can come to appreciate what NL means to you as well”-*Melissa*

Katie, as previously mentioned, is currently still living in a small community in Newfoundland has two children, and is engaged to be married in the summer of 2016. She was the only interviewee out of the four women who was in a long-term committed relationship, and who had children. This interview really spoke volumes about the deeply rooted traditions and the prevalence of gender roles within the context of rural NL.

During our interview, we talked about the dynamics within her own household and in her relationship with her fiancé, Paul. Katie emphasized how she thinks her relationship is more progressive in terms of renegotiating gender roles. At the same time, she is a stay-at-home mother who reinforces the traditional role of the woman in the home in rural Newfoundland. This is something she recognizes herself as she stated,

“Our relationship is pretty progressive for here - but that's hard for me to say or explain because I fit that exact stereotype. But I know if I wanna go to work I can go to work but I am expected to stay home with my kids here. When I talk about going back to work and other moms seem to judge me.”- *Katie*

We then proceeded to discuss the divisions of labour within her home. I could tell that this topic was a source of frustration for her, as she was very passionate and heartfelt in her responses. She would have stayed on this topic all day.

“As if my day isn't busy enough with a three year old and a ten month old, mine and even my fiancé’s parents will call and ask what I got on for supper. If I say “nothing” they say “Nothin? Well what's Paul gonna have when he comes home from work?” - *Katie*

This response made me think about how when I get a call from home, the first question my own mother asks is “what do you have on for supper tonight?”, assuming that I have

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taken on that role, just as she does, and has done for decades.

How do you challenge Newfoundland's traditional gender roles?

I asked each interviewee whether or not they recognize themselves challenging these roles that so evidently shape the lives of many women of the province. Those who moved away from their rural communities reported that their move to a more urban space had broadened their views and perspectives about certain feminist issues, which played a role in their decision to reject the cultural norms of the island. Both Ashley and Melissa spoke about the roll that their education played in the process of challenging and renegotiating their gendered identities, and how they independently perform their daily tasks.

“Coming from a small town, as you know, we didn't really experience such a wide perspective of views on such topics as gender roles and patriarchy. Moving here and attending such an independent institution made me broaden and challenge my views and give me a new outlook on how to approach these kinds of opinions and not feel so pressured into being close minded like it had made me feel coming from a smaller community”. - *Ashley*

Melissa believes she challenges the patriarchal values in Newfoundland's culture by,

“being an outspoken feminist and pursuing multiple degrees in post-secondary education - so not just accepting my place as wanting to be a stay at home mom (which is a totally amazing job) but pushing that stereotype and entering a predominantly male oriented work field (law) has definitely challenged those ingrained stereotypes”- *Melissa*

Katie, on the other hand, spoke about how she tries to challenge the cultural gendered norms through educating her children for the future on the fluidity of gender roles. She also implied that she often resists complying with the expectations that are placed on her to remind her family of the work that she does daily that often goes unrecognized.

“I was raised with gender roles all around me but I try my best to make it clear to

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my son that I do it because I want to, and that things aren't always that way. I let him know that girls can do anything boys do, and boys can do anything girls do". - *Katie*

In terms of how the labour is shared inside the home, she states

"I'm usually pretty spiteful about it (challenging gender roles in terms of domestic labour). I remember what it was like before I was engaged, and before the kids were born. Nobody called me mid-day asking me what I was up to and nobody cared what I had for supper. I'll specifically not do something because it's expected of me now. Or when someone asks me what I got on for supper I'll say "Nothin' I'm not a maid" But most days I just do it. Don't get me wrong I do love what I do, and I love bein' a stay at home mom. I really couldn't imagine my life any other way- sometimes I just get frustrated because it's so natural for my relatives and people here expect me to do everything - they never ask Paul what he's making for supper!"- *Katie*

Katie is a particularly special case because before her first pregnancy, she was living in the city of St. Johns. Therefore she has experienced the differences in terms of what is expected of women, and how they perform their gendered roles between rural and urban contexts. She reflected upon her time in the city, and how she never once felt the pressure to perform the particular roles that are expected of her now.

"When I moved back to GFW it was like moving back to another era. In SJ I had dreadlocks, pink hair, and piercings and here I got stopped on the street. People really care in smaller communities it's like you go back in time. I guess it's like that in every small town." - *Katie*

Her greatest fear in raising her children in such a traditionally gendered culture lies within the lack of acceptance for deviations from the 'norm', especially in relation to the gendered performances and binary expectations of boys and girls.

"I want to raise my kids letting them know that they can do whatever the f!#@ they want the hardest part is teaching them that you aren't always gonna be accepted here if you don't "fit the mould" of what is considered a manly man, or an ideal woman."- *Katie*

I asked her to go into detail about the ideal "moulds" that boys and girls in remote areas of the province are pressured to conform to. As we engaged in further discussion on this

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topic, I asked her if she could think of a particular example where she or her children deviated from a traditional gendered 'norm' and felt judged by somebody else.

To which she responded,

“Yes actually! One day I had my son's hair tied back because it was long and he asked me to get it out of his face. When my mom came over she got mad at me and said “boys shouldn't have buckles in their hair!” I wouldn't dare putting his hair up like that around Dad or his family, they're even worse!” - *Katie*

Deviations from heteronormative relationships and sexual orientations, assigned gendered performances, and personal appearances can often influence the lack of acceptance that one may feel within rural Newfoundland community.

Analysis and Discussion

Independence and Strength

Throughout this research, a common theme emerged that I hadn't anticipated. Throughout the interviews, I noticed that the women who participated all spoke very highly of the women in their lives who live in rural NL and reinforce gendered traditions of the province's history. These women were most often described by the participants as strong, independent, hardworking, and resilient. “Women did it all, especially when all the men started leavin' for the West Coast”, said Melissa. Though this shouldn't be particularly surprising to me, as the women who have shaped my life back home in rural Newfoundland are some of the most resilient, caring, and hard-working people I have ever met. I think it was particularly interesting, since research on logging culture suggests that the women in rural logging communities were generally described as “traditional, dependent, conservative, maternal, regressive, or simply victims of their exploitation within systemic power relations” (Boucher, 1994,; Warren, 1993 in Reed, 2003, 10) as previously mentioned. Throughout my research however, not one of these negatively

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implied terms were used to describe the women of the province. Instead, these women were most often praised by the participants for their tireless efforts to maintain the well-being of the home, and were never viewed as oppressed or exploited in any way. Instead rather, the roles of women were simply viewed as “ways of life” by all participants.

Personal Choices, Education, and Employment

The findings of my study also show that in many cases, women chose to live a traditional gendered lifestyle because having a nuclear family and a gendered division of labour is their ultimate goal. Some women set goals of achieving higher education, or travelling the world, while others chose to live more traditionally rooted lives. Many women simply enjoy being a stay-at-home mother, providing care to their partners, children, and families.

It appears that women in rural Newfoundland do in fact recognize the patriarchy within the home- especially in comparison to men. They know the value that their work holds, which their dominant partners often seem to ignore or fail to identify. Rural women currently residing in urban social spaces have reported challenging patriarchal values and gender roles in their lives by pursuing male dominated careers and obtaining a post-secondary education, waiting to find a partner/get married/have children, and engaging in feminist debates and discussions surrounding gender inequality. On the other hand, the one woman currently residing in rural Newfoundland reported challenging these same roles and patriarchal values by simply boycotting the every-day tasks such as cooking and cleaning which are expected of them. This resistance sends an indirect message to their partners, families and communities letting them know that they are not to be taken for granted, once again demonstrating the strength and independence, and the value of women and their work within rural communities.

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It is clear that the women who have moved away from their rural Newfoundland homes have had greater success in terms of achieving higher levels of education, or seeking greater career opportunities. Though the woman who remains in the province has not returned to work since the birth of her second born child, and has not completed post-secondary education, she does not feel that her decisions were merely influenced by patriarchal gendered expectations and roles of her partner. Rather, she reported to be more-so influenced by her fear of judgement from other mothers. However, despite these influences she is certain that she loves her lifestyle and wouldn't want it any other way.

This research also suggests that those who move away from rural Newfoundland to more urban spaces for the purpose of education or employment are also less likely to marry at a young age, have children, and pursue the traditional nuclear family lifestyle. In turn, they are as predicted, also more likely to reproduce traditional gendered roles and identities.

Resistance and Negotiating Tensions

The women in the study also reported that they often struggle with negotiating the tension between loving their rural communities and feeling alienated from them once they've left and challenged traditional gender roles. Speaking from personal experience, it feels as if you are making a commitment to yourself when you make the decision to leave and resist traditions. Consequently, this commitment unfortunately often results in feelings of cultural disconnect, exclusion, and even sometimes contention from your home-town. After leaving the province, and choosing to pursue higher education or employment opportunities, it is often more difficult to relate to the women you once looked up to, or many of the friends you grew up with who remain in the province. Making the initial decision to leave however, is often quite difficult for many women,

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since, as Melissa put it, “It’s just such an amazing place”.

The tensions experienced by the women, (including myself) are generally resolved (or addressed, at least) through a combination of *resistance* and *adaptation*. Though leaving the province of NL is never easy because of its natural beauty and its deeply rooted culture, women who leave seem to resist these tensions and feelings of exclusion through adaptation of their new, urban environments and cultures. In other words, rurally reared women who leave the province and challenge traditional gender roles become more adapted to cultures that are more “gender-equal”. In which case, their ideals, values, and performances of gender are reshaped or renegotiated through their cultural surroundings- once again, demonstrating how gender is not static, and how gender performances are capable of change. This also explains why women who resist traditional gender roles and performances often find it difficult to relate to women in their hometowns; since their ideals have changed, and the ideals of the women who remain in the province often remain the same, it is often difficult to find common grounds between the two.

Conclusion:

After analyzing my findings, and reflecting on the conversations I had with the women who participated in the interviews and autoethnographic research, I have concluded that women who have left their parental homes and moved to more urban locations do share similar lived experiences (myself included) and tend to challenge traditional, patriarchal values in like-minded ways. That being said, as the literature on gender and gender roles has demonstrated, women (of all ages) are effected primarily in terms of seeking higher education, employment and work (inside and outside the home), marriage and family dynamics. Women who succeed in their quest for education and employment

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opportunities also negotiate their gendered identities much differently than rural women in terms of performing their every-day tasks and activities. It is also evident that women who leave the province experience feelings of alienation, and exclusion once they resist their traditions to adapt to new cultural contexts.

My hope is that this research can build upon, or contribute to existing research within the field and within the province that I call “home”. My ultimate goal is to develop new, proactive and progressive opportunities for women in the province who may not want to leave, and to advocate for the women who recognize their assigned role and wish to challenge it, or who may not have the opportunity to leave. I hope to encourage new perspectives on issues surrounding gender, gender roles, and divisions of labour for both current and future generations of women in the province.

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